Original Paper

A Case Study on the Development of Chinese EFL Debaters' Argumentative Competence

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Abstract

This study aims to explore and analyze the argumentative competence of Chinese debaters by observing the fallacies they made in one semester's English debate course. The 8 rounds of debates are selected, of which three teams participated in 2 of the prepared debates and 2 fixed impromptu debates respectively. It is evident that of the five categories of fallacies, relevance-related, sufficiency-related and acceptability-related fallacies were the most common fallacies compared with structural-related fallacies and rebuttal-related fallacies. In prepared debate, the debaters' argumentative skills in relevance, sufficiency, acceptability, structure, and rebuttal improved but in impromptu debate, this trend did not exist, revealing the debaters' argumentative competence was unstable and varied from team to team.

Keywords

argumentative competence, fallacy, English debate

1. Introduction

This ability to think and to express their thoughts correctly is arguably one of the most fundamental skills underlying success in academia and professional careers. Those who master these critical thinking (CT) skills can understand, decide, or persuade effectively through the process of argumentation. This situation has engendered the growth of such courses as a debate at university due to its proven relationship with critical and higher-order thinking and is the reason for the increasing popularity of the research on the cultivation of critical thinking ability in the field of English teaching and scientific research.

However, In China, with a distinct lack of empirical research being undertaken, research focused on how to embed CT skills into courses such as English debate remains only in the hypothetical stage,

making little contribution to our understanding of how CT skills developed in English in-class debate. Yet, it is often the case that debate does good in language fluency but not argumentative competence and only a few debaters can break preliminary rounds while many others ceased to advance in their argument skills. There are lots of questions worth exploring such as what are the characteristics of debater's argumentative competence, how to scientifically evaluate it, and how to improve it through specific teaching means. In a word, the research on the effectiveness of argumentation in college students' English debate is almost blank and needs to be studied in detail.

2. Literature Review

CT skills are defined from the perspective of skill and content, but as yet no generally accepted, comprehensive list of skills that constitutes "CT Skills" has been formulated. A clear definition of these skills is the basic work of CT ability research. At present, there are three influential theoretical models at home and abroad namely, Delphi Panel's Dualistic Model (2011) proposed by Faction, the Ternary Model by Paul and Elder (2006), and Wen Qiufang's hierarchical theoretical model (2009). In particular, Wen's model highlights the cognitive core skills i.e. analysis, inference, and evaluation, with each corresponding to clarity, correlation, logicality, profundity, and flexibility. Since this model simplifies the cognitive standards and emotional characteristics of thinking elements, Chinese teachers have taken it to assess students' CT skills in different courses such as English writing, speaking, and reading.

However, the CT skills vary from subject to subject. In this case, Sun Min (2017) combined the characteristics of the above three theoretical models and put forward a new analytical framework, with which, he took "analysis, inference and evaluation" in Wen's hierarchical theoretical model as CT skills and designed CT sub-skills according to the core tasks in different stages of persuasive speech. Inspired by Sun Min's framework, the author worked out CT sub-skills for English debate (see Table 1) according to each task stage of debate activities.

Table 1. CT Skills in English Debate Practice

Stage		Core tasks	CT skills	CT sub- skills
Before-class		Information assessment	Analysis & evaluation	Analyze the background of the topic and check the relevance and accuracy of the information
			Analysis	Analyze the topic type
			Analysis	Analyze the definition and interpretation of the topic
			Analysis	Analyze potential issues
In-class	Preparation	Argumentation	Analysis and evaluation	Build the case
			Analysis	Analyze the burden of proof
			Inference	Make claims or arguments
			Inference	Provide reasons and linkage to help reach the conclusion

		Analysis	Predict the opposite view
		Evaluation & analysis	Establish criteria for judging arguments.
Debate	Presentation	Analysis and inference	Rebuild the arguments
		Inference & evaluation	Respond to refutation, opposing views.
After-class	Self-evaluation	Evaluate	Evaluate the structure of the arguments
		Evaluate	Test the relevance of the claim to the conclusion
		Evaluate	Check the acceptability of claims
		Evaluate	Evaluate the sufficiency of claims for the truth of the conclusion
		Evaluate	Check the completion of team goal
		Evaluate	Test the validity of refutation

