

การพัฒนาทักษะการเขียนเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษเชิงวิชาการเพื่อการโต้แย้งโดยใช้โครงสร้างการเขียนเรียงความของ Rolls & Wignell (2013): กรณีศึกษานักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏลำปาง

The Development of Academic English Argumentative Essay-Writing Skills Based on Essay Structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013): The Case Study of Lampang Rajabhat University Students

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บทคัดย่อ

นักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยควรมีทักษะการเขียนเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษทางวิชาการ เพื่อใช้ในการเรียนรู้ระดับมหาวิทยาลัย อีกทั้งยังเป็นการเพิ่มความรู้ สติปัญญา และทักษะการคิด นอกจากนี้ควรมีการเรียนการสอนเกี่ยวกับโครงสร้างกระบวนการเขียนให้แก่ นักศึกษา เพื่อสนับสนุนทักษะการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ งานวิจัยนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการเขียนเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษทางวิชาการเพื่อโต้แย้ง ด้วยโครงสร้างกระบวนการเขียนเรียงความของ Rolls & Wignell (2013) ของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะครุศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏลำปาง กลุ่มเป้าหมายในการวิจัยเป็นนักศึกษาชั้นปี 4 จำนวน 53 คน การศึกษาในครั้งนี้มุ่งเน้นไปที่การเขียนเรียงความเพื่อโต้แย้ง เนื่องจากเป็นกระบวนการเขียนที่ช่วยให้นักเรียนพัฒนาข้อโต้แย้งหรือมุมมอง พร้อมทั้งสนับสนุนข้อโต้แย้งนั้นด้วยหลักฐาน เหตุผล ตัวอย่าง และข้อมูลจากแหล่งต่างๆ เพื่อโน้มน้าวให้ผู้อ่านเห็นด้วยกับข้อโต้แย้งที่เป็นรูปธรรม ขั้นตอนการวิจัยประกอบด้วย การวิเคราะห์โครงสร้างกระบวนการเขียนเรียงความของ Rolls & Wignell (2013) การพิจารณาหัวข้อเรียงความ การทดสอบก่อนเรียน การสอนเขียนเรียงความ การฝึกเขียนเรียงความ การทดสอบหลังเรียน และการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ผลการวิจัย ได้แก่ ค่าร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย และค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ค่าความต่างของคะแนนก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน คือ 409 หรือร้อยละ 36.86 ส่วนความต่างของค่าเฉลี่ยคะแนนก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน คือ 11.06 และค่าเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐานเท่ากับ 0.59 จากผลการทดลองจะเห็นได้ว่าทักษะเขียนเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษทางวิชาการเพื่อโต้แย้ง สามารถพัฒนาได้โดยใช้โครงสร้างกระบวนการเขียนเรียงความของ Rolls & Wignell (2013) ซึ่งสนับสนุนทักษะการเขียนเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาให้เป็นมาตรฐานที่คล้ายคลึงกันและประสบความสำเร็จในการเรียนในระดับปริญญาตรีได้

คำสำคัญ : การเขียนเรียงความ การเขียนภาษาอังกฤษเชิงวิชาการ การเขียนเพื่อการโต้แย้ง โครงสร้างการเขียนเรียงความของ Rolls & Wignell (2013) มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏลำปาง

Abstract

University students should have high competence in academic English essay-writing skills to produce writing tasks in university academic disciplines and increase their knowledge, intelligence and thinking skills. The structure of the writing process should be provided for students to support their writing skills. This study aimed to develop the academic argumentative English essay-writing skills of students enrolled in the English programme at the Faculty of Education at Lampang Rajabhat University, Thailand. The study focused on academic argumentative essay writing because it is the

writing process that help students to develop a persuasive argument supported by evidence, reasoning, examples and information from various sources to convince readers to agree with concrete arguments. The study target group comprised 53 fourth-year students. The stages of the study included the essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013) and involved multiple steps; namely, essay structure analysis, essay question consideration, a pre-test, tutoring, essay practice, a post-test and data analysis: percentages, means and standard deviations. The study found that the difference between total pre-test and post-test scores was 409 or 36.86%, with a mean difference of 11.06 and a standard deviation of 0.59. These results indicate that academic English argumentative essay-writing skills can be developed by using Rolls & Wignell's (2013) essay structure, which can support students' writing skills to meet similar standards of writing English essays and be successful in studying at bachelor degree level.

