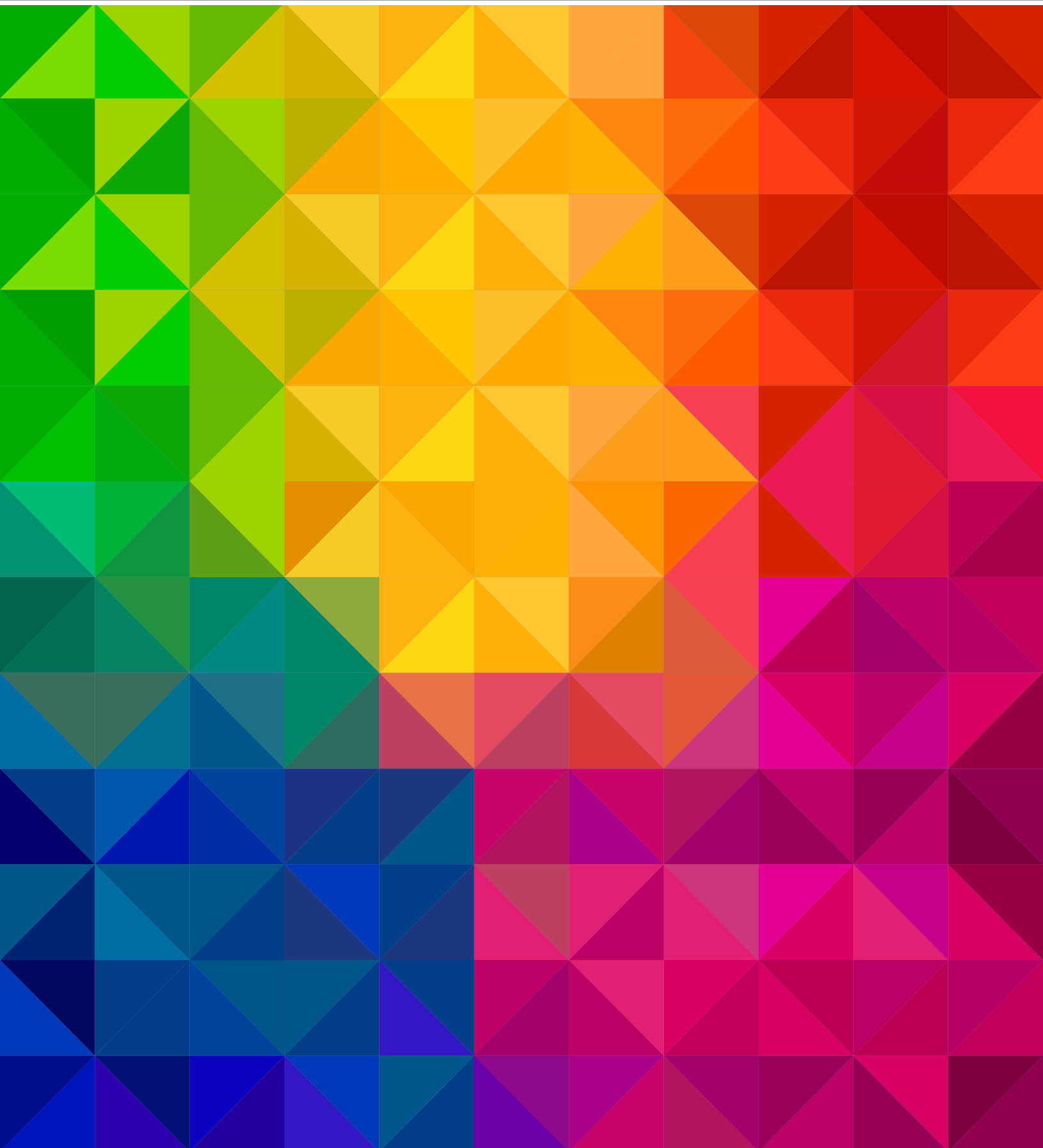


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FROM NEWSTELLING TO NEWS DEBATING: A PATH TO FOSTER EFL ARGUMENTATION SKILLS

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Abstract

This article depicts the findings of an action research project intended to describe the impact of news debating founded on newstelling as a pedagogical strategy to enhance argumentation and transcend the commonplace news report in EFL. The participants were 20 Law students enrolled in a Legal English course at a Colombian university. The research was theoretically supported on EFL newstelling, debate and argumentation. The data collecting instruments were: students' journals, a survey and a debate rubric. Data analysis was done applying the grounded theory. The results suggest that the embedment of newstelling with debate contributes to students' social engagement, legal vocabulary acquisition and argumentation skills.

Keywords: argumentation skills, debate, newstelling, speaking, TEFL.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación acción orientada a describir el impacto del debate de noticias fundamentado en la narración de noticias como estrategia pedagógica para mejorar las habilidades argumentativas, y trascender el usual reporte de noticias en las clases de inglés. Participaron 20 estudiantes de derecho inscritos en un curso de inglés legal ofrecido en una universidad colombiana. Esta investigación estuvo fundamentada teóricamente en la narración de noticias, el debate y la argumentación en escenarios de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera. Los instrumentos utilizados para recopilar los datos fueron: el diario del estudiante, una encuesta y una rúbrica de debate. El análisis de datos se

realizó aplicando la teoría fundamentada. Los hallazgos sugieren que la integración de la narración de noticias y el debate contribuye al compromiso social de los estudiantes, la adquisición de vocabulario legal y las habilidades argumentativas.

