Education Quarterly Reviews

The Asian Institute of Research *Education Quarterly Reviews* is a peer-reviewed International Journal. The journal covers scholarly articles in the fields of education, linguistics, literature, educational theory, research, and methodologies, curriculum, elementary and secondary education, higher education, foreign language education, teaching and learning, teacher education, education of special groups, and other fields of study related to education. As the journal is Open Access, it ensures high visibility and the increase of citations for all research articles published. The *Education Quarterly Reviews* aims to facilitate scholarly work on recent theoretical and practical aspects of education.

ASIAN INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH
Connecting Scholars Worldwide

Tracing Cultural Values in Thai Students' Dialogical Argumentation

Tanyapon Phongphio[1]

[1] Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Correspondence: Tanyapon Phongphio, Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, Thailand 50200, Tel: +66 53 943251, E-mail: tanyapon.p@cmu.ac.th

Abstract

Critical thinking and argumentation skills are crucial for developing responsible citizens and active participants in society. Indeed, reasoning and argumentation are known to be exercised differently in distinctive cultures. Historical, cultural and institutional contexts shape the way people in a society think, communicate and act. In this regard, the predominant Western assumption that reasoning should be detachable from emotion may not necessarily be accurate within the Thai cultural context. This paper highlights how different cultural assumptions were displayed in dialogical argumentation in English for fourteen, first-year undergraduates of the English Programme at a Thai university. The analysis of the argumentation data indicated that some participants presented their claims close to the end of their argumentative turns. In addition, personal experience was regularly employed as an argumentative strategy. Interestingly, there was also an absence of claims in some argumentative turns. The aforementioned findings and the themes derived from an analysis of the semi-structured interview data reflect some specific characteristics of Thai culture and values. They include indirectness and a desire for harmony, a subjectivity in argumentation and modesty.

Keywords: Argumentation Skills, Reasoning, Thinking Skills

1. Introduction

Critical thinking is considered to be a core learning skill in higher education. According to the economic model referred to as "Thailand 4.0", a major objective of the Thai government is the transformation of its citizens into "competent human beings in the 21st Century" (Royal Thai Embassy, n.d.). The implementation of these skills in the academic context requires the interweaving of various disciplinary themes into instruction, including critical thinking in order to enable students to make informed and reasoned decisions in the modern world. Critical thinking skills are concerned with systematic thinking, effective reasoning, and the making of reasoned judgments and decision-making (Partnership for 21st Century learning, 2009). In response to the government's policy, the National Qualifications Framework (Thailand NQF) has prescribed that Thai university students be equipped with skills in thinking and making reasoned judgments which will help to develop responsible citizens for the society (Office of the Education Council, 2017).

1.1. Critical Thinking and Argumentation

There is a nexus between critical thinking and argumentation because both implicate logic and reasoning. Allied with philosophy, critical thinking places emphasis on logical thinking with an application to the analysis of arguments (Quellmalz, 1987). Likewise, logical thinking and reasoning dominate argumentation. In argumentative exchanges, in which the participants attempt to scrutinise problematic issues and derive reasoned conclusions, the participants attempt to convince each other with their arguments. To do so, they are required to use logic and reasoning as a tool for analysing, evaluating and investigating each other's arguments, as well as defending their own arguments.

1.2. The Predominant Western Views of Reasoning and Argumentation and the Thai Context

Logic, reasoning and debate originated in Ancient Greece, and accordingly, argumentation has long been commonly practiced and is a fundamental character of Western civilisation and its democratic nature. In the West, it is thought that logic and reasoning involve a set of cognitive processes that are contradictory to emotions (Kahneman, 2003). Indeed, some experimental studies have shown that emotions are associated with human capabilities that are strong enough to influence and cancel rationality (Weigand, 2004). Taking into account the concept that emotions are human conditions, and reasoning and logic are regarded as human capabilities, emotions and reasoning are often detached within intellectual discourse in Western culture. As reasoning and logic dominate argumentation, which is commonly practiced in the West, individuals cannot trust arguments that are principally constructed based on emotions. In short, in the Western argumentative discourse context, there is an incompatibility with being both reasonable and emotional, in that reason is contrasted with emotion, which is perceived as being associated with the irrational.

Of course, the practice of the use of reasoning and logic in argumentation to establish truth claims in the Western context reflects an objective sense. According to Cassaniti and Luhrmann (2011), in Western culture the mind consists of an inner essence associated with cognition, motivation, awareness, emotion, judgment and action. It is treated as private, standing in natural separation from the world. In contrast, it could be argued that in a South Asian context, the mind is understood to be integrated and immersed with others in society. Specifically, in the Thai context, the mind has an energy which can wander, diffuse, get lost and return under the influence of others. In Thai culture, controlling one's own mind is the moral responsibility of an individual.

These cultural dimensions could be said to delineate the different concepts of the relationship between an individual's mind and a society – individualism versus collectivism. The worldview of individualism in the Western culture encourages the autonomy and agency of an individual's mind. In contrast, collectivism in the Asian context describes an individual's mind as an integral component of a society (Matsumoto, 1990; Zohar, 2013). Autonomy is considered to be a foundational principle of a liberal or democratic theory of society (Mackenzie, 2014). Indeed, there has been a view which equates autonomy with a self-centred individualism (Tappolet, 2014). Individual autonomy implies having the freedom, opportunity and appropriate competences for making choices and enacting decisions on the basis of one's own motives, reasons or values. In philosophical moral psychology, a competence is acknowledged as a person's capability to respond with reason (Mackenzie, 2014).

