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The Effect of the Dialogue Journal on Developing Engineering College Students' Argumentative Essay Writing

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Abstract. Effects of implementing the dialogue journal as a bridge from written conversations to the academic argumentative essay with 51 engineering bachelor's students enrolled in an academic writing course were investigated. During a 15-week semester, the control group (n=26) and the experiential group (n=25) joined a three-semester-hour academic writing course which meets 3 times a week for 50 minutes each period. One 50-minute period each week was assigned for teaching the argumentative essay. Findings indicated that (a) course instructors believed that they had covered the argumentative elements in class; (b) experimental students demonstrated significantly higher levels ($p > .01$) of perceived knowledge and achieved significantly better ($p > .01$) than did control students on written and videotaped participation assessments; (c) students and instructors showed positive perceptions of the dialogue journal; and (d) in general there is not too much difference between groups in attitudes towards academic wiring; the apparently slightly more favorable feelings of one group in one assessed area may be reversed in another.

Key words: Pedagogy; dialogue journal; argumentative essay; academic writing; EFL learners; English language centers; higher education

Introduction

In an attempt to improve the overall performance of students, English language teacher educators and curriculum developers have started to question the fundamental fairness of teacher-centered approaches and traditional achievement tests (e.g., objective tests such as standardized tests) as a measure of the growth and achievement of English language learners. (Alamillo et al., 2005) Instead they have strongly recommended various non-traditional forms of teaching approaches and assessment (i.e. alternative assessments) including classroom observations by teachers, journals, portfolios, self-and peer-assessments, conferences and interviews, and so forth, as they are assumed to "blend cognition and social interaction into a functional theoretical framework by situating individual cognitive development in a context of collective classroom activity." (Clark, 2011, p. 28) As the most formative of all the alternative assessments, (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010), journals have been used in the field of EFL education for students at different ages "to write down their reactions and reflections to what they are reading or hearing in class." (Denne-Bolton, 2013, p. 3) They have gained popularity in recent years and their potential value as instructional tools as well as measurement tools "occupy a prominent role in a pedagogical model that stresses the importance of self-reflection in a student's education." (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 134)

As journals have been promoted in the field of EFL education, a number of overlapping categories or purposes in journal writing have emerged such as language-learning logs, grammar journals, responses to readings, strategies-based learning logs, self-assessment reflections, diaries of attitudes, feelings and other affective factors, acculturation logs. Most classroom-oriented of journals are what have now come to be known as the dialogue journal, (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010), which is "a written conversation in which a student and teacher communicate regularly (daily, weekly, etc., depending on the educational setting) over a semester, school year, or course. The teacher is a participant in an ongoing, written conversation with the student, rather than an evaluator who corrects or comments on the student's writing." (Peyton, 1993, p. 2) The dialogue journal has been utilized within the field of English language teaching, and the results showed that the dialogue journal has the potential to create a non-threatening constructivist learning environment which can promote meaningful student involvement (Issirlis, 1996; Nassaji and Cumming, 2000; Lee 2004) through extensive writings (Peyton et al., 1990; Nassaji and Cumming, 2000) for a real audience. (Peyton et al., 1990; Sanders, 2000)

Despite a recent criticism of the dialogue journal in English language learning classes that it bears little relation to the academic writing in which EFL students may be required to become competent, an argument can be made in favor of the dialogue journal as a pedagogical tool for the rigors of academic writing for two main things. (Denne-Bolton, 2013) "For one thing, before students can write academic essays, they need to be comfortable with their writing abilities, and writing in dialogue journals certainly builds learner confidence." (Denne-Bolton, 2013, p. 8) The dialogue

journal helps to blend "ongoing social influences in emergent interaction with personal development" (McCaslin, 2004, p. 250). It has also been argued that the dialogue journal has the potential to give students "a way to see beyond the surface conventions of academic writing to their fundamental purpose" (Carroll and Mchawala, 2001, 58), as it "blends cognition and social interaction into a functional theoretical framework by situating individual cognitive development in a context of collective classroom activity" (Clark, 2011, p. 28) Denne-Bolton (2013) explained that rhetorical forms can arise naturally out of the student-generated content of dialogue journals through having the liberty to write about a range of issues and engage with mature concepts in their dialogue journals, students are given the opportunity to learn inductively which lays the foundation for rhetorical knowledge understanding the reason why one or another rhetorical form is used, and that knowledge makes it easier for the writer to use the correct form. However, while the dialogue journal has been used successfully with English language students in a variety of different ways, we could not locate studies which focused specifically on independently writing particular academic essays (the argumentative essay in the present study, for example). Also, although some previous studies showed promise in the potential value of using the dialogue journal as a way to enhance student participations and writing abilities, we do not see direct investigations of the effect of the dialogue journal on students' attitudes towards academic writing itself.