Palabras clave: debate, habilidades argumentativas, habilidad de habla, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE), narración de noticias.

Introduction

Today, more than ever before, it has become a must for education to respond to social demands. In fact, it is quite necessary a real and in-depth involvement in what is happening outside the frontiers of an educational institution, rather than “educating” behind the backs of the reality. In other words, educating is called to make learners really aware of their surroundings and to nurture a sense of engagement and responsibility in relation to the construction of a better world. In this sense, learners

[...] need to learn how and why to be engaged citizens who think critically—so that they can, for example, analyze news items, identify biases, and vote in an educated way. They need to be able to solve problems so they can propose or review policies to address social challenges. They need to be able to work with others if they are to effectively serve as jurors or participate in political campaigns. They need to be able to communicate effectively orally and in writing so that they can share their opinions publicly, defend their rights, propose new policy, etc. (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012, p. 6)

In other words, students' needs are primarily oriented to taking part of their nearby area's concerns, and their participation should be characterized by aspects

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such as; criticality, analysis, proposition, leadership, cooperation and communication, among others. An alternative to foster critical thinking and social engagement within the English lessons is argumentation, which is conceived as “reason giving in communicative situations by people whose purpose is the justification of acts, beliefs, attitudes, and values” (Freeley & Steinberg, 2000, p. 2).

Thus, a pedagogical proposal was designed bearing in mind relevant features associated with newstelling and debate (news debating) in order to serve a twofold aim. In the first place, the enhancement of EFL argumentation skills at tertiary education. In the second place, the students’ involvement in an approach to learning for life. In most respects, news discourse may be perceived as the spawning ground for generating ideas and opinions, eliciting argumentation and setting own standpoints concerning some current issues. Van Dijk (1988) declares that news tacitly supports overriding beliefs and views, and essentially amounts to assertion as a speech act. However, a piece of news gathers diverse ideas that eventually derive into debatable stances, problem-solving instances and alternative perspectives to tackle determined issues.

As this article is intended to display the insights and findings obtained from the implementation of a pedagogical proposal aimed at developing argumentation skills by utilizing newstelling in association with debate, it provides an account of the systematic review of previous research concerning the development of argumentation skills, as well as newstelling and debate as pedagogical strategies. Besides, it presents the research methodology, the analysis of the collected data and the emerging conclusions.

Statement of the Problem

Along history, education has endeavored to respond to a far greater number of demands placed on it. In Colombia, English has become a concurrent issue which has been the core of various programs as the National Bilingualism Program (2004-2019) and the National English Plan (2015-2025). Nevertheless, at tertiary education apart from the reiterated English learning, it is paramount to inquire into the specific requirements derived from the professional profiles, and to what extent English learning and teaching processes can represent an academic option to foster an integral education.

In this case, law students are supposed to gain knowledge about different law branches, procedures and specific legislations. Besides, they are also required to hone their problem-solving, critical thinking and argumentation skills. Concerning argumentation skills,

it is worth mentioning that from a dialogical perspective legal argumentation is understood as a discussion procedure aimed at defending a legal stance under the grounds of some rationality parameters (Feteris & Kloosterhuis, 2009).

The students’ difficulties with expressing their point of view, defending their stance, counter-arguing, proposing solutions to everyday problems from a legal perspective, and thinking out of the box in relation to controversial current issues constitute the reason for designing and executing pedagogical interventions aimed at fostering their speaking in English along with their argumentation skills.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned assumptions, the guiding question for this study was:

What is the impact of implementing debates accompanied by newstelling as a pedagogical strategy to enhance argumentation skills in law students enrolled in a Legal English course?

Theoretical Framework

The theory which founded this project is correlated with research conducted on the following topics: newstelling, debate and argumentation.

Newstelling

Newstelling provides an ample range of benefits concerning the development of oral skills as it involves students in planning and presenting activities around news facts (Neall, 2007). For instance, reflecting, interpreting, making assumptions, and assuming a posture regarding the implications, forthcoming consequences and decisions around the given news.

In this sense, news as texts hold the meaning which subsequently becomes the core of further discussion. In this regard, White (1998) asserts that

[...]every meaning within a text occurs in a social context where a number of alternative or contrary meanings could have been made, and derives its social meaning and significance from the relationships of divergence or convergence into which it enters with those alternative meanings. (p. 28)

In relation to the use of news reports in EFL, it is quite advisable to permit students to decide on what sort of news they want to read or listen to according to their own interests. The selection process itself may become a crucial stage to engage them as they start querying and

making predictions about the content. Mackenzie (1997) declares that despite the difficulty of the oral report, students get involved in a wide range of activities as content prediction, gist listening, listening for particular details and even discussion on the report's main issue.

Furthermore, students are capable of making the path from reporting news facts to confronting ideas, defending own viewpoints, analyzing facts and eventually proposing solutions. According to Shaw (2004)

No matter what type of open-ended discussion group takes place in a classroom, a newspaper is an integral part. There is always the need to find connections in the reading to the world, to self, and to other texts. All three of these connections can be found in the newspaper on any given day. When taking part in a discussion, students need to bring every possible resource to the forefront. Confirmation, rejection, support and elaboration are all key elements in a meaningful discussion. (p. 8)

As a result, English classes become an ideal scenario to foster argumentation skills as students transcend the initial reading comprehension stage, and take a position in regard to the news content. In the framework of this pedagogical proposal, news constitute the prime basis to lead students to construct more elaborate utterances and communicate their own perspectives on determined issues. Furthermore, at a broader scope they may be encouraged to think critically of their nearby problematic, and take an active role towards their solution.