The historical, social and cultural conditions in which individuals are embedded shape their identities and values (Mackenzie, 2014) and influence the way people communicate and act. In this regard, the political and social constraints and the values associated with Thai culture can influence and somewhat restrict the conditions which accommodate the development and exercise of autonomy. According to Malikhao (2017), Thais tend to succumb to beliefs in supernatural powers, entreating them for protection in order to be able to personally survive in a hierarchical-oriented society and an uncertain and threatening world. It is also considered unacceptable to question, challenge or blame supernatural powers when a wish or request is not fulfilled. Instead, the requester evaluates their own behavior, considering whether there is anything they may have done that would have dishonored the spirits. It is likely that this behaviour is associated with the impact of hierarchy-oriented and patriarchal conditions

within society. Historically, the societal structure of Thailand is rooted in the *Sakdina* system, a feudal structure based on land possession[1]. It should also be noted that the country's shift and alliance towards capitalism have not completely altered the Sakdina system. Rather, the transition from a feudalistic to capitalistic society leans on, rather than replaces, this conservative force.

Many commentators contend that religious doctrines represent a fundamental problem for the country. Approximately, 95% of the population in Thailand are Buddhists (National Statistical Office, 2011). However, Thailand is located at the nexus between the beliefs of Buddhism, Brahmanism and Hinduism. Although Buddhism is the religion of reasoning and there is no discrimination towards women in Buddha's original teaching, it has been suggested that the adoption of certain prejudices in Buddhist doctrines in Thailand contributed to a patriarchy and a male-dominant society (Xu, Kerley, & Sirisunyaluck, 2011). Further, the belief systems in Brahmanism and Hinduism, which also rely on patriarchal structures, are similarly entrenched within Thai culture. For example, Thailand's male clergy has refused to allow the ordination of women as female monks.

In addition, extraordinarily, according to traditional beliefs, a female birth is an unfortunate event and the child is of inherently less value were they born a male. Correspondingly, it is thought that making good deeds in the current life will result in being born a man in the next life. It is surely not surprising that Buddhists agree with the conventions which promote the patriarch within a family. For example, parents are considered 'house gods' and a woman is required to obey her father, husband and even her son (Gross, 2014). These paradigms clearly demonstrate that the status of a woman in Thai society is secondary to that of a man.

However, it is important to emphasise that Buddhism has a connection with ethical reasoning and that Thai society is a complex mixture of a culture and not solely animistic. Gyamtso (2010) addresses how the Buddha emphasised the importance of the path of reasoning without denying the path of faith. In Buddhism, faith or belief can motivate and guide how people act and live their life in a society and enable them to reach what they aim to achieve. In addition, faith and belief can generate diligence and are fundamental parts of an intellectual development process (Phrachonyanmuni & Wongsaard, 2020). In the tradition in which the path of faith is significant, a practitioner acknowledges the significant role of a teacher and believes in the teacher's words. On the contrary, people who follow the path of reasoning use their own intelligence to examine what is being taught. To exorcise their doubts, people should use their critical analysis to investigate the Buddha's teaching[2]. If they find that his teachings are useful and practical, they should accept the teachings out of their confidence, rather than out of their faith in the Buddha. It can be understood that a person with a true Buddhist mind should employ critical thinking and reasoning to evaluate and make conclusions about what they have their faith in.

Thinking and reasoning have been practiced differently in each country in accordance with their culture and values. In a discourse in which a speaker intends to influence the behaviours, opinions or beliefs of others, they use sound reasons to support their propositions (Weigard, 2004). The literature on cognitive psychology (e.g., Nisbett, 2003) addresses how Westerners and Eastern Asians are likely to possess some differences in their cognitive styles and modes of reasoning. For example, Westerners are more likely to apply formal logic when reasoning about everyday matters, although their use of formal logic may occasionally cause errors in their reasoning. On the contrary, Easterners are willing to entertain contradictory propositions and sometimes this approach enables them to get at the truth. With regard to formal logic, Toulmin (1976) questioned how far the rigid structures of formal logic could be applied, particularly, in the context in which an individual argues for his or her belief or action with a properly convincing case. Toulmin suggested alternatively shifting the direction towards rhetoric rather than formal logic. In addition, Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) describe how, from an anthropological perspective, reasonableness

---

[1] The Sakdina system can be translated as status endowed by land possession. The king, who is perceived as semi-divine, omnipotent and infallible, is the owner of all land. The Sakdina status and the changeability of the status is dependent on how the king distributes the right to use the land in accordance with an individual's relationship with royal blood or by service to the king (Malikhao, 2017).
[2] There are two approaches for expelling doubt in Buddha's teachings and entering into enlightenment, including (1) an analysis of our own experiences and (2) an analysis of our own five sense consciousness and mental consciousness to understand the difference between the mode of appearance and the mode of an underlying reality.

and rationality are not seen as objective, universal and static; rather they can be seen as (inter)subjective, cultural-bound and dynamic.