The theoretical concepts providing the framework for the implementation of the dialogue journal in the EFL classroom are threefold. They relate first to the construct that the dialogue journal is a key mediator in the construction of knowledge "within specific sociocultural discursive contexts, each with specific constructions and constellations with respect to values systems, practices and a range of symbolic signifiers of what constitutes a particular sense of place." (MacRuairc, 2011) Prompts and available resources are of great help to students. Thus the use of the dialogue journal in the EFL classroom can draw its theoretical vitality from a variety of cognitive theories particularly the later work of Jean Piaget (1970) and from Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the socio-historical aspect of knowledge and the role of the social context in facilitating the process of learning. From a cognitive perspective, the role of students' prior knowledge and cognitive process work as a foundation for cognitive development and deep understanding in a complex and fundamentally nonlinear process. From the sociocultural perspective, the socio-historical aspect of knowledge and the role of the social context facilitate the process of learning. Particularly influential has been Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is "the interpersonal space where minds meet and new understandings can arise through collaborative interaction and inquiry." (Cummins et al., 2007, p. 59) These two perspectives together provide a useful framework for the consideration of using the dialogue journal inside the EFL classroom: blending cognition and social interaction into a functional theoretical framework by situating students' cognitive developments in a context of collective classroom activities. (Clark, 2011) In other words, it can be assumed that the

dialogue journal can help students work with instructors and peers as a community of discourse engaging in activity, reflection, and conversation, (Fosnot and Perry, 2005), in a non-threatening constructivist learning environment which can promote meaningful student involvement (Issirlis, 1996; Nassaji and Cumming, 2000; Lee 2004) through extensive writings (Peyton et al., 1990; Nassaji and Cumming, 2000) for a real audience. (Peyton et al., 1990; Sanders, 2000)

The second related trajectory of scholarship draws on perspectives focusing on the nature of linguistic acquisition and interactional adjustments by the native speaker or more competent interlocutor. In this regard, a consideration of interaction using the dialogue journal is highlighted because it results in "pushed output (i.e. output that stretches the learner's current capabilities) [that] helps learners notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge, test their hypotheses about the target language, and reflect on their language use." (Wolf, 2013) Drawing on perspectives which focus on the nature of linguistic acquisition and interactional adjustments by the native speaker or more competent interlocutor, second language acquisition theories can also provide support for the use of the dialogue journal. Interaction (Long, 1996) and output (Swain, 1995) hypotheses are examples. Interaction hypothesis suggests that engaging in negotiation of meaning which is "a process in which a listener requests message clarification and confirmation and a speaker follows up these requests, often through repeating, elaboration, or simplifying the original message" (Pica, 1994, p. 497), would trigger interactional adjustments by the NS or more competent interlocutor, facilitating acquisition because it connects linguistic input, internal leaner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways. (Long, 1996) This would results in "pushed output (i.e. output that stretches the learner's current capabilities) [that] helps learners notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge, test their hypotheses about the target language, and reflect on their language use." (Wolf, 2013) Both perspectives provide the basis to consider how the EFL classroom setting, where socio-cultural and cognitive and linguistic systems meet and sometimes clash, is delimited by specific expectations for particular forms of linguistic practices and ways of thinking.

Finally, a key construct unifying both perspectives is a consideration of the manner in which EFL academic writing students operate within different situations, each delimited by specific expectations for particular academic writing practices in terms of cognitive/linguistic involvement level and contextual support degree. The early work of Cummins (1984) which demonstrated the differences between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) can be regarded as a key construct unifying both perspectives. It considered the manner in which EFL academic writing students operate within different situations, each delimited by specific expectations for particular academic writing practices in terms of cognitive/linguistic involvement and contextual support degree. BICS describes the development of conversational fluency in the second language and CALP describes the use of language in decontextualized academic situations. "BICS is said to occur when there are contextual supports and props for language delivery. Face-to-face 'context

embedded' [boldface in original] situations provide, for example, non-verbal support to secure understanding. Actions with eyes and hands, instant feedback, cues and clues support verbal language. CALP, on the other hand, is said to occur in 'context reduced' [boldface in original] academic situations. Where higher order thinking skills (e.g. analysis, synthesis, evaluation) are required in the curriculum, language is 'disembedded' [boldface in original] from a meaningful, supportive context. Where language is 'disembedded' the situation is often referred to as 'context reduced' [boldface in original]." (Baker, 2006, p. 174)

