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The Application of Phrase Writing Formulas to Improve Argumentative Clarity of Thai EFL Students

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to improve the argumentative clarity of EFL students at Muslim Satun Wittaya School through the application of a systematically designed phrase writing formula. The background of this study stems from the difficulties experienced by students in writing argumentative texts due to differences in the linguistic structures of Malay, Thai, and English, which often cause language interference. The research method used was Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted in two cycles involving 25 high school sophomore students. Data were collected through writing tests, teacher and student observation sheets, field notes, and documentation. The results show a significant improvement in students' argumentative writing skills. The average writing score increased from 46.80 in the pre-cycle to 56.04 in Cycle I, and jumped to 85.48 in Cycle II. Teacher activity also increased from a score of 69 to 94, while student activity rose from 73.64 to 86.04. These findings prove that the phrase writing formula can function as effective scaffolding in helping students construct clearer, more coherent, and structured arguments. This study recommends the use of phrase formulas as a pedagogical strategy in argumentative writing instruction in a multilingual EFL context
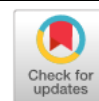
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INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing body of research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing in Thailand, several gaps remain that need further investigation. A number of studies have documented general difficulties Thai EFL learners face in writing, including challenges with grammar, vocabulary, organization of ideas, and writing structure. For example, empirical evidence highlights that Thai students often struggle to organize ideas, lack sufficient vocabulary, and have limited mastery of English grammar, which together hinder their writing proficiency in academic contexts(Almosa, 2024). esearch investigating Thai learners' English writing for standardized tests such as IELTS also underscores persistent problems with grammatical accuracy, time management, and text coherence, indicating that even exam preparation contexts do not fully resolve writing challenges. Moreover, studies aimed at exploring undergraduate EFL writing difficulties have identified multiple error types and low overall performance levels, with a significant focus on linguistic issues such as grammar and lexical choice. Some intervention research, including investigations into genre-based instruction, points to benefits of pedagogical techniques but mainly targets performance improvement rather than the underlying cognitive and sociocultural factors that contribute to writing difficulties.

However, in practice, English language learning in Thailand still faces various challenges, especially in developing writing skills that require mastery of complex language structures, vocabulary, and idea organization. The quality of effective English language education depends not only on the curriculum and teaching methods, but also on the development of learning strategies that are appropriate to the characteristics and needs of students in the local context. As a country at the heart Southeast Asia, Thailand has a strategic

interest in improving the English language competence of its younger generation to support ASEAN economic integration and academic and professional mobility at the regional and global levels. Therefore, innovation in English teaching methods, especially in writing skills, is essential to ensure that Thai students can compete effectively in an international context

The ability to argue is one of the higher-order thinking skills that is very important in modern education and professional life. In the context of English language learning, argumentative writing is a means for student to develop critical thinking skills, analyze issues, evaluate evidence, and convey their views logically and persuasively. (Allagui, 2024) emphasizes that argumentative writing is not only about expressing opinions, but also about constructing coherent arguments with strong evidence and systematic organization. The argumentation model explains that an effective argument consist of a claim, supporting data, warrant (guarantee), backing (additional support) qualifier (limiter), and rebuttal (refutation), all of which must be arranged cohesively and coherently to create a convicing argument (Nazmi, 2021). However, for EFL students, especially in Thailand, argumentative writing is often a significant challenge because it requires mastery of rhetorical structures that differ from their native language, as well as the ability to construct clear and precise phrases and sentences. Research shows that Thai EFL students tend to experience difficulties in organizing ideas, using appropriate discourse markers, and constructing arguments with good cohesion and coherence (Adistia & Cahyani, 2016).

Argumentative clarity, which is the ability to convey arguments explicitly and in an easily understandable manner, is highly dependent on the use of appropriate and well-structured phrases. Key phrases such as transitional phrases (e.g., "however," "furthermore," "on the other hand"), logical connecting phrases (e.g., "as a result, "consequently," "due to"), and argument-forming phrases (e.g., "it can be argued that," "evidence suggests that," "this demonstrates that") play an important role in guiding readers to understand the writer's train of though and follow the logic of the argument being constructed. Hinkel (2004) argues that the appropriate use of metadiscourse markers, including transition and connecting phrases, is an important characteristics of high-quality academic writing in English. However, EFL students often have difficulty selecting and using these phrases appropriately, resulting in writing that is less coherent and difficult to understand. These difficulties often stem from differences in rhetorical structure between English and students' native languages, as well as a lack of exposure to good models of argumentative writing and a lack of systematic practice in using these argumentative phrases.