1.3. Social Practices and Interactions as Pathway to Higher Order Thinking

In actual life, logical reasoning is bounded within the planes of philosophy, cognition and social interaction. Apart from a philosophical knowledge of logic and a mechanism of higher-order thinking, reasoning abilities also require a social process of communication. Some scholars (e.g., Billig, 1996, Mercier and Sperber, 2011) contend that reasoning is fundamentally a social ability. This hypothesis is also aligned with the views of Vygotsky and Piaget. Within Vygotsky's concepts, there is a close connection between the social activity of speaking and an active process of higher mental functioning, including reasoning (Daniels, 2001). Based on his view, an individual's process of reasoning is culturally mediated through a social process of communication. According to Piaget (1976, p. 80, quoted and translated in Doise & Mugny, 1984, p.19), "social interaction is a necessary condition of the development of logic." These concepts suggest that reasoning may be a social trait. A concrete example in this regard is manifested in the different perceptions of reasoning and emotions in the West and the East.

The term 'argumentation' is basically concerned with a verbal, social and rational activity. Eemeren and his colleagues (1996, p. 5) conceptualised argumentation as a verbal and social activity of reason. In argumentation, speakers attempt to increase the persuasiveness of their standpoints or decrease the acceptability of other speakers' propositions with sound reasons in order to convince and obtain agreement from their target audience. According to Sperber (2001), a reasoning ability is manifested in both the individual's reflection in monological argumentation and in dialogical argumentation. The perspective which emphasises argumentation as a process of social interaction informed my investigation of Thai university students and their processes of reasoning in terms of how they construct their own arguments[3]. In addition, it has been well documented (e.g., Bruner, 1996; Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996; Fiske et al., 1998) that cultural assumptions about talking and thinking shape the philosophical and scientific foundation of social practices and interactions. For this reason, it is left to further explore the consistency between Thai cultural values regarding the relationship between talking and thinking and psychological reality in the Thai context.

As Buddhism has significantly contributed to the Thai worldview, I made the reasonable assumption that the Buddhist way of thinking would have a substantial impact on Thai students' rationality and reasoning capacities. This research study used a data analysis of Thai students' dialogical argumentation to investigate the influence of certain values of Thai culture portrayed in the students' argument patterns. The findings generated a better understanding of how the reasoning capabilities of Thai students have been shaped by their Thai social and cultural values. The research questions addressed in this study include:

1) What are patterns of argument in Thai students' dialogical argumentation that can reflect certain Thai cultural values?
2) What are sociocultural contexts of Thai students that shape the way they proposed their arguments with those argument patterns?

2. Methodology

The research design adopted a qualitative research approach which generated an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its context. This study was carried out with fourteen volunteers who were first-year students of the English Programme at a university in Thailand. The students participated in pairs in dialogical argumentation in English. The session started with a warming-up activity in order to familiarise the participants with argumentation. Then each pair chose two or three topics for discussion from a list of the topics provided. Prior to argumentation on each topic, the participants were given a ten-minute preparation time. The participants' argumentation tasks

---

[3] In this paper, the term 'argumentation' denotes the process of developing arguments, and I use the term 'argument' to refer to the product or content.

were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis using a line-by-line approach of what was actually stated. The audio recordings of the argumentation tasks of all fourteen participants lasted, approximately, 270 minutes in total. Then twenty-one transcripts of the 270-minute argumentation were divided into 302 sections for further analysis in order to detect and trace patterns of argument that reflected certain Thai cultural values. Apart from the data of dialogical argumentation, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were undertaken in Thai after the participants had performed the argumentation task. The full transcripts of the interview data collected from twelve participants were analysed using thematic analysis to generate themes that inform how the sociocultural background of the participants impacted on the way they delivered their arguments and the associated patterns.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the dialogical argumentation transcripts reported some argument patterns which are reflective of certain Thai cultural values. In addition, the analysis of the interview data, in particular, reflected certain social and cultural values and illustrated the Buddhist approach towards thinking and reasoning. These sociocultural values and Buddhist attitudes also illuminated the following themes.

3.1 Indirectness in Argumentation

The emergence of the first theme is concerned with how the participants were more likely to be indirect in argumentative reasoning. This action seemed associated with the avoidance of conflict in order to maintain harmony within a group. From the analysis of the transcripts, amongst the 302 sections of the participants' dialogical argumentation, it was found that twenty-two sections had a similar pattern. Each of those sections started with supporting ideas, but the speakers' claims were presented close to the end of the sections. This can be seen in the following extracts of which the claims are underlined.

