Online Debate in Argumentative Writing Course: Potentials and Challenges

Ira Mutiaraningrum
Tanjungpura University, Pontianak
West Kalimantan, Indonesia

Bambang Yudi Cahyono
State University of Malang
East Java, Indonesia

Abstract

This study examined online debate in Argumentative writing course by exploring the potentials and challenges. It involved 48 Indonesian EFL students attending argumentative writing course from two classes at the university level. The students were divided into two big groups. Each of them was given a task of argument in the form of online debate on a topic from the government point of view and opposition. Points of arguments that the students posted in online debate were recorded and analyzed to see how arguments are delivered. The process of the online debate and the postings of the students were analyzed to find out the potentials and challenges from the researcher's side. Following the online debate, questionnaires were distributed to the students to investigate what they thought about the potentials and challenges of online debate. The result showed that potentials of online debate were in the form of time flexibility, learning autonomy, and critical thinking based on the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. In addition, the study also revealed challenges in the application of online debate which include the emergence of delayed responses, confusion in the implementation on the part of the students, and technical problems dealing with signing up and posting delivery.

Keywords: online debate, argumentative writing, potentials, challenges

Writing is an important skill which is interwoven with critical thinking skill (Golpour, 2014; Hashemi, Behrooznia & Mahjoobi, 2014; Nikou, Bonyadi & Amirikar 2015). Critical thinking skill is crucial to develop in order to be successful in a knowledge-based society (Hashemi et al., 2014). A study by Golpour (2014) showed that students possessing higher level of critical thinking ability write better than other students since students with higher critical thinking skill can organize their thought better using higher levels of cognitive and metacognitive strategies while writing. Writing, especially argumentative writing has been recognized as an essential skill expected of university students. Studies by Flores (2006) and Samanhudi (2011) reveal that argumentative writing is an effective means to portray students' critical thinking. Argumentative writing is regarded as a manifestation of critical thinking skills, since a writer has to analyze, evaluate and counter arguments and maintain a logical justification to convince the reader (Hashemi et al., 2014). However, many students do not display critical thinking in their language skills such as argumentative writing (Shahsavar, 2012).

In this digital era, researchers have speculated that there may have been a relationship between the use of online learning and the development of critical thinking skills (MacKnight, 2000). A study by Conrad and Donaldson (2004) showed that activities which involve students' interaction and sharing idea in online learning environment (OLE) promote higher order thinking and deeper level of thought. A study by Shahsavar (2012) proved that online learning can be used as an effective strategy to teach critical thinking skills in improving students' argumentative writing. One potential strategy to encourage students' higher order thinking in OLE is the use of the structured format of online debating (William & Mostert, 2005). Online debate is a potentially useful pedagogical strategy to develop students' argumentation skills (Mont, 2014). The potential of online debate in educational field has been recognized as a useful strategy, particularly in supporting students' interaction and knowledge construction.

There is only limited number of studies examining the role of online debate in education. A study by William and Mostert (2005) describes that the formal structure of the face-to-face debate provides a clearly defined framework for discussion by assigning particular roles and procedures to be followed which gives students clear guideline of the instruction in online debate and help students develop their argumentation skills. It encourages students' participation to provide well-argued and reflective responses in online discussions. Also online debate provides students time to reflect more carefully on their responses. A study conducted by Khalsi (2013) describes online debate as an effective tool to foster knowledge building such as assigning roles or tasks to online debaters. She adds that the interaction in online debate also support collaborative learning which enhances critical thinking. In the study by Park, Kier and Jugdev (2011) investigating debate as a teaching strategy in online education, it was figured out that online debate allows students to be more engaged to the discussion, increases confidence levels and improves the ability to take a stand and formulate arguments, particularly when required to oppose their own previously held belief. In addition, online debate gives the students opportunity to consider more thoughtful, more logical evidence to support the arguments before making a response (Tu, 2004).

Online debate takes the advantages and of course, disadvantages of the nature of face-to-face debate in facilitating critical thinking. A study by Kennedy (2007) has proven that debate promotes active engagement and higher order thinking. It promotes students critical thinking skills by making students define the problem, assess the credibility of sources, identify and challenge the issue, recognize the inconsistencies, and prioritize the relevant argument. Another study by Scott (2008) showed that debate allows students to enhance critical thinking through investigating arguments, researching issues, engaging in research, gathering information, performing analysis, assessing arguments since they are formulating rebuttal to the opposition, questioning assumptions, and demonstrating interpersonal skills. In preparing for rebuttals, the students are required to gather relevant evidence of support while thinking critically to put forth a strong argument (Zare & Othman, 2015).

There are also several potential obstacles of online debate in facilitating students' higher order thinking. William and Mostert (2005) highlighted some obstacles which hindered the students from participating actively in the online debate. They revealed that the students found it difficult when they the goals of the debate is not clear, topic under discussion is ambiguous, and procedural clarity in the online debate such as where and how to send the argument is not clearly specified. This is in line with the result of the study conducted by Parkin and Henderson (2014) that revealed that in studying online, students tend to encounter confusion, apprehension or nervousness. The confusion might happen in OLE since text-only medium presents opportunities to misinterpret and to be misinterpreted (Murphy, 2004). Another obstacle of online discussion is the delayed response from the instructor which causes confusion (Song & Hill, 2007), and lack of convenient access and reliable link (William & Mostert, 2005).