In the context embedded situations, the students are encouraged to negotiate meaning in written conversations where the language is supported by a wide range of meaningful paralinguistic and situational cues, negotiated rules and dispersed knowledge to answer the questions and achieve a "joint accomplishment", (Cromadal (2001), as a group of people who share a certain set of practices through joint action (Gee, 2004). This type of the interaction was more typical of the everyday world outside the classroom, while many of the typical writing skills and linguistic demands of the classroom reflected activities which are closer to the context reduced end of the continuum. In the context reduced situations, the students have to rely on their linguistic cues to meaning and their successful writing skills rely heavily on their typical knowledge of the language to do, for example, individual free writings on general topics in their dialogue journals. The dialogue journal can also be used to addresses the developmental aspects of the writing skill in terms of the degree of active cognitive involvement in the activities, in other words, the amount of argumentative elements that have to be processed simultaneously by the individual in order to carry out the activity. Informal written conversations and free writing activities, for example, require few argumentative elements and thus require little active cognitive involvement while writing argumentative essays on particular academic topics are activities which require more argumentative elements and thus require more active cognitive involvement.

Research conducted from a social constructivist perspective has reported positive effects of the dialogue journal on English-language learners' compositions and writing skills. Peyton (1989), for example, used dialogue journals with beginning ESL learners to provide opportunities for them to learn correct grammatical forms and structures and master some elements of morphology such as the past tense of regular verbs and the plural and third-person singular -s, the copula be, the progressive auxiliary +/-ing, and the past tense of irregular verbs through reading teacher responses and imitating them. He states that "rather than overt correction of student errors, correct grammatical forms and structures can be modeled in the course of the interaction" (p. 27). Casanave (1994) analyzed 96 journals written by 16 university students for changes over time of the length of sentences, complexity of sentences, and accuracy. She found sentence length and accuracy progress differ from student to student. While some students' journals showed a decline in accuracy, some of the students were using the same words in more sophisticated and focused topics. As a volunteer English instructor in a community literacy program in Central Texas, Larrotta (2008) implemented

dialogue journals (DJs) in an effort to engage 17 Hispanic adult ESL literacy students in writing for authentic communication. This class took place twice a week for periods of two hours for an entire semester. The main goal of the DJs was to establish communication in English in writing with each student. In other words, the students and the researcher had individual private conversations in writing. The researcher responded to students' journal entries the same way she does when friends or colleagues send her an e-mail message or drop a note for her in her mailbox. She did not point out the students' mistakes in their letters, and she did not make corrections on their compositions. Not correcting students' mistakes right away was for the researcher as the instructor a new way of looking at students' writing. It was hard at the beginning because she was not used to returning students' compositions without explicitly having pointed out their mistakes. The researcher and her students did other writing activities aiming for correct grammar and spelling, such as a literacy autobiography in which the students followed the steps in the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing), including a final typed version. The DJ activity became more exciting as the written conversations progressed since the entries became more personal and authentic.

Recent studies have used a critical frame to consider issues of power, identity and social and cultural diversities within classroom contexts. For example, Brown (1996) implemented dialogue journals between students as well as with the teacher. He found that the use of dialogue journals with the teacher could provide students freedom and privacy and give the teacher an opportunity to adjust writing level of each individual student to a higher level as the journals progress. Brown (1996) concluded that the use of dialogue journals between students would help students feel comfortable and create positive attitudes towards social and cultural diversities. Situating dialogue journals within the Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical framework, Darhower (2004) explored weekly dialogue journal communication as a form of mediation in L2 learning. Data was examined from the journals of eight learners (four high-frequency classroom participators and four low-frequency participators) in an intact intermediate college Spanish class. The study reported unique ways that dialogue journals function as mediators of (a) identification as a language learner and reflection on language learning experiences; (b) consolidation of course content as evidenced in the reporting of personal experiences and opinions relating to topics covered in class; and (c) use of language functions stressed in the classroom. The researcher concluded that the dialogue journal is an interactive writing environment in which learner goals and agency can comprise an important part of the learning process. Also, Miller's (2007) study showed promise in the potential value of using dialogue journals as a way to write without having to worry about anxiety or social pressure. He investigated the reflective journal writings of 10 high school students who had recently arrived in the country. He found that dialogue journals not only improve the quality of writings of non-native English speakers but also help them to establish their identities and voice in English.

