【特別企画】

Argument-Counterargument Activities in EFL Writing Classes in a Japanese University[1]

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英語学習者のライティング授業における論証と反論の活動

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　　　This article discusses how I incorporated argument-counterargument activities in an informal oral mode and a formal presentation format in first-year university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic writing classes in Japan. The activities involved engaging students in informal mini-debates during class sessions and formal presentations comprising a thesis supported by multiple arguments, counterarguments, and responses based on the students' research papers written in the course. Notably, one class of students opted to participate in a competitive debate tournament outside regular class hours, resulting in varying degrees of success.

　　この論文では、日本の大学 1 年生の外国語としての英語 (EFL) アカデミック・ライティングの授業において、インフォーマルな口頭発話と正式なプレゼンテーション形式の両方で、議論と反論の活動を組み込んだ方法について紹介する。具体的には、授業中にミニディベートを行い、また、授業で作成したリサーチペーパーを基にして、学生が複数の議論（論証）に支えられた主張、反論、再反論から成るフォーマルなプレゼンテーションを行った。特筆すべき点として、一つのクラスでは、学生が授業時間外にディベート大会に参加することを選択し、ある程度の成功を収めた。

Keywords: argument, counterargument, debate, EFL, writing.

1. Introduction

　　　This is a report of my struggle to introduce some argumentation-centered activities into EFL writing classes. I deliberately used the word "argument" to initially avoid words like "debate" or "debating" in the

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classroom, although some students noticed that what I introduced was debate. The students were asked to make a pair to give reasons for and against a chosen topic. They were also asked to write arguments with researched evidence from online sources, to present them in class, which were responded to by assigned "devil's advocate" in pairs. Generally, many of the students were ready to participate in debating activities and so I switched to a more explicit reference to "debate" later in the course.

1.1. Argumentation/Debate Activities in Writing Classes

Debate or argumentation activities can be used in EFL writing classes in a number of ways. An informal debate can be used, more or less independent from the course contents of writing, as a warm-up activity at the beginning of the class or as a "wake-up" activity in the middle of the class when students get sleepy. Debating can also be more integrated into the course contents in academic writing classes.

Given a typical process of writing explained in a writing textbook (Zemach et al., 2020, pp. 5-7), including brainstorming, organizing, drafting, reviewing, revising, and publishing, some of these steps can be assisted or replaced by debating activities. Out of these tasks in the process of writing, informal debate can be used as a pre-writing activity or brainstorming ideas. Organizing ideas using outlining is also important in debating. Cross-examination and refutation/rebuttal in debate can be used as a peer review process of writing (Inoue, 2019). "Publishing" in the classroom context includes simply submitting the paper to the instructor, showing it to the classmates, or often an oral presentation in class. The oral presentation can take a form of a formal debate. In addition to such typical use of debate in the writing course, the whole course or part of it can be replaced by the process of formal debate, including research and speech writing.

1.2. Types of Debate

There are different styles and formats of debate that can be used in classroom. First, some of the formats from standard competitive debate may be used with or without some modifications. These include team policy cross-examination debate, often called "academic debate" in Japan, parliamentary or British style debate, Lincoln-Douglas or one-on-one debate (Inoue, 1996; Aleles & Inoue, 2020; various formats in Freeley & Steinberg, 2013). Second, more informal formats, often with shorter or less strictly timed speeches, can be used. In American debate literature, the term "SPAR (SPontaneous ARgumentation)" is used. It is a shortened format of debate with shorter/fewer speeches and cross-examination. It is extemporaneous but different from parliamentary debate (e.g., Lynn, 2016; Zompetti & Carlson, 2017). Dr. Joseph Zompetti's workshops at Kyushu University (Zompetti, 2021) also had this segment in the past. Informal debates in EFL can take a variety of formats in EFL contexts in Japan (Jost, 2018; Otsuka, 2021).

In what follows, I will describe three major ways in which I incorporated debating activities in the writing courses in 2023, i.e., tournament participation, informal debate, and formal presentation.

