
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring high school students' logical and rhetorical argumentation patterns incorporated in their performed speeches during classroom debates

Hassan LEMZAOUAK¹✉ and ANASSE Khadija²

¹Doctoral student, Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts, University Ibn Tofail, Kénitra. Morocco

²Professor, Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts, University Ibn Tofail, Kénitra. Morocco

Corresponding Author: Hassan LEMZAOUAK, **E-mail:** Hassan LEMZAOUAK

| ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the logical and rhetorical argumentation patterns of high school learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Moroccan classrooms. In particular, focus is laid on students' use of persuasion techniques inherent in their performed debates during classroom debate. Thorough content analysis of students' speeches has been conducted to explore key logical and rhetorical strategies employed by debaters to persuade their opponents and the audience, alike. Data were collected from a diverse group of students across various grade levels, utilizing audio recordings and to capture the nuances of the logical and rhetorical patterns. The findings reveal a range of normative instances, such as the validity of arguments along with persuasive patterns like ethos, pathos, and logos. This study contributes to our understanding of how high school students construct and employ logical and rhetorical argumentation skills, highlighting the importance of effective persuasion within educational and real-world contexts. The implications suggest that engaging students in more meaningful learning activities, like classroom debates, could enhance students' logical and rhetorical argumentative competence.

| KEYWORDS

Classroom debating, logical, rhetorical, argumentation, EFL classroom

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 12 November 2024

PUBLISHED: 23 December 2024

DOI: 10.32996/jweep.2024.6.3.15

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

In Moroccan language classrooms where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), English language teaching (ELT) primarily focuses on evaluating students' reading skills, writing and their conscious knowledge of rules and word forms. That is, language classes tend to be form- focused than meaning-focused. Little focus is given to constructing meaning through learner-centered activities like classroom debates that enhance learners' active engagement and foster learners' implication and responsibility for their own learning. Thus, Moroccan EFL teaching practices need to be revised and revisited in alignment with the pedagogical and learning outcomes inspired by the strategic vision of the reform 2015-2030 (CSE, 2015).

1.2 Research questions and research hypotheses

The present classroom study was conducted to answer the following research questions and confirm or disconfirm their corresponding research hypotheses.

RQ1: How do students demonstrate logical patterns when engaged in classroom debates?

RQ2: How do students demonstrate rhetorical patterns when engaged in classroom debates?

RH1: Students when participating in classroom debating, will report no logical argumentation patterns.

RH2: Students when participating in classroom debating will report no rhetorical argumentation patterns.

2. Literature review

2.1 Defining argumentation

Argumentation is an inevitable aspect of daily life communication. In its basic lexical definition, argumentation refers to the "logical arguments used to support a theory, an action, or an idea" (Oxford advanced dictionary, 2006, p. 65). While this term has been approached interchangeably to indicate both an 'argument' and 'argumentation' (Andrews, 2010), a clear distinction of the meaning of argument was delineated by O' Keefe (1977). This latter referred to the argument in its two-fold sense: Argument₁ and Argument₂. The first means the dynamic process of making an argument, making a claim and providing support for it. On the other hand, the second sense of argument refers to having an argument in its confrontational sense underlying both a discussion or a quarrel or a dispute, often heated, between two or more people, such as in "They were arguing about what to do after class. In the present study, the working definition of the argumentation is more comprehensive, as it draws upon both the process-product the sense of argument (Freeman, 2011).

2.2 Logical approach

Argumentation has often been viewed as a product, focusing on the collection of statements that include a conclusion and one or more premises (Tindale, 1999). This perspective prioritizes the assessment of the outcomes of rhetorical and dialectical exchanges, where arguments are typically defined by their premises and conclusions (Wenzel, 1987). This approach aligns more closely with formal logic, which aims to systematically determine whether conclusions logically follow from the premises (Jeffrey and Burgess, 2006), which ensures validity in arguments.

2.3 Rhetorical approach

The rhetorical sense of argument emphasises that an argument is a process whose central objective is persuasion. Following Aristotle's approach, rhetoric is defined as "the art of persuasion" (Andrews, 2005, p. 111). To this end, Aristotle draws upon three technical principles of persuasion: the *ethos*, the *pathos* and the *logos*. That is, whenever the arguer displays these constituents effectively, persuasion is likely to take place (Herrik,2020).

To begin with, the *ethos* impact takes place when persuasion is carried out through the character of the speaker. That is, whenever the speech is held in a such a way as to render the arguer worthy of credence and trust, the extent of *ethos* patterns rises.

The second technical means of persuasion stands for *pathos*. Persuasion here features through the emotional state of the hearer, which underlies the assumption that persuasion is strongly associated with the people's mood and feelings. To illustrate, people are likely to undergo some changes in opinion and attitude when attending a speech, which will inevitably change their conclusions and decisions.

The third principle of rhetoric conducive to persuasion is *logos*. Regarding the topic the speech is about, persuasion can be achieved through the use of arguments which draw upon logical evidence like facts, statistics and other reliable grounds. By so doing, the argument is the most seemingly device to prove a case is right through the use of premises and conclusions. Such evidence is put forward in support of a claim which is likely to persuade the audience (Rapp, 2002).

