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Mini Review

# Learning Argumentative Capacities at the Primary and Junior School Levels: A Practical Teaching Pedagogy

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## Abstract

The development of argumentative skills is often postponed until after students complete their compulsory education, creating a gap in their understanding and abilities. This gap can be attributed to issues with the curriculum and teaching methods. To address this, we propose that teaching argumentative skills at the primary school level is crucial for enhancing students' comprehension of the world and its inhabitants. To support this idea, we have designed practical teaching modules that can be introduced in primary and junior schools. Our pedagogical approach emphasizes relatable examples, interactive discussions, peer reviews, and recommendations, with a focus on teacher-to-teacher training. It is vital that teachers receive thorough training on implementing these pedagogical strategies and consider the context to achieve early development of argumentative skills in the modern classroom.

## Introduction

Developing argumentative capacities is crucial at all levels of education. This skill is integrated into the language curriculum and requires less attention. In today's classroom, it is essential for students to possess the ability to approach the world from multiple perspectives. Therefore, students at the primary and junior levels must improve their discursive practices to accomplish this. These practices will enable them to approach the world from diverse angles and express themselves effectively. Teaching this skill is not only the responsibility of policy-makers but also of educators who face interpersonal challenges in the classroom. Possessing knowledge of the subject matter and providing assistance to students is not enough. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century teaching process is complex, involving didactics, pedagogy, and interpersonal processes that are highly contextualized and situated. The relational dimension is always present during every teaching moment, making it clear that teaching is an interpersonal profession [1]. Thus, teachers must be equipped to handle various relational challenges in their everyday practice, including curriculum changes and reforms. Research indicates that the teacher-student relationship is a critical factor with implications for research, policies, and practice in every classroom (Cornelius-White 2007, Roorda et al. 2011). Hattie's [2] meta-study found that a trustworthy teacher-student relationship has a more significant impact on students' achievements than the teachers' subject knowledge. Thus, teachers must prioritize building and maintaining strong relationships with their students to maximize learning outcomes and gain their trust in the classroom.

## Problem Statement

Studies have demonstrated that the learner's progress and overall development are prioritized when given attention [3]. This includes classroom cultures, student physical well-being, and mental health. This practical study article provides teaching pedagogies based on the authors' experience, teaching philosophies, teaching methods, and theoretical framework, mainly focusing on learning argumentation capacities at the primary and junior levels. We emphasize the importance of teaching debate- capacities to improve students' argumentative competence, interpreting constructive argumentation as the ability to support or refute viewpoints at the primary school level. That way, students will be more abreast and updated on world issues, know trending issues, do critical reading and listening, and forge logically centered personal traditions of arguments as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill (OECD).

Moreover, when looking at the teaching pedagogies associated with language and linguistics in the school system, debates are introduced after descriptive writings and the practice of narration. However, teaching argumentative capacities is a different genre or discursive capacity for language. This has been the contextual omission with many curricula in language and linguistic study. Somehow, debating is introduced after the (14-15 years) mandatory schooling. We argue that argumentation capacities as a discursive genre should be taught as different topics at the primary and junior school levels, as acquiring its capacities takes time. Based on the contextual evidence for teaching argumentative capacities, students' first contact should be sufficient and accompanied by activities oriented with argumentative schema. This takes us to introduce some teaching models and our practical way of teaching argumentative capacities.

## Laws of the Learner- Classroom Pedagogy

In this session, we delve into the teacher-student-centered laws authored by Bruce Wilkinson [4]. The Law of the Learner rekindles the passion for teaching by mastering the secret of the forgotten mindset and the teacher's responsibility to cause the student to learn. This law emphasizes the importance of understanding the learner's perspective and tailoring teaching approaches to meet their needs. The Law of Expectation ensures high performance, even from historically low achievers, by adjusting expectations and devising a way to help learners blossom. This law is based on the principle that students will rise to the level of what is expected of them. The Law of Application affects lasting life changes in students with intense cooperation and the teacher's ability to lay down well-laid plans for life change. This law stresses the importance of the practical application of knowledge to promote long-term retention and real-world application. The Law of Retention enables learners to master twice the material in half the time by using the secrets of speed teaching. This law focuses on



the importance of efficient learning and retention techniques. The Law of Need demolishes boredom and gives students a well-informed reason to achieve their study goals. This law projects seven principles to help teachers build the needs of students before teaching their content. These principles include creating relevance, focusing on the learner's needs, and setting clear expectations. After the needs of the students are realized, the Law of Equipping surfaces. This law employs the master teacher's secrets of super coaching to help students learn any skill for life service and edification. Finally, the Law of Revival allows teachers to encourage ongoing personal renewal and revival in students' lives. This law emphasizes the importance of creating an environment of positive energy and fostering continuous growth with students at the tertiary level and all levels of learning.