Statement of Research Problem

Nearly most English language centers at universities are now offering English academic writing courses. As English academic writing has recently gained special attention due to its place at the center of teaching and learning in higher education, fulfilling a range of purposes according to the various contexts in which it occurs, (Coffin et al., 2003), educational program organizers and policy makers have expressed concern over the accountability of programs. English language teachers also need to be able to assess the performance of individual students in order to improve their own instruction, given the learning context has traditionally been focused on teacher-centered instruction and measurement-driven assessments, and students have few opportunities to go beyond the knowledge telling towards more dynamic, complex and probably more sophisticated skills of critical thinking and self-reflection, or in the case of learning academic writing, "to see beyond the surface conventions of academic writing to their fundamental purpose." (Carroll and Mchawala 2001, p. 58) This represents an unnecessary and detrimental reduction of the potential for the complex socio-cognitive dimensions of learning academic writing. At the same time, "a good many students, at all levels of schooling, hates the types of language associated with academic content areas." (Gee, 2004, p. 3), and they have particular difficulty with the concept of academic writing with fear of a teacher's scrutinizing every grammatical or spelling error, (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010), which usually result in student low achievement and underachievement and significant achievement gaps between students. (Alamillo et al., 2005)

Importance and contribution of the study

While the dialogue journal has been used successfully with English language students in a variety of different ways, we could not locate studies which focused specifically on independently writing particular academic essays (the argumentative essay in the present study, for example). Also, although some previous studies showed promise in the potential value of using the dialogue journal as a way to enhance student participations and writing abilities, we do not see direct investigations of the effect of the dialogue journal on students' attitudes towards academic writing. Therefore, the current study provides us with more understandings as to the implementation of the dialogue journal as a bridge from written conversations to the argumentative essay that is not acknowledged in traditional EFL classrooms in higher education context.

Terms definitions

Written conversations

Discussions of written comments between the teacher and the students to improve the argumentative essay writing

Dialogue journals

Journals in which each student carries on a private written conversation with the teacher and share it with other students for a period of one academic semester

An argumentative essay

An essay in which the student agrees or disagrees with an issue, using reasons to support his opinion

Study objectives and hypotheses

The study aims to investigates the effect of the dialogue journal on English language learners' academic essays, one of which was the focus of the present study; namely, whether it is possible to use the dialogue journal as a bridge to help students move to argumentative essays while they are engaged in written conversations with their instructors and peers in higher education context, and if so, what effects it may have on particular argumentative essay elements (i.e. a clear stand on an issue, a clear statement, a clear argument, a solid evidence for arguments, a clear opposing argument, an explanation of the opposing, linking of ideas at a 'local' or sentence and paragraph level, rebuttals to the opposing argument, and a block pattern or a point-by-point pattern) and overall student essay performance. Also, the study is an attempt to explore instructors' and students' perceptions of the dialogue journal and to determine student classroom participation. Furthermore, the study tries to investigate the effect of the dialogue journal on the attitudes of the experimental group towards academic writing as compared to other students in the control group. To this end, six hypotheses will guide this study.

1. Course instructors will cover the argumentative essay elements in class.
2. Experimental students will achieve better than do control students on perceived knowledge assessments.
3. Experimental students will achieve better than do control students on videotaped participation assessments.
4. Experimental students will achieve better than do control students on essay writing assessments.
5. Experimental students and their instructor will show acceptance of the dialogue journal.
6. Experimental students will show more positive attitudes towards academic writing than do control students.

Research Design

The present study was conducted on engineering bachelor's students enrolled in an academic writing course (N = 51). The main objective of the course was to help students write coherent and unified four types of academic essays: chorological order/ process essays, cause/effect essays, comparison/contrast essays, and argumentative essays. This three-semester-hour course meets 3 times a week for 50

minutes each period. The students were administered a survey to decide if they had or they would have any educational instruction about the dialogue journal to write argumentative essays other than their weekly classes. No students were identified as having had or presently using the dialogue journal, but seven students, identified as having had instruction about argumentative essays, were assigned to the control group. This would force assignment and classes with odd numbers of students resulted in the unequal distribution between the two groups. Therefore, half the students were assigned to the control group in two classes (with 14 and 12 students), and the remaining students were assigned to the experimental group in two classes (with 13 and 12 students). The researcher discussed the theoretical perspectives and nature of the study with the instructors of the experimental group during one hour informal meeting. The instructors of both groups have almost the same teaching experiences and academic degrees. Both groups of students attended the course for an equivalent amount of time each week during a 15-week semester. One 50-minute period each week was assigned for teaching the argumentative essay. The control group had no activities with the dialogue journal. Quizzes and assignments were used for assessment and feedback. The experimental group was involved in activities with the dialogue journal.

