

Debating in an English Writing Course: Expressing Opinions on Controversial Issues

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1. Introduction

In recent years, discussion among educators has focused on the need to nurture critical thinking ability. Partnership for the 21st Century (P21), a coalition founded in 2002, consists of educators, employers, and government leaders. It is tasked with mapping the full range of skills needed by students in the new millennium (Haber, 2020). The P21 framework identifies critical thinking as one of ‘Four Cs,’ which include critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity organized as overlapping domains (Haber, 2020). Expressing opinions on controversial issues clearly and persuasively while employing critical thinking skills will take on ever more importance in the new millennium. Academic debate is one activity that can help university students improve their persuasive writing skills.

The purpose of this study is to investigate (a) whether debating helps improve university students’ ability to construct persuasive arguments, and (b) how debating helps students write in English more persuasively. This study is based on sociocultural theory, which suggests that cognitive development occurs in interaction with others and that this context is significant (Vygotsky, 1987). A sociocultural perspective can help explain how cognitive development takes place in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom.

This study employs a mixed method. First, it quantitatively and qualitatively compares drafts of a writing assignment submitted both before and after a debate activity. Second, it analyzes the students’ reflections qualitatively in terms of how helpful debating is for them. This study reveals the effect of debate in facilitating students’ ability to express their opinions on controversial issues while nurturing critical thinking skills.

2. Theoretical Background

This study is based on sociocultural perspectives, especially the following concepts: *social*

interaction, the ZPD, scaffolding, cognitive apprenticeship, and the communities of practice (CoP).

Sociocultural perspectives

The role of interaction can be analyzed through a sociocultural framework. Learning is considered to be a mediated process. It means that higher forms of human mental activity are mediated. The cognitive development occurs in interaction with others and this is a significant context within which learning takes place (Vygotsky, 1987). In Vygotskian theory, *social interaction* is a key element in understanding the relationship between cognitive development and language. Social interaction means that “human development is the product of a broader system than just the system of a person’s individual functions, specifically, systems of social connections and relations, of collective forms of behavior and social cooperation” (Vygotsky 1999, p. 41). According to Vygotsky (1978), internalization is best facilitated by assistance aimed at learners’ zone of proximal development (ZPD), defined as the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development. The former is determined by independent problem solving and the latter is determined through problem solving under adult or teacher guidance or working together with more capable peers. The critical point is that the ZPD can be created not only by experts but also through interaction between learners.

The metaphor of scaffolding, which is related to the Vygotskian notion of ZPD, was introduced by Bruner and his colleagues (Bruner, 1983, 1985; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding includes the supports the teacher provides to help the student carry out the task, taking either the form of suggestions or help (Collins, 2006). Wertsch (1979a) described scaffolding as a dialogically produced interpsychological process and that learners internalize knowledge they co-construct with more capable peers through scaffolding.

Cognitive apprenticeship, which means learning through guided experience on cognitive and metacognitive skills and processes (Collins et al. 1989; Collins, 2006; Burner, 2007), is also a significant concept in education. It grew out of criticism of formal education, in which learning is usually separated from practice. Learning by cognitive apprenticeship gives the opportunity to see “the subtle, tacit elements of expert practice that may not otherwise be explicated in a lecture or knowledge-dissemination format” (Dennen & Burner, 2007, p. 427). This is what differentiates cognitive apprenticeship approach and traditional classroom-based methods. Certain instructional strategies can be purposely implemented to support learning (Collins et al., 1989). The teaching method based on cognitive apprenticeship gives learners “the opportunity to observe, engage in, and invent or discover expert strategies in context” (Collins, 2006, p.50). This study especially focuses on

the elements of cognitive apprenticeship: *reflection and exploration*. Reflection means encouraging learners to compare their performance with others'. These are significant in helping learners to focus their observations of expert problem solving and to gain conscious access to their own problem-solving strategies (Collins, 2006). Exploration means encouraging learners to pose and solve their own problems. The aim of this method is to encourage learner autonomy, which would help learners to define and formulate the problem which should be solved.