In the context of learning in Southern Thailand, particularly in Satun Province, the challenges of learning English become more complex due to unique linguistics and cultural factors. Muslim Satun Wittaya School, the location of this study, is an educational institution with students who are pre predominantly from a Malay Muslim background with Malay as their mother tongue. This multilingual situation, where student use Malay in their daily lives, Thai as the national language, and Englis as a foreign language, creates its own challenges in learning argumentative writing. This multilingual context has important implications for the English learning process because students must navigate three different linguistic systems with different grammatical structures, rhetorical patterns, and writing conventions. Malay and Thai have different sentence structures and discourse organization patterns from English, which can cause negative transfer or language interference when students write in English (Al-saggaf, 2022).

Initial observations conducted at Muslim Satun Wittaya School indicate that students experience significant difficulties in constructing clear and coherent written arguments, particularly in the use of key phrases necessary for building effective argumentative structures. These difficulties not only impact the quality of students' writing, but also their confidence and motivation in learning English. Many students feel frustrated when they are unable to express their ideas clearly in English, even though they have a good understanding of the topics they are writing about. Although these various approaches have shown effectiveness in certain contexts, there is still limited research that specifically develops structured, practical, and easy-to-apply phrase writing formulas to improve the

argumentative clarity of EFL students, especially in the context of learning in Southern Thailand with its multilingual characteristics. There is a gap between complex pedagogical theory and the practical needs of teachers and students in the field for simple yet effective tools to improve the quality of argumentative writing.

This study aims to develop and apply a systematic phrase writing formula to improve the argumentative clarity of EFL students at Muslim Satun Wittaya School. This formula is designed to provide practical and structured guidance for students in constructing key phrases needed in argumentative writing, such as argument starters used to begin presenting the main argument, transitional phrases that serve to show the logical relationship between one idea and another, evidence presenters used to introduce data, facts, or examples that support the argument, and concluding phrases that help students summarize and reaffirm their arguments effectively. This formula was developed based on an analysis of the structure of good argumentative texts, common mistakes made by Thai EFL students, and pedagogical principles that support effective learning. By using a structured and easy-to-remember formula, it is hoped that students can improve their ability to compose clearer, more coherent, and persuasive argumentative writing, as well as reduce anxiety and increase their confidence in writing English.

Specifically, this study aims to answer research questions regarding how phrase writing formulas can improve the clarity of students' arguments, which elements of the formula are most effective in helping students construct coherent arguments, and how students perceive the use of these formulas in their writing process. The results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for teachers and education practitioners in developing more effective writing teaching methods that are tailored to the needs of EFL students in similar contexts, not only in Thailand but also in other Southeast Asian countries with similar multilingual characteristics. Furthermore, this research is expected to contribute to the literature on teaching argumentative writing in an EFL context and enrich the understanding of how simple yet structured pedagogical tools can facilitate complex language learning

METHOD

This study used the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method, which was carried out collaboratively between researchers and subject teachers, with the main objective of improving the quality of the learning process and outcomes of students. The research subjects were 25 students in the 2nd grade of Satun Wittaya Muslim High School, who were selected because of the need to improve the effectiveness of learning in that class. CAR was chosen as the approach because it has cyclical characteristics that allow for continuous improvement through concrete actions in the classroom (Siburian et al., 2022). This study was conducted in several cycles, and each cycle consisted of four stages, namely:

action planning, at this stage, the researchers and the English subject teacher collaboratively designed the instructional plan based on the problems identified in the preliminary observation;

implementation, the action stage involved implementing the planned learning activities in the classroom. The teacher conducted the English writing lessons by applying the phrase writing formula as the main instructional strategy;

observation Observation was conducted simultaneously with the implementation of the action.

Reflection was carried out after each cycle to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented actions. The researchers and teacher analyzed the collected data to identify strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles encountered during the learning process (Diana et al., 2021).