Yet, there are no evaluation standards to assess CT skills in debate courses. Teachers' feedback or their decision to the rankings are mainly assessed from the perspective of information exchange effectiveness such as the choice of words, sound control, language fluency etc. This assessment is difficult to match with CT skills. Moreover, scholars employ Wen Qiufang's standard (clarity, correlation, logicality, profundity, and flexibility) in the hierarchical theoretical model in their studies, but which standard is the crucial one, and how to assess them? Toulmin's argumentation model is also used but his model is not comprehensive enough to include all the argument skills in debate. In other words, each of them, though reflecting CT skills, fails to assess specific sub-skills of debate.

To sum up, the effective evaluation of debater learners' CT skills is an important breakthrough in the empirical research of CT. Most importantly, this assessment needs to be highly relevant and operational to the nature of the debate and CT skills.

3. Literature Review of Argumentative Competence

Argumentative competence "refers to the ways in which different types of skills related argumentation are manifested in person's performance in both monological and dialogical context" (Rapanta, Garcia-Mila, & Gilabert, 2013, p. 488). However, it is not yet clear what exactly is meant by the term argumentative confidence and what is being fostered through the courses like English debate. To find the answer, one could possibly drawback to the very nature of the argumentation: "the valid combination between claims and premises" (Plantin, 1996).

To decide what skills constitute argumentative competence, we cannot neglect the way how judges determine the ranking in any debate. In practice, the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, to some extent, contributes to the very availability of an increased number of online tournaments. A reduction in the cost

of hosting and attending such events affords participants more opportunities of participating and enables many young adjudicators with excellent credentials in the field to take part in as well. The benefit of this situation is that we are provided with more oral feedback from judges who, as experienced debaters, are much better qualified to evaluate participants' argumentative competence than teachers who have little experience of formal debate themselves. By clarifying how the rankings are determined and why certain teams are preferred over others, judges are actually explaining how they distinguish bad arguments from good ones by pointing out the particular fallacies made by each individual or team.

Since whether a team can win a tournament is determined by the quality of arguments, it is reasonable to define the argumentative competence in debate as to the ability to construct good arguments, as Damner claims that "An assessment of the quality of an argument is almost always a judgment call, for the criteria lend themselves to adjudication in debate". An argument is a claim supported by other claims. Yet, it may not be a very good one, even if it is supported and on the other hand, good arguments, even with flaws can still be persuasive.

Therefore, recognizing and distinguishing good arguments from bad ones is to check whether there is "the valid combination between claims and premises", a definition of argumentation (Plantin, 1996). Johnson and Blair's model (Trapp, 2016) proposes three criteria for assessing the quality of an argument, namely, acceptability, relevance, and sufficiency. Damer identifies five criteria including for good arguments which are clearer, and more specific with the purpose of helping to recognize good arguments. His criteria include "(1) the structural demands of a well-formed argument, (2) the relevance of the premises of the argument, (3) the acceptability of the argument's premises, (4) the sufficiency of the premises to support the conclusion of the argument and (5) the effectiveness of the arguments rebuttal to the strongest criticisms against the argument or the position it supports" (Damer, 2008, p. 2). His criteria help constitute argumentative competence in debate shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Skills Constituting Argumentative Competence

Skills	Description
Structure-related skill	The ability to efficiently reconstruct arguments by an orderly separation of the premises from the conclusion
Relevance-related skill	The ability to transfer the acceptability of evidence to the claim
Acceptability-related skill	The ability to make evidence acceptable to a reasonable person
Rebuttal-related skill	The ability to build effective rebuttal to criticisms of the argument
Sufficiency-related skill	The ability to fully transfer the acceptability of evidence to the claim

"The presence or absence of fallacies is a good general method for placing arguments along the continuum of a very good to very poor" (Trapp, 2016, p. 248). This reveals that the appropriate way to assess the quality of arguments or argumentative competence is to observe fallacies made by debaters.