Communities of practice (CoP) perspective is a new way of approaching learning focusing on the social and cultural nature of learning. The framework of the CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) shows that learning is considered to occur through participation in communities to which participants belong. The concept shows that individuals do not simply receive, internalize, and construct knowledge in their minds, but enact it by participating in the practices of a social community. The CoP perspective is a useful tool for investigating second language learning, viewing learners as members of social and historical collectivities. Learning a language is considered as social participation. It means that an individual is considered as an active participant in the practices of social communities where a language is used. The CoP perspective can be applied to implementing activities in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Some researchers (Casanave, 1998; Cho, 2004; Dong, 1996; Flowerdew, 2000; Li (2005); Young & Miller, 2004) have used Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), focusing on second language writing. In their CoP model, potential members of a community begin as peripheral, or marginal, participants, and subsequently acquire the knowledge or skills necessary for fuller participation. These studies suggest that the CoP model can potentially be a useful tool for investigating second language learning. Furthermore, the CoP model could be best used as a research framework in formal learning contexts, in schools and classrooms (Lea, 2005).

Critical Thinking

In order to express opinions persuasively on controversial issues, critical thinking ability is essential. As Haber (2020) shows, language-related skills relevant to critical thinking involve persuasive communication. According to Haber (2020), "critical thinking is entirely about argument generation and analysis" (p. 81) and an argument defined as a set of statements includes evidence, a conclusion, and logical inferences connecting the premises to the conclusion. A coherent series of reasons, statements, or facts intended to support or establish a point of view should be included in the critical-thinking project. In order to express opinions clearly and persuasively, nurturing critical thinking is significant in terms of argument generation and analysis. Debating activities, which

nurture persuasive communication based on critical thinking, have a meaningful place in writing courses.

The following research questions were used for this study:

1. Does debating help improve university students' ability to construct persuasive arguments?
2. How does debating help students write in English more persuasively?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 12 first and second year university students enrolled in an elective English writing course, which consisted of one 90-minute class per week for one semester. They had no prior experience writing argumentative essays in English. The course objective was to nurture critical thinking and have students express their own opinions on controversial issues in English.

3.2 Task design

The textbook used in this class included 15 different controversial issues. This study focuses on Unit 2, in which the participants debated the proposition, "Are you for or against entrance exams?" and wrote their opinions in English.

First, the students wrote their own opinions after reading arguments from both sides of the issue. At this time, there was no peer interaction. After submitting their first drafts, they worked in pairs in class to exchange opinions. Following that, each pair engaged in brainstorming to generate arguments for both sides of this issue. After preparation was complete, all pairs engaged in two-on-two mini-debates. Their first debate was in Japanese since utilizing the first language is considered vital in cultivating original ideas. Students then worked in pairs to look up unfamiliar terms in the dictionary and familiarize themselves with the relevant key words in English. The students had a second mini-debate in front of the class, and they received feedback on the strength of their logic and evidence from the instructor. After receiving input on developing persuasive reasons, refuting arguments, and responding to refutations logically, the students performed four-on-four debates in front of the class. After these procedures, they were asked to write their own opinions based on the debating experiences and to submit a second draft.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

3.3.1 Materials

Materials used in this study included two writing tasks, evaluations of the first and second drafts, and student responses obtained from a self-reflection sheet which included three open-ended questions.

Writing tasks. Two tasks were collected: (a) the first draft submitted before the debate lesson, and (b) the second draft submitted after the class activities, which included the mini-debate and the four-on-four debate.

Evaluation. Evaluations of the first and second drafts were based on the criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Criteria

Content	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
1. Clear explanation of the thesis statement	5	4	3	2	1
2. Clear statement of the first point supported by appropriate evidence	5	4	3	2	1
3. Clear statement of the second point supported by appropriate evidence	5	4	3	2	1
4. Clear statement of the third point supported by appropriate evidence	5	4	3	2	1
5. Persuasiveness	5	4	3	2	1
Total					/25

Self-reflection sheet. Three open-ended questions included in the self-reflection sheet are shown at Table 2.

Table 2

Open-ended questions

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How was listening to others' opinions in debating helpful in writing your second draft?2. What do you think are the differences between your first draft and the second draft, which you wrote after listening to others' opinions through debating?3. What points do you think you have improved through this lesson? |
|---|

Instructor's comment. Qualitative data was obtained from the instructor's comments on the first and second draft of each paper. Comments focused on the persuasiveness of topic sentences and appropriateness of supporting examples.