2. Students' Participation in a Debate Tournament (Spring/Summer, 2023)

The first method of introducing debate is having the students participate in classroom competitions and an open tournament held on campus. It's rather unusual, and I was lucky in a sense in the Spring and Summer quarters in 2023 at Kyushu University, when I was asked to teach a writing course consisting of

medical school students. At the same time, my colleagues and I had an annual debate tournament called "Exchange Debate Contest" and the resolution for the tournament was about a medical topic, i.e., "Resolved: that the Japanese government should legalize gestational surrogacy" (Kyushu University, 2023a). With such a combination of medical students and the surrogacy topic, I managed to persuade the students to participate in the competition instead of giving formal classroom presentations. A debate tournament may be arranged within the class, but participating in an outside tournament is much more challenging.

2.1. The Debate Tournament

The format of debate is a modified version of the popular policy debate formats used in high school debates in Japan ("*Debate Koshien*") (NADE, 2024). Speech times are as follows (The 21st Exchange Debate Contest, 2024):

1. Affirmative Constructive Speech (5 min.) Preparation Time (2 min.)
2. Negative Cross-Examination (3min.)
3. Negative Constructive Speech (5 min.) Preparation Time (2 min.)
4. Affirmative Cross-Examination (3min.) Preparation Time (2 min.)
5. Negative Rebuttal Speech (3 min.) Preparation Time (2 min.)
6. Affirmative Rebuttal Speech (3 min.) Preparation Time (2 min.)
7. Negative Summary Speech (3 min.) Preparation Time (2 min.)
8. Affirmative Summary Speech (3 min.)

There is no preparation time before the constructive speeches because they are usually prepared in advance. The final two speeches may be called second rebuttal speeches rather than summary speeches. The resolution is announced well in advance, and teams debate the same resolution a number of times on both the affirmative and negative sides. The constructive speeches can be read from the manuscript entirely written up before the debate and supporting evidence is cited in the speech as in academic writing.

Preparation for this kind of debate typically includes multiple steps: analyzing and researching the topic, collecting and organizing quotations, writing constructive speeches, practicing speech delivery and cross-examination, and participating in multiple practice rounds. This process may require an entire semester of 10 or more weekly meetings for preparation (See "Appendix 3: Sample Syllabi" in Aleles & Inoue, 2020), but I tried to squeeze the process in five weeks and emulated the originally planned contents based on the textbook (Folse & Pugh, 2020), which was already decided as I was a last-minute substitute instructor because the previously assigned instructor could not teach the course.

2.2. The Original Syllabi and Modifications

The original syllabi of the writing course "Production 1" and "Production 2" are outlined below. The two courses are part of Kyushu University's current English program called "Q-LEAP3" as explained in Haswell et al. (2022), and the "Production" courses are described in the article's Section 3.2.3 "Academic English: Production 1 & 2." The official guidelines distributed to the instructors before the Spring and Fall

quarter (Kyushu University English Curriculum Committee, 2023) describe them as follows:

> "Academic English: Production 1" is designed to improve students' productive skills for writing paragraphs/essays and oral presentations. Since logically organizing and developing arguments is essential for academic activities, this course offers practical writing and presentation strategies through various types of activities. (p. 9)

> "Academic English: Production 2" is designed to develop students' productive skills for writing short academic research papers and oral presentations. This course is intended to build on the outcomes of "Production 1". Since reinforcing arguments with useful collected information is essential for academic research activities, this course offers research-based writing and presentation strategies through various types of activities. (p. 11)

Based on those stipulated general principles and the chosen textbook (Folse & Pugh, 2020), my initial syllabi were:

Spring Quarter
1. 4/14. Introduction. Unit 1. Reviewing the Essay.
2. 4/21. Unit 1. Reviewing the Essay (2)
3. 4/28. Unit 2. The Writing Process
4. 5/12. Unit 2. The Writing Process (2)
5. 5/19. Unit 3. Using Original Sources
6. 5/26. Unit 3. Using Original Sources (2)
7. 6/2. Preparing for oral presentation
8. 6/9. Oral presentation

Summer Quarter
1. 6/16. Introduction. Unit 8. The Research Paper.
2. 6/23. Unit 4. Cause-Effect Essays.
3. 6/30. Unit 5. Comparison Essays.
4. 7/7. Unit 6. Reaction Essays.
5. 7/14. Unit 7. Argument Essays.
6. 7/21. Preparation for oral presentation. Delivery and visual aids.
7. 7/28. Oral presentations (1)
8. 8/4. Oral presentations (2)

While going through the Spring quarter following the original syllabus, I obtained an agreement from the students that they would compete in the debate tournament instead of giving final presentations in class in the Summer quarter. They may have chosen the tournament option to complete the course a few weeks earlier than the final exam week, and hopefully, they have at least partially recognized the fun and

importance of debate. I gave them various information about speech activities for medical students, including presentations and debate videos in which former Kyushu University medical students participated (e.g., Kyushu Debate Education, 2015; inouenarahiko, 2011). I also introduced various resources about competitive debating in English, among which was a blog message posted by a professor who used to debate in a college ESS (Komeda, 2014).