> **Extract 1:** Bella proposed an argument to support her view that studying subjects which meet the demands of a job market is more advantageous than studying subjects which suit one's own abilities.
> *I really agree with this because we can see that in Asia nowadays in many colleges we have many new students who graduated from many colleges and many faculties too. Everyone also has their own different skills and knowledge. There's nothing that can confirm that everyone who just graduated can get a job that they want in a suddenly time. Because nowadays it's really hard to find some jobs, any job that you really want to do and something that link with your ability and your knowledge. So I think we choose to study in the subject or the faculty that are needed in the job market. I think it's easy to find a job more than our preference (Bella).*

> **Extract 2:** Violet advanced her argument to support the idea that studying subjects which suit one's own abilities provide more advantages.
> *I think that I can't deny the impact of labour market demands is factor on students to choose career. It doesn't matter because when you graduate from the university, you must have somewhere to work or somewhere to (inaudible). But for me to make your own desire to study, there are so many ways to make yourself in somewhere that you can do something for your life because there are a lot of ways. Such as, maybe in this time, yes, you really have to find a job. There's less offer than before, Maybe you can make your own business. Maybe you can be your own boss. Or maybe you can work that related to what you have learned or studied because… But I think I believe in this statement that "Do what you love and love what you do" always leads you to success and true happiness. But I don't mean that to study the subjects that meet the demand of the market is not going to be unhappy or not. But I am talking about that if you have your own desire to study or learn. I think no matter what you are going to do what you love or like, it's going to be what you really like and you do it with your best and do it what you really want to do with your own passion (Violet).*

As indicated, these claims were only presented at the end of an argument. The above extracts illustrated an argument pattern shared amongst some participants. The participants structured their arguments by referring to the background of a problem or by providing supporting information, rather than stating their claims at the very beginning of their turns. This pattern is likely to be associated with the Thai values of avoiding direct confrontation. There is an expression in Thai, "Chak Mae-Nam Thang Ha," which translates in English as "Pulling all five rivers." The expression means that a person draws upon multiple reasons to convince an interlocutor and to reach their goals. This expression has its origin from the literature on Mahachat, the story of the last great incarnation of the Buddha, and the five rivers are the five major rivers in India. This expression reflects how an indirect nature is viewed as a favourable characteristic of Thais.

Starting their exchanges in argumentation with supporting details, rather than with a claim or an argument, reduces the extent of being too direct, assertive and challenging. The analysis of the interview data pinpointed that some participants appeared to be careful when communicating with their interlocutors, even with acquainted peers. This is doubtless influenced by Thai culture characteristics that emphasise a harmonious atmosphere. Upsetting the feelings of other interlocutors could create both an unfavourable atmosphere and an unsuccessful outcome from the interaction. Rather than allowing this circumstance to occur, Thais would prefer to subjugate their actual thoughts and feelings.

According to some participants, the avoidance of confrontation, especially with adults, is the appropriate behaviour in the Thai context. A young person who confronts an adult would be judged as a disrespectful person. Fiona, one of the participants, shared her story regarding how she avoided confrontation with her relatives who strongly encouraged her to choose a study programme in which she had no interest.

> *My parents were okay with my choice of the English Programme for my first degree at the university. However, my relatives who wanted me to study medical science complained about my decision. I felt exhausted due to their complaints. During the preparation time for a university entrance exam, I avoided to see them face to face. Whenever they came to visit my parents, I locked myself up in my bedroom and claimed that I was busy with studying…. I avoided confrontation with them. I didn't want to argue against them because they were adults. And I knew it would be hard to change their minds (Fiona).*

The concept of the avoidance of conflict in order to keep harmony within a group is also manifested in Jasmine's interview data.

> *Despite holding a different view, if it's not a big deal matter, I'm sort of compromise and view it as negotiable. Therefore, I often take it easy and let it go. I'm personally concerned about maintaining good relationships with other people (Jasmine).*

In Buddhist tradition, especially meditation, it is acknowledged that the states of silence and introspection help facilitate a higher level of thinking. Another Thai proverb, "Pood Pai Song Pai Bia, Ning Sia Tam Lueng Thong," reflects this custom to some extent, Thais' values. The meaning of this proverb rhymes with the English adage "Speech is silver, but silence is golden" and this reflects the Thais values and approaches to interpersonal communication. Seen through the lens of Buddhist teaching, modesty, the middle way and selflessness are key aspirations for behaviour. The Buddha taught his followers to treat others, including enemies, with compassion and kindness (Swati & Ghani-ur-Rahman, 2012). The avoidance of conflict could be characterised as a predominant feature of Thais' interpersonal communication. The aim is to maintain the relationship and harmony of the group as a whole. In this regard, Thais are taught at an early stage to oppress their emotions and to avoid the initiation of a conflict. This approach can readily be seen in the prevalence of the participants' emotions in their means of constructing arguments.

The collectivistic characteristic of Thai society drives the group dynamics and determines the harmonious and cooperative interdependence between individuals and others and the subjugation of the concept of the individual. Some research studies have found an association between these collectivistic cultures and the suppression of emotion. Individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to diminish the expression of their emotions, whereas people from individualistic cultures would often express their emotions more readily (Matsumoto, 1990; Matsumoto et

al., 2002). Subsequently, it is likely that the desire to create harmony and cooperation within a Thai group played a role in the way the students structured their arguments.

3.2 Rationality and Subjectivity in Argumentation

The analysis of the transcripts indicates that personal experience plays a significant role in Thai participants' argumentative dialogues. According to the data, twenty-seven out of 302 sections included the firsthand experiences of the participants and the experiences of others which the participants used as evidence or as a ground for supporting their arguments. The participants' employment of personal experiences in supporting their arguments can be seen in Extracts 3 and 4.