2.4 Classroom debates

Unlike arguing or yelling at each other, classroom debate refers to a specific structured educational event whose main objective is to engage students with topics and content (Davis et al., 2016). Debating, at its core, is described as a "formal discussion on a specific topic where opposing viewpoints are presented" (Oxford Dictionary, 2006, p. 376). This implies that debate involves examining various perspectives whereby the three fundamental constituents of rhetoric ,logs, *pathos* and *ethos*, are at play for reaching a conclusion (Freely & Steinberg, 2005). More specifically, it can be characterized as "a structured communication event regarding a topic of interest, where opposing advocates take turns before a decision-making body" (Snider & Schnurer, 2002, p. 8). In relation to argumentation, debate is defined as "the process of discussing claims in contexts where an adjudicator must determine the outcome" (IDEA, 2009, p.2).

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The sample of this study was drawn from a high boarding school, hosting male students whose age ranges between 15 and 16 years old. They were non-randomly selected from Common Core and first year baccalaureate classes on the basis of their interest and motivation to participate in this study. The participants made two groups of four students representing either the proposition or the opposition side of the debate.

3.2 Instrument

- 3.2.1 Audio recording
- 3.2.2 Notta (ai) transcription from speech to text
- 3.2.3 Qualitative Coding
- 3.2.4 Content analysis

3.3 Research design

In the current study, the researcher has adopted a qualitative research design that basically draws upon content analysis in an attempt to address a particular research problem, and test one research hypothesis. It approaches students' performed speeches using content analysis, highlighting argumentation skills patterns which comprise rhetorical and logical patterns of argumentation.

3.4 Context of the study

This study took place in a boarding high school that hosts male students only. Such a boarding institute promotes a collaborative learning environment wherein students are committed to almost eight hours of regular classes and attend two hours of controlled homework sessions on a daily basis. The participants of the present study have access to a well-equipped multimedia large room with free Internet and big number of encyclopedias and reference book, encouraging learner autonomy and accountability in their education. Additionally, the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the students foster cultural tolerance and understanding, creating a platform for exchanging viewpoints and enhancing cooperation among them (Duffell, 2000).

4. Findings and data analysis

The findings of this study have been presented in the form of students' transcribed and coded speeches, highlighting patterns of argumentation whose main objective was to maintain structural validity and preserve rhetorical principles in order to ensure the persuasion of the opponents and the audience alike.

Qualitative coding of students' performed speeches unveiled a variety of patterns reflective of the logical approach to argument. That is, during the classroom debates, students incorporated logical aspects of argumentation associated with validity. That is, coding has outlined patterns of arguments that adhere to the principles of the evaluative approach to argument. For example, the second speaker's argument proved valid in the sense it provides several reasons (premises) to support the conclusion that *"shopping online is useful in the sense that it is convenient, time saving, and cheaper"*. He also demonstrates that the argument is valid as the premises logically lead to the conclusion. If the premises are true, the conclusion follows. In plain words, in a valid argument, whenever the premises (Toulmin, 2003; Walton, 2006). In so doing, the speaker managed to preserve the evaluative criteria of argument and meet the prerequisites of the logical approach to argumentation. To this end, the speakers have incorporated factual patterns like statistics and surveys whose truth can be verified by consulting reference sources, surveys, or scientific studies.

Additionally, the speeches that were performed revealed textual patterns, highlighting three fundamental persuasion principles: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. The first pattern has been implemented through the use of evidence to advocate the popularity of shopping online in the US arguing that according to a recent study conducted in 2022 *"the world e-commerce sales will reach \$58.74 Trillion by 2028"*. The second rhetorical argumentation principle best showcased in the first speech of the first speaker of the opposition is the *ethos*. It was established through the speaker's credibility aimed for persuasion which was established through his personal experience with shopping online, implying that they have encountered many shortcomings, which made the audience trust the speaker's stand and strengthened his position in the debate. The third, argumentation rhetorical pattern highlighted in the speakers' performed speeches is *pathos*. In the first debate, shopping online, the speakers' performed speeches. The first speaker's speech was crafted to gain the persuasion and approval of the opponents and the audience using feelings of frustration and disappointment with fake product representation, evoking empathy from the audience who may have experienced the same disappointment with shopping online.

In brief, qualitative coding and analysis revealed that performed speeches involve logical patterns of arguments which featured in maintaining structural validity in their argument. Besides, the qualitative analysis highlighted a variety of rhetorical argumentation patterns reflective of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* as strategic tools to persuade and gain the acceptance and approval of the opponents and the audience.

5. Discussion

RQ1: How do students demonstrate logical strategies when engaged in classroom debates?

RH1: Students who participate in classroom debating will report better logical argumentation strategies.