Keywords : Essay Writing, English Academic Writing, Argumentative Writing, Rolls & Wignell's (2013) Essay Structure, Lampang Rajabhat University

Introduction

The four skills of studying a language are a set of four capabilities that allow an individual to comprehend and produce language for proper and effective interpersonal communication. These skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Particularly, effective writing conveys meaningful messages and uses English well. If students can understand the message, they will have succeeded in communication. [1]

Writing is a form of communication in which feelings and ideas are put on paper. Students can formulate convincing arguments by organising their knowledge, reasons, evidence and beliefs into writing which are essential for their writing task in university academic disciplines. The more students practise writing, the more their knowledge, intelligence and thinking skills increase. This is because writing is related to and integrated with knowledge, intelligence and thinking skills. These help to generate creative ideas and strengthen learners' writing skills. Writing in this manner is counted as academic argumentative writing [4, 9]. This kind of writing helps students to develop a persuasive argument supported by evidences, reasons, examples and information from sources to convince readers to agree with concrete arguments [2]. Therefore, academic argumentative writing was used in this study because it is essential for the target group as university students.

Although academic argumentative writing seems beneficial, some students, including Lampang Rajabhat University students, think that academic writing in particular, academic essay writing is something they must do because teachers tell them to do. An 'essay' is a piece of writing that is often written from an author's personal point of view. For some, writing an essay is as simple as writing notes down in a notebook, but much more planning goes into writing an essay successfully. Therefore, writing an essay becomes a difficult and time-consuming assignment [6].

The author—an English lecturer in the English programme at the Faculty of Education at Lampang Rajabhat University—has found that most students in the programme have low competency in writing English essays, including grammatical structures and vocabulary. Also, students are particularly poor at displaying logical thinking in their essays. For examples, students' writing papers lack unity, voice, cohesion, coherence, flow and logical thinking, particularly in the part of the writing process. Students may not have been trained in writing a long English composition at the school level. They seem to write an essay by describing a character, event or a place in great details. Some students also use their experience composing in Thai when they write an essay in English [6].

If students have never written an essay before, or if they struggle with writing and want to improve their skills, it is a good idea to go through several steps in the essay-writing process. There are some basic steps to English essay writing that students might work through in their classrooms. Unfortunately, writing at the paragraph level, such as academic argumentative English essay writing, has been neglected in Thailand, even though English has been taught in Thailand for a long time, because most teachers probably believe that they are teachers of English not of writing [6]. Moreover, as a result of economic competition, the Thai Government encouraged Thai citizens to speak fluent English. Therefore, in the mid-1980s the communicative language teaching approach was adopted in the Thai English-language curriculum [8, 12] resulting in a reduction in the role of writing communication. Today, the communicative approach is still implemented in the Thai curriculum, but the focus is more on listening and speaking not on writing as before. Students think that they need to talk to communicate; in fact, communication can be through writing.

Thai educational institutions are concerned with current literacy levels and have attempted to increase student literacy, especially in English writing. This is because student competence in English is fundamental to national development and the achievement of sustainability in Thailand [7]. Especially, pre-service English teachers need to be trained to teach writing in schools to benefit their future English teaching. Moreover, at present, writing is considered more as a communication channel rather than only one of four English skills. To handle this perception, learners need to understand and apply writing theories and principles and may need to be trained to write an essay efficiently through a writing process. The process that most essay writing involves is defined structurally. It is believed that if students follow this structure step by step, this will lead them to write a complete logical essay successfully.

Therefore, the author is interested in developing academic English argumentative essay-writing skills for students enrolled in the English programme at the Education Faculty of Lampang Rajabhat University, Thailand. This study is based on the writing process method of Rolls & Wignell (2013) [11] written in the Booklet on Academic Essay Writing for Students at Charles Darwin University, Australia [5]. The booklet intends to provide information and exercises as a scaffold for students to help them be successful in writing academic argumentative essays, because this is the skill that students need in most university courses and that can be transferred to assessments in other courses.