Since this thesis is concerned with pedagogical implications to good argumentative competence, what really matters is not how many types of fallacy debaters make but what particular fallacies lead to poor quality of argument and whether the number of these fallacies reduced through the cultivation of English debate course. This thesis takes T.Edward Damer's theory of fallacy for the reason that his model identifies five criteria for good arguments and fallacies are defined as being any violation of those criteria. Specifically, (1) Fallacies that violate the structural criterion of a good argument for they prevent the conclusions from following either necessarily or probably from the premises; (2) Fallacies that violate the relevance criterion; (3) Fallacies that fail to meet the conditions of the acceptability criterion, making them unacceptable to a mature and rational person; (4) Fallacies that fail to meet the sufficiency criterion; (5) The fallacies that fail to provide an effective rebuttal.

4. Research Method

4.1 Research Questions

This study mainly discusses two questions: (1) how do students improve their argumentative competence in the process of learning English debate courses? (2) what factors affect the development of students' argumentative competence?

4.2 Research Object

The study focuses on 3 teams of debater learners. They are all sophomores majoring in English, showing a strong willingness to debate and willing to accept interviews and cooperate with research. All students have completed relevant theoretical knowledge of debate on the MOOC online learning platform such as parliamentary debate rules, topic types, debate positions and responsibilities, evaluation criteria, etc.

4.3 Teaching Background

The course design is divided into three stages: pre-debate stage (before-class), during-debate stage (in-class) and post-debate stage (after-class).

Before-class preparation for debate entails team discussion and information searching. During the three-hour in-class activities each week, topic explanation, debate practice, feedback and discussion are covered. The specific arrangements are as follows: In the first week, teachers explain the basic concepts, analyze one particular topic (such as social movement, economy, feminism, etc.), and assign the motion to debate for the following week. Debate practice is held in the second class of the second week. After drawing lots to decide the roles, there are 15 minutes of preparation time before the debate begins, this is followed by teachers' oral feedback and interaction. Each round of debate is videotaped for teachers to review students' performances and reflect on what guidance and feedback would be of constructive help after class. Furthermore, having participated in a debate, students are required after class to write reflection journals and complete questionnaires at the end of the semester.

4.4 Data Analysis

The present study is conducted based on eight rounds of in-class English debating competitions (Table

3). All three teams completed at least four prepared debates and two impromptu debates. The debates in this study are all in the form of British Parliamentary style in which two teams represent the Proposition: the Opening Government (OG) & the Closing Government (CG). And two teams represent the Opposition: the Opening Opposition (OO) & the Closing Opposition (CO). To present a complete picture of their argumentative competence in each of the four-position, the author chooses two impromptu debates in which all three teams participated and two additional debates based on the remaining two team positions. For example, in the two impromptu speeches, Team A was randomly assigned to CO and CG, so the other two prepared debates were those in which they were in the position of OG and OO positions.

Table 3. Motions for Each Round

Round	Motion
1	THBT private universities should be required to annually adjust their student fees in proportion to their recent graduates' average incomes.
2	TH regrets the overwhelming trend that protagonists in LGBTQ +films and dramas (e.g., BL series) are played by heterosexual actors or actresses.
3	The state should ban advertisement of financial products.
4	THR the romanticisation of mental illness in media and literature.
5	This house opposes the trend of the Chinese work philosophy of "touching fish".
6	This House believes that the WHO should compel its rich members to donate their vaccines to COVAX for fair and equitable distribution to low middle-income and lowest income countries.
7	TH as feminist, would actively criticize movies with over emphasis on feminism as a selling point (2020 Mulan, Harley Quinn, Ocean's 8).
8	TH regrets the environment protection opinion of Greta Thunberg.