> **Extract 3:** Beatrix delivered her argument with an intention to challenge the view that the use of social media applications has caused social isolation.
>> *I don't really agree with you that I think social media application doesn't cause isolation in the society. Because, I think social media make we get closer. For example, friend, my friends uploaded the story where they go, what they did last week. I can see them although I didn't go with them. When we meet each other, we can talk about that. Like, yes, we have something to talk and it really makes we get closer… (Beatrix).*

> **Extract 4:** Patricia constructed her argument with an aim to support her perspective on the negative effects of the use of social media applications.
>> *My dad keeps playing Facebook at the dinner table and I have to say to stop him from playing. Because of social media, we have social distancing from each other. We don't spend more time with family. That's why we should not pay attention to phone too much. I didn't talk about it that it doesn't cause isolation, but it also has a problem of isolation (Patricia).*

The interview data also confirmed the importance of personal experience for some participants in argumentation. One of the participants, Bella felt that she fully engaged herself in the discussion topic on how the "Internet celebrity market diminishes the value of human beings" because of her own personal experience. Bella indicated how:
> *The topic is quite related to my personal experience and it allowed me to draw upon my direct experience in argumentation. From others' perspectives, my image was relatively good. This shaped my views that I needed to act and behave well to meet others' expectations. In argumentation, I felt like, eventually, I was able to say what I truly thought. Upon my reflection on myself, my previous behaviour reduced my self-esteem (Bella).*

The participants' choices of supporting their arguments with personal experiences can be further explained through the lens of Thai culture in which there is an intersection of rationalism and animism. Buddhist teaching emphasises how listening and studying from more knowledgeable people, combined with direct and practical experiences are the correct approaches to wisdom. However, reflection and reasoning is also an important approach for the development of wisdom, which, in turn, promotes rationality (ปัญญาภา, 2014). Indeed, a true Buddhist mind accommodates and embraces critical thinking (Zhang, 2018). In addition, Boss (2015) addresses how firsthand experience is positioned at the first level of the model of thinking, whereby a person simply describes his or her own experience, as well as the information received directly from others. In order to develop critical thinking, that person is required to further interpret and analyse those experiences. Following the Buddhist approach to wisdom and Boss' model of thinking, it can be understood that making sense of personal experiences, not only of their own but also of others, through the process of reflection and reasoning is vital for developing higher-order thinking. It may appear trite to highlight the importance of personal experience to some participants in their argumentative strategy; however, that this group of individuals used such experiences without making sense or contextualizing them, indicated a profound absence of reflection and reasoning.

Further, it should be noted that Buddhism goes beyond the level of reflection and reasoning. Supernatural knowledge or intuition is also considered to be another significant tool for making sense of a phenomenon. In Buddhism, rationality is situated at two different levels. At the foundational level, a phenomenon can be understood with elementary wisdom and empirical and rational knowledge. However, to achieve a higher level, a phenomenon cannot be merely understood with elementary wisdom; rather, an extraordinary wisdom or supernatural knowledge is required (ปัญญาภา, 2014). As previously discussed, the Buddhist approach to the development of wisdom emphasises reflective thinking and making sense of one's own private experience. Interestingly, experiences based on empirical reasoning have been assessed as a valid tool for examining some supernatural beliefs within Thai culture, particularly in the Northern and Northeastern communities (Wattanagun, 2018). The author reported how his Thai interviewees tended to adopt both scientific and supernatural strategies as rational explanations to illustrate and examine the mysterious incidents they have experienced. In other words, experiences based on empirical reasoning and the adoption of rational explanations seem to play a supporting and co-existing role in scrutinising supernatural phenomena. Although supernatural beliefs have been viewed as a fallacious mode of thinking in the scientific context, the beliefs, as such, cannot be explained by scientific-rationalist notions of reality. Drawing upon the aforementioned sociocultural practices and beliefs to understand the phenomenon, it can be understood that the participants applied both subjective and rational strategies in argumentation. Some participants' deployment of personal experiences in their argumentative strategies illustrated the paradox between subjectivity in the social and cultural values for Thais and their analytical and logical attempt to devise a tool for the logical explanation of an incident based on scientific rationality.

3.3. A Nuanced Stance in Argumentation

The third theme to emerge from analysis of the transcripts of the participants' dialogical argumentation relates to the notion of the adoption of a nuanced stance to avoid being judged by peers as too extreme in terms of opinions. Being modest and subtle is likely to allow the participants to be more flexible in handling argumentative dialogues, especially with unfamiliar interlocutors who may hold opposing views. The data analysis highlighted that some participants did not make it clear at the beginning of their talks in argumentation what stance they were taking, supporting or opposing with regard to a motion. It was found that six sections in the transcripts started with and mainly contained supporting ideas, with the absence of the speakers' claims. This can be seen in the following Extracts 5 and 6.

Extract 5: Fiona expressed her view on the topic "Happiness in this era emerges in social media rather than in the real world."