3.3.2 Procedure

The first and second drafts were evaluated based on the criteria shown in Table 1. A total of nine valid data sets were produced. The nine students were placed into four separate groups (A, B, C, and D) according to the increase of the total score on the second draft. The first and second drafts from each group were compared to determine how persuasiveness was developed, and the characteristics of each group were analyzed. The written responses obtained from the self-reflection sheet focused on the helpfulness of debating experience in writing opinions on controversial issues in English. These responses were coded and analyzed thematically.

4. Findings

4.1 Writing tasks and evaluation

Comparisons between the first and second drafts were made based on the writing evaluation results. Table 3 indicates the total scores for each draft, the overall increase in points, and the relevant group for each student.

Table3

Comparison between the first draft and the second draft

Students	First draft score	Second draft score	Overall increase in score	Group
Student 1	15	21	6	C
Student 2	11	18	7	B
Student 3	16	19	3	D
Student 4	15	20	5	C
Student 5	13	23	10	B
Student 6	17	25	8	B
Student 7	4	11	7	B
Student 8	9	16	7	B
Student 9	10	23	13	A

Nine students were placed into groups A, B, C, or D according to the increase in the total score, as follows: A: 11~13 points, B: 7~10 points, C: 4~6 points, D: 0~3 points. The number of the students in each group is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Number of students in each group

Group	Increase in total score	Number of students
A	11~13 points	1
B	7~10 points	4
C	4~6 points	3
D	0~3 points	1

Table 5 lists the instructor's comments on persuasiveness from both the first and the second draft for each student.

Table 5

Instructor's comments on persuasiveness

	Score (first draft)	Instructor's comment	Score (second draft)		Increase in the total score
Student 1	15	Examples are not strong enough to persuade others who have different opinions.	21	Examples are better, but because of poor sentence structure and vocabulary, the message was not conveyed appropriately.	6
Student 2	11	Cause-effect relationship is not clear. (Subjective)	18	Cause-effect relationship improved but consistency is still poor.	7
Student 3	16	The topic sentences themselves are clear, but not supported by appropriate evidence.	19	Examples are not appropriate; based on personal feelings.	3
Student 4	15	Topic sentences are not supported by concrete examples.	20	More concrete examples are shown.	5
Student 5	13	The topic sentences are clear but not supported by appropriate evidence.	23	The topic sentences are supported with more appropriate examples.	10
Student 6	17	The topic sentences are very persuasive and consistent, but the examples do not support them.	25	Examples strongly support the topic sentences.	8
Student 7	4	Overall writing shows poor vocabulary and grammar.	11	New English expressions are included and grammatical errors are corrected.	7
Student 8	9	The writing itself is too short with few examples	16	New sentences are added but some parts don't make sense because of poor sentence structure.	7
Student 9	10	The topic sentences are clear but examples are not persuasive enough to refute different opinions.	23	Examples have become more persuasive; paying attention to different opinions.	13

Overall comparison of first and second drafts

The characteristics of the first draft are as follows: (a) Some of the topic sentences were not clear, and (b) some evidence was subjective and therefore inappropriate. As for the second draft, the characteristics are as follows: (a) New perspectives were added in their reasoning, (b) three reasons were supported by more appropriate evidence, and examples were more concrete and objective, and (c) the students gained awareness of other opinions. Results from the second draft indicate the

debating experience had a positive effect on the students' ability to incorporate appropriate evidence into their arguments.

Group characteristics

This section focuses on changes between the first and second drafts and examines the characteristics of each group.

Group A. Student 9 increased the score from 10 to 23 points. The first draft did not include appropriate evidence, although the topic sentences were clear. In addition, the cause-effect relationship was weak, so it needed more explanation. In the second draft, more concrete examples were included to support each topic sentence. As a result, the writing became more persuasive.

Group B. On the first draft, the four students in this group could not demonstrate clear cause-effect relationships. Appropriate examples were not used, and poor vocabulary and grammar limited expressiveness. In the second draft, more appropriate examples were included but some parts were illogical, which limited persuasiveness. Overall, these students need to learn more about how to support topic sentences, including what types of examples should be used, and how to express themselves more effectively in English. Moreover, a clear understanding of the relationship between the thesis statement and the topic sentences is required. In this sense, awareness of consistency is vital.

Group C. Two students in Group C improved their writing by adding other reasons with more appropriate examples. However, due to poor grammar and vocabulary, their messages were not clearly conveyed.