Debate

The debate has been highly implemented as a pedagogical strategy to foster the argumentative competence in EFL scenarios. It has demonstrated its usefulness at expanding cognitive capacities, and encouraging social engagement. Snider and Schnurer (2006) define debate "as an instructional tool that meets multiple educational objectives" (p. 10). It clearly demands mastery of content, communication and critical thinking skills. Then, when debating students are immersed in a complex and high-order thinking speech act.

In the same line of thought, Nisbett (2003) declares that "debate is an important educational tool for learning analytical thinking skills and for forcing self-conscious reflection" (p. 210). In this sense, it can be inferred that EFL classes enriched by debatable issues tend to overcome commonplaces in educational practic-

es, and are oriented to the achievement of lifelong and lifewide learning.

As part of the results arisen from a research, Fauzan (2016) concludes that debate practice prompted students to improve their language skills so as to construct their arguments, increase their fluency as well as their confidence. Furthermore, Yang and Gamble (2013) assert that "debates encourage evaluation of assumptions, weighing evidence, supporting claims, and reflecting on issues to build both CT and speaking skills" (p. 400). In this sense, students are expected to reflect, judge and consider alternative perspectives.

Argumentation

Toulmin's (2003) argumentation model laid the foundations for further research on this issue. He drew a parallel between arguments features and the judicial process

There must be an initial stage at which the charge or claim is clearly stated, a subsequent phase in which evidence is set out or testimony given in support of the charge or claim, leading on to the final stage at which a verdict is given, and the sentence or other judicial act issuing from the verdict is pronounced. (p. 16)

Based on his foundations, there have been various considerations on the argument composition and its concept, Copi and Cohen (1990) assert that

a proposition by itself is *not* an argument. A proposition is said to be "true" or "false". An argument is a group of propositions of which one, the conclusion is claimed to be true on the basis of other prepositions, the premises, that as asserted as providing grounds or reasons for accepting the conclusion. But not every passage containing several propositions is an argument. (p. 26)

Concerning the argument composition, Freeley and Steinberg (2000) promulgate six constituent elements. According to their insights, an argument comprises: statements denoted as the conclusions to be pursued along the argumentation act; grounds or foundations constitute the notions intended to underpin the statement; guarantees catalogued as the evidence to support the grounds; additional proof to further reinforce the statement; qualifications to forge cohesiveness into the statement; and counter-arguments used to undermine the contradictory statements.

Argumentative competence. The term competence hints at the cluster of knowledge, learnings, skills, aptitudes and attitudes that enable an individual to do a task or cope with specific situations effectively, efficiently and within high standards of performance. With regard to the argumentative competence, Rapanta, Garcia-Mila and Gilabert (2013) state that it refers to “a group of skills [...] manifested in discourse forms, in the use of specific strategies, or as the fulfillment of an argumentation goal in a particular context” (p. 512).

Additionally, Kline (1998) asserts that the argumentative competence encompasses the creation of consensus regarding problematic situations, the advocacy of proposals, the promotion of commitment and the amalgamation of identities. Based on the previous conceptualizations, it is quite relevant to remark that “arguing constitutes the daily sort of speech in the law field due to the control of rationality. Thus, legal argumentation can be regarded as the exercise of practical rationality” (Sanz, 2013, p. 103).

Research Methodology

This research constituted a qualitative study, as it intended to inquire into a phenomenon in a natural setting in order to describe it and interpret it based on the experience and the information gathered (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2007). In this case, it aimed at describing the impact of debate accompanied by newstelling as a pedagogical strategy to enhance argumentation skills, and transcend the commonplace report of news in English lessons.

Thus, it relied on the action research cycle. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), action research is implemented where a problem entailing people, tasks and procedures demands a solution. Regarding the steps immersed in the action research cycle, Burns (2009) indicates four stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In the first one, a plan is devised to tackle a problematic situation. Afterwards, the plan is implemented and the actions conducted are observed. Finally, effects are pondered for further planning, intervention and analysis.

Therefore, in this study students' needs and interests in terms of EFL argumentation skills were identified. Four workshops were designed (Appendix C), aiming to favor reflective learning, problematizing reading, problematizing newstelling and argumentation skills. This first stage also involved the selection of gathering data instruments: students' journals, a survey (Appendix A) and a debate rubric (Appendix B). Afterwards, four workshops were conducted based on the pedagogical route proposed by the researcher (Figure 1), and eventually collected data were categorized and analyzed to present some conclusions.

Setting

This research was conducted at Universidad Santo Tomás (hereafter referred as USTA), a private, catholic and accredited university in Villavicencio, Meta, Colombia. It was founded by the Order of Preachers in 1580. In accordance with its pedagogical model, it is intended to promote students' integral development. Integrality is comprehended in terms of the person's dimensions: being (*ser*), doing (*hacer*) and acting (*obrar*), which orient to the person's growth (Universidad Santo Tomás, 2010). Accordingly,

by means of the constant study, the criticality and the creativity, reality should be known and apprehended, in other words, it is fundamental to **see**, observe, ponder and analyze it in order to **make judgements** on it, and subsequently **act** on it to transform it to the best extent possible. (Universidad Santo Tomás, 2015, p. 30)

In regard to foreign language policies, at USTA the role of English is determined by an agreement (Acuerdo 46, Diciembre 3, 2014) consistent with the National English Plan 2015-2025, which is directed by the Colombian Ministry of Education, and sets the bilingualism goals in Colombia. As part of its guidelines, it encourages the design of flexible curricula adapted to students' needs.