I changed the syllabus accordingly. In Meeting 1 of the Summer quarter, in addition to explaining what the research paper is, I explained the nature of research-based policy debate, the competition rules of the debate ("The 21st Exchange Debate Contest, 2024") and the resolution (Yano, 2024).[2] The class of fifteen students was divided into four debating teams. Based on the principles of the cause-effect essay (Meeting 2), I explained how to analyze the resolution to construct affirmative and negative cases. Typical cases of the policy debate involve cause-effect links from the affirmative's proposed plan to advantages (affirmative cases) and disadvantages (negative cases). Using the idea of comparison essays (Meeting 3), I explained how the affirmative and negative arguments were compared in rebuttal and summary speeches.

Meeting 4 was planned for delivery practices, but most of the class time was spent on preparing the arguments because of a request from students who wanted more time to work in teams. In Meeting 5 (July 14th), just one day before the Tournament, the teams had two practice rounds in two separate classrooms, once on the affirmative side and once on the negative side. In one room, I was judging and giving advice while a TA, who was an experienced competitive debater from the ESS (English Speaking Society), took control of the other room. Before the practice rounds, I found that two students could not participate in the tournament for their own reasons, so instead of debating, I asked them to take notes and judge the practice debates. The two students also gave their team's constructive speech and received cross-examination from the other students in Meeting 6 to make up for their absence from the tournament. Meetings 7 and 8 were canceled because all the students completed the required "oral presentations" in the debate tournament or in Meeting 6.

2.3. Results of the Competitions

In the tournament, the four teams performed very well by winning all the affirmative and two negative rounds. One of the two-win teams broke the preliminary to debate on the affirmative side against another two-win high school team. The affirmative team won the debate partly because, in my view, the rebuttal speaker was successful in refuting the negative constructive arguments and responded to some of the negative rebuttal arguments. The affirmative rebuttal speaker was awarded the "Best Debater" prize based on the discussion of the judges of the final round. Their performance was reported at the University's website and picked up by its social media accounts.[3]

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[2] The tournament adopted the 2024 Japan's high school national topic to attract high school teams, who practiced debating as part of their curriculum and/or as an extra-/co-curricular activity.
[3] My colleagues and I wrote a news report for the University's website (Kyushu University, 2023b) and it was picked up by a science communicator of the University, who posted the news in Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook:
　　　https://www.instagram.com/p/CwXDO4gPauj/?img_index=1
　　　https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7100739017700216832
　　　https://twitter.com/KyushuUniv_EN/status/1694977398352261445

In retrospect, there were some good points and problems in using debate to replace the writing course's contents. The students were motivated and worked hard in their teams. Given a short time of preparation, they managed to write their speeches with citations and competed successfully. They learned the essential elements of academic writing, such as making evidence-based arguments and counterarguments, logically organizing arguments, delivering formal speeches, and asking and answering questions. The medical students in their general education were exposed to an ethical controversy related to a medical topic (gestational surrogacy). On the downside, the very learning of evidence-based arguments was undermined because of the rhetorical nature of competitive debate. The team which won the tournament wrote an affirmative constructive speech with some weaknesses in citations. Although I emphasized the importance of direct quotations to support their arguments in debate speeches as well as in academic writing, their citations were scarce, and more paraphrases were used than direct quotations. They did not follow my suggestion to revise the speech but won the debates. The winning ironically undermined the importance of citations. In classroom settings, the instructor could have given them immediate feedback about such a problem after the speech or the paper submission. In an out-of-class competition, however, the instructor could not control the judges nor dictate what kind of feedback they would give.