According to the video of each debate, teachers' scores, feedback, and reflective journals, the research procedures of the study include transcribing the oral feedback into written form, identifying, evaluating debaters' argumentative competence through identifying and classifying fallacies, and figuring out the factors that affect their argumentative competence.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The purpose of the paper is not to test how many fallacies appeared but to assess whether debaters' argumentative competence improved by looking at whether the number of fallacies that lead to false reasoning decreased, and which particular fallacies do. In Table 4, the fallacies made by six debaters of three teams are figured out. Although this figure is not sufficient to draw a complete picture of all debater's fallacies, a basic understanding of whether and how argumentative competence developed can be built.

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Table 4. The Frequency and Distribution of Fallacy Categories

Teams	Types of debates	Motion	Draw	Rank	Fallacy types				
					SL	RE	AY	SY	RL
A	1st prepared	1	OG	2nd	0	1	1	1	0
	1st impromptu	7	OO	4th	1	2	1	2	1
	2nd prepared	4	CO	1st	0	0	0	1	0
	2nd impromptu	8	CG	2nd	0	1	1	1	0
	Total Percentage				7%	29%	21%	36%	7%
B	1st prepared	2	CG	1st	0	1	1	0	0
	1st impromptu	7	OO	4th	1	2	2	2	1
	2nd prepared	5	CO	2nd	0	0	2	1	0
	2nd impromptu	8	OG	4th	1	2	1	2	0
	Total Percentage				11%	22%	33%	28%	6%
C	1st prepared	3	CG	4th	0	2	2	0	1
	1st impromptu	7	OG	3rd	1	2	1	2	0
	2nd prepared	4	OO	1st	0	1	0	0	0
	2nd impromptu	8	CO	3rd	0	2	1	3	1
	Total Percentage				5%	37%	21%	26%	11%

5.1 Fallacies Identification and Categorization

In this study, in order to test debaters' argumentative competence, the fallacies are categorized into five major types: 1) structural-related 2) relevance-related 3) acceptability-related 4) sufficiency-related and 5) rebuttal-related. Besides, the debate is divided into prepared and impromptu to evaluate which kind of debate helps to improve debaters' argumentative competence. It is obvious from (table 4) that among these five types of fallacies, relevance-related fallacies, sufficiency-related fallacies and acceptability-related fallacies (accounting for more than 20%) are the most common fallacies compared with structural-fallacies and rebuttal-related fallacies. As far as the prepared debate is concerned, it is worth noting that in the second time, the three teams committed fewer fallacies in all categories. However, this trend did not exist in impromptu debates. This demonstrates that the argumentative competence embodied in impromptu debate varies from team to team. The following article evaluates each fallacy type in detail and discusses the factors related to each fallacy type that affect argumentation ability. The following passages evaluate each fallacy type in detail and discuss the factors associated with each fallacy type that affect the ability to demonstrate.

5.2 Debater's Argumentative Competence Evaluation

5.2.1 Relevance-related Skill

Those who follow the principle of relevance can present an argument for or against a position by providing only evidence for the truth of the argument. This ability, to a greater extent, decides whether

debaters can win one round of debate.

Of five fallacies, this category is witnessed being reduced during the second prepared debate but kept almost the same number during the impromptu debate, except Team A. As reflected by debaters' reflective journals, prepared speech gave them one week to search and collect information, which helped them understand the social and historical background of the topic, so that they could clarify the core events of the whole debate. Yet, on-site debate only allows debaters 15 minutes to prepare. Under time pressure, "my concern is only my arguments in favor of my side. I am afraid of nothing to say rather than whether my view touches on the core issues".

Moreover, this category was one of the most frequent ones and was 100% committed by teams of rank 4 and 3, meaning that this fallacy is a direct link to the cause of faulty reasoning. Those who committed relevance-related fallacy were unable to attach the core idea of the topic. Take "TH regrets the environment protection opinion of Greta Thunberg" as an example, Team B, in the position of OG, clarified the negative effects of Greta calling on students to strike but this had little to do with the environment protection opinion of Greta Thunberg. The same example could be found in the motion "The state should ban the advertisement of financial products". Team C lost this round, even though this was a prepared debate. The root cause, as they later reflected, was that they did not spend time thinking over the keywords which are not "financial products" but "the advertisement". Since their arguments provided no evidence for the truth of the conclusion, they failed to construct a good argument.