To minimize discussion among peers, the experimental-group members were asked not to discuss the dialogue journal until the study was concluded. Students used dialogue journals to write argumentative essays in 14 study weeks and doubled their writing assignments the day following an absence. Only the first session was intended to orient students towards the dialogue journal to be sure they encountered no problems; they were, for example, informed about materials, frequency of writing, length of writing, writing instructions and topics, journal partners/groups. (Peyton, 1989) Also, students were introduced to nine elements of the argumentative essay which were recommended by four professional instructors of EFL during the development stage (1) a clear stand on an issue; (2) a clear statement; (3) a clear argument; 4) a solid evidence for arguments; (5) a clear opposing argument; (6) an explanation of the opposing; (7) linking of ideas at a 'local' or sentence and paragraph level; (8) rebuttals to the opposing argument; and (9) a block pattern or a point-by-point pattern. Students were informed that the elements would be covered as they move from written conversations towards academic argumentative essays.

To determine the effect of the dialogue journal on the experimental students' attitudes towards academic writing as compared to the control group, all students in both groups completed Likert-type surveys in their first class meeting. It contained specific response choices. Response descriptors and positive/negative polls were varied in an effort to maintain respondent focus of attention. I analyzed experimental student attitude towards academic writing by tabulating individual responses followed by the associated mean and standard deviation (see Table 1). All mean responses were 2.26 or lower on a 5-point scale, with a standard deviation range of 0.53 to 0.77. T-tests revealed that attitudes towards academic writing were not statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ in all areas.

Table (1). Results of Pretest of Students' Attitudes towards Academic Writing .

Question	Traditional Class (n= 26)		Dialogue Journal Class (n= 25)		
	M	SD	M	SD	t
Do you think academic writing is an interesting subject?	2.08	0.74	2.24	0.60	0.86
Do you think academic writing would help you in your future job?	2.15	0.73	2.08	0.64	0.38
Are you excited about learning academic writing?	2.04	0.77	2.16	0.69	0.59
Is academic writing easy to understand?	2.15	0.67	2.24	0.66	0.46
Do you recommend other students to study academic writing?	2.26	0.53	2.32	0.56	0.33
Would you like to study academic writing in the future?	2.09	0.74	2.12	0.73	0.21
Overall	2.13	0.70	2.19	0.65	0.47

Following the treatment all students completed Likert-type attitude surveys containing specific response choices created. I varied response descriptors and positive/negative polls in an effort to maintain respondent focus of attention. The control-group survey included questions about perceptions of specific knowledge regarding writing argumentative essays. The experimental group survey included the same questions, and additional questions and specific response choices concerning the dialogue journal were also included. Following an opportunity to view any argumentative essay element we wished, the instructors completed a Likert-type survey designed to find out if they felt the element to be assessed had been adequately covered in class (see Table 1). They responded to a 5-step continuum anchored by "not at all" and "comprehensively." Additional questions related to the teaching methods and possible irritants regarding covering the argumentative essay elements, students' participations and any changes observed in the classroom.

Table (2). Course Teacher Responses Indicating Perceived Adequacy of Material Covered in Class.

Questions	**Responses**						
	Low				High		
How well do you think you have covered teaching your students how to use . . . . in their argumentative essays?	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
a clear stand on an issue	-	-	-	3	1	4.25	0.50
a clear thesis statement	-	-	1	2	1	4	0.82
their own arguments	-	-	-	3	1	4.25	0.50
solid evidence for their arguments	-	-	1	1	2	4.25	0.96
a clear opposing argument	-	-	-	1	3	4.75	0.50
an explanation of the opposing	-	-	-	2	2	4.5	0.58
linking of ideas at a 'local' or sentence and paragraph level	-	-	1	2	1	4	0.82
rebuttals to the opposing argument	-	-	1	3	-	3.75	0.50
A block pattern or a point-by-point pattern	-	-	-	1	3	4.75	0.50
Overall	-	-	4	22	19	4.33	0.64

Note. A dash (-) indicates no response.