### Teaching Through Interactions Framework (TTIF) in Context

The teaching through-interactions framework is an evidence-based frame of effective teaching focusing on classroom interactions related to students' learning and development [5]. In this article, we developed a contextual understanding of teaching through an interactions framework (TTIF). This evidence-based frame of effective teaching focuses on classroom interactions related to students' learning and development [5]. Regarding teacher-student relations, we also use Robin Barrow's book "Plato, Utilitarianism and Education." We focus on how students can choose what they want but should be explicitly guided to the areas of argumentative topics that interest them. These aspects contribute to sustainable leadership and governance in schools and classrooms. Consequently, approaching arguments will be logically built, well-structured, and presented with much more clarity and counterevidence. In this, teachers will teach for understanding and be able to assess students' development in developing argumentation capacities (Teaching for understanding: Perkins & Blythe [6]).

### Teaching Philosophies for Argumentation Capacities

Progressivism is a philosophy that underscores the significance of experimentation as the most effective means to test ideas and encourages questioning as a pathway to learning. This approach values individual beliefs and promotes student interaction to facilitate learning, with the scientific teaching method at its core. This philosophy works practically when teaching discursive genres, specifically argumentative capacities. Moreover, re-constructionism, on the other hand, is centered around global progress and controversial issues to develop a new vision for a better world. It emphasizes the need for students to engage with the world around them, and it is associated with pragmatism and essentialism. Learning argumentative capacities, the didactic exploitation of knowledge on argumentative discourse, best explains this philosophy as the learner learns to develop observational and analytical capacities to change the dispositions of their general understanding of a situation to convince better and challenge the status quo.

Constructivism is a student-centered philosophy that prioritizes hands-on learning and active lesson participation. This approach believes students learn best when they discover lessons independently through hands-on activities. It encourages students to construct their understanding of the world around them. Employing this philosophy in teaching and learning argumentation falls under the didactic sequence of Dolz and Pasquier, which comprises a network of activities for the learner to form their ideas through engaging texts, re-writing, developing arguments, challenging opinions, learning negotiations, planning argumentations, and developing the necessary auditory for an audience. In this module, the teacher is a facilitator and a guide to assess and recommend. In contrast, behaviorism is a teacher-centered philosophy closely related to realism. It focuses on the influence of external stimuli on human behaviour and believes that changes in behaviour can be achieved by altering the environment. It emphasizes the importance of reinforcing positive behaviors to achieve desired outcomes. This philosophy could be omitted and challenged by scholars. However, it is needed for argumentation. This is because learners from the primary level must learn right. In argumentation, learners are taught to debate using polite words, gestures, and suggestions to express their knowledge [7,8].

### Teaching argumentative capacities at the primary and junior levels

As a teacher, you may wonder about the most effective teaching methods in argumentative capacities. There are several approaches you can adopt to ensure that your students remain engaged and learn meaningfully. The following are some of the combined teaching pedagogies that authors employ in their argumentation module classroom. One of the most effective ways to teach argumentation is by using relatable examples. During classroom teaching, especially during debates, it is important to use

examples and facts that students can easily understand. This approach helps students to quickly grasp the issues at hand and to make informed judgments based on their formed logical base. Another effective teaching method is the teacher-to-teacher mode. In this mode, two teachers lead the class. This approach is particularly effective when students are many or when they can understand two or more languages. During the teaching process, teachers have more time to explain different concepts in different languages, thereby enhancing student comprehension. In addition, teachers can pay closer attention to students during teaching, ensuring that they fully understand the day's topic [9].

In-practice discussions are yet another experiential teaching method that can be implemented in the argumentative classroom. Here, students are given the day's topic, and a general understanding of the text is provided for critical reading. Students are then allowed to bring keywords that better explain the topic, and they can do a contextual analysis of the text for an open discussion. The teacher will then provide general remarks at the end of the period. This approach gives the topic more clarity and room for further discussions backed with facts. In this class, no student is right or wrong until the assertions or facts cannot be set straight. Peer reviews (with factual comments) and recommendations are also useful teaching methods for students to effectively argue about issues on a peer stage. The teacher selects some of the best debaters, trains them on how to judge arguments, and allows them to set their standards and criteria for judging their peers. The topic is then given to the entire class, not just the panellists and debaters. As the debaters prepare, the whole class prepares to engage them as the chairman of the panellists demands. After the debate, the chairman of the panellists, whom the judges choose, gives general remarks about the whole debate, and afterward, a verdict is given. In this practical teaching, verdicts are based on understanding factual and logical arguments. Through this experiential teaching method, students gain more confidence, develop critical listening skills, use logical countering and finding loopholes, and use facts to support assertions effectively.

