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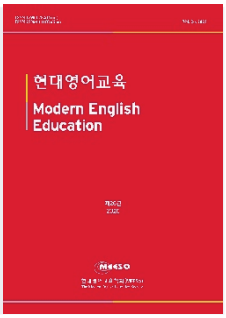

The Effects of English Debate Activities on Korean University Students' Written and Oral Argumentation Skills

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Abstract
This quasi-experimental study examines the effects of English debate activities on Korean university students' written and oral argumentation skills. A pretest-posttest control group design was utilized, comprising an experimental group (n = 46) that engaged in weekly English debate sessions and a control group (n = 33) that received alternative English instruction. Data were collected through written and oral argumentative opinion tasks administered before and after the semester. The participants' argument structures were analyzed using a modified version of Toulmin's model of argumentation. ANCOVA was conducted to compare the posttest performances of the two groups, incorporating pretest scores as covariates. The findings indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in overall argumentation skills. Specifically, the experimental group showed notable improvements in their ability to use warrants, present counterarguments, and incorporate qualifiers, reflecting a deeper understanding and more effective construction of arguments. These enhancements were consistently observed across both written and oral tasks, demonstrating the transferability of skills. The study underscores the effectiveness of debate as a pedagogical method for enhancing critical thinking and argumentation in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and discusses the implications of integrating debate activities into EFL curricula.

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INTRODUCTION

Effectively constructing and defending arguments is a critical skill for university students learning English as a second language (L2), especially in academic and professional contexts where English acts as the global lingua franca. Developing these skills through debate activities is particularly relevant for Korean university students. Argumentation enables students

to express their ideas clearly, engage in meaningful discussions, and demonstrate nuanced reasoning in both written and spoken forms. As an interactive and goal-oriented activity, debate serves as an engaging platform for students to refine their English communication skills, better preparing them for academic success and active participation in intercultural discourse.

Research emphasizes the significance of L2 argumentation skills in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving abilities among university students. Through structured argumentation, learners improve their ability to critically analyze information, evaluate evidence, and articulate their viewpoints clearly and precisely (Amin et al., 2024). This dynamic process encourages students to grapple with complex ideas, construct well-reasoned positions, and defend them while exploring diverse perspectives that enhance analytical reasoning skills. Additionally, argumentation supports essential problem-solving competencies, including problem identification and generating and evaluating solutions—skills vital for success in both academic and real-world settings (Sato, 2022).

Classroom debates have been shown to be particularly effective in enhancing the argumentation skills of L2 learners. Engaging in debates not only promotes critical thinking but also improves writing proficiency while fostering greater confidence and a willingness to participate in argumentative discourse (Chen et al., 2022; Walker & Kettler, 2020). For example, Oros (2007) found that debates notably enhanced students' abilities to organize written arguments, specifically in formulating claims and counterarguments. Likewise, el Majidi, Graaff, and Janssen (2023) reported significant improvements in fluency, syntactic complexity, and overall essay quality among L2 students involved in debate programs. Additionally, debates have bolstered students' preparedness for engaging in argumentative dialogue. Meral, Zeynep, and Fatih (2021) observed substantial advancements in argumentative skills among prospective teachers who actively participated in debate-based activities.

Despite the extensive literature highlighting the benefits of debate for language learners, there is a lack of research specifically examining its impact on the argumentation skills of Korean university students learning English as a second language. This gap signifies the necessity for context-specific studies to gain a deeper understanding of how debate activities influence skill development within this particular demographic. Furthermore, previous research has identified potential challenges related to debates, such as a negative impact on students' attitudes toward argumentation (Goodwin, 2003; Kassem, 2021). This context underscores the importance of implementing debate activities that utilize pedagogical approaches emphasizing collaboration and fostering a supportive, interactive learning environment in L2 classrooms.

In light of these considerations, the present study raises the following research questions to address these challenges:

1. How do in-class English debate activities influence the development of written argumentation skills among Korean university students?
2. How do in-class English debate activities influence the development of oral argumentation skills among Korean university students?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

The Use of Debate in L2 Classrooms

Pedagogical Benefits of Debates in L2 Contexts

Debates serve as a remarkably effective pedagogical tool in the L2 learning contexts, providing an integrative approach to developing essential language skills. They combine the four language skills into a single interactive activity, enhancing communicative language practice. In a debate setting, students are tasked with reading and analyzing evidence, listening to opposing arguments, articulating their viewpoints orally, and frequently composing structured written arguments or reflections. As Kennedy (2009) points out, the complexity of debates promotes experiential learning that immerses students in authentic communication. Jung (2006) also notes the advantages of pro and con debates for enhancing general English proficiency, emphasizing the necessity for students to blend listening and speaking skills with logical reasoning and the integration of provided materials and insights. Moreover, debates encourage active participation and foster critical thinking as students assess and contest opposing viewpoints (Huh & I. Lee, 2014; Xargia, 2016).

Research shows many benefits linked to incorporating debates in L2 classrooms. For instance, studies by Berland and McNeill (2010) along with Chen, Hand, and Park (2016) reveal that engaging students in debate activities creates immediate motivation to build persuasive and complex arguments, effectively linking oral and written argumentation. The organized framework of in-class debates further enhances students' abilities to convey their arguments clearly in both speech and

writing. Deliana and Ganie (2024) emphasize that instructors who utilize debate methods prioritize active student engagement. Their findings indicate that such practices enhance students' speaking skills and confidence and facilitate the construction and presentation of well-structured arguments while promoting critical thinking and effective communication. These insights affirm the effectiveness of debates as a teaching method to boost university students' speaking capabilities, especially when active participation is emphasized. Similarly, Wang and Buck (2018) report that debates aid students in logically and persuasively organizing their ideas—a skill transferable to both written and oral tasks. These benefits are further strengthened by the collaborative and interactive nature of debates, encouraging students to practice turn-taking, active listening, and appropriate language in relevant contexts.