Group D. Student 3 in Group D failed to present appropriate evidence to support each topic sentence, although the topic sentences themselves were simple and clear. The examples presented were based on personal experience, making them subjective. Presenting more objective evidence would have made the draft more persuasive.

4.2 Self-reflection sheet

This study analyzes the written responses obtained from the self-reflection sheet, which focused on the helpfulness of debate in writing opinions on controversial issues in English. The findings

indicate characteristics common to each group and among the whole class. The concepts extracted from the qualitative data are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Concepts extracted from student responses from the self-reflection sheet

Concept	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
1. Learning how to be persuasive	◎	◎	○	○
2. Having multiple perspectives	◎	◎	○	○
3. Learning English expressions	◎	◎	○	
4. Paying attention to the audience or readers	◎	◎		
5. Necessity of more support Lack of vocabulary				◎

◎ = Concepts are strongly shown ○ = Concepts are shown

Concepts 1-4 indicate positive aspects of the debating activity. Concept 5 indicates a negative aspect and was only extracted from the one student in group D. At first, common characteristics of the four groups are: (a) learning how to be persuasive, and (b) having multiple perspectives. Group D did not indicate the concept of “learning English expressions” through debating. Groups C and D did not note the concepts of “paying attention to the audience or readers.” Only Group D highlighted necessity of more support” and “lack of vocabulary.”

Group characteristics

(1) Groups A and B

Groups A and B perceive debating as helpful in writing their own opinions, demonstrating four concepts: learning how to be persuasive, and reorganizing the draft in more persuasive way; having multiple perspectives; learning new English expressions; and paying more attention to the audience or readers. “S” is the abbreviation of “student”, and the comments were translated by the researcher.

Reorganizing for persuasiveness. Listening to others’ opinions helped students confirm whether their first draft was persuasive enough. The following remarks reflect this attitude:

Listening to others’ opinions has made me check whether my opinion is OK, and helped me reorganize my thoughts to write my draft in a more persuasive way. (S9)

Every time I write my draft, I keep in mind that I need to write it so that even the person who has a different opinion from mine can understand why I think so. (S2)

In debating, students needed to refute the other side, so assertiveness might have been nurtured.

It was my first experience to refute to someone's ideas. This class has made me more assertive. (S8)

Moreover, the students in Groups A and B learned that concrete examples and reasonable evidence are necessary to support topic sentences persuasively. This point is best expressed in the following comment:

The debating has helped me write my opinions in more persuasive ways. I learned how to express my opinion clearly with concrete examples which could persuade the readers. (S5)

Furthermore, debating seems to have motivated the students to clarify their message with the aim of improving their ability to refute arguments. The following comment expresses this idea:

After listening to both the positive and negative aspects, I made an effort to convey the message clearly in a more persuasive way since I needed to refute the different opinions well. (S9)

Multiple perspectives. Debating made students aware of opposing perspectives that they never would have generated on their own. This was appreciated. The following remarks reflect this:

I think it interesting to see things from the opposite perspective. (S7)

Even though the opinion is the same as mine, it is interesting to know that the way of reasoning and background knowledge are different from mine. (S9)

Others' opinions made me aware or discover what I've never come up with. (S2)

Moreover, the debating experience made the students include opposing opinions in their own writing, with some of them even modifying their original perspective. This recognition is expressed in the following remarks:

I put emphasis on listening to the opinion on the other side. I tried to include the other side's opinion in my writing. (S7)

Others' opinions have sometimes changed my own opinion. (S8)

Listening to a totally different opinion sometimes made me sympathize with it, which made me change my opinion. (S2)

In addition, the students appreciated the different perspectives since they broadened their views. This sentiment is especially strong in Groups A and B:

By listening to others' opinions which have different perspectives from mine, my way of thinking has been broadened. (S5)

Others' opinions have been very influential in organizing my own ideas and reasoning. (S6)

It was a significant experience for me to learn that each person has her own ideas. (S8)

There is an opposite opinion from mine, which made me reconsider my fixed idea. (S2)

By listening to different opinions, I learned what I could not have learned by myself, which made me think from multiple perspectives. (S9)

During the debate, a member from the same team presented reasons I had not come up with, which broadened my view. (S7)

Learning new English expressions. While listening to others' opinions, students became aware of good expressions used by others and tried to include the language in their own output. They realized that effective expression is important for clarity. One common statement reflects this:

I included good expressions used by others in my second draft. I especially kept in mind efficient use of conjunctions when including my experiences as examples. By doing so, I think my ideas or messages would be conveyed to others more clearly. (S5)

Paying more attention to the audience or readers. The students learned that paying attention to the audience is important when expressing their opinions on controversial issues. This is best reflected in the following comment:

Discussion in the class made me aware of the necessity of paying attention to the audience more. (S5)

The students in Groups A and B could compare their performances, identify their individual problems, and try to solve them. They even set subgoals for themselves in this class activity. They engaged in reflection and exploration very deeply, which may be one reason why they improved their writing in the second draft.

(2) Group C

Persuasiveness. Compared with Groups A and B, their remarks are rather short, demonstrating less reflection and exploration:

In order to persuade others, I need to show concrete examples based on my experiences. (S1)

Multiple perspectives. They also appreciated the opportunity to gain multiple perspectives through debating:

It was good for me to listen to ideas which I've never come up with. (S4)

Listening to the different opinions has broadened my view. (S1)

As these remarks illustrate, the reflection and exploration of Group C members was not as deep as that of Groups A and B.

English expressions. The students in this group realized what is necessary for them to write effectively. They engaged in reflection and exploration, but their analysis was not as thorough as that found with Groups A and B.

I learned what kinds of words should be used in this class. (S4)

I learned the different English expression, which I included in my writing. (S1)

As these statements indicate, the students in Group C could compare their individual performances with stronger ones, but they did not engage in extensive exploration, unlike the students in Groups A and B. They did not recognize their own problems, nor did they try to solve them. They could not set subgoals for themselves, as the students in Groups A and B did.

(3) Group D

The lone student in Group D did not see the debating experience as providing the opportunity to learn new English expressions. Only two common concepts were extracted from the qualitative data.

Persuasiveness

I often agree with both sides on an issue, so I made an effort to use clear reasons which could be more persuasive. (S3)

Multiple perspectives

It was good for me to listen to the ideas which I've never come up with. (S3)

Need more support / Lack of vocabulary

The concepts specific to this group are the following:

I needed some kind of format for assertion or refutation. (S3)

I felt sad because I could not understand what others said because of lack of my vocabulary. (S3)

As these remarks indicate, this student needed more scaffolding to present opinions and make refutations effectively when debating. In addition, a lack of vocabulary led to a feeling of alienation in the debate activity. These sentiments were not expressed in the other three groups. This may be why this student's writing did not improve in the second draft.

5. Discussion

First, debating helped the students write their opinions more persuasively on controversial issues in the second draft. Most of the students could develop and deepen their thoughts through the debate activity. In other words, debating helped improve university students' ability to construct persuasive arguments. However, this study also shows the differences among the four groups in their relative development of persuasiveness. More specifically, the differences lie in whether they can write while paying clear attention to the cause-effect relationship: whether each topic sentence is supported by appropriate evidence; whether concrete examples are included as evidence; whether examples are objective rather than subjective; whether consistency is maintained; whether they are conscious of opposing opinions; and whether their writing persuades others who have differing opinions. The critical point dividing the students into four groups was the ability to effectively incorporate refutations from debates into their writing.

Second, the debating experiences are helpful in that (a) the students learned how to be persuasive at their own level (although the levels varied between the groups), and (b) they could all gain multiple perspectives to some extent. Only Groups A and B paid attention to the audience or readers by including refutations in their writing. They could pay attention to others who have different opinions. Group C realized that they learned English expressions used by others but failed to write persuasively. Group D could not afford to pay attention to the audience or readers since the student needed more support with debate format and English expressions. A lack of vocabulary also prevented the student from gaining any benefit from the debate activity.

The findings of this study indicate that the differences among the four groups might be attributable to the following: different level and degree of cognitive awareness concerning persuasiveness; basic English skills, especially vocabulary and sentence structure; and the differing ZPD levels. Groups A and B engaged in reflection more deeply than other groups. Reflection involves enabling students to compare their own problem-solving processes with those of an expert, another student (Collins, 2006). More specifically, learners need to be encouraged to look back on their performance and compare their opinions to others' which were more persuasive. Engagement in reflection can draw special attention to the critical aspects of persuasiveness in debating. Furthermore, exploration involves guiding students to a mode of problem solving on their own. The debating experience invites students to pose and solve their own problems. It helps students to frame questions or problems that they can solve. By comparing others' ideas with their own, they can explore issues more deeply.