Being engaged in classroom debates allowed speakers to implement one essential evaluative criterion of an argument, adhering to the logical argumentation approach. It is validity of an argument. Following the findings of the current study, the first research question has been positively answered. That is, those findings accorded with the previous theoretical studies emphasizing that engaging learners in controversial and critical activities, such as classroom debates, compels students to craft well-structured arguments, deploying logical arguments where conclusions follow the premises (Tindale, 2004; Besnard & Hunter, 2008; Freeman, 2011; Walton, 2013 Palmer, 2014, van Eemeren, 2015). In so doing, debaters render their performed speeches valid and acceptable. With such a normative perspective on argument construction, learners become aware of their duties toward the audience and their opponents with respect to the structural elements of an argument (Toulmin, 2003). Thus, the first research hypothesis has been confirmed, holding that students who participate in classroom debating will report better rhetorical argumentation patterns (Alasmari & Ahmed, 2013; Van Eemeren et al., 1987).

RQ2: How do students demonstrate rhetorical strategies when engaged in classroom debates?

RH2: Students who participate in classroom debating will report better rhetorical argumentation strategies.

The findings drawn from the students' performed speeches also underscored the importance of classroom debates as an arena where students' rhetorical argumentation patterns flourish and develop, which aligns with empirical studies conducted on the issue of rhetorical skills and classroom debating (Jiménez-Aleixandre & Erduran, 2007; Moshman & Tarricone, 2016). Alluding to the content analysis conducted on the performed speeches, we can conclude that the second research question has also been positively answered to confirm the second research hypothesis, holding that "Students who participate in classroom debating will report better rhetorical argumentation strategies". This close relationship between controversial and critical classroom activities and the use of rhetorical strategies accounts for the importance of incorporating such classroom activities as a strategy to foster argumentation skills and other aspects of critical thinking (Kuhn & Crowell, 2011; Iman, 2017; Almajidi et al., 2021).

Overall, we can conclude that the speakers' performed speeches aligned with the principle of argumentation within logical and rhetorical patterns of argumentation (Freeman, 2011). That is, when debaters were engaged in a classroom debate, their performed arguments translated remarkable patterns of logical and rhetorical argumentation skills conducive to validity and persuasion as integral attributes of informal logic (van Eemeren, 2015; van Eemeren & Henkemans, 2016).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Engaging learners in meaningful learning contexts, such as classroom debates, has rendered them more conscious of their role to take a stand and defend it using rhetorical argumentation patterns associated with *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. Teachers, then, are recommended to incorporate classroom debates whereby students develop and implement their argumentative competence. More importantly, developing such rhetorical skills will certainly improve learners' critical thinking abilities, which in turn will ensure their personal as well as professional success.

About the author

Hassan LEMZAOUAK is a high school teacher of English in Kenitra, Morocco. He has worked as a high school teacher of English for twenty years. He is currently working on a Doctorate dissertation about the effect of classroom debate on improving high school students' argumentation skills and critical thinking. His areas of academic interest are literacy, active learning, argumentation and critical thinking.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1] Alasmari, A., & Ahmed, S. S. (2013). Using debate in EFL classes. *English language teaching*, 6(1), 147-152.
- [2] Andrews, R. (2005). Models of argumentation in educational discourse. *Text-Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, 25(1), 107-127.
- [3] CSE, 2015, «Vision stratégique de la réforme 2015-2030» Pour une école de l'équité, de la qualité et de la promotion
- [4] Davis, K. A., Zorwick, M. L. W., Roland, J., & Wade, M. M. (Eds.). (2016). *Using debate in the classroom: encouraging critical thinking, communication, and collaboration*. Routledge.
- [5] Duffell, N. (2000). *The making of them: The British attitude to children and the boarding school system*. Lone Arrow Pres
- [6] Freeman, J. B. (2011). *Argument structure: representation and theory*. Springer: New York.
- [7] Herrick, J. A. (2020). *The history and theory of rhetoric: An introduction*. Routledge.
- [8] Iman, J. N. (2017). Debate Instruction in EFL Classroom: Impacts on the Critical Thinking and Speaking Skill. *International Journal of Instruction*, 10(4), 87-108.
- [9] Jiménez-Aleixandre, M. P., & Erduran, S. (2007). Argumentation in science education: An overview. *Argumentation in science education: Perspectives from classroom-based research*, 3- 27.
- [10] Moshman, D., & Tarricone, P. (2016). Logical and causal reasoning. In *Handbook of epistemic cognition* (pp. 54-67). Routledge.
- [11] Palmer, W. (2012). Discovering arguments: An introduction to critical thinking, writing, and style. (No Title).
- [12] Tindale, C. W. (2004). *Rhetorical argumentation: Principles of theory and practice*. Sage.
- [13] Toulmin, S. E. (2003). *The uses of argument*. Cambridge university press.
- [14] Van Eemeren, F. H., Grootendorst, R., Blair, J. A., & Willard, C. A. (1987). *Argumentation: Perspectives and Approaches*. De Gruyter Mouton
- [15] Van Eemeren, F. H. (2015). Reasonableness and effectiveness in argumentative discourse. *Argumentatio library*, 27.
- [16] Van Eemeren, F. H., & Henkemans, A. F. S. (2016). *Argumentation: Analysis and evaluation*. Routledge.