In the context of South Korea, Jung (2006) notes the advantages of employing English debate techniques in teaching, as reflected by positive attitudes from English teachers. They indicate that such techniques significantly contribute to integrating new teaching strategies and ideas. Moreover, Lee and Yang's (2014) analysis of debate participants' speeches confirms that these participants seldom made critical errors that compromised comprehension.

Beyond linguistic development, debates also significantly enhance intercultural communication skills. Given that many debate topics involve global or culturally diverse issues, students encounter various perspectives, deepening their understanding of content areas (Çolak, 2022; Peasah & Marshall, 2017; Snider & Schnurer, 2006). This exposure sharpens their argumentation skills and cultivates adaptability, enabling them to engage more effectively with content-area learning.

Research on Argumentation and Debate in L2 Learning

Numerous studies have underscored the influence of debate-based activities on enhancing argumentation skills. These activities enable learners to construct, articulate, and defend their arguments effectively. A key aspect of this is how debates foster critical reasoning, logical structuring of ideas, and the ability to respond to counterarguments, as noted in foundational research by Kuhn (1991, 2018) and Crowell and Kuhn (2014). These researchers highlight that engaging in debates within educational settings promotes a profound understanding of argumentation by pushing participants to critically assess opposing viewpoints, formulate cohesive arguments, and defend their stances using evidence. Kuhn's research particularly emphasizes the significance of practice and reflective engagement in debates to enhance reasoning skills. This includes recognizing logical inconsistencies and anticipating counterarguments. Crowell and Kuhn (2014) further illustrate that structured debate participation improves students' clarity in articulating their ideas while encouraging tolerance and intellectual flexibility when encountering differing perspectives.

In recent explorations, researchers have focused on debating as a distinct pedagogical tool within L2 classrooms. For instance, el Majidi, Janssen, and Graaff (2021) demonstrate that organized debate activities in English as an EFL contexts significantly enhance learners' argumentative writing capabilities by providing explicit frameworks for creating persuasive and well-structured essays. They highlight the dialogic interactions characteristic of L2 debates are particularly valuable in helping learners develop logical reasoning skills as they practice formulating statements, employing rebuttal strategies, and persuading an audience. Their study emphasizes how debates bridge linguistic proficiency and the logical organization of ideas in writing.

Building on this foundation, el Majidi, Graaff, and Janssen (2023) take a broader comparative view and analyze how debate practices can be tailored to various L2 learning environments to optimize their impact on students' argumentative competence. Their findings across diverse EFL classrooms indicate that debate practices bolster learners' abilities to construct arguments and enhance their critical assessment and refutation of opposing viewpoints—essential components of strong argumentation. Incorporating debates into L2 curricula has increased learners' confidence in expressing ideas in the target language and stimulated engagement with complex topics, ultimately leading to more nuanced and persuasive oral and written arguments.

With a growing interest in the role of technology in education, Guo et al. (2023) investigate chatbot-assisted in-class debates (CaIcD) through an argumentative chatbot called Argumate. Their research with 44 Chinese undergraduate students employed quasi-experimental and within-subjects design to evaluate the impact of CaIcD on argumentation skills and task motivation. The results demonstrate that CaIcD significantly improved the quality of arguments as students incorporated more claims, data, and evidence, leading to more organized arguments, although no notable enhancement in structural complexity was observed. Furthermore, students reported higher task enjoyment and effort with CaIcD compared to traditional methods, while perceptions of task relevance and perceived performance were similar across both approaches. This indicates that argumentative chatbots can potentially enrich learning outcomes and boost motivation during classroom debates.

Lim (2009) also utilizes a rhetorical perspective within the Korean context by examining metadiscourse strategies employed in English debate formats. Her analysis reveals crucial links between argumentative structures and rhetorical

strategies in debates, identifying a wide range of metadiscourse elements present in English debates among Korean university students. This contributes to a deeper understanding of debate practices relevant to L2 learning in this demographic.

These recent studies validate the effectiveness of debates as a pedagogical tool in L2 settings, highlighting that debates help cultivate argumentative competence by intertwining linguistic, cognitive, and interpersonal skills. By engaging learners in the reasoning process, adapting arguments to fit contextual requirements, and refining responses dynamically, debates are a valuable platform for developing essential communication skills required for academic success and practical interactions in a second language.

Toulmin's Model of Argumentation

Overview and Application of Toulmin's Model

Toulmin's model (1958, 2003) of argumentation provides a structured framework for analyzing and constructing effective arguments by dividing them into six essential components: claim, grounds, warrants, backing, qualifiers, and rebuttals. These components are grouped into primary elements—claim, grounds, and warrants—that form the foundation of an argument, and secondary elements—backing, qualifiers, and rebuttals—that enhance its depth and complexity. By integrating these components, the model captures both the structure and quality of an argument, thus serving as a valuable tool for analysis and refinement.

The primary elements define the core of the argument. The claim is the central assertion that the argument seeks to prove. For example, in an argumentative essay, one might assert that "debate activities improve L2 students' argumentation skills." Grounds are the evidence or data supporting the claim, such as statistical evidence showing improvements in students' argumentation. Meanwhile, warrants establish the logical connection between the grounds and the claim by explaining how that evidence supports the conclusion—such as stating, "Debate provides structured opportunities to practice forming arguments, which strengthens critical thinking and coherence."

On the other hand, the secondary components further develop and enrich the argument. Backing provides additional support or credibility to reinforce the warrant, such as referencing studies that validate debate as an effective teaching strategy. Qualifiers introduce a level of certainty or limitation to the claim using expressions like "likely" or "in most cases." For example, a qualifier might say, "Debate activities generally improve argumentation skills, although outcomes may vary depending on contextual factors." Rebuttals, in contrast, address potential counterarguments or opposing viewpoints, such as concerns that students with lower language proficiency might struggle to engage fully in debate activities.