Despite the obstacles of using online debate, we can see that online debate is a potential strategy to use in university level. Although many previous studies as mentioned above have investigated the students' critical thinking in writing or critical thinking in online debate, any research investigating students' critical thinking in students' argumentative writing through the use of online debate remains under-researched. In response to this gap, the current research aims to examine the potentials and challenges of using online debate in Argumentative Writing Course, especially in supporting Indonesian EFL students' critical thinking in argumentative writing. We used the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy to classify and analyze students' postings which reveal their cognitive process dimension from lower order thinking skill to higher order thinking skill. Based on the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy, the students' postings were classified into: (1) remembering (2) understanding (3) applying (4) Analyzing (5) Evaluating, and (6) Creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001: 67-68). See Figure 1 for the Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.
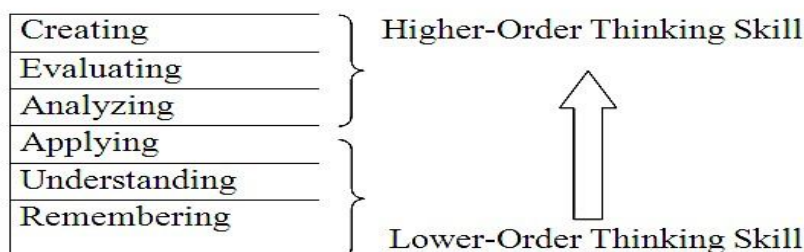
Figure 1: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

The present research is based on our investigation in using online debate in Argumentative Writing course supported by students' perception toward the use of online debate in Argumentative Writing course. The two research questions are proposed, namely:

1.   What are the potentials of online debate in Argumentative Writing course?
2.   What are the challenges in the application of online debate in Argumentative Writing Course?

Method

In this study, online debate was applied to students from two Argumentative Writing classes of undergraduate students of the English Department of State University of Malang, Indonesia. The total numbers of students from two classes were 48. Students from each class were divided into five groups and were paired to the other five groups from the other class. One class acted as the government side (class A) and the other one as the opposition side (Class B). We gave the topics and structured guideline (see Appendix 1) on how the online debate should run before the students started the debate. The online debate spanned for 2 weeks to give students sufficient time to make arguments and responses to the topics.

Edmodo, an internet application serving as online social media in educational setting is used as a secure environment for online learning. We used online debate in *Edmodo* as a part of blended course between two classes to improve their critical thinking skills as the final ability in the Argumentative Writing course. There were five pairs of group performing the debates with five different topics. The topics were: (1) Improving students' English proficiency by watching movies, (2) Game as a strategy to enhance students' English skill, (3) Game-based English learning, (4) Comprehending novel by watching the movie, (5) Concept mapping in the English writing class.

Along with the progress of online debate, only 30 students took part in the exchange of ideas for the assigned topics. Out of the 30 students, 10 students were selected purposively based on the frequency of the contribution of exchange (posting) in the debate. They were given the open-ended questionnaire regarding the potentials and challenge of online debate in Argumentative Writing course. They were taken from active and passive students from each debate to gain holistic description of the use of online debate considering the different atmosphere of debate might cause students to have different views. It was assumed that the active students can describe the potential use of online debate for their critical thinking in Argumentative Writing course and the challenge of using online debate can be obtained from the passive students.

Two methods have been applied for data collection: document analysis and open-ended questionnaire. In this study, document analysis was used as the main data source. In document analysis, we took a closer look to the postings and conversations on the online debate to then relate them to our experience. The open-ended questionnaires were sent via email and answered in a written form. We with the students interacted via email to ask deeper regarding the students' answers. The use of email did not influence the quality of answers since all students were always online. The questionnaire contains 11 questions regarding the potentials of online debate (items 1-7) and the difficulties the students encountered during the online debate (items 8-11) (see Appendix 2). Questions were modified on the basis of the literature reviews regarding the potentials (Khalsi, 2013; MacKnight, 2000; Park et al.,2011; Scot, 2008; William & Mostert, 2005) and challenges (Murphy, 2004; Parkin & Henderson,2014; Song & Hill, 2007; William & Mostert, 2005) of using online debate.

Findings

To answer the research questions, we describe the findings into two major themes: the potentials of online debate in Argumentative Writing course and the challenges in the application of online debate in Argumentative Writing course. Each of the questions was answered on the basis of our experience in using the online debate and students' opinion.

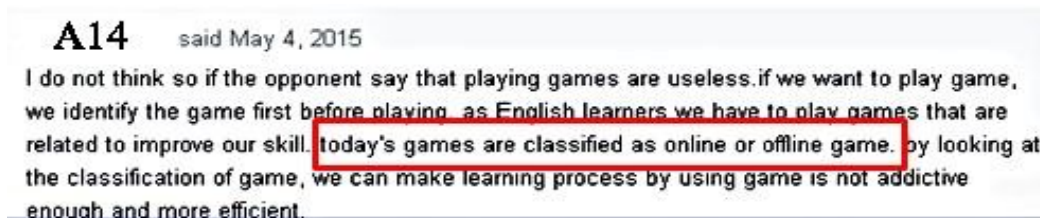## The Potentials of Online Debate in Argumentative Writing Course

On the basis of our investigation on the use of online debate in Argumentative Writing class, there are two major potentials of online debate: Flexibility, Learning Autonomy, and Critical Thinking. The most salient potential of online debate is in term of time flexibility. First, students and instructor do not need to meet face-to-face or online at the same time to have a discussion. The instructions can be sent to the group without physical presence. We realize that misunderstanding might occur in online activities. Therefore, before commencing the debate, we gave the students a guideline to follow. The guideline clearly explains the steps they need to do in using online debate:

(1) making an *Edmodo* account to join the group (2) finding their topics and their side (affirmative or negative) which has been written in the group (3) starting the debate from the topics given and (4) completing the debate within a set timeframe.

Using this guideline, we ensure that students understand what we want them to do in the debate. Giving instruction or assignment in online debate is as effective as classroom learning since the students can clarify their understanding towards the instruction/ assignment by sending a post to the group.