Though a debater's ability to conform to the relevance principle is not clearly seen as being improved in impromptu debate, the prepared debate did help them gain a higher level of this competence. At least, debaters were aware of the necessity to test the relevance of their arguments, although they have not yet formed a habit. Secondly, both teachers and debaters ignored the importance of wording in the motion, or at least, students have not been trained to make subtle distinctions of meaning and using words precisely.

5.2.2 Structural-related Skill

The ability to form the argument in a way "that the conclusion either follows necessarily or probably from its premises" (Damer, 2008, p. 30) is another skill that constitutes argumentative competence. Thus, debaters who lack this skill violates the structural criterion of a good argument, which leads to the inability to provide us with sufficient reasons to accept a specific conclusion. Similar to relevance-related fallacy, structural-related fallacies, are only committed by the third and fourth-ranked teams but are considered serious fallacies because they are harmful to the debate. The fallacy created in this way does not even seem to be an argument.

Fortunately, debaters rarely made these mistakes, only in the first impromptu debate, which showed that their understanding of good structure had improved. Chen of Team C said that his argument structure has been improved because a task assigned by teachers was to reconstruct their arguments in the form of premise (sub premise) and conclusion. After more practice, he became familiar with this structure. During the 15 minutes impromptu speech preparation time, instead of thinking about examples, he jotted down premises, assumptions, and links to explain why their claims are credible or possible.

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However, due to individual differences, Zhang of Team B still committed this fallacy in two on-site debates. Specifically, to prove his stance that movies with an overemphasis on feminism as a selling point should be criticized, he formed his argument in the structure as below:

Since feminism should not be regarded as a selling point. (premise)

Feminism regarded as a selling point is wrong. (implicit assumption)

Therefore, we should criticize movies that take feminism as a selling point. (conclusion)

This is a typical "begging -the -question fallacy" which is flawed in the form of "since A, therefore, A.". Since this evidence is bogus based on the implicit assumption that "feminism being regarded as selling point is wrong", the conclusion explicitly appears as the premise. In other words, there is no substantial difference between premise and conclusion. Such a conclusion without credibility is not persuasive at all.

When asked why there are structure-related fallacies, Zhang of Team B replied with two factors. First, As the first government team, his role as prime minister only allowed him 15 minutes to think. During this period, he needed to build a government case by defining and interpreting the topic and providing arguments, so that he had little time to think about the evidence. But more importantly, he had no idea what the feminist elements in the film were, nor why overemphasizing feminism would bring more harm than good to the feminist movement.

5.2.3 Acceptability-related Skill

In debate, one who presents an argument for or against the position should use reasons that are likely to be acceptable by a mature rational person. Due to the fact that an individual debater might have several pieces of evidence, the acceptability of one piece of evidence might not be the main reason for the ranking allocated to the teams. This is what distinguishes this fallacy from the fallacy of relevance and structure.

Team A made this error fewer than other teams. Like Team C, they improved this skill especially when they were given more time to consider. As Yang from Team A said if she had enough time, she would check whether the explanation or example was in line with common sense or supported by recognized authorities. This way of thinking enabled her to attack other people's fallacies. In the prepared debate on "romanticism of mental illness in media and literature", she pointed out that OO's argument that Romanticism of mental illness could attract wide attention and helped victims feel better was unacceptable because romanticism was misinformation of mental illness. Hearing that others think pre-exam anxiety was a mental disorder would only make the victim feel more angry and depressed. This case shows that highly competent debaters are aware of the need to examine, question and judge the acceptability and sufficiency of the premise.