The academic essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013) helps students to gain knowledge about organising essays, such as essay questions, writing an introduction, creating a thesis statement and paragraph writing. According to the academic English argumentative essay-writing process of Rolls & Wignell (2013), every sentence of a written essay has its function. This can improve students' essay writing and enable them to succeed at university.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to use the academic essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013) to develop the academic English argumentative essay-writing skills of students enrolled in the English programme at the Faculty of Education at Lampang Rajabhat University, Thailand.

Research Methodology

This section describes the study design, study setting, target group, sampling procedure and methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures used in this study.

This study focused on a target group of 53 fourth-year students undertaking the English language programme at the Faculty of Education at Lampang Rajabhat University in Thailand. The research had a one group pre-test/post-test design, focusing on one group and testing causal relationships involving manipulation of an independent variable and measuring its effect on a dependent variable.

Non-probability sampling, known as ‘purposive selection’ in quantitative research, was used to select the target group. This is because the researcher works at the research site, facilitating access to students and approval for data collection by a senior colleague.

The data in this study had been collected for one semester in the first term of the academic year 2021. Steps taken in developing the academic English argumentative essay writing skills of the target group in this study are based on the essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013) which are outlined as follows. The first step was the analysis of Rolls & Wignell’s (2013) essay structure. The structure consecutively consists of an introduction, the essay body and a conclusion. The introduction comprises an orientation, a thesis statement and road maps. The orientation gives the reader some background to the essay question or the essay topic; one to two sentences is sufficient. The thesis statement is the most important sentence in the introduction because it clearly states what the main argument of the paper is. In other words, the thesis statement is the argument that the writer chooses to agree and it is based on the focus of the essay question. A sign post, or road map, is the next section. This part shows the reader what evidence the writer is going to use and how the writer is going to present this to support the thesis statement. In a 1000-word essay, three road maps are sufficient. The concept of the introduction was depicted in Table 1 as an essay-planner sample presented to the target group in this study under the essay question, ‘Some people believe that students should not be given homework every day, while others think that students must get homework every day in order to be successful at school’ [3].

Table 1 Structure of the introduction based on Rolls & Wignell’s (2013) essay structure

Orientation	<p><i>Write neutrally, covering both viewpoints in the essay question, without mentioning the advantages and disadvantages of either. Write two to three sentences.</i></p> <p>Example: Homework that has gone hand in hand with schooling in Thailand for a very long time. Some parents think that giving homework every day is not necessary for students, but many think that homework can help students succeed.</p>
Thesis statement	<p><i>This is the writer’s point of view about the subject posed in the essay question. Write one sentence.</i></p> <p>Example: However, I think that giving homework every day affects students for three reasons.</p>
Road map	<p><i>The rationales for the issues chosen by the writer. Write one sentence per item.</i></p> <p>Example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Doing homework every day causes students’ stress. 2. This can be harmful to students’ health. 3. Parents’ rest time can be interfered with if homework is given every day.

Next section of the essay is the first part of the body, body 1. This begins with a topic sentence paraphrased from road map 1 and is followed by evidences supporting the point made in the topic sentence. Two to three items of evidences are sufficient in each body section. The topic sentence and evidences are concluded with a concluding sentence. Lastly, body 1 is ended by a linking sentence paraphrased from road map 2 and linked to the topic sentence of the next paragraph, or body 2.

Table 2 Structure of body 1 based on Rolls & Wignell's (2013) essay structure

Topic sentence 1	<i>Paraphrase road map 1 in one to two sentences.</i> Example: First, homework can be stressful for students.
Evidence 1	<i>Give an example (one to two sentences) to support topic sentence 1.</i> Example: For example, if students study various subjects and have been assigned homework from every subject, this will cause them stress through not being unable to finish all the homework on time.
Evidence 2	<i>Give an example (one to two sentences) to support the topic sentence 1.</i> Example: Students who are stressed from doing homework every day may not want to study that subject any more, developing a negative attitude towards the subject.
Concluding sentence 1	<i>Summarise the idea of topic sentence 1, including evidence 1 and 2 not go off-topic.</i> Example: Therefore, teachers should consider whether giving too much homework may cause students stress.
Linking sentence 1	<i>Paraphrase road map 2 in one to two sentences to link to the next body section.</i> Example: Further, in trying to finish homework on time, students' health may be harmed.

Body 2 and body 3 have the same structure as body 1. In a 1000-word essay, three body paragraphs are sufficient.