Incorporating counterarguments and qualifiers is crucial for crafting sophisticated arguments within Toulmin's framework. Engaging with counterarguments reflects advanced critical thinking and rhetorical skills, demonstrating one's ability to recognize and thoughtfully address opposing perspectives (Crammond, 1998; Hays & Brandt, 1992). Counterarguments serve as a key marker of reasoning proficiency and are vital for demonstrating intellectual rigor (Liu & Stapleton, 2014; Nussbaum & Schraw, 2007). Likewise, utilizing qualifiers contributes to rhetorical flexibility by recognizing uncertainties or alternative positions, enhancing the argument's overall credibility and persuasiveness (Nussbaum, Kardash, & Graham, 2005; Yang, 2022). Crammond (1998) argues that qualifiers are essential for rhetorical effectiveness because they signal adaptability and openness. By moderating the scope of claims, they render arguments more credible and acceptable to diverse audiences (Cheng & Chen, 2009). Including qualifiers in debates demonstrates a heightened sensitivity to opposing perspectives, marking the development of nuanced argumentation skills (Kennedy, 2009). However, many students encounter challenges in effectively applying qualifiers, which can impede their argumentation skills (Yang, 2022). Thus, while qualifiers are crucial for articulating the strength of claims, their misuse can lead to ambiguity and weaken the argument overall. Understanding their correct application is vital for effective communication and reasoning in academic and practical contexts.

In education, Toulmin's model proves particularly useful for teaching and evaluating argumentation because it simplifies complex arguments into manageable components. This allows instructors to guide students in understanding the anatomy of arguments, identifying weaknesses, and building stronger reasoning skills. For instance, Erduran, Simon, and Osborne (2004) applied the model to science education, enabling students to construct and critique arguments more effectively. Similarly, Nussbaum and Schraw (2007) demonstrated its effectiveness in fostering collaborative discussions and critical thinking. By linking theoretical concepts with practical applications, Toulmin's model empowers educators and learners alike to view argumentation as a skill that can be developed and systematically analyzed.

Previous Studies on Toulmin in L2 Contexts

Toulmin's model has been widely applied to evaluate argumentation in L2 learning, offering valuable insights into both written and oral contexts. For example, Berland and McNeill (2010) utilized the model to assess L2 students' claims and reasoning in scientific contexts, emphasizing how structured argumentation tasks can enhance cognitive engagement and linguistic proficiency. Cheng and Chen (2009) further investigated argumentative essays written by L2 learners, identifying variations in the use of components like warrants and backing, which highlighted the challenges these learners face in constructing logical arguments in a second language. Liu and Stapleton (2014) expanded on this by applying Toulmin's framework in a cross-cultural context, revealing that cultural differences impact students' use of qualifiers and rebuttals, demonstrating the model's ability to highlight subtle variations in argumentation.

The model has also been extensively used to analyze L2 writing. For instance, Jumariati, Febriyanti, and Rizki (2021) examined the argumentation skills of advanced EFL students in their essays, using Toulmin's framework as a lens. Their analysis of 60 essays from 30 students in an Academic Writing course revealed a mean score of 14.29, categorized as good. However, notable deficiencies were found regarding the use of opposition and refutation: 40% of students' first essays and 20% of their second essays lacked opposing arguments, and 46.66% in the first and 50% in the second writing omitted refutations. The researchers recommended providing more practice opportunities.

In Korea, Toulmin's model has been employed to explore the development of argumentation through specific instructional interventions. Huh and I. Lee (2014) investigated how peer feedback contributed to EFL students' argumentation skills, identifying correlations between different elements of argumentation and overall writing quality. By analyzing drafts, revisions, and peer feedback from 34 students using both quantitative and qualitative methods, they found that peer feedback improved writing quality and facilitated the development of students' argumentative strategies by encouraging reflection on logical coherence. Similarly, J. Lee (2020) studied the structural features of argumentative writing using an adapted Toulmin's model, focusing on how writing proficiency levels influenced using the model's components. The findings showed that while students frequently used primary elements like claims and data, they rarely utilized secondary elements such as counterclaims, rebuttals, and associated data. The writing quality correlated significantly with primary elements among low-level students and with secondary elements for all students, though no significant links were observed among high-level participants.

Moreover, Toulmin's model has proven valuable for teaching and assessing argumentation skills in debate-specific contexts. Crammond (1998) illustrated how the framework improved students' critical reasoning during debates by emphasizing qualifiers and rebuttals, thereby strengthening logical consistency. Similarly, Kennedy (2009) analyzed students' arguments in competitive debates, finding that the structured format resonated well with Toulmin's framework, making it a powerful tool for evaluating logical balance. More recently, Walker and Kettler (2020) explored the use of Toulmin's model in debate-based learning, concluding that it enhances students' argumentation skills and increases their metacognitive awareness regarding the construction and evaluation of arguments.

In conclusion, Toulmin's model is a versatile and robust analytical framework for understanding argumentation in L2 contexts. It enables a systematic evaluation of argument quality, offering insights that can inform the design of more effective teaching strategies. The model reveals persistent challenges for L2 learners, such as effectively linking evidence to claims through warrants, thus providing specific targets for instructional improvement. These insights underline Toulmin's adaptability as a tool to enhance both linguistic and cognitive competencies in educational settings, particularly in fostering rigorous and well-rounded argumentation skills in debate contexts.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study involved 79 university students in South Korea, consisting of 58 females and 21 males aged 19 to 23. It included three classes, where two classes ($n = 46$) made up the experimental group, while the third class ($n = 33$) served as the control group. Over the semester, the experimental group participated in in-class debate activities, including writing and delivering debate speeches. In contrast, the control group received alternative English instruction to improve speaking and writing skills. This included activities such as crafting scripts and giving oral presentations, with both groups receiving instruction at the same frequency, as detailed in Table 1.