Students completed a researcher-designed written posttest assessment. Testing took place at the end of the semester. It included two parts. The first part included matching, multiple-choice and true/false questions designed to assess each student's knowledge about the argumentative essay elements. This assessment only contained material the instructors believed they had covered. Students were asked to write "I don't know" for items they could not answer, providing me some assurance that the students had no accidently skipped the item. The second part of the assessment included one essay question. Students were given three argumentative topics and asked to write an argumentative essay on one of them.

A videotaped posttest, conducted to determine participants' active learning, requested students to work in groups and pairs, do presentations, and make discussions and search for information from on-line and written supplementary materials provided by their teachers. Students were videotaped in random order as they went through the class routines and assigned a number displayed on the tape.

Two professional instructors of EFL reviewed the argumentative elements during the development stage to evaluate them and recommend some of them for students to learn. The researcher graded the first part of the written test based on the answer key. The essay question was evaluated by the two instructors based on a 5-point scale rubric which was designed by them to measure the nine elements of the argumentative essay. Video evaluation also involved a 5-point scale rubric developed by evaluators in which they indicated the observed students' interactions inside the classroom. Independently judged evaluations of the video and written assessment were analyzed using the Pearson production-moment correlation coefficient that indicated an acceptable interjudge reliability of 0.95 for the written essay assessment and 0.81 for the video assessment.

Table (3). Results of T-Test Analysis of Students' Perceived Knowledge.

Question	Traditional Class (n= 26)		Dialogue Journal Class (n= 25)		
How much do you think you know how to use . . . in the argumentative essay?	M	SD	M	SD	t
a clear stand on an issue	2.31	0.55	2.92	0.70	3.48*
a clear thesis statement	2.23	0.65	2.80	0.65	3.13*
your own arguments	2.15	0.67	3.08	0.70	4.80*
solid evidence for their arguments	2.38	0.57	3.20	0.71	4.54*
a clear opposing argument	2.62	0.50	3.12	0.60	3.28*
an explanation of the opposing	2.35	0.89	2.96	0.84	2.53*
linking of ideas at a 'local' or sentence and paragraph level	2.54	0.58	3.16	0.69	3.49*
rebottles to the opposing argument	2.34	0.74	3.40	0.65	5.59*
a block pattern or a point-by-point pattern	3.12	0.59	3.48	0.59	2.22
Overall	2.45	0.64	3.12	0.68	3.67*

*** The result is significant at p < 0.01.**

Research Findings

To determine whether the teachers believed they had covered the argumentative elements, I calculated the mean responses and associated standard deviations for the appropriate survey questions (see Table 2). Results indicated that all mean responses were 3.75 or higher on a 5-point scale with an overall SD range of .50 to 0.96. Generally, the instructors seemed to believe they had covered the assessed material.

I calculated student responses on the appropriate survey questions to determine the students' perceived knowledge of the assessed areas (see Table 3). T-tests revealed that dialogue journal responses were statistically significant, except in one area (i.e. a block pattern or a point-by-point pattern).

Scoring of the students' essay and video assessments placed the advantage toward the student. For a response to be counted low, both evaluators had to mark that specific low response. If either evaluator counted a response higher, the higher response was considered. This procedure allowed latitude for teaching style, presentation, terminology, and interpretations.

Written and video assessments were analyzed by comparing percentage of items across groups. Based upon a possible total of 100, traditional written scores ranged from 30 to 81, with a mean of 60.54. Dialogue journal written scores ranged from 47 to 95 with a mean of 70. This difference between groups was significant on the Mann-Whitney U test ($n_1 = 25$, $n_2 = 26$ $p < .01$). Traditional class scores on the video assessment based on a possible total of 100 ranged from 29 to 75 with a mean of 62.62. Dialogue journal video scores ranged from 52 to 97 with a mean of 72.2. This difference between groups was significant on the Mann-Whitney U test ($n_1 = 25$, $n_2 = 26$ $p < .01$).

I analyzed experimental student attitude toward the dialogue journal by tabulating individual responses followed by the associated mean and standard deviation (see Table 4). All mean responses were 3.96 or higher on a 5-point scale, with a standard deviation range of 0.51 to 0.98. Overall, the students seemed pleased with the dialogue journal. When asked if they wanted to use the dialogue journal in the future, 22 students responded "yes". When asked if they had a chance to use it in other English language courses, would they be interested to use it, 23 students responded "yes".

Table (4). Dialogue Journal Group Responses Indicating Perceptions of the Dialogue Journal.