Participants

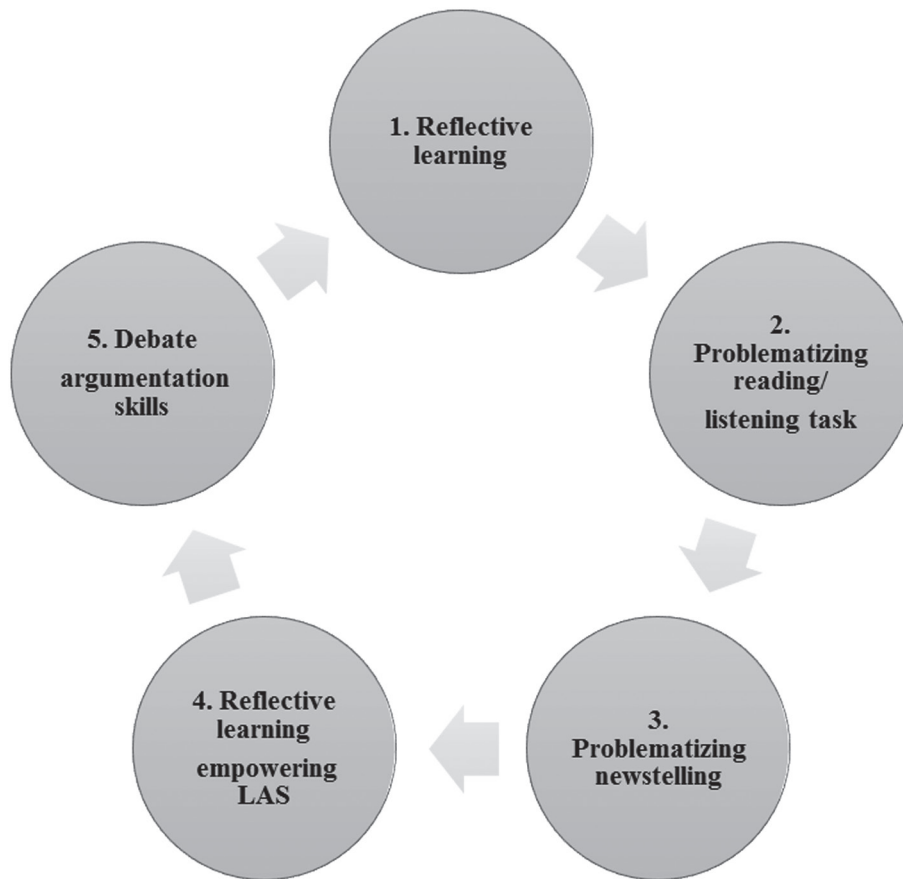
Participants of this study corresponded to Law students enrolled in a Legal English course at USTA in Villavicencio, Colombia. They were 20 students, 15 females and 5 males whose age ranged from 19 to 25 years. As part of the law program educational plan, they had already fulfilled the university's requirements for General English courses -seven levels- and were expected to pursue two Legal English courses under a 2-hour weekly basis each. At the time of this study, their English level was likely to be correlated with B1, based on the University Proficiency Progression chart, adapted from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Accordingly, students were able to

understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc., produce simple connected texts on topics which are familiar or of personal interest and describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24)

Pedagogical intervention

This study is intended to enhance EFL argumentation skills through debates accompanied by newstelling in order to guide students to overcome mere informative speech acts, and be capable of setting their position, constructing their own criteria, arguing and counter-arguing and making decisions regarding problematizing situations and controversial issues. In this way, the following procedures were carried out during the English classes:

Figure 1. Pedagogical route.



Source: Own elaboration

- First, four current pieces of news concerning controversial issues such as: euthanasia, defamation, child labor and drug trafficking, were selected.
- The researcher introduced the project to the students, who showed interest in participating and subsequently signed the consent letter.
- Workshops. Each workshop was designed according to the argumentation cycle proposed by the researcher, and comprised five stages explained as the following:

1. *Reflective learning*: students were engaged in activities prior to reading or listening to the selected piece of news. They were usually requested to observe a picture and answer some questions about it as a way to prompt participation and a preliminary discussion on the given topic.

2. *Problematizing reading / listening task*: students read or listened to the piece of news related to the topic discussed in the first stage. They should answer more specific questions and developed activities such as: fill in comparative charts, exemplify, provide extra details, among others.

3. *Problematizing newstelling*: students were encouraged to orally report the facts and main details of the piece of news. They should make reference to the people involved, the venue where the events occurred, how the case developed, and even hypothesized about the motives behind the facts.

4. *Reflective learning: Empowering LAS (Legal Argumentation Skills)*: students discussed questions regarding the role of law in the case (piece of news). Thus, they exchanged their perceptions and opinions on issues such as: the penalization of drug smuggling in China, the foundations of legal decisions by the Colombian Constitutional Court concerning euthanasia, or the physical and psychological consequences of child labor.