3. Informal and Formal "Debate" in Class (Fall/Winter, 2023)

Mini debates and quasi-debate formats of presentations can be more easily incorporated into most academic writing courses. One way I tried in many of the "Production" courses at Kyushu University[4] was to use a mini informal debate as a warm-up activity and use a similar but longer (more formal) format as the final presentation based on the research paper the students learned to write throughout the two quarters (sixteen weeks).

The instructors were asked to choose one of the recommended textbooks, and I chose the one I used to adopt in similar writing courses a few years before (Zemach et al., 2020). The textbook explains the organization of a persuasive paper as follows to introduce "counterarguments" and "responses":

> A persuasive paper can also organize arguments from weak to strong, or from less important to more important.
>
> Additionally, however, writers often acknowledge and then refute the counter arguments against their position. This shows that the writer understands the issue broadly and has already considered other opinions.
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> (Zemach et al., 2020, p. 38)

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https://www.facebook.com/KyushuUniv.en/posts/pfbid0JxdrsgYP1dEcN5AJttrj3HCtfHS51d6ZZ m23wQF9d8c1YJ1oJNCDFBfB2Xnt1VfXl

The final round's video is available on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBUYSiMYgaM).

[4] Those were the same courses as in the above Spring/Summer quarters but offered for different students in Fall/Winter 2023; the same courses were scheduled in Spring/Summer or in Fall/Winter depending on the students' Schools.

3.1. The Original Syllabi and Modifications

The original syllabi of the two courses were essentially the same as those in the Spring/Summer but followed the units of the textbook I chose for the Fall/Winter quarter:

Fall Quarter

1. 10/3. Introduction. Textbook Unit 1. Review of the Essay

2. 10/17. Unit 2. Choosing a Topic

3. 10/24. Unit 3. Peer Review

4. 10/31. Unit 4. Researching

5. 11/7. Unit 5. Outlining

6. 11/14. Unit 6. Avoiding Plagiarism

7. 11/21. Unit 7. The Language of the Research Paper, Oral Presentation 1

8. 11/28. Unit 8. Writing the First Draft, Oral Presentation 2

Winter Quarter

1. 12/5. Unit 9. In-text Citations

2. 12/12. Unit 10. Academic Language

3. 12/19. Unit 11. Editing Your Paper

4. 12/26. Unit 12. Presenting Your Research

5. 1/16. Argument-Counter Argument (Practice in groups)

6. 1/23. Final Presentation: Argument-Counter Argument (1)

7. 1/30. Final Presentation: Argument-Counter Argument (2)

8. 2/6. Final Presentation: Argument-Counter Argument (3)

Since there was no available debate tournament during the Winter quarter and there were a total of about 60 students in four classes, which was too many for me to manage to teach to participate in formal debate competitions, I chose to introduce some elements of debate in informal classroom activities and in the final presentations.

3.2. Informal Argument-Counterargument-Response Format

In the four classes I had, each consisting of about 15 students (all first-year students from the Schools of Engineering, Law, Economics, and Letters), I explained the following process of giving arguments, counterarguments, and responses.

1. Pick up a proposition: X is Y, or X should do Y.

2. Two minutes to think about reasons for and against.

3. One or two-minute monologue. Student 1: . . . because . . . .

4. One or two-minute monologue. Student 2: Counterargument:

      That's not true, because . . . .

      That's not always true, because . . . .

Actually, the opposite is true, because . . . .
5. One-minute monologue. Student 1: Responses.
6. Switch the sides.

I asked them to make a pair (or three in one group in case of the odd-number class). I gave them a topic in the first few trials and then later asked to choose a topic of their own. I used a countdown timer on the classroom screen to give a beep sound to control the time. I moved around the classroom but did not strictly monitor students' activities. From what I observed, most of them worked hard to speak in English and enjoyed the activity. This activity was introduced usually once at a varied point during the 90-minute class meeting. It functioned as a warm-up activity in the beginning, as a break from textbook-based exercises in the middle, and a wrap-up at the end of the class time. I did not individually grade their activity although it was considered part of "contribution to the class activities," which accounted for about 20% of the final grade in the initial announcement in the syllabus.[5]

3.3. Argument-Counterargument-Response as a Formal Presentation

3.3.1. Devil's Advocate in the Oral Presentation (Fall, 2023)

At the end of the Fall quarter, I introduced the idea of assigning a "cross-examiner" about evidence (Inoue, 2019) or the "devil's advocate" (Todayama, n.d.), hoping to encourage students to ask critical questions after their partners' oral presentation. They were paired up and assigned to read their partners' speech drafts. Then, they asked questions about the assumptions, the lack of evidence/explanation, and the source of evidence (author qualification, date, etc.) to their orally presented speeches. Still, most of the questions asked were not particularly critical but simply seeking more information or the presenter's comment on a related topic. I decided to introduce a more confrontational format of two students giving arguments, counterarguments, and responses in the Winter quarter.