Questions	Responses						
	Low				High		
	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
Did the dialogue journals help you understand how to write an argumentative essay?	-	1	9	5	10	3.96	0.98
Do you think the dialogue journal would have helped you work with other students?	-	1	6	10	8	4	0.87
Were you excited about using the dialogue journal?	-	-	-	13	12	4.48	0.51
Did the dialogue journal help you participate with your teacher more inside classroom?	-	1	1	13	10	4.28	0.74
Do you recommend the dialogue journal to be used with students in the other group?	-	-	2	9	14	4.48	0.65
Are you going to use the dialogue journal in the future?	-	-	4	8	13	4.36	0.76
Overall						4.26	0.75

Note. A dash (-) indicates no response.

Questions related to the instructors' perceptions of the dialogue journal and its implementation showed a strong propensity toward acceptance of the dialogue journal and its perceived value. None of the instructors believed that the students had missed too much of their regular class, and all the instructors indicated they had noticed improvement in the classroom participation and/or attitude of the students using the dialogue journal as opposed to those who did not. All the instructors indicated they would adapt their teaching in order to use the dialogue journal, they would use the dialogue journal in other courses if it were possible, they thought it would be beneficial to use the dialogue with other classes, and they would have students use it outside their classroom.

Student responses were calculated on the appropriate survey questions to determine the students' attitudes towards academic writing (see Table 5). T-tests revealed that in general there is not too much difference between groups in attitudes towards academic wiring. The apparently slightly more favorable feelings of one group in one assessed area may be reversed in another area.

Table (5). Results of Posttest of Students' Attitudes towards Academic Writing.

Question	Traditional Class (n= 26)		Dialogue Journal Class (n= 25)		
	M	SD	M	SD	t
Do you think academic writing is an interesting subject?	2.40	0.71	2.35	0.96	0.28
Do you think academic writing would help you in your future job?	1.96	0.84	2.08	0.80	0.51
Are you excited about learning academic writing?	2.42	0.70	2.72	0.46	1.78
Is academic writing easy to understand?	2.31	0.88	2.04	0.79	1.14
Do you recommend other students to study academic writing?	2.27	0.78	2.12	0.88	0.64
Would you like to study academic writing in the future?	2.36	0.99	2.54	0.95	0.66
Overall	2.29	0.82	2.31	0.81	0.84

The results are not significant at $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

Findings in this study show promise in the potential value of using the dialogue journal as a way not only to cover the argumentative elements but also to improve students' perceived knowledge of argumentative writing elements as well as academic writing ability to produce coherent and unified argumentative essays compared to other students in the control group as essay written assessment and videotape analysis showed. Also, videotape analysis showed that the experiential students appeared more active in participation than students in the control group. These findings are in line with previous investigations which reported positive effects of the dialogue journal on the achievements and participation of EFL writing students. (e.g., Peyton, 1989; Casanave, 1994; Brown, 1996; Darhower, 2004; Miller, 2007; Larrotta, 2008)

One possible reason for the significantly different achievement ratings between groups may be the learning environments which the dialogue journal would create for students. It seems reasonable that students involved in traditional learning environments may not learn better the material presented as appropriately as they learn in environments in which instructors and peers work as a community of discourse engaging in activity, reflection, and conversation, (Fosnot and Perry, 2005), in a non-threatening learning environment which promotes meaningful involvement (Issirlis, 1996; Nassaji and Cumming, 2000; Lee 2004) through extensive writings (Peyton et al., 1990; Nassaji and Cumming, 2000) for a real audience. (Peyton et al., 1990; Sanders, 2000) Such a learning environment with its contextual support and interactional adjustments would not only enhance students' participation but also their cognitive and linguistic abilities, and as a result, their academic argumentative writings.

Overall results indicated an acceptance of the dialogue journal. Both the instructors and students indicated a desire to have and use the dialogue journal, and there was a perceived educational value for implementation. However, implementation of the dialogue journal was met with a number of negative perceptions of the dialogue journal from some learners. One of the instructors argues that "the acceptance of the dialogue journal was not fully realized until the conclusion of the study . . . For some students, the dialogue journal was perceived as something more like an interrogation . . . There was sometimes a tendency to receive the feedback as negative or as overly critical." As a result, "resistance was a part of the classroom discourse which sometimes took the form of silence," the other instructor writes. One possible justification for the improvement of the acceptance of the dialogue journal is that negative perceptions of the dialogue journal from some learners such as resistant behavior was more the result of organizational features of social networks and instruction than other factors, and was therefore rectifiable through classroom management. (McFarland, 2001)