5. *Debate*: Finally, they were expected to partake in a debate where they could express their opinion, answer more deeply questions about the effectiveness of law to handle controversial issues, the involvement of multinationals to promote child labor and the concept of dignified death.

As it was previously mentioned, the pedagogical route displayed in Figure 1 was undertaken four times in order to determine the impact of debate accompanied by newstelling to enhance argumentation skills. In the framework of this research, newstelling constituted the preparation step to prompt students to discuss the given subject more deeply.

Data collection instruments

Over the course of this research, three collection instruments were used: students' journal, survey and a debate rubric.

Students' journals. Students were requested to keep a journal so that they could register their insights regarding the pedagogical strategies implemented, the class activities they engaged in, and their accomplishments in terms of their EFL argumentation skills. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), action research implies keeping a journal for students to document their considerations about their learning process. In this case, the journal was structured bearing in mind the pedagogical path proposed by the researcher, and students were provided with some questions to prompt them to record their learning experience. Thus, the journal entries gave account of aspects such as: the warming-up activities conducted during the *reflective learning stage*, their performance while they were involved in the *problematizing reading or listening tasks*, their reflections on the topics (news) treated in class, and the development of their EFL argumentation skills over the course of this study.

Survey. At the end of the study, a survey (Appendix A) was conducted to collect students' insights concerning the implementation of both pedagogical strategies: newstelling and debate. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) assert that

Typically, surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events. (p. 205)

Thus, the survey intended to inquire into aspects such as: students' engagement in news' analysis, the contribution of Legal English classes to the development of oral and written argumentative skills as well as the impact of debates and newstelling as a pedagogical alliance to enhance EFL argumentation skills.

Debate rubric (Appendix B). The students' performance during the debates was assessed by the implementation of a debate rubric. It aimed at examining whether students formulate their arguments in a clear and organized manner as well as inquiring into the strategies displayed to support their ideas, cross-examine, rebut opposite arguments and persuade opponents. According to Jeong (2015), rubrics contribute to the assessment process as it becomes more accurate, transparent and reliable.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that students who employ rubrics to appraise argumentation skills tend to produce better arguments (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007), in comparison with those who are not quite acquainted with scoring criteria and methods. In this case, students were aware of the assessment methodology implemented during the debate sessions, and the features of good arguments.

Data analysis

Data analysis was done applying the grounded theory. Punch (1998) asserts that "[...] grounded theory is best defined as a research strategy whose purpose is to generate theory from data. 'Grounded' means that the theory will be generated on the basis of data; the theory will therefore be grounded in data" (p.163). In this research, the data were collected from three instruments: students' journals, a survey (Appendix A) and a debate rubric (Appendix B). The data collected from the three sources were sorted, coded and triangulated. Thus, students' journals were read in-depth in order to trace commonalities, which subsequently were contrasted with the data from the surveys. In this manner, two major concerns were identified as the emerging categories, and linked together with the sub-categories.

Findings

Taking into account the research question and the data collected, two categories and three sub-categories emerged. They are described as the following:

Table 1. Emerging categories and sub-categories.

<p>First category Newstelling as a strategy oriented to foster social engagement</p>	<p>Second category Students' approach to Legal Argumentation in English (debate)</p>
<p>Sub-category 1. Vocabulary acquisition Sub-category 2. Problematizing newstelling as a trigger for problem-solving</p>	<p>Sub-category 1. Students' empowerment to perform in real life situations related to their field of study</p>

First category: newstelling as a strategy oriented to foster social engagement

Essentially, this study aimed at implementing debates accompanied by newstelling as a pedagogical alliance to enhance EFL argumentation skills in law students enrolled in a Legal English course. Thus, a pedagogical path was determined to motivate students to take an interest in reading news in English, sharing their insights and discussing on the legal matters related to a given piece of news.

Apart from providing a speaking topic, newstelling serves to foster social engagement. Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela (2012) declare that “learning about what happens around us and in our community, reflecting on it, and discussing about it with others constructively affects the political realm; as well as it facilitates a cohesive community by enabling citizens to engage in civic action” (p. 229). In this regard, one student stated that English classes contributed to gain competences and skills to fully perform in real life situations because “education is not only for now, but it is always useful in different life situations” (Survey, student 12, 27-10-2015). In the same line of thought, another student mentioned that Legal English classes “trained him for real-life cases” (Survey, student 3, 27-10-2015).

The implementation of newstelling in Legal English classes was carried out with a twofold objective: to trigger argumentation, while fostering social engagement. News allowed students to confront their surrounding reality as they were discussing on controversial current issues.

Sub-category 1. Vocabulary acquisition. One of the main constraints students usually face when learning a language concerns the lack of vocabulary. In this case, they should transcend the basic lexicon they managed, and get acquainted with vocabulary related to the topics proposed for the course as euthanasia, child labor, defamation and drug smuggling. Therefore, throughout the development of the pedagogical intervention workshops considered stages to introduce new words and facilitate their comprehension in context. Wang (2010) declares that “the L2 is used unrealistically for the sake of practicing structures, not in order to DO things that the learners wish or need to do in the L2” (p. 282).

Over the course of this study, students were constantly prompted to do things with the new vocabulary and avail themselves of their background knowledge about English and legal matters, as well. They commented that “We could know new terminology that was more related to our career” (Journal Entry # 5 - Student 2). By

the same token, another student expressed in the survey that she felt engaged in the analysis of legal cases because she “could practice the new vocabulary and the new knowledge” (Survey, student 3, 27-10-2015).