Unlike the other two teams, team B had the lowest ability to meet the acceptance criteria, even in a prepared debate. Concerning the motion "This house opposes the trend of the Chinese work philosophy of 'touching fish'", team B claimed that this trend helped employees improve efficiency was unacceptable. In order to strengthen their statement, they further proved that the philosophy of "touching fish" helped them maintain a good mood, and their ability to release pressure allowed them to have a good rest and devoted more energy the next day. If the term "touch fish" is used to refer to

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those who have low expectations of themselves but have a spirit of collectivism, this argument seems very convincing. However, their premise was linguistically confusing because "touch fish" refers to those who are more likely to deliver medium-quality work, stay in the toilet for a long time and play games on mobile devices. Therefore, the conclusion that this "touching fish" would be encouraged to improve efficiency was not tenable. To some extent, the example given by Team B is off the topic of "touching fish". Therefore, fallacies related to acceptability are sometimes mixed with other defects, which jointly reduce the quality of the argument. The reflective journal of Team B showed that such fallacies were directly related to the knowledge reserve. In other words, the more familiar debaters are with the subject, the higher the acceptance and relevance of their arguments, and vice versa.

5.2.4 Rebuttal-related Skill

Excellent constructive speech includes an effective rebuttal to the most serious criticism of the arguments, if not all. In debating, no matter how good one side constructs their arguments, so long as they fail to engage with strong cases from two opposite benches, they cannot be winners. Their refusal to take others' arguments seriously minimizes their own strength. Moreover, refutation does not solely refer to pointing out other sides' fallacies but explains why this is wrong or why their arguments are not important.

As in the case of the structural-related one, none of the three teams found this type of fallacy in the second prepared debate but occasionally appeared in the impromptu debate. Debater Yuan of Team A attributed her progress to watching the online world-class debate, saying that "in order not to forget to refute, my method of refutation is to start my speech with a rebuttal". However, world-famous debaters are capable to integrate their rebuttals into every detail of their speech and take advantage of chances of Points of Information to engage a potential weakness or lack of clarity regarding the argument that is being presented.

As group B of OO, facing OG's argument that "women can do everything men can do" will only arouse men's strong opposition. OO tries to divert attention from these practical problems by saying that these were extreme situations. Due to the lack of refutation and reconstruction of the arguments, the opponents' arguments are still as strong as before. After an interview, Zhang of team B said that he took advantage of this diversion to maneuver into a less embarrassing position because he was not confident to invalidate OG's argument. However, it was in this way that he gave up thinking about the most powerful refutation. His weakness in reasoning skills prevented him from meeting the rebuttal criterion.

5.2.5 Sufficiency-related Skill

Those who commit sufficiency-related fallacies fail to provide "a sufficient number of relevant and acceptable premises of appropriate kind and weight in order for relating to evidence not being sufficient in numbers and weight" (Damner, 2008, p. 37). All teams committed fallacies related to adequacy, accounting for a larger proportion (more than 25%). This type of fallacy appeared more in impromptu debates than in prepared debates, and these fallacies were committed by groups ranking first to fourth in any kind of debate, but in different forms and degrees. Although this fallacy did not do the greatest harm to the construction of a good argument, it did not show a downward trend, but an upward trend,

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just as in the case of team B and team C.

Among all sufficiency-related fallacies, omission of key evidence was the most crucial one that directly ended up with losing one particular debate. Specifically, Team B used too little evidence to prove the harmful effects of the environment protection opinion of Greta Thunberg. Although their argument "preventing the development of industry in the third world would damage the economy" sounded good, it was not convincing to just claim that people lost jobs and therefore they couldn't survive unless more links were provided between industrial development and employment opportunities.

The hasty conclusion was the second form that debaters often made. In the motion entitled "the state should prohibit advertising of financial products", Team C, as CG, spent more than three minutes discussing how advertising of financial products successfully persuaded the elderly to buy financial products. This was good, but since there was no mechanism to explain how it happened, they hastily concluded that the government must take action to ban advertising. The key to the policy motion is "why do you need to do this as the government (problem) + how will you do it (model) + why should you implement the model (case)". In contrast, team A was also affected by insufficient evidence, but to a negligible extent. As OG, in order to support that "private universities should adjust tuition fees annually according to the average income of their recent graduates", they put forward the argument that teachers were encouraged by this policy to reform courses and teaching methods. Although their description of the characteristics of Chinese private universities was not comprehensive enough, key evidence, such as how the policy worked and how important the policy was to students and teachers, provided a good connection between this proposition and the conclusion.