Design

The study utilized a quasi-experimental design to address the research questions at hand, following the previous study (el Majidi et al., 2021). As detailed in Table 1, the experimental group carried out different activities during each debate session, while the control group engaged in various writing and speaking tasks throughout the debate intervention. The debate activities for the experimental group followed a three-phase structure adapted from the World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) format to promote critical thinking and argumentation skills through systematic preparation and organization.

Phase 1 encompassed four sessions, wherein students were introduced to the WSDC format and began engaging with their assigned motions (topics). The WSDC features two teams: the Proposition team, which supports the motion, and the Opposition team, which opposes it. Each team consists of three or four speakers. Each speaker delivers a main speech followed by a reply speech from one member of each team. The debates alternate between the two teams, with strict speech time limits. Students argue with motions that can either be prepared in advance or given with limited preparation time. This format emphasizes logical argumentation, rebuttal, teamwork, and persuasive presentation skills. During the first two sessions, students prepared and presented an affirmative speech, followed by the development of a negative speech over the next two sessions, integrating rebuttals to their earlier arguments.

Phase 2 also lasted four sessions. During the first session, students were introduced to the debate motions and randomly assigned into affirmative and negative teams for each motion. Within these teams, specific speaker roles were allocated: first speaker, second speaker, third speaker, and reply speaker. The first and second speakers presented constructive speeches, the third provided rebuttals, and the reply speaker synthesized the team's arguments while countering opposing points. For the integrity of the debates, students were instructed to keep their arguments confidential from their opponents. The second session focused on intra-team collaboration, where students worked to refine their scripts for consistency in presenting their team's stance. The third session allowed teams to practice their speeches, culminating in a practice debate competition in the fourth session, which adhered to formal debate rules.

Phase 3 spanned six weeks and still adhered closely to the protocols established in Phase 2. Teams were randomized again to facilitate new debate dynamics. The first three sessions were dedicated to preparatory activities such as exploring topics, distributing roles, and team practice. The final three sessions comprised formal debate competitions, with one group debating each week, followed by voting to simulate a live debate championship experience.

TABLE 1
Main Activities of Experimental and Control Groups

Experimental Group			Control Group	
Phase	Session	Description	Session	Description
Presentation practice	1	Students draft affirmative speech scripts.	1-6	Students draft speech scripts and deliver speeches in pairs.
	2	Students deliver affirmative speeches.		
	3	Students draft negative speech scripts.		
	4	Students deliver negative speeches.		
Practice debate competition	1	Teams and speaker roles are assigned randomly.	7-10	Students draft speech scripts individually and deliver speeches in groups.
	2	Teams meet to finalize their scripts.		
	3	Teams engage in practice sessions.		
	4	Teams participate in debate competitions.		
Formal debate competition	1	Teams and speaker roles are assigned randomly.	11-14	Students draft speech scripts individually and deliver speeches in class.
	2	Teams meet to finalize their scripts.		
	3	Teams engage in practice sessions.		
	4-6	Teams compete in formal debate competitions.		

Tasks for Pretest and Posttest

The assessment involved written opinion essays and oral presentations as both pretest and posttest measures (See Appendix). Students focused on two debated topics for their opinion tasks: "Non-native English teachers are more effective for

elementary school students than native English teachers." and "AI teachers can replace human teachers." These topics were chosen for clear opposing viewpoints, allowing students to develop counterarguments and rebuttals. During the opinion essay assessments, students wrote their essays in a classroom environment using laptops or tablets. They worked independently under the instructor's supervision, without access to the Internet or additional writing tools, within a strict 30-minute timeframe that mimicked exam conditions. For the oral presentation assessments, students had preparation time to create their speeches on the same topics. They were encouraged to draw upon the content of their written essays but instructed not to read from them directly during their presentations.

Data Analysis

This research adapted Toulmin's model to better fit the contextual needs of assessing students' written and oral arguments, capturing the variations in their argumentative structures. While the three primary elements of Toulmin's framework—claim, grounds, and warrants—were retained, secondary elements—counterarguments and qualifiers—were adapted and expanded, as noted by el Majidi et al. (2021). First, the concept of qualifiers was refined to include two distinct dimensions: reservation, which delineates the conditions or circumstances that restrict the claim's validity, and constraints, which define the scope within which the claim is applicable. Second, the counterarguments or rebuttal element, traditionally focused on identifying objections to the claim, was broadened in this study to encompass participants' engagement with opposing perspectives that actively challenge their argument, following el Majidi et al. (2021). A new category, relevance, was introduced as the primary element to assess how well the evidence supports the claim, focusing on the strength and appropriateness of this connection. This addition addressed a recurring finding of insufficient relevance in participants' arguments, leading to the replacement of Toulmin's original backing component. Given the brevity of the essays, there was limited space for extensive justifications. These changes enabled a more precise analysis of argument structure tailored to participants' written and oral outputs.

The framework for evaluating oral presentations also included extra criteria: persuasiveness, delivery, and time management, which address aspects specific to spoken arguments. Persuasiveness highlights the presenter's ability to engage their audience effectively, while delivery and time management focus on presentation style and pacing. This comprehensive analysis includes indicators of linguistic competence—such as cohesion, accuracy, fluency, and word choice—to evaluate overall language proficiency.

As shown in Table 2, this expanded classification scheme assesses argumentative quality across both written and oral modalities. Seven elements—clarity, relevance, grounds, warrants, counterarguments, cohesion (flow), and fluency—are utilized for evaluating both formats. Qualifiers, accuracy, and word choice are specifically used for written output, and persuasiveness, delivery, and time management are for oral evaluations.