In fact, students were aware of their needs and acknowledged that being encouraged to talk about controversial issues and their legal implications demanded them to broaden their range of vocabulary and functional language. One student declared that legal English classes contributed to developing her argumentative skills because “the classes helped to think in English and enrich the vocabulary” (Survey, student 12, 27-10-2015).

As part of the workshop on defamation, one student wrote the following reflection, which evinces the management of vocabulary to express her ideas:

Colombia is a country where freedom of speech is protected thanks to the National Constitution. This right safeguards the transmission of many types of thoughts, opinions and ideas. This is a fundamental right that guarantees the right to information, and the Constitutional Court considers it as a significant liberty in a democracy (Journal Entry # 6 - Student 7).

Thus, reading news and making oral reports on them guided students to become more socially engaged, and provided them with the necessary lexical tools to be capable of expressing their ideas and thoughts. The pieces of news were by no means fictional stuff, but a portrait of the surrounding reality.

Sub-category 2. Problematizing newstelling as a trigger for problem-solving. This study proposed problematizing newstelling as a trigger for nurturing EFL argumentation skills and exposing learners to situations in which they were expected to be problem-solvers. In this sense, news depicted information summarizing key facts related to a problem, and students should approach the issue from a critical perspective. In other words, they should act as critical thinkers. In this regard, Rezaei, Derakhshan and Bagherkazemi (2011) assert that

One of the distinguishing features of critical thinkers is to be able to raise questions and find pertinent answers for them on the basis of reliable evidence. The process of finding contingent resolutions is premised upon thinking critically. To do so successfully, students need to work in pairs and groups to describe the content of discussion, to define the problem, to personalize

the problem, to discuss the problem and its alternative solutions, and finally to evaluate the whole process. (p. 775)

Based on the selected pieces of news, students were able to observe their own surrounding reality from their position as law students. As a result, they did not restrain themselves to give account of their reading comprehension, but they were engaged in brainstorming sessions to analyze the role of law, the legal procedures conducted and the solutions that may have been proposed to effectively respond to the given issue.

In this regard, one of the students perceived the value of analyzing the news as legal cases: "When analyzing cases, we applied the Colombian legal system, vocabulary, points of view and the reality we live in every day" (Survey, student 4, 27-10-2015). Apart from analyzing the events depicted by the pieces of news, students were encouraged to partake in debates. One of them considered debating as a meaningful task, she stated that "with my classmates, I could express my own points of view regarding different cases, it was easier to speak, learn and understand each other" (Survey, student 5, 27-10-2015).

Additionally, students comprehended it was quite necessary to provide solutions to the issues debated, and were aware of the steps they were following to generate alternatives. One of them expressed it as the following: "First, I analyzed a situation, and after I searched legal support to be able to provide solutions and arguments based on law" (Survey, student 6, 27-10-2015).

Students acknowledged the implemented strategies (newstelling and debate) as useful to foster English learning in general: "those activities are examples that English has many ways to be learned, I think that when we reported the news and participated in the debates, we strengthened our English level" (Journal Entry # 10 - Student 15).

Second category: students' approach to Legal Argumentation in English

For law students Legal Argumentation underpins a great deal of their performance as future lawyers. In fact, as part of their course of studies they should enroll in subjects concerned with argumentation and juridical logic. However, their first approach to Legal Argumentation in English takes place as they involve in Legal English classes. At this stage, they are expected to apply their legal knowledge to provide solutions or their own insight regarding current controversial issues. Of 13 students surveyed, 100% indicated that Legal English classes contributed to develop their oral and written argumentative

skills. (Appendix D)

According to Walton (2002)

much legal reasoning, then, is of a kind that fits legal rules to particular cases. Legal reasoning typically takes the form of an inference in which the major premise states a generalization (rule) and the minor premise is a specific statement that fits the circumstances (facts) of the particular case into the scope of the general premise. (p. 4)

Therefore, issues debated (euthanasia, child labor, defamation and drug smuggling) emerge as the focal points for presenting major and minor premises, which subsequently may derive into solutions, explanations and alternatives.

In this sense, English lessons became a significant learning scenario where students were capable of improving their communicative skills in a foreign language, while they were implementing their disciplinary knowledge in law. In this respect, a student emphasized that "Legal English classes helped her to think in English and enrich the vocabulary. In fact, this semester we analyzed legal cases and studied some topics we were discussing in other subjects as well" (Survey, student 12, 27-10-2015).

English lessons in connection with learners' field of study encouraged knowledge transfer and greater involvement in the tasks proposed. Students were prompted to engage in the analysis of news from a legal perspective, which required specific vocabulary learning as well as the assimilation of argumentative devices to display and defend their own standpoint. On this subject, Huang, Eslami and Willson (2012) note that "an output task that induces a higher level of involvement load will lead to better vocabulary gains" (p. 554). In the framework of this research, argumentation based on law constituted the output task.

Sub-category 1. Students' empowerment to perform in real-life situations related to their field of study.

Students' involvement in the Legal English lessons set the path to their own empowerment as future lawyers and active citizens. Lessons provided them with opportunities to apply their knowledge and foster their argumentative skills in English. Of 13 students surveyed, 84,6% indicated that they gained competencies and skills to fully perform in real-life situations (Appendix D). In this regard, one student mentioned that in the English lesson she "talked about legal cases related to the reality" (Survey, student 4, 27-10-2015). In the same vein, another stu-

dent commented that Legal English lessons “contributed to the development of their professional life” (Survey, student 1, 27-10-2015).