The last section is the conclusion. This section summarises the discussion and reaffirms the thesis statement. It answers what the introduction says it will do. This section begins with repeating the essay question briefly, followed by mentioning the thesis statement and the road map once more. The writer may confirm the argument again in the last sentence.

In this study, the target group's essay writing was marked using a rubric adapted from the writing marking rubric of Charles Darwin University, Australia [5]. It was reviewed with the target group, focusing on where students should put in most of their effort.

The analysis of Rolls & Wignell's (2013) academic essay structure and the adapted rubric were approved by academic staff of the English programme, Faculty of Education, Lampang Rajabhat University, and language in this article was edited by professional editors at Elite Editing, Australia.

Next, types of essay questions were discussed, considered and selected by consulting with experts from the English programme based on the analysed essay structure. It was agreed that the essay questions used in this study were of the argument type—to clarify, that if students in the target group were asked to argue, they would

need to support or reject a point of view systematically by presenting evidence. The target group students also needed to show that they were aware of the opposing point of view. This is in line with Rolls & Wignell's (2013) writing process. Following this, the target group students took the pre-test, answering the essay question, 'Some people believe that educated people are more valuable than people who have learned skills through experience' [3]. Following the pre-test completion, a record was kept of each student's score. Next, the target students were instructed on the academic essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013). Then the participants practised writing for other two essay questions. After that a post-test was conducted, with students answering the essay question, 'Discipline is an increasing problem in modern schools. Some people think that discipline should be the responsibility of teachers, while others think that this is the role of parents' [3]. Finally, once participants had completed the post-test, the researcher analysed the test results in terms of percentages, means and standard deviations. A workflow of the methodology for the development of academic English argumentative essay-writing skills is provided in Figure 1.

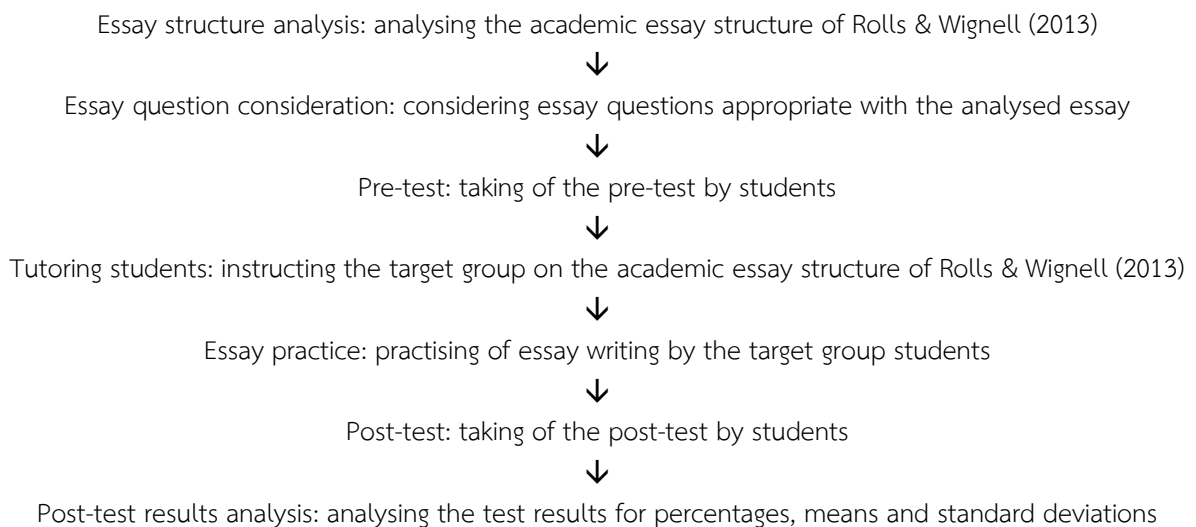


Figure 1 Workflow of the methodology for the development of academic English argumentative essay writing skills based on the essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013)

Results

The academic argumentative essay writing process administered to the target group in this study involved multiple steps; namely, essay structure analysis, essay question consideration, a pre-test, essay practice, a post-test and data analysis. Once participants had completed the post-test, the researcher analysed the test results for percentages, means and standard deviations (S.D.). All results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Pre-Test, post-test and difference scores of essay writing tests administered to the target group

	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Total	395	804	409
%	35.57	72.43	36.86
\bar{x}	10.67	21.73	11.06
S.D.	2.71	3.30	0.59

Table 3 presents the results of academic argumentative essay writing tests administered to the target group and the differences between the students' pre- and post-test scores. The combined pre-test score was 395 or 35.57%, with a mean of 10.67 (S.D. = 2.71), while the combined post-test score was 804 or 72.43%, with a mean of 21.73 (S.D. = 3.30). The difference between the total pre- and post-test scores was 409 or 36.86%, with a mean difference of 11.06 (S.D. = 0.59). This information is also illustrated in Figure 2.