In general there is not too much difference between groups in attitudes towards academic wiring. The apparently slightly more favorable feelings of one group in one assessed area may be reversed in another. One possible justification may be

attributed to the fact that "attitudes, as an affective response, are determined by beliefs, which are basically cognitive." (Petric, 2002, p. 10) For example, academic competence accepting in a second language would mean to them rejecting their collective identity. (Valenzuela, 1999) In other words, academic specialist varieties of language are complex, technical, and initially alienating to many learners. They are significantly different from people's everyday varieties of language. Academic specialist varieties of language are also integrally connected to complex and technical ways of thinking. They are the tools through which certain types of content are thought about and acted on. (Gee, 2004) "By inviting students to examine their beliefs about writing and writer identity, these activities are useful in any classroom, across disciplines, in which high-stakes [academic] writing is used." (Fernsten and Reda, 2011, p. 171) Much time, effort, and determination may be required for significant change in students' attitudes towards academic writing to take place.

Conclusion

Results of this study showed an acceptance of the dialogue journal by both students and instructors. The dialogue journal was also found to be effective in raising student achievement levels in writing argumentative academic essays and class participations. However, several limitations were inherent in the design of the study. First, in order to find a large enough population four different sections were used. Therefore, differences between course instructors, student demographics, facilities, and equipment are only some of the factors that may have influenced the results. Second, the decision to assign students with the dialogue journal experience to the control group and the adjustment for classes with an uneven number of students may have influenced results. Third, even though students were asked to not discuss the dialogue journal amongst their peers, this behavior was never verified. It can be assumed that any such discussion probably benefitted the control group's assessments. Finally, all researchers must be cognizant of the "halo effect" that can influence students such as this where a group of students receives a different type of attention and pedagogical practices than do their peers. The various ways in which the dialogue journal can be used are as numerous as pedagogical practices and types of academic writing essays. It seems reasonable that the success demonstrated here could be equaled by similar dialogue journals written for writing courses mentioned in the literature. Based on the quantitative and qualitative results in this study, future investigation in implementing the dialogue journal in academic writing courses with different types of writing essays is recommended. Also, the effect of the dialogue journal on students' attitudes towards academic writing is warranted and should be actively pursued to help students "see the relevance of their identities as successful [academic] writers in contexts other than school and to renegotiate their positions and abilities to draw on and make use of various writing conventions. It is in making these efforts that we believe we can help 'struggling' students become competent, confident, empowered and emancipated [academic] writers." (Worthman et al., 2011, p. 327)

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تقييم برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية في السنة التحضيرية في جامعة الدمام

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المدينة المنورة

ملخص البحث. هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة أثر استخدام دفتر اليوميات الحواري على تطوير كتابة المقال الجدلي لدى ٥١ طالب هندسة بكلية ينبع الصناعية والمسجلين في مادة الإنشاء خلال الترم الأول للعام الاكاديمي ٢٠١٢/٢٠١٣م. تم توزيع الطلاب في مجموعتين و تخصيص لقاء مدته ٥٠ دقيقة أسبوعيا (أحد اللقاءات الأسبوعية الثلاثة للمادة) لتدريس المجموعتين المقال الجدلي. تم تدريس المجموعة الاولى (٢٦ طالب) بالطريقة التقليدية باعتبارها المجموعة الضابطة. وتم تدريس المجموعة الثانية (٢٥ طالب) باستخدام دفتر اليوميات الحواري باعتبارها مجموعة تجريبية. خضعت المجموعتان لاختبار قبلي وآخر بعدي في عناصر المقال الجدلي. وقد دلت نتائج تحليل الاختبار القبلي على عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية، مما يدل على تكافؤ المجموعتين. أما نتائج تحليل الاختبار البعدي فقد أسفر عن الآتي: ١) لاتوجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في تغطية تدريس عناصر المقال الجدلي للمجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة؛ ٢) توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في المستوى المعرفي لعناصر المقال الجدلي بين المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة لصالح المجموعة التجريبية؛ ٣) توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في التصورات حول استخدام دفتر اليوميات الحواري بين المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة لصالح المجموعة التجريبية؛ ٤) لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في اتجاهات الطلاب حول الكتابة الأكاديمية بين المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دفتر اليوميات الحوار؛ المقال الجدلي؛ الكتابة الأكاديمية؛ طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ معلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ المحادثة الكتابية؛ مراكز اللغة الانجليزية.