English lessons departed from the aim of getting students acquainted of some legal terminology in English (legalese), while they were exchanging views and discussing the aforementioned controversial subjects. Furthermore, news as the lessons’ starting point contributed to the enhancement of argumentative skills in English along with the development of critical reflection. In consequence, students became capable of reading in the context of the given piece of news, reflecting, tracking more information in connection with it, setting and defending their own position, and even suggesting alternative ways to handle the problem.

In regard to critical reflection, Mezirow (2007) declares that

critical reflection is the process of assessing one’s assumptions and presuppositions. Through critical reflection we can change the way we see the content of a problem or see our process of problem-solving. This can result in transforming our meaning scheme or point of view. We may also become critically reflective of the premises upon which the problem is posed, how the problem is framed or defined. Premise reflection can lead to a transformation in our meaning perspective or habit of mind. (p.12)

Thus, students became capable of honing even more their previously acquired analytical, critical and argumentative skills, as they were immersed in learning scenarios which demanded them to apply their prior knowledge concerning legal issues. Primarily, students were prompted to read beyond the facts and obtain a more accurate overview of the legal framework within the given piece of news. As a result of approaching daily news from their perspective as law students, they surpassed the difficulties related to vocabulary and reading comprehension. In this manner, they did not restrain themselves to reading for information, and moved toward reading for critical understanding. On this subject, Huang (2011) states that “being critical is also understood as a way of reading that draws attention away from emphasis on the technicalities of language to meaning making” (p.150).

This is bolstered by the fact that students attained to confront the news’ facts with the reality. In consequence, Legal English lessons outreached the class boundaries and contributed students to gain competencies and skills required in real-life situations. In this sense,

they perceived the value of this work for their professional life: “Education is not only for the moment, it always serves different life situations” (Survey, student 12, 27-10-2015). In fact, students perceived English as a non-essential subject within their professional goals, but along the pedagogical interventions they were also aware of its relevance: “Legal English lessons prepared us for real-life cases” (Survey, student 3, 27-10-2015). Regarding this issue, of 13 students surveyed, 92.3% indicated that the Legal English classes contributed to develop their analysis skills (Appendix D).

Conclusions

This study provides evidence that debate accompanied by newstelling contributes to the enhancement of argumentation skills in English courses at tertiary education. In this case, law students became capable of overcoming difficulties concerning the expression of their viewpoints, stance-taking, defending, problem-solving, counter-arguing and thinking out of the box in relation to controversial current issues. As the learning sessions demanded them to develop additional skills or upgrade their current ones, they did not restrain themselves to the usual report of facts and involved in discussions on the issues debated (euthanasia, child labor, defamation and drug smuggling).

Thus, debate accompanied by newstelling supports a synchronous development of communicative and argumentative competencies. With regard to the former, this project assisted students in expanding their vocabulary so that they could partake in the speaking sessions conducted. Furthermore, they engaged in listening and reading activities (news formats), which contributed to prepare themselves for intervening in discussions and debates.

In connection with the latter, students read beyond the text and confronted its ideas, the surrounding reality and the extra information they gathered from other sources. They inquired about the particular issues treated in class, and augmented their knowledge to critically approach the problematic and provide potential solutions. As a result, they demonstrated a heightened sense of social engagement, as this project contributed to prevent themselves from ignoring current controversial issues, in which law plays a significant role.

Finally, given the positive results of this study, it is recommended that teachers include pedagogical strategies as newstelling and debate in the English classroom as a way to foster the in tandem development of communicative and argumentative competencies.

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Appendix A

Survey



RESEARCH PROJECT: FOSTERING STUDENT'S LEGAL ARGUMENTATION THROUGH PROBLEMATIZING NEWSTELLING

Dear student,

This survey is aimed at gathering information about your perceptions on the implementation of newstelling pervaded by debate exercises as strategies to foster argumentation. Please, be honest and answer according to your experience.

PROBLEMATIZING NEWSTELLING

1. The Legal English classes contributed to develop your analysis skills especially because you were asked to analyze news and give your point of view as a lawyer.

Yes ___ No ___ why? _____

2. Were you engaged in the analysis of news presented in class?

Yes ___ No ___ why? _____

3. What difficulties did you face at reading news in English?

LEGAL ARGUMENTATION SKILLS - DEBATE

4. Legal English classes contributed to develop your oral and written argumentative skills.

Yes ___ No ___ Why? _____

5. Legal English classes contributed not just to get legal vocabulary, but also to gain competences and skills to fully perform in real life situations.

Yes ___ No ___ Why? _____

6. The analysis, recreation, and argumentation of legal cases in English classes contributed to apply your knowledge about law.

Yes ___ No ___ Why? _____

7. Right now, do you feel more confident in taking active role in legal issues debates, stating your point of view, sharing your opinion and expressing your arguments?