TABLE 2

Classification of Scheme Based on Expanded Toulmin's Model

Element		Description
Primary argumentative elements	Clarity of arguments (Claims)[a]	The arguments should be presented in a straightforward and understandable manner.
	Relevance of arguments [a]	All arguments must be directly related to the topic, maintaining focus throughout the essay or speech.
	Grounds or evidence [a]	Arguments should be supported by strong and well-elaborated evidence, including examples, analogies, or citations from authoritative sources.
	Warrants [a]	Clear reasoning should connect evidence to claims, explicitly showing how the evidence supports each argument.
Secondary argumentative elements	Counterarguments [a]	Opposing viewpoints or criticisms should be acknowledged and addressed to strengthen the depth and credibility of the argument.
	Qualifiers [b]	Including qualifiers enables a nuanced presentation of claims, indicating the degree of certainty and strength behind each argument.
Linguistic elements	Overall cohesion and organization (flow) [a]	The written text should be logically structured and cohesive, smoothly guiding the reader through the argument. In speeches, the organization should include a clear introduction, body, and conclusion.

Element		Description
	Accuracy and syntactic complexity [b]	The text should demonstrate grammatical accuracy as well as varied and complex sentence structures.
	Fluency [a]	Written arguments should meet 300-running word count requirements to ensure sufficient development. Oral arguments should be delivered smoothly, with clear pronunciation and minimal hesitation.
	Word choice [b]	Varied and appropriate vocabulary should be used to enhance clarity and engagement without compromising precision.
	Persuasiveness [c]	The speech should effectively convince the audience of its position.
	Delivery and confidence [c]	In oral presentations, speakers should present with confidence, using an appropriate tone, body language, and eye contact.
	Time management [c]	The speaker should effectively use the allotted time to cover key points without unnecessary rushing or delays.

Note. [a]: Applicable for both written and oral argument evaluation, [b]: Evaluation element for written argument output only, [c]: Evaluation element for oral argument output only

The quality of both written and oral arguments was assessed using a 5-point rating scale. This scale evaluated how effectively each component of the argument was presented, considering factors like the relevance of evidence and the coherence of the delivery. Scores ranged from 1 point (very poor) to 5 points (excellent), with higher scores reflecting more elaborate and clear arguments that included pertinent evidence, addressed counterarguments, and demonstrated persuasive qualities.

Two raters underwent a calibration process to ensure interrater reliability. They began by discussing and aligning their interpretations of the coding framework while reviewing sample texts. After this, each rater independently evaluated half of the dataset and subsequently compared their scores. The reliability of the ratings was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded scores of 0.88 for the pretest and 0.84 for the posttest. With acceptable reliability established, the raters proceeded to score the remaining data.

After completing the scoring, ANCOVA analyses were conducted to compare the posttest scores between the experimental and control groups for both writing and oral argumentation tasks. Pretest scores served as covariates to control for any lingering differences from the pretest in the posttest outcomes. This method facilitated a thorough evaluation of the in-class debates' effectiveness, revealing whether the experimental group exhibited statistically significant improvements compared to the control group.

Results

Written Opinion Tasks

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the analysis of written opinion tasks. A key finding from these statistics is that both groups consistently maintained the relevance of their arguments throughout the essays across the pretest and posttest tasks. Additionally, both groups focused on prioritizing the primary elements such as claims, grounds, and warrants while showing less emphasis on secondary elements such as counterarguments and qualifiers in both tasks. Cohesion achieved the highest ratings in both groups among the linguistic elements evaluated in both tasks. Nonetheless, both groups demonstrated overall improvements across both primary and secondary elements in the posttest tasks. This indicates a general advancement in their written argumentative skills, encompassing clarity of claims, relevance of supporting evidence, elaboration of arguments, and sophistication in reasoning. Participants also progressed in addressing opposing viewpoints (counterarguments) and integrating rhetorical elements (qualifiers) into their arguments. Furthermore, their writing exhibited stronger cohesion, more accurate phrasing, and more effective vocabulary usage.

TABLE 3
Pretest and Posttest Means and Standard Deviation of the Written Opinion Essays

Evaluation Elements	Experimental Group (n = 46)				Control Group (n = 33)			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Claims (Clarity of arguments)	3.10	.87	3.90	.59	3.09	.72	3.56	.53
Relevance of argument	3.96	.63	4.63	.49	4.12	.55	4.52	.51
Grounds or evidence	2.30	.60	3.13	.58	2.53	.68	3.02	.61
Warrants	2.59	.85	3.55	.65	2.62	.55	3.17	.67
Counterarguments	1.79	.69	2.49	.83	1.67	.85	1.80	.64
Qualifiers	2.02	.86	2.79	.66	2.12	.78	2.44	.66
Cohesion	2.92	.87	3.95	.703	3.23	.67	3.79	.59
Accuracy	2.12	.63	2.92	.77	2.12	.61	2.65	.57
Fluency	2.54	.96	3.65	.69	2.73	.88	3.58	.78
Word choice	2.46	.62	3.21	.70	2.45	.52	2.89	.39
Total	2.58	.60	3.42	.49	2.67	.52	3.14	.42

Concerning the first research question, ANCOVA analyses were performed to evaluate the impact of in-class debate activities on the quality of the arguments generated by the experimental group participants compared to their control group counterparts, with the written pretest as a covariate. The covariate did not demonstrate a significant effect (F (1,77) = 1.183, p = .280). The findings, summarized in Table 4, indicate that incorporating debate activities in class significantly improved the overall quality of written arguments, as reflected by the total argument score (F (1,77) = 7.573, p = .007). Further analysis of specific argumentation elements using ANCOVA revealed significant improvements in the experimental group compared to the control group for claims (clarity of arguments) (F (1,77) = 5.220, p = .008), warrants (F (1,77) = 6.932, p = .002), counterarguments (F (1,77) = 7.957, p = .001), qualifiers (F (1,77) = 4.277, p = .017), and word choice (F (1,77) = 5.650, p = .020). In contrast, the improvements in the other elements did not show significant differences between the two groups.