> *When I see my brother is playing with friends, playing football with friends or riding, I see children are happy when spending time together in real life with their friends. But when they play the game, they will get mad at their friends. They are happy, but sometimes they get mad at their friends when playing computer games. And they speak that bad words to others. His friends speak the bad words to my brother. My brother speaks that bad words to his friends, and they fought until they go to school again. But when they play together, if they controversy, they can reconcile in the future in a minute because they are together. When they controversy when they play the game, one of them can close the game, can leave the game and they haven't talked to each other for a while (Fiona).*

Extract 6: Bella discussed the topic "Studying subjects which meet the demand of a job market is more advantageous than studying subjects which suits one's own abilities."

> *I think it also relates on the personal of each people too. For me at the beginning I go to school, my mum always suggests me or advise me to learn this or choose that, something like that. In Grade 9, I studied in English programme before, so I had to choose the new programme in Grade 10. And yes, I choose the English programme too. But my mum, she said, not just my mum, every parents said you have to choose science and math programme first because it gives you more chance to choose the faculty in the college too in order to find a job in the future (Bella).*

When the goal of argumentation is to convince a target audience, it is crucial for a speaker to clearly state his or her stance and supporting arguments. The absence of some arguments is likely to be a consequence of how some participants tended to undermine their own voice or lacked the confidence to express their stances. The perspectives from one of the participants, Florence, clearly indicated her concern regarding a potential negative appraisal and rejection from others. Florence commented:

> In the previous semester, I had discussed the topic "Abortion should be legalised in Thailand" in a classroom. The teacher asked the students to vote for the side they agreed upon. I noticed that the majority of the students were likely to support legalisation of an abortion. I heard one of the classmates said it was impossible that anybody here would be against this motion. Indeed, I was definitely against this motion. However, I felt unconfident to express my stance. I was worried of being judged as a conservative and narrow-minded person (Florence).

In addition, some participants' experiences in an English communication classroom reflected how Thai students tend to be reserved and reluctant to express what they really think, particularly in an unfamiliar environment. Indeed, Sage's observations reflect how, despite the fostering of a safe and supportive environment for learning in the classroom, many students were not comfortable expressing themselves.

> From my experience in the English communication classroom, the atmosphere of teaching and learning was relatively quiet. The students were not familiar with one another, so majority of us chose to be quiet rather than expressive. The classroom atmosphere was like very few students contributed to sharing ideas in discussion (Sage).

This observation can be analysed through the lens of two dimensions. First, viewing this experience through the lens of Buddhism, Thais are taught to take the middle path, which means an avoidance of existing within the two extremes of life. This refers to being neither indulgent in the sensual pleasures of life, nor living life with strict asceticism. It is possible that to clearly identify one's own stance in the argumentation can be seen as an extreme form of self-expression for the participants. Indeed, the participants are more likely to be in favour of compromise and harmony in argumentation, rather than explicitly clarifying their position.

In addition, Malikhao (2017) suggests that Thai animism is focused on appropriately and passively honouring, rather than challenging the power of the supernatural. This illustrates a modesty within the Thai character and its approach towards animism. As mentioned earlier, the controlling conditions that arise from the social structures and religious doctrines within the country are likely to restrict Thais' personal liberties and these conditions impact the political and social worlds. It can readily be understood that Thais are unlikely to have full agency and the opportunity to exercise their autonomy competences. Further, animism is not a phenomenon associated with commonplace realities and rational principles (Malikhao, 2017).

The other dimension for understanding this observation is concerned with the idea that Thailand is a highly collectivist country. A long-term commitment and loyalty to a group is a predominant feature of Thai society. Thais are likely to hold the view that building strong bonds and relationships between each other requires time and patience. Therefore, to preserve their own membership within a group, they are required to avoid confrontation and abide by the rules of the group. In this regard, any actions and communication which openly show discord with the majority of the group can be considered aggressive and impolite, and, consequently, this can lead to losing face.

3.4 Emotions in Argumentation

The emergence of such issues in the data analysis in this research suggests that Thai students tend to reason through emotions. In particular, this seemed to be exemplified by the students' concerns over the judgement of others about them. For them, argumentation does not solely involve proposing arguments with reasons and evidence, but their actions in argumentation were strongly driven by emotions – feelings and concerns about themselves and their interlocutors. The first issue with regard to emotions includes a concern that opposing views in argumentation

might make the relationship with an interlocutor acrimonious and inharmonious. The other issue involves a lack of confidence in revealing an opinion or stance during argumentation.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) contend that people in different cultures have a different understanding of the self, of others and of the interdependence of the self and others. Consequently, this understanding can influence the nature of individual experience, including emotion. Buddhism, which has been credited as a significant source of the Thai worldview (Mulder, 2000; Sattayanurak, 2002, 2005), takes into account a balancing between reasoning and emotions and allows a contribution from healthy emotions to play a role in thinking processes. The traditional philosophy of Buddhism considers empathy and love for all living beings as the foundation of critical thinking and flourishing towards a good life. Healthy emotions, as such, may promote some positive emotional effects, including a sensitivity to others' views. De Silva (2006) analysed the psychodynamic condition of emotional states and indicated that there is a range of factors which emerge out of the socio-economic structure of a certain society. The author suggested that this phenomenon was aligned with the notion of the Buddha and that the weight given to a range of emotions (e.g., loving, kindness, empathy, desire to share, fear, guilt, grief and anger) had a significant association with the value system embedded in a particular society.