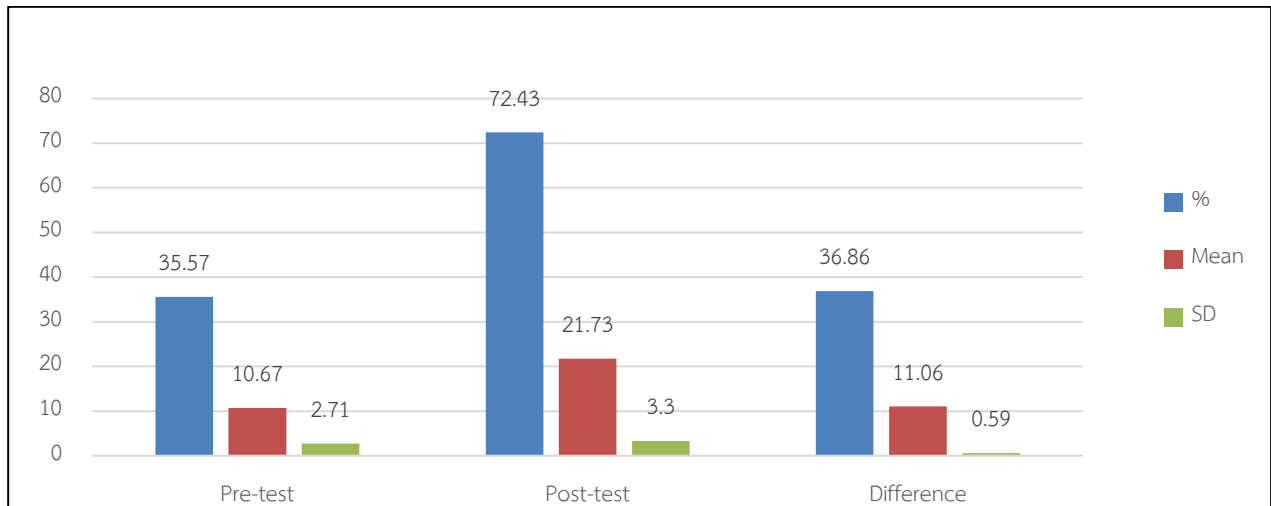


Figure 2 Pre-Test, Post-Test and Difference

As can be seen, the S.D. of the pre-test was 2.71 and the S.D. of the post-test was 3.33 both SDs are more than 1. This shows that the distribution of the individual student's essay writing development in this study was various and the total scores were affected. In another words, the target group students had various background knowledge of writing academic argumentative essays, even though they had studied English for more than 10 years previously in schools. From this it can be interpreted that writing academic argumentative essays is not yet supported in Thai classrooms at both the basic education and university levels.

However, the bar graph indicates the total S.D. of the difference between the pre-test and the post-test sharply decreased. The difference in S.D. between the pre-test and the post-test was only 0.59 (<1). This means that the distribution of the target group students' essay writing development became more consistent. They seem to have had similar skills in the essay writing process in terms of structure after they took the post-test. This could have caused the scores obtained to be consistently distributed. This shows that there was improvement in the target group's writing-process skills, especially the argumentative essay writing skills after they had been trained to write the argumentative essay writing by using the academic essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013). This is because post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores. Importantly, as English teachers to be, the English essay writing competence of the target group students should meet similar standards, so that they can be better equipped to teach essay writing more effectively on their practicum and in their future roles as English teachers.