The reason why it is difficult for debaters to improve their adequacy-related skills is related to their familiarity with the subject and the short preparation time for ad hoc debate, but the most important thing is motion type analysis. In order to meet the criterion of sufficiency, the burden of proof (that is, what you must prove to win the debate) plays a vital role, and different types of motions determine the burden of proof in this debate. Specifically, the motion of "we regret" requires both sides to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the factual world and the counterfactual world according to different standards. Although both teams discussed the positive or negative effects of Greta Sandberg's environmental view, they failed to compare the real world affected by Greta Sandberg's environmental view with the counterfactual world. The high frequency of such errors also shows that the analysis of motion types in classroom teaching has not been paid enough attention. If the debaters were trained to fully understand that the type and wording of the motion determine the burden of proof, then 15 minutes of preparation time would be enough for them to focus on the core issues. This training not only helps to reduce the fallacies related to adequacy but also helps to reduce the fallacies related to relevance.

6. Conclusion

This study assesses the argumentative competence of six debate learners from the fallacies they made in preparing debate an impromptu debate. The fallacies collected from eight classroom debates are classified

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and analyzed in detail to test whether their argumentative competence has improved. At the same time, on the basis of qualitative analysis, possible assumptions are made about the causes of these errors.

In the second prepared debate, as these fallacies decreased, the debaters' argumentative competence related to relevance, sufficiency, acceptability, structure, and rebuttal, had improved. However, in terms of impromptu debate, the data fluctuation of the five categories did not show a significant downward trend. It is worth noting that the fallacies related to adequacy were on the rise in the two teams. Moreover, all teams performed better in structure and refutation skills than in relevance, adequacy, and acceptability. Team A was good at debating because they fully understood the need to examine, ask questions and judge the acceptability, sufficiency and relevance of others' and their own arguments. This was closely related to their active participation in off-campus competitions and watching world debate competitions.

To sum up, we can infer some important factors that are crucial to argumentative ability. In this study, the prepared debate provided the debater with more time and did help him make progress in five skills. In this way, the teaching arrangement of six prepared debates and two impromptu debates for one semester is reasonable for sophomores, which can provide a reference for debate curriculum design. But second, and perhaps most importantly, debaters need to be trained to fully assess whether they provide an appropriate burden of proof and whether they really understand what they agree or disagree with. This requires them to have higher evaluation ability. To be further, Students need to reflect on their speeches according to the five criteria of a good argument and answer questions such as "did I gain an advantage from the other side?", "was my argument structure reasonable?", "did my evidence acceptable to the judge" and so on. Thirdly, students should be encouraged to take part in more online debates. The Covid-19 virus outbreak in 2020 resulted in the availability of more online debates. With the reduction in the cost of hosting and attending such events, participants have been offered more opportunities of participating, interacting with excellent debaters, and gaining feedback from young adjudicators with excellent credentials in the field. Finally, the more knowledge they have, the better the connection between relevant claims and conclusions can be built. Therefore, debaters need to accumulate knowledge on hot topics such as feminism and the environment. Otherwise, even if debaters master all the skills of constructing arguments, they have no evidence or details to prove why their arguments are true and why they are important and finally lose the game.

It is suggested that teachers should spend more time designing more exercises to help students understand these important terms, such as the burden of proof and developing thinking habits, rather than just inculcating all specific terms in the field. Second, teachers should personally participate in English debates and listen to the speeches of world-famous judges or debaters. Otherwise, despite their extensive reading of relevant books, they cannot grasp the core of the debate and therefore cannot provide effective classroom teaching. The author hopes that this paper can provide teachers with an understanding of students' argumentative competence, so as to improve the quality of classroom instruction.

Acknowledgement

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