Yes ___ No ___ Why? _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Debate rubric

Criteria	4	3	2	1	Grade
1. Organization & Clarity: Main arguments and responses are outlined in a clear and orderly way.	Completely clear and orderly presentation	Mostly clear and orderly in all parts	Clear in some parts but not overall	Unclear and disorganized throughout	
2. Use of Argument: Reasons are given to support the resolution	Very strong and persuasive arguments given throughout	Many good arguments given, with only minor problems	Some decent arguments, but some significant problems	Few or no real arguments given, or all arguments given had significant problems	
3. Use of cross-examination and rebuttal: Identification of weakness in Negative team's arguments and ability to defend itself against attack.	Excellent cross-exam and defense against Negative team's objections	Good cross-exam and rebuttals, with only minor slip-ups	Decent cross-exam and/or rebuttals, but with some significant problems	Poor cross-exam or rebuttals, failure to point out problems in Negative team's position or failure to defend itself against attack.	
4. Presentation Style: Tone of voice, clarity of expression, precision of arguments all contribute to keeping audience's attention and persuading them of the team's case.	All style features were used convincingly	Most style features were used convincingly	Few style features were used convincingly	Very few style features were used, none of them convincingly	
TOTAL SCORE					

Taken from: <http://studylib.net/doc/7788566/debate-grading-rubric>

Appendix C

Sample worksheet

WORKSHOP 1

TOPIC: EUTHANASIA

Cycle's stage 1: Reflective learning = pre-reading

1. REFLECT

Look at the following picture and answer some questions.

- Who are they?
- What are they doing?
- What is wrong with them?



Cycle's stage 2: Problematizing reading task

2. READING

Read the piece of news below and do the activities.

A 79-year old Colombian man has become the first person in the country to die legally by euthanasia.

Ovidio Gonzalez was suffering from terminal throat cancer and said he had been suffering unbearable pain. Colombia's Catholic Church has said euthanasia is morally unacceptable and it has threatened to close its hospitals across the country.

Colombia is one of the few countries in the world, and the only one in Latin America, where euthanasia is allowed.

Assisted suicide was approved by the Constitutional Court in the 1990s. But no procedures had been performed because the measure had not been regulated.

It was only in May that the health ministry intervened and issued a set of guidelines for hospitals.

'Less publicity'

Mr Gonzalez died in a clinic in the western city of Pereira, after a legal battle.

His son Julio Cesar is a cartoonist with one of Colombia's top newspapers, El Tiempo.

"My father received the news [that the procedure had been approved] with relief," said Mr Gonzalez, better known by his pen name Matador, or The Killer.

"It is a pity that it had to be like that. My dad deserved to go with less publicity," he added.

Euthanasia is highly controversial in the predominantly Roman Catholic country.

Critics also point out that the measure has not been voted by Congress.

Cycle's stage 3: Problematizing news telling

3. SPEAKING

Share with the class specific details about the news.

What is the legal foundation of this decision by the Constitutional Court?

Do you know any other similar cases?



Cycle's stage 4: Reflective Learning = Empowering LAS

Read and reflect about the following statements

Assisted suicide and euthanasia are the same.

Colombia is the only Latin-American country where Euthanasia is allowed.

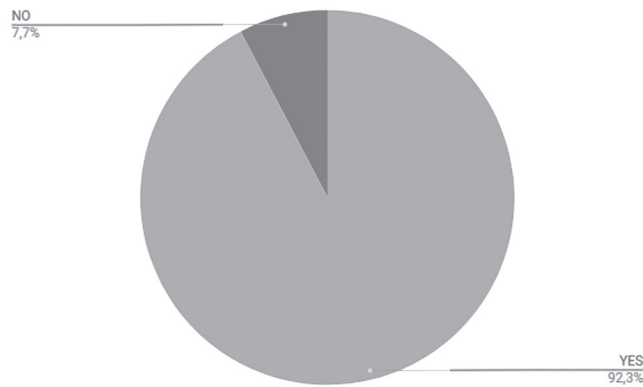
Euthanasia is morally unacceptable.

Cycle's stage 5: Argumentation skills = Debate

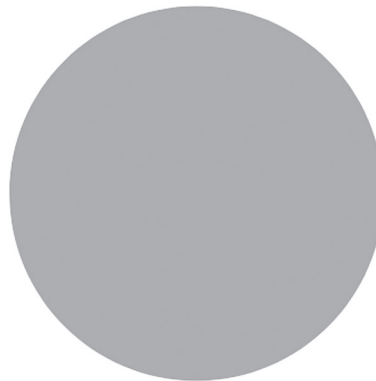
Appendix D

Survey results

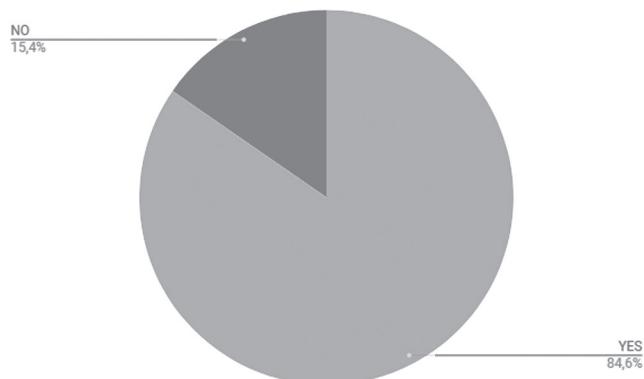
1. The Legal English classes contributed to develop your analysis skills especially because you were asked to analyze cases and give your point of view as a lawyer.



4. Legal English classes contributed to develop your oral and written argumentative skills.



5. Legal English classes contributed not just to get legal vocabulary, but also to gain competences and skills to fully perform in real life situations.



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