TABLE 4
ANCOVA Analysis Results of the Posttest Written Opinion Essays (N = 79)

Evaluation Elements	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Claims (Clarity of arguments)	1	2.466	5.220	.006
Relevance of argument	1	.280	1.131	.291
Grounds or evidence	1	.300	.865	.358
Warrants	1	3.318	8.206	.005
Counterarguments	1	8.853	15.424	.000
Qualifiers	1	2.662	6.327	.014
Cohesion	1	.524	1.229	.271
Accuracy	1	1.366	2.794	.099
Fluency	1	.114	.211	.647
Word choice	1	1.966	5.650	.020
Total	1	1.615	7.573	.007

The findings indicate that engaging in debate tasks significantly improved participants' skills in constructing clear, well-supported, and nuanced arguments. A noteworthy observation is the marked enhancement in counterarguments and qualifiers within the experimental group, which initially had lower mean scores than the primary argumentative components.

Even though the posttest scores for counterarguments and qualifiers remained somewhat lower, the significant progress made underscores that in-class debate activities played a crucial role in helping students recognize the importance of addressing opposing viewpoints and anticipating audience criticism while formulating their arguments. Furthermore, among the primary argumentative components, there was a significant improvement in warrants within the experimental group. This suggests that students became more proficient at linking their claims with supporting evidence and articulating the connections between them, demonstrating enhanced reasoning abilities.

Spoken Opinion Tasks

Table 5 provides descriptive statistics for the analysis of oral opinion tasks. The findings reveal a pattern similar to that of the written opinion tasks: The participants concentrated more on primary elements—claims, grounds, and warrants—while placing less emphasis on the secondary element of counterarguments in both tasks. Among the linguistic elements, cohesion of the speech (flow) also received the highest ratings in the oral presentations. Furthermore, both groups showed improvements across all evaluated elements in the posttest, indicating that their oral argumentative skills advanced not only in clarity, relevance, argument elaboration, and counterarguments, as seen in their written tasks, but also in speech-specific aspects like persuasiveness, delivery, and time management.

TABLE 5
Pretest and Posttest Means and Standard Deviation of the Oral Opinion Speeches

Evaluation Elements	Experimental Group (n = 46)				Control Group (n = 33)			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Claims (Clarity of arguments)	3.02	.91	3.89	.61	3.09	.73	3.52	.51
Relevance of arguments	3.83	.68	4.61	.49	3.82	.55	4.27	.63
Grounds or evidence	2.35	.64	3.09	.55	2.52	.68	2.94	.61
Warrants	2.58	.86	3.52	.66	2.61	.55	3.12	.70
Counterarguments	1.79	.670	2.46	.81	1.70	.85	1.79	.65
Persuasiveness	2.10	.70	3.01	.87	2.42	.78	2.61	.63
Flow	2.93	.88	3.92	.68	3.18	.67	3.56	.63
Delivery	2.77	.92	3.05	.84	2.58	.61	2.68	.67
Fluency	2.35	.73	3.22	.70	2.52	.88	2.74	.80
Time management	2.28	.61	3.08	.58	2.45	.52	2.61	.61
Total	2.53	.41	3.38	.36	2.69	.52	2.98	.42

Concerning the second research question, ANCOVA analyses were conducted to determine whether the in-class debate activities influenced the quality of oral arguments produced by the experimental group compared to their control group, with the spoken pretest as a covariate. The analysis yielded a significant effect for the combined variables on the written posttest output, F (2, 77) = 26.001, p = .000. The covariate demonstrated a substantial influence on the posttest, with a significant effect (F (1,77) = 24.541, p = .000). Table 6 indicates that debate activities led to an overall improvement in the quality of oral arguments, with the covariate effect excluded. The experimental group exhibited significant improvement from the pretest to the posttest compared to the control group in terms of overall arguments (F = 36.632, p = .000). Significant differences between the groups were found in speech-specific elements such as persuasiveness (F (1,77) = 7.576, p = .007), delivery (F (1,77) = 7.336, p = .008), fluency (F (1,77) = 13.887, p = .000) and time management (F (1,77) = 19.373, p = .000). Three elements—claims (F (1,77) = 11.975, p = .001), warrants (F (1,77) = 10.456, p = .002), and counterarguments (F (1,77) = 14.669, p = .000)—showed significant differences in oral arguments as well as in written arguments.

TABLE 6
ANCOVA Analysis Results of the Posttest Oral Opinion Speeches (N = 79)

Evaluation Elements	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Claims (Clarity of argument)	1	3.387	11.975	.001
Relevance of argument	1	3.001	10.835	.002
Grounds or evidence	1	.748	2.734	.128
Warrants	1	4.306	10.456	.002
Counterarguments	1	8.286	14.669	.000
Persuasiveness	1	4.347	7.576	.007
Flow	1	3.666	9.232	.003
Delivery	1	3.992	7.336	.008
Fluency	1	6.426	13.887	.000
Time management	1	5.763	19.373	.000
Total	1	4.131	36.632	.000

The findings indicate that involvement in in-class debate activities has greatly enhanced students' overall oral argumentative skills. The improvements observed in the experimental group's primary argumentative components are logical, given that their oral tasks were based on written assignments. Remarkably, the marked advancements in specific speech elements, like persuasiveness, suggest that participants gained a deeper understanding of their audience and improved their capacity to deliver speeches that not only effectively persuaded opposing viewpoints but also robustly defended their positions. Additionally, the experimental group showed enhanced speech flow and delivery, reflecting this greater audience awareness and showing progress in using physical elements such as eye contact and voice modulation during their presentations.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Debate in Enhancing Argumentative Skills

This study investigated the impact of in-class English debates, modeled on the WSDC format, on students' oral and written argumentative skills. The findings revealed significant improvements in the experimental group's performance across both modalities. While consistent practice throughout the course may have contributed to these outcomes, the findings suggest that the improvements cannot be solely attributed to practice effects. Debate activities incorporate a competitive format, where one team (affirmative or negative) prevails, fostering an environment that encourages cooperation among team members while minimizing potential pitfalls such as excessive competitiveness. Immersive and authentic debate experiences in a collaborative classroom setting engaged students in critical and strategic reasoning, requiring them to take on specific speaker roles and follow a structured three-phase process. This environment allowed students to internalize key argumentation techniques and develop a deeper understanding of effective reasoning practices.