Discussion

The academic argumentative essay is quite complex. During the essay writing process tutorial, the most challenging part for the target group students was the road-map writing. This part clearly shows the readers what evidence is going to be used and how the writer is going to present this to support the thesis statement. Most of the target group students struggled with thinking about the road maps to support their thesis statement. To clarify,

various target group students wrote road maps that overlapped, whereas each road map should be clearly separated from the other. Otherwise, the evidence for each road map will be repeated or loop. For example, there are three reasons or road maps (Actually, there are probably many other reasons as well but in a 1,000-word essay, three road maps are sufficient), why homework should not be given to students every day (thesis statement). First, doing homework every day stresses students. Second, students could become mentally ill from doing a lot of homework. Lastly, if homework is given every day, students become unhappy about going to school. It can be seen that all three reasons, or road maps, have similar meanings. This can cause looping ideas when evidence is presented to support the thesis statement.

Moreover, the target group students' thinking skills were increased from practising writing with the academic essay writing process. To illustrate, the essay structure of Rolls & Wignell (2013) used in this study is based on the process of an argumentative essay. The writer needs to argue a viewpoint with either one point in response to the essay question by providing logical evidence to support his or her thesis statement. This can be confirmed by the work of Roa's (2007) observation that the target group's thinking skills are increased from practising writing with the academic essay writing process [10].

Further, the essay-writing process skills will become of more benefit to the target group students in this study if they are able to apply their improved essay writing and thinking skills in other subjects—in particular, research courses. As Saito (2010) mentioned that university students, including undergraduate students, need to write reports, academic essays, research papers, research proposals and theses. This is because it can support students to develop an argument or point of view that will be supported by concrete evidence, reasons, examples and information from academic sources [13].

Conclusion

The major finding of this study is that, on average, post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores, thus the study appears to have achieved its objective. Further, the rigorous methodology employed in this work—essay structure analysis, essay question consideration, a pre-test, tutoring, essay writing practice, a post-test and data analysis—can support the development of academic argumentative English essay writing skills, which will be useful for the study participants in producing writing tasks in their university academic discipline.

However, even though writing skills are important for students learning English including the target group in this study, they are not yet practically promoted in language classrooms. It seems there are various difficulties in teaching English writing in Thai classrooms.

There are various reasons why the development of English writing skills is challenging in English classrooms of Thailand. First, Thai students learning English including the target group in this study may perceive that writing is the most difficult of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). According to Saito's (2010) study, writing is not easy for foreign language learners because many attempts are needed to do it successfully [13]. However, the results of this study show that the target group's academic writing competency was developed using Rolls & Wignell's (2013) essay structure as a guideline. This is because Rolls & Wignell provide steps as a scaffold to help the target group students until they gain enough knowledge about essay organisation to be successful at writing academic English argumentative essays.

The next obstacle to encouraging writing skills in Thai students may be the washback effects of language tests. 'Washback' refers to the impact a language test may have on teaching and learning practices [1, 8]. Although various researchers [6, 10, 13] have agreed that academic writing ability should be encouraged and taught to students at all levels. Prapphal (2008) makes an important point that the relationship between language teaching and testing in Thailand is reflected in history [8]. For example, the washback effects of language tests employed in school and university admission in Thailand, work in reverse. That is, discrete-point tests in multiple-choice format are the most common approach. Therefore, although writing skills are encouraged in schools for Thai students, they seem to pay less attention. This is as writing skills have not been tested in high-stakes national tests or present in school and university admissions because of the overload of marking the test items.

Suggestion

Even though there is the problem of language-test washback effects, to provide the greatest benefits to Thai students, English writing skills should be emphasised in the language classrooms, particularly at university level. Importantly, most Thai students' perception is that writing is the most difficult of the four language skills to handle. It is suggested that basic writing process be taught at school level and academic essay writing process should be taught at university level. The essay structure of Rolls and Wignel (2013) used in this study can be recommended for students at both levels. In addition, writing teachers in school and university should be trained to practise writing process, and the methodology of academic argumentative essay writing in this study can be recommended to them as a guideline.

Students may find the English essay writing process is difficult at the beginning. However, if they are provided with a practical writing-process model together with instruction by teachers who have been trained essay writing process previously, Thai students' attitude towards English writing can be positively improved. Also, their creative thinking skills can be increased and their writing communication skills developed. This is because writing is also a medium of communication like speaking.

It is recommended that students start to write a complicated explanation or argument, then combine sentences into paragraphs. This can lead them to transfer their thinking and writing strategies to English academic writing, such as an argumentative essay.

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