3.5. Implications for Teaching and Learning of Argumentation

Undoubtedly, there are fundamental differences between the cultural values of Western and Eastern societies and transplanting Western-style teaching strategies can pose significant difficulties for Thai students in the classroom. Following the conventional approach to propose an argument, the students are required to clarify their claims at the beginning of their talk. However, growing up in a culture in which being too direct could be perceived as aggressiveness and where indirectness is associated with politeness and harmony is likely to impact the Thai student's approach in argumentation. This paper suggests that it is important to guide learners to recognise the different patterns of reasoning between the Western culture and the Thai culture. Learners should be provided with more scaffolding and support of conventional argument patterns, so that they are more familiar with such patterns and can adopt them when communicating in the culture of the target language.

In addition, employment of personal experience by some students as a strategy in argumentation indicates an issue which may be of concern for teachers. As discussed, describing firsthand experience is the primary level of thinking. To encourage one's level of thinking to be more critical, an individual is required to make sense of that experience and analyse it (Boss, 2015). However, the findings showed that in argumentation, the students merely described their own or others' direct experiences, rather than interpreting, examining and contextualizing those experiences. For this reason, it is crucial to equip Thai students with the skills necessary for interpretation and analysis of firsthand experiences and to cultivate these habits. To foster these skills, the author suggests promoting an environment in the classroom that allows the students to question one another in an open, collaborative and conducive manner. Each person brings different interpretations and experiences that need to be respected.

The final issue is concerned with the students' reluctance to present their stances. The participants were worried about challenging and not being accepted by their peers, especially if their stances are contrary to those of their peers. This phenomenon was clearly a consequence of the important cultural value attached to conformity to the collective society. The findings informed the requirement of empowering the students to realise that their voices exist and to express their voices. Moreover, it is crucial to design tasks and pedagogical techniques which can support the cultivation of being open-minded to other points of view, particularly ones which disagree with their views. Such 'perspective-taking' is known to be a fundamental characteristic of critical thinking. With regard to an approach to empowering the students, teachers should create a positive and supportive classroom environment that allows the students to take different roles and perspectives on a certain discussion topic.

4. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate Thai students' argumentation patterns. The students' dialogical argumentation process clearly indicated that this type of discourse required the reasoning skills of the students. However, most

importantly, the argumentation tasks also elicited strong emotional responses amongst the students. Thematic analysis derived from the interview data confirmed the impact of Thai culture and values on the participating students' actions and strategies in dialogical argumentation. In particular, some of their argument patterns reflected Thai cultural values. These emphasise an avoidance of confrontation and a desire to maintain harmony within a group. Further, deploying personal experience as a strategy in argumentation echoed the values embedded in Buddhist teachings and the apparent contradictions between mythological and superstitious beliefs and religious beliefs within Thai culture. In addition, the collectivism apparent in Thai society appeared to influence how the students would avoid taking an extremist position in stating their stances. Indeed, this desire to maintain harmony within a group often led to a situation whereby the students would be reluctant to even state a position.

Despite the impact of the aforementioned sociocultural factors, this paper contends that the employment of conventional patterns of argument and dialogical argumentation tasks have significant potential in the teaching of critical skills. More scaffolding tasks will provide learners with more exposure to the argument patterns of the targeted language and culture. Furthermore, a classroom environment which is positive and supportive and allows for the expression of opinions and perspective taking will encourage learners to take more risks and foster their confidence. In conclusion, theses pedagogical techniques are likely to develop reasoning skills in a systematic manner, and, along with English language skills, provide learners with more exposure to the culture of the targeted language.

References

Billig, M. (1996). *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boss. (2015). *Think: Critical Thinking and Logic Skills for Everyday Life* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Bruner, J. S. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. London: Havard University Press.

Cassaniti, J., & Luhrmann, T. M. (2011). Encountering the Supernatural: A Phenomenological Account of Mind. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research*, *2*(1), 37–53. https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2011.020103

Daniels, H. (2001). *Vygotsky and Pedagogy*. London: Routledge.

de Silva, P. (2006). *The Psychology of Emotions in Buddhist Perspective. The Wheel Publication No. 237*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Doise, W., & Mugny, G. (1984). *The Social Develoment of the Intellect*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Eemeren, F. H. van, & Grootendorst, R. (2004). *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation: The Pragma-Dialectical Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eemeren, F. H. van, Grootendorst, R., Henkemans, F. S., Blaire, J. A., Johnson, R. H., Erik, C. W. K., … Zarefsky, D. (1996). *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Fiske, A. P., Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., & Nisbett, R. E. (1998). The Cultural Matrix of Social Psychology. In D. Gilbert, A. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (pp. 915–981). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Gross, R. M. (2014). The Suffering of Sexism: Buddhist Perspectives and Experiences. *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, *34*(1), 69–81. https://doi.org/10.1353/bcs.2014.0015

Gyamtso, K. T. (2010). The Path of Faith and the Path of Reasoning. Retrieved June 2, 2021, from https://tricycle.org/magazine/path-faith-and-path-reasoning/

Kahneman, D. (2003). A Perspective on Judgment and Choice: Mapping Bounded Rationality. *American Psychologist*, *58*(9), 697–720. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.9.697

Mackenzie, C. (2014). Three Dimensions of Autonomy: A Relational Analysis. In A. Veltman & M. Pipe (Eds.), *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender* (pp. 15–41). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199969104.001.0001

Malikhao, P. (2017). *Culture and Commuication in Thailand: Communication, Culture and Change in Asia 3*. (J. Servaes, Ed.). Hong Kong: Springer.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture of the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation. *Psychological Review*, *98*(2), 224–253.

Markus, H. R., Kitayama, S., & Heiman, R. J. (1996). Culture and "Basic" Psychological Principles. In E. T. Higgins & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles1* (pp. 857–913). New York: Guilford Press.

Matsumoto, D. (1990). Cultural Similarities and Differences in Display Rules. *Motivation and Emotion*, *14*(3), 195–214. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00995569

Matsumoto, D., Consolacion, T., Yamada, H., Suzuki, R., Franklin, B., Paul, S., … Uchida, H. (2002). American-Japanese Cultural Differences in Judgements of Emotional Expressions of Different Intensities. *Cognition and Emotion*, *16*(6), 721–747. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930143000608

Mercier, H., & Sperber, D. (2011). Why do Humans Reason? Arguments for an Argumentative Theory. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *34*(02), 57–111. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X10000968

Mulder, N. (2000). *Inside Thai Society: Religion, Everyday Life, Change*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

National Statistical Office. (2011). Survey of Social and Cultural Conditions 2011. Retrieved January 20, 2018, from http://service.nso.go.th/nso/nsopublish/themes/files/soc-culPocket.pdf

Nisbett, R. E. (2003). *The Geography of Thought: How Asian and Westerners Think Differently...and Why*. New York: The Free Press.

Office of the Education Council. (2017). *National Qualifications Framework (Thailand NQF)* (Revised ed). Bangkok: Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education.

Partnership for 21st Century learning. (2009). P21 Framework Definitions. Retrieved September 9, 2019, from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED519462.pdf

Phrachonyanmuni, & Wongsaard, S. (2020). Buddhism and Belief. *Journal of Palisueksabuddhaghosa*, *6*(2), 99–115. Retrieved from https://so05.tci-thaijo.org

Quellmalz, E. S. (1987). Developing Reasoning Skills. In J. B. Baron & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice* (pp. 86–105). New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Royal Thai Embassy, W. D. C. (n.d.). Thailand 4.0. Retrieved January 26, 2021, from https://thaiembdc.org/thailand-4-0-2/

Sattayanurak, S. (2002). Intellectuals and the Establishment of Identities in the Thai Absolute Monarchy State. *Journal of the Siam Society*, *2*(90.1 &2), 101–124. Retrieved from http://www.siamese-heritage.org/jsspdf/2001/JSS_090_0g_SaicholSattayanurak_IntellectualsAndIdentities.pdf

Sattayanurak, S. (2005). The Construction of Mainstream Thought on "Thainess" and the "Truth" Constructed by "Thainess." In *2nd Humanity Research Conference: New Dimension of Interdisciplinary and Integration Humanity Research*. 10-11 August 2005, Chiangmai, Thailand. Retrieved from http://thaimissions.info/gsdl/collect/thaimiss/index/assoc/HASH0182/3bba5980.dir/doc.pdf

Sperber, D. (2001). An Evalutionary Perspective on Testimony and Argumentation. *Philosophical Topics*, *29*(1 & 2), 401–413.

Swati, M. F., & Ghani-ur-Rahman. (2012). Assassination Attempts on the Buddha as Depicted in the Gandharan Reliefs. *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, *35*(1), 65–75. Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/openview/a64ac9005312e1e0c114417641cd4993/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=105703

Tappolet, C. (2014). Emotions, Reasons, and Autonomy. In A. Veltman & M. Pipe (Eds.), *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender* (pp. 163–180). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199969104.001.0001

Toulmin, S. (1976). *Knowing & Acting: An Invitation to Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Wattanagun, K. (2018). The Phenomenology of Supernatural Belief. *Asian Ethonology*, *77*, 79–98. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26604834

Weigand, E. (2004). Emotions: The Simple and the Complex. In E. Weigand (Ed.), *Emotion in Dialogic Interaction: Advances in the Complex*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Xu, X., Kerley, K. R., & Sirisunyaluck, B. (2011). Understanding Gender and Domestic Violence from a Sample of Married Women in Urban Thailand. *Journal of Family Issues*, *32*(6), 791–819. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X10386306

Zhang, R. (2018). Critical Thinking and Buddhism. *Outstanding Gateway Papers*, *16*. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/gateway/16

Zohar, S. (2013). Influence of Cultural Values on Emotion Regulation and Well-Being: A Study of Thai University Students. *Scholar: Human Science*, *5*(1), 83–91. Retrieved from http://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/Scholar/article/view/164

ปัญญาภา, ร .(2014) .Potential of Wisdom in Buddhism: Principal Concept for Educational Administration. *วารสารครุศาสตร์ปริทรรศน์ฯ*, *1*(1), 27-42. Retrieved from https://so.02tci-thaijo.org/index.php/EDMCU/article/view/142737