Data collection was carried out using various instruments, such as observation sheets of teacher and student activities, learning outcome tests, field notes, brief interviews, and documentation of activities. The phrase writing formula was implemented through structured and gradual steps to help students develop writing skills from simple language units to more complete written texts. The steps were as follows:

Introduction to Phrases

The teacher introduced the concept of phrases, including common types such as noun phrases and verb phrases, along with examples relevant to students' daily experiences. This stage aimed to build students' basic understanding of phrase construction.

Phrase Construction Practice

Students were guided to construct simple phrases based on given keywords or pictures.

Developing Phrases into Sentences

Students practiced expanding the phrases they created into simple sentences. Emphasis was placed on grammatical accuracy, sentence structure, and clarity of meaning.

Sentence Expansion into Short Paragraphs

In this step, students combined several related sentences into short paragraphs. The teacher guided students in organizing ideas logically, using connectors, and maintaining coherence between sentences.

Feedback and Revision

The teacher provided feedback on students' writing, focusing on phrase accuracy, sentence structure, and idea organization. Students were then asked to revise their work based on the feedback received.

Independent Writing Practice

Finally, students applied the phrase writing formula independently by producing short written texts on given topics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Result

In this study, students' argumentative writing skills were measured before the intervention was given using a test. Next, improvements were made in cycle I and cycle II. The students' results are shown in the following table.

Tabel 1. Student Argumentative Writing Result

Cycle	Result	Difference
Pre-cycle	46.80	-
Cycle I	56.04	9,24%
Cycle II	85.48	29%

Table 1 shows the results of students' argumentative writing skills measured through three stages, namely pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The data shows that in the pre-cycle stage, students' argumentative writing skills were still very low with an average score of only 46.80. This figure indicates that before the application of the phrase writing formula, students had significant difficulties in constructing clear and coherent written arguments. After the intervention with the application of the phrase writing formula in Cycle I, there was a 9.24% increase in student ability, so that the average score increased to 56.04. Although the improvement in Cycle I was moderate, it showed that students were beginning to understand and apply the formula that had been taught. The most striking improvement occurred in Cycle II, where the students' average score jumped dramatically to 85.48, an increase of 29%. This significant jump shows that the repeated and systematic application of the phrase writing formula had a very positive impact on the clarity of students' arguments. Overall, there was a total increase of 38.68 points from the pre-cycle to Cycle II, which demonstrates the effectiveness of the phrase writing formula in improving the argumentative writing skills of EFL students at Muslim Satun Wittaya School.

Next, measurements were taken of teacher performance in conducting lessons, whereby the researcher observed teachers as they taught. The results of teacher activities can be seen in the following table.

Tabel 2. Teacher Activity Observation Result

Cycle	Result	Difference
Cycle I	69	-
Cycle II	94	25%

Table 2 presents the results of observations of teacher activities in implementing the phrase writing formula during the learning process. In Cycle I, teacher activities scored 69, indicating that teachers had implemented the learning process quite well, but there was still room for improvement and refinement in the delivery of material. This score indicates that in the early stages of applying the new method, teachers may still be in the process of adapting and adjusting to teaching techniques using the phrase writing formula. In Cycle II, there was a significant increase of 25%, bringing the teacher activity score to 94. This increase shows that teachers have become more proficient and skilled in applying the phrase writing formula as a learning strategy. Improvements in teacher activity covered various aspects, such as clarity in delivering instructions, the ability to provide more concrete examples relevant to students' lives, skills in facilitating class discussions, and effectiveness in guiding students to apply the formula in their writing. The improvement in teacher activity from Cycle I to Cycle II shows continuous reflection and improvement in teaching practices, which ultimately contributes to successful learning and improved student abilities.

Tabel 3. Student Activity Observation Result

Cycle	Result	Difference
Cycle I	73.64	-
Cycle II	86.04	12,4%

Table 3 shows the results of observations of student activity and engagement during the argumentative writing learning process using the phrase writing formula. In Cycle I, student activity scored 73.64, indicating that students showed fairly good participation and engagement in learning activities. This score reflects that students began to respond to the new learning method that was applied, although there may still be some students who did not fully understand or apply the phrase writing formula optimally. In Cycle II, student activity increased by 12.4%, bringing the score up to 86.04. This increase shows that students were more active, involved, and enthusiastic in the learning process. Students demonstrated a better understanding of the use of the phrase writing formula, were more confident in constructing arguments, and were more active in discussing and collaborating with classmates. The increase in student activity also indicates a reduction in the level of difficulty and anxiety in writing English, as well as an increase in learning motivation. The positive correlation between the increase in student activity and the improvement in argumentative writing results shows that the active involvement of students in the learning process is an important factor in the successful application of the phrase writing formula to improve the clarity of their arguments..