3.3.2. Final Presentations of Arguments/Counterarguments (Winter, 2023)

The students were asked to write a mini research paper and to give an oral presentation based on the second draft of the paper in the Winter quarter. The format of the final presentation was this:

1. The first speaker gives the thesis of the paper (or a related thesis) and defends it by giving arguments (major points). 5 min.
2. The second speaker gives counterarguments. 3 min.
3. The first speaker gives responses. 2 min.
4. The other students decide on whether the thesis has been defended. 3 min.

The paired students were allowed to read their partner's manuscript in advance to prepare for counterarguments and responses. Before their oral presentation, the manuscripts were shared in the cloud

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[5] The specific syllabus of each course can be retrieved from the University's online syllabus site (https://ku-portal.kyushu-u.ac.jp/) by searching for the instructor's name.

storage with the whole class so that the judging students could closely examine the arguments and supporting evidence. The students were told that their arguments may contain some personal stories, but the primary support should be published information from journal/newspaper articles, books, quality blog posts, etc. They were encouraged to use direct quotations rather than paraphrasing the relevant texts (Usami, 1992). The citations were also in the shared manuscripts.

3.4. Evaluation (Students' Ballot Questionnaire)

Peer evaluation was administered through the Moodle course, consisting of eight items. The students either give ratings or brief comments depending on the item:

1. Thesis/Arguments
   (1) What is the thesis?
   (2) Which arguments are convincing and why?
2. Thesis/arguments. Rate each item: 1 (Poor) - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 -7 - 8 - 9 - 10 (Excellent)
   (1) Is the thesis clearly stated?
   (2) Are arguments convincing?
   (3) Is the presentation effective?
3. Which counterarguments are convincing and why?
4. Counterarguments. Rate each item: 1 (Poor) - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 -7 - 8 - 9 - 10 (Excellent)
   (1) Are counterarguments convincing?
   (2) Is the presentation effective?
5. Which responses are convincing and why?
6. Responses. Rate each item: 1 (Poor) - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 -7 - 8 - 9 - 10 (Excellent)
   (1) Are responses convincing?
   (2) Is the presentation effective?
7. Explain your judgment about whether the thesis has been successfully defended in terms of the arguments, counterarguments, and responses.
8. Overall, are you convinced by the thesis? (Not at all) - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 (Very much so)

3.5. The Students' Performance in Arguments/Counterarguments

Introducing argument-counterargument activities in writing classes found mixed results in its effectiveness. Probably the most successful, in terms of students' active engagement in the class, was an informal mini-debate in warm-up activities. The more formal presentation of the debate (thesis-arguments-counterarguments-responses sequence) showed mediocre success. The initial arguments were relatively well-constructed with supporting citations. The quality of counterarguments varied; some students gave critical responses with or without supporting citations, but others failed to fully use the three minutes allocated to the counterarguments. Most of the students' "responses" (the initial presenter's rebuttal to the counterarguments) were often very short, and their quality was not necessarily good, often repeating their

initial arguments.

4. Conclusion

I have explained how I introduced argumentation activities in my writing classes in three ways. The participation in the debate competition outside the classroom was relatively successful, but it was probably due to the fortunate combination of the motivated highly-skilled medical students and the medical topic. Informal mini-debates were relatively successful, but the quality of the arguments presented in those debates could have been better. Using a formal debate format in the oral presentation was not particularly successful in counterarguments and responses. So, those activities are feasible alternatives to the typical activities in the writing courses but need improvements.

Further studies are needed to evaluate the quality of students' arguments, requiring close examination of the presented arguments in the expressed claims of the students, reasoning and unexpressed premises the students used, and the quality of citations. The relevance and the strength of the counterarguments and responses should also be analyzed in detail.

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