The instructional approach during in-class debates, which progressed gradually in line with the three-phase process, likely enhanced students' argumentation skills. Elements such as explicit instruction, iterative practice with audience feedback, and well-defined speaker roles consistently provided opportunities for improvement. Collaborative group activities encouraged teamwork and mutual learning, while the competitive and public nature of the debates further motivated students to engage deeply in the process. Together, these strategies created a well-structured learning environment that amplified the benefits of the debate format and supported the development of argumentation skills.

The progress observed in students' written argumentative essays closely paralleled their improvement in oral argumentation, indicating that in-class debates effectively facilitated skill transfer between these two forms of communication. This finding aligns with earlier research (Berland & McNeill, 2010; Chen et al., 2016; el Majidi et al., 2021; Wang & Buck, 2018). Participation in debate activities encouraged students to construct persuasive and complex arguments, strengthening the link between their oral and written skills. Moreover, debates improved students' ability to logically and persuasively structure their ideas, highlighting a transferable skill applicable to both oral and written contexts. The interactive and collaborative

aspects of debates (Deliana & Ganie, 2024; Wang & Buck, 2018) enabled students in the experimental group to practice essential skills such as turn-taking, active listening to opposing speeches, and the appropriate use of language in meaningful, contextually relevant situations. Preparing debate cases served as a conduit between oral and written modes of communication, allowing students to enhance their argumentation abilities in both areas. Additionally, students incorporated feedback from each debate into subsequent tasks, reinforcing their learning through a continuous cycle of practice and refinement. This iterative process was integral in facilitating the transfer of argumentative skills across both modalities.

Key Improvements in Argumentation

In examining the enhancements in argumentative skills, one key area of improvement identified is the use of warrants. The experimental group displayed notable progress in effectively linking evidence to claims in both their oral and written arguments compared to the control group. This improvement indicates a strengthening of their ability to justify the logical connections that form the foundation of their arguments. Conversely, el Majidi et al. (2021) reported that enhancements in warrant usage were limited to oral posttests, with no significant changes seen in written responses after a debate-based intervention. The current study's findings resonate more with those of Huh and I. Lee (2014), where students receiving argumentative writing instruction alongside explicit peer feedback demonstrated similar advancements, although the experimental group here did not undergo explicit training in writing argumentative essays. Past research (e.g., Cheng, 2010; Crammond, 1998) has pointed out the infrequent use of warrants in student arguments despite their vital role in improving rhetorical quality and persuasiveness (Crammond, 1998). In this research, the notable posttest gains in warrant usage across both written and oral arguments within the experimental group—albeit warrants scored lower than other essential argumentative elements—illustrate how engaging in in-class debates can effectively enhance students' capabilities in constructing coherent and persuasive arguments.

Moreover, participation in debate activities improved secondary argumentative elements, such as counterarguments and qualifiers, in the posttest performances of the experimental group. Mastering these elements demands higher-level critical thinking and rhetorical skills. Previously, Jumariati et al. (2021) noted the limited engagement of students in employing these secondary argumentative components. While el Majidi et al. (2021) observed significant advancements in counterargument usage in both written and oral posttests following debate interventions, and J. Lee (2020) found distinctions in counterargument development between high- and low-L2 proficiency groups in writing classes, Huh and I. Lee (2014) noted no significant pretest and posttest differences among students who received writing instruction with explicit peer feedback. Although counterarguments were still relatively infrequent in this study, the experimental group exhibited marked improvements in effectively incorporating and addressing counterarguments. This underscores how involvement in debates can cultivate the cognitive and rhetorical capabilities necessary for constructive engagement with differing perspectives. Notably, students in the experimental group enhanced their ability to anticipate objections, counterclaims, and critiques from various angles. This development signals a deeper epistemological comprehension of argumentation, enabling them to grapple with complex issues and consider multiple viewpoints—both crucial competencies for forming high-quality arguments and fostering empathetic understanding (Liu & Stapleton, 2014; Nussbaum & Schraw, 2007).

The findings reveal that the experimental group's written arguments showed significant enhancements in their use of qualifiers, standing in contrast to the control group. This aligns with research by el Majidi et al. (2021), who noted notable improvements in qualifiers among students in a debate intervention in Dutch secondary schools. Moreover, Yang (2022) found similar trends in using qualifiers in the argumentative writing of Chinese college students. According to Crammond (1998), qualifiers serve as essential rhetorical tools that bolster persuasiveness by addressing concerns, clarifying the extent of claims, and rendering arguments more defensible (Cheng & Chen, 2009). The experimental group's higher frequency of qualifiers suggests a deeper recognition of differing perspectives and a more nuanced, open-minded approach (Kennedy, 2009). This incorporation of qualifiers enables students to craft more sophisticated arguments, demonstrating their enhanced critical thinking abilities.

Enhancing Argumentative and Cognitive Skills Through Competitive Debate

The competitive debate format itself was a significant factor in these positive changes, particularly due to the interaction with opposing teams. This competitive dynamic prompted students to develop more intricate and compelling arguments. Using the WSDC framework, participants needed to articulate their reasoning clearly while countering their peers' positions and addressing critiques from their fellow adjudicators. Such an environment significantly contributed to sharpening their argumentative and rhetorical skills, especially in live presentations. Throughout the debates, students often challenged the

validity and relevance of their peers' arguments, asking for clarifications and justifications while also identifying logical inconsistencies. This back-and-forth process refined their critical evaluation skills and fostered a stronger grasp of effective reasoning.

Through this ongoing process of challenge and response, students learned to better construct and assess high-quality arguments. Ultimately, this study illustrates how debates cultivate students' abilities to employ warrants, counterarguments, and qualifiers—facilitating feedback-driven learning and genuine opportunities for argumentation. These results underline the educational value of debates as a means to enhance both argumentative capabilities and broader cognitive skills.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the impact of in-class L2 debates on the argumentative skills of Korean university students, demonstrating significant advancements in essential components such as claims, warrants, counterarguments, and qualifiers. The experimental group exhibited marked improvement in both oral and written skills, establishing debates as effective teaching methods. The structured and interactive format of the debates, inspired by the WSDC, cultivated a dynamic learning atmosphere where students engaged in meaningful argumentation, received ongoing feedback, and adopted critical rhetorical techniques.

Notably, the use of warrants—key for linking evidence to claims and ensuring logical coherence—exhibited the most significant enhancement. There was also a notable increase in the application of counterarguments and qualifiers, indicating that students developed advanced cognitive and rhetorical skills in confronting opposing views, refining their claims, and constructing sophisticated arguments. These outcomes affirm how collaborative, audience-focused activities like debates foster critical thinking and enhance students' understanding of complex topics. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the necessity of merging oral and written communication within debate-oriented learning. Activities such as speech writing and public speaking acted as bridges between these modes, allowing students to cultivate their competencies in a comprehensive manner. The integration of paired collaboration, structured feedback, and repeated practice was crucial to their development, with students reporting heightened confidence and enjoyment as tasks that once seemed daunting became more achievable.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are significant. Debates provide an active learning platform that merges critical evaluation, teamwork, and effective communication, encouraging students to build coherent arguments and address counterarguments. The experiential nature of debates reflects real-world reasoning practices, fostering cognitive and metacognitive skills that can be transferred to both academic and professional environments. Debates' competitive and iterative aspects enable students to refine their arguments while receiving feedback that promotes long-term growth. Instructors can enhance this process by focusing on audience-centered strategies, equipping students to anticipate and address critiques, which is essential for advanced critical thinking.

However, the study has limitations that future research should consider. The small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings, as does the specific context of a Korean university, which may not represent the diversity found in other cultural or educational settings. The quasi-experimental design did not separate the effects of individual debate components, such as formal competition or teamwork, and the absence of longitudinal data restricts insights into skill retention over time.

Future research should build on these findings by incorporating larger, more culturally diverse participant groups and examining the sustainability and transferability of skills to different disciplines or professional environments. Longitudinal studies could offer a clearer understanding of how skills developed through debates are retained or evolved. Additionally, exploring specific elements of debates—like audience engagement and team collaboration—could elucidate their roles in skill enhancement. Comparative studies of different debate formats (e.g., British Parliamentary, Lincoln-Douglas) and qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, reflective journals) could enrich our understanding of argumentation skill development processes.

In conclusion, this study underscores the transformative potential of L2 debates in enhancing Korean university students' oral and written argumentative skills. Through active, iterative, and collaborative learning mechanisms, debates empower students to create stronger, more nuanced arguments and improve their critical reasoning while bridging the gap between oral and written communication. The findings reinforce the importance of debates as a pedagogical tool for nurturing argumentation proficiency and critical thinking—essential skills in today’s complex, information-rich landscape. Researchers and educators are encouraged to delve deeper into and refine debate-based instruction to maximize its instructional and developmental benefits.

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Appendix

An experimental group student's pretest and posttest written essays

Pretest	Posttest
[Claim] I agree with the motion that non-native English teachers can teach English better than native English teachers. I have three reason why i agree with it. First, **[Ground 1]** I think non-native English teacher knows well what students don't know than native teacher. **[Ground 2]** Non-native teacher would also have had a hard time learning English at first. But, they would have studied hard by finding a way to overcome the difficulty learning English until they can use it well and teach it to students. **[Warrant 2]** So I think they may know not only specific difficulty on studying English but the solution to solve it. And it can be useful to students studying English. Second, **[Ground 3]** I think contents of lesson can be more likely to be delivered well between non-native teachers and students than native teachers. **[Warrant 3]** As non-native teachers use the same language and have lived in same culture with students, they can explain definitely what they want students to know in their class.	**[Claim]** I think it is more appropriate for a non-native teacher to teach an English class. **[Ground 1]** The reason why I support non-native teachers over native teachers is because of communication. In the case of native-speaking teachers, it is difficult to freely communicate with students, **[Qualifier]** so it may happen that students learn wrong concepts in the process of learning with native teacher. **[Warrant 1]** Teachers should induce students to learn by giving accurate concepts in English classes. At this time, if a native English teacher who has difficulty communicating conducts English classes, the efficiency of learning may decrease, so I support non-native teachers. In addition, I will introduce the advantages of when the non-native teacher conducted the English class. **[Ground 2]** The advantage of non-native teachers conducting English classes is that customized learning is possible. **[Warrant 2]** In the case of non-native teachers, it is expected that they will be able to lead the class with an appropriate topic and speed in teaching English to students because they can quickly check whether the learning speed and difficulty are appropriate while using the same language as students. Therefore, I support non-native teachers and think that non-native teachers can bring out greater efficiency when conducting English classes. In this essay, I supported non-native teachers rather than native teachers, **[Counterargument]** but the best learning in English is that two teachers conduct classes together. If the two teachers are together, a non-native teacher who understands the flow of the class will be able to explain the situation to a native speaker, and students will be able to talk to a native speaker and develop their speaking skills. In conclusion, building a convergence map so that the advantages of native and non-native teachers can be revealed in class, **[Qualifier]** rather than insisting on just one method of class progress, will have the greatest efficiency in learning English.