Discussion

The significant improvement in students' argumentative writing skills in this study demonstrates the effectiveness of using phrase writing formulas as a form of scaffolding in writing instruction. This finding is in line with arguments emphasizing that EFL/ESL learners need scaffolding to master writing skills (Rashtchi, 2019). The dramatic jump in Cycle II indicates that learning phrase writing formulas requires time and repetition for optimal internalization. This is consistent with Vygotskian theory on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where structured scaffolding helps students reach their maximum potential with gradual support that can then be removed as students' competence increases (Ajeng et al., 2023).

The effectiveness of phrase writing formulas in the context of this study can be explained through the concept of formulaic sequences or prefabricated language, which are critical components in spoken and written texts. Multiword expressions are estimated to account for up to 50% of English (Giawa, 2024) . Therefore, knowledge of formulaic sequences is essential for successful communicative purposes (Khasanah et al., 2023). The phrase writing formula developed in this study serves as building blocks that facilitate students in constructing arguments in a more structured and coherent manner. By providing ready-to-use templates or phrase frameworks, students can focus on developing argumentative content without being burdened by the complexity of linguistic construction.

The multilingual context of students at Muslim Satun Wittaya School adds complexity to argumentative writing instruction. Students face various problems when writing

argumentative essays, which are categorized as cognitive, linguistic and discourse, and psychological problems (Siriwardhana et al., 2023). Writing formulae help reduce students' cognitive load by providing a reliable structure, especially for students who have to navigate three different linguistic systems (Malay, Thai, and English). In this situation, formulae act as "cognitive scaffolds" that reduce the complexity of the writing task and allow students to concentrate on higher-level aspects such as argument development and idea organization.

From the perspective of Second Language Acquisition theory, phrase writing formulas can be viewed as a form of lexical approach that emphasizes the importance of chunks of language in language learning. Lexical bundles as formulaic structures show consistent frequency of use in academic abstracts, introductions, and conclusions (Mallahi, 2024). This approach recognizes that language is not learned word by word, but in larger units that have specific meanings and functions. The formulas taught in this study, such as argument starters, transitional phrases, evidence presenters, and concluding phrases, are lexical bundles that have specific pragmatic functions in the genre of argumentative writing.

The practical implications of this study suggest that argumentative writing instruction in the context of EFL can be improved through the use of systematic and structured formulas. Argumentative writing is widely recognized as one of the most cognitively and linguistically challenging genres in EFL teaching, requiring learners to formulate clear positions, develop logical reasoning, integrate counterarguments, and adhere to academic discourse conventions (Siriwardhana et al., 2023). Writing formula phrases provide an accessible entry point for students to enter this complex genre, especially for students with developing proficiency levels.

In addition, the success of this study also demonstrates the importance of a gradual and recursive approach to teaching writing. Learning does not occur linearly, and students need multiple exposures and opportunities for practice to truly master the use of formulas in varied contexts. Repeated cycles with gradual increases in complexity and student responsibility allow for deeper internalization and more flexible use of the formulas learned..

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the application of phrase writing formulas effectively enhances the argumentative clarity of EFL students at Muslim Satun Wittaya School. The use of these formulas offers a more focused and systematic language structure, enabling students to construct arguments that are coherent, logical, and easier to comprehend. Through iterative classroom action processes, both students and teachers demonstrated positive progress in learning engagement, comprehension of instructional materials, and the application of writing strategies. The phrase writing formula functions as effective scaffolding by providing explicit guidance for organizing ideas, linking arguments, presenting supporting evidence, and concluding argumentative paragraphs in a structured manner. Furthermore, this approach contributes to increased student confidence in expressing ideas in English. Overall, the findings affirm that phrase writing formulas constitute a relevant and practical pedagogical approach for teaching argumentative writing to EFL learners, particularly within multilingual learning contexts.

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