### Practical Teaching Module

This comprehensive teaching module is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of argumentation capacities to students. It is a month-long course that can be tailored to suit a class of over 40 students. The teaching pedagogy utilized in this context is the teacher-to-teacher mode, which has proven effective in achieving a holistic development of learners' understanding of argumentation capacities. At the beginning of the module, students are introduced to Argumentative Essays and Debate skills. In this module, argumentative essays are classified as written language, while debating is defined as the auditory presentation of the writing aspects [10]. This approach is essential in aiding learners' comprehension of argumentation capacities. The students are given some simple argumentative texts to read and identify the general opinions of the topic and its structure. This section is critical in developing learners' critical reading and understanding skills. The learners are encouraged to analyze the structure of the text rather than just its ideas.

After reading, students are asked to express their opinions about the texts, considering the structure and ideas presented. The teacher then assists the students in comparing and contrasting the differences between these texts for better understanding. It is important to note that students' general ideas formed in those sections are not considered 'wrong.' The aim is to help students express their understanding of an unknown author's arguments based on their reading and comprehension skills [11]. Moreover, students revisit the argumentation and debating skills learned in class and identify them in the texts provided earlier. This approach aims to improve the learners' retention and application levels. Peer-to-peer learning and review are employed in our teaching model, and learners are encouraged to observe the submissions of others to improve their knowledge. Furthermore, learners form groups and are given various relatable topics to develop paragraphs to support or refute the claim. Students are advised to use references outside the classroom, preferably from newspapers and other literature. Students are taught introductory referencing skills, which makes it easier for them to cite their sources. Additionally, learners are advised to use rhetoric or literary devices in argumentation, specifically, the introduction part and sometimes rebuttals (auditory) [12].

Students are also taught how to weave and formulate a conclusion that agrees with the reasons evoked at the end of the debate. The student-judge facilitates this by using a polite address to make concessions. Learners hand in their scripts in groups for the teacher to assess and recommend better presenting ideas and facts. The learners rework their scripts and choose presenters. Here, there are only three presenters: the first speaker (who introduces the topic and their stands), the second speaker (who expresses opinions with facts convincingly), and the third speaker



(who challenges opinions and opposes/forwards objections). During the debate, the speakers confront assertions not developed in articulation and facts and challenge doubtful testimonies. Debaters use critical listening skills to deduce loopholes and counter in their responses. Learners could diminish the assertions and truthfulness of their fellows by employing depreciating verbs and expressions of challenge in their facts and contradictions. Finally, the teachers receive all scripts, which are analyzed as learners are advised to improve their argumentative capacities. The module is an excellent tool for improving learners' critical thinking and communication skills, which are essential in any academic or professional setting. Overall, this teaching module provides a comprehensive and detailed approach to developing argumentation capacities that can benefit students in various settings.

## Conclusion and Implications

Promoting a well-rounded development of language and linguistic abilities is a crucial aspect of modern education. One effective way to achieve this goal is by introducing argumentative skills training to students at both primary and junior levels of education. By teaching students how to construct and present persuasive arguments, educators can help them hone their language and critical thinking skills, which are essential for their academic and personal growth. A combination of student- and teacher-centered approaches is advisable when teaching argumentative skills. This means that while teachers should provide guidance and support, students should also be encouraged to take an active role in their learning. To achieve this, teachers can use various teaching methods, such as relatable examples, engaging in class debates, and providing peer feedback and suggestions. It is important to note that teaching argumentative skills should be gradual, without rushing the process. This approach allows students to learn at their own pace and ensures a solid foundation before moving on to more complex concepts. As such, argumentative skills training is best implemented in the primary and junior levels of the education system.

To be an effective instructor in this module, one should be open to change and constructive criticism. This means being receptive to feedback from students and colleagues and being willing to adapt one's teaching style to meet students' needs better. Additionally, labelling students can be counterproductive and should be avoided. Instead, the aim should be to cultivate a lifelong passion for learning beyond just grades. By doing so, educators can help students become confident, articulate, and critical thinkers equipped with the skills they need to succeed academically and in life.

## Note

Mao Xiao assists David Kyei-Nuamah in preparing the teaching notes and analyzing the class to achieve its aim and purpose.

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