The more students engage in reflection and exploration, the more they can develop

persuasiveness in their own writing. In that sense, Groups A and B engaged in exploration more deeply than other groups concerning how to be more persuasive in their own writings. In addition, exploration helped students in Groups A and B set particular subgoals for themselves, as the qualitative data shows. Through developing and achieving individual goals, students are able to conceptualize problems and develop strategies to resolve them (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991).

However, every student tried to write more persuasively in their second draft, although the degree of engagement in reflection and exploration differed depending on the group. This study also shows that some students in Groups C and D needed more scaffolding to develop persuasive communication skills.

In addition, some of the students in Groups C and D lacked basic English skills, especially in vocabulary and sentence structure. Some students not only struggled to understand what others said but also had difficulty expressing their own ideas and opinions clearly. This may be one reason why their writing was organized in a less persuasive manner than that of Groups A and B.

Groups A and B could develop their persuasive writing skills because their debating experience occurred within their ZPD. Debating played a role as appropriate scaffolding. In other words, different perspectives encouraged them to write more persuasively. On the other hand, Group C might have improved more if they had received more appropriate support relevant to their ZPD, for example, regarding what kinds of words or structures can be used in persuasive writing. Furthermore, Group D needed more scaffolding, such as on how to support topic sentences with appropriate evidence. This student should have been given the opportunity to learn how to present evidence to support the topic sentences. As the findings show, scaffolding should be tailored to that learner's needs in achieving their goals of the moment (Sawyer, 2006). If the instructor tells the students how to do something without consideration of the student's ZPD, it may not be effective.

Effective scaffolding provides prompts and hints that help learners to figure it out on their own. In other words, Students' active construction of knowledge can be scaffolded in effective learning environments. In order to create effective learning environments in the classroom, scaffolding should be gradually added, modified, and removed according to the needs of the learner, and eventually the scaffolding fades away entirely (Sawyer, 2006). Teachers should keep in mind that each student has a different level of ZPD, and that a graduated and contingent nature of help should be provided. In that sense, the teacher should be sensitive to each student's ZPD.

As the overall findings show, the debating experience made the students aware of opposing viewpoints, which they appreciated. This helped them broaden their own perspectives on controversial issues. This is a characteristic specific to CoP, which views language learning as a social

practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Second language learning is considered to be a relational activity that occurs between specific speakers situated in specific sociocultural contexts. Learners used to be regarded as individual language producers, but the perspective of language learning as a social practice sees learners as members of social and historical collectivities. Through debate, the students learned from and stimulated each other, which led them to share resources in the EFL classroom.

In addition, as the concept of CoP demonstrates, the members of the community move from peripheral participation to full participation (Casanave, 1998; Cho, 2004; Dong, 1996; Flowerdew, 2000; Li (2005); Young & Miller, 2004). Potential members of a community begin as peripheral or marginal participants, and subsequently acquire the knowledge or skills necessary for fuller participation. This suggests that the students in Groups C and D could subsequently acquire persuasive writing skills as well as the basic English skills if they are provided appropriate scaffolding tailored to their ZPDs.

Conclusion

This study reveals that debating experiences can play an important role in facilitating student expression of opinions on controversial issues, nurturing critical thinking ability. In order to express opinions clearly and persuasively, critical thinking is necessary to generate effective argument and analysis. The students learned how to be persuasive and appreciated the opportunity to gain multiple perspectives by listening to others' opinions. However, the extent of persuasiveness differed depending on level and degree of cognitive awareness concerning persuasiveness, basic English skills, and the level of the ZPDs.

This study also demonstrates that the debating activity contributed to creating a learning environment in the EFL classroom where learners share interests and learn from each other. As the CoP model suggests, the students are practitioners who developed a shared repertoire and resources through the activity, which in turn helped them write more persuasively. As per the aims of P21 framework, the debate activity includes critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, organized as overlapping domains. Expressing opinions on controversial issues clearly and persuasively based on critical thinking ability should be more heavily emphasized in writing courses. More long-term research is necessary to unveil what kind of scaffolding is necessary for learners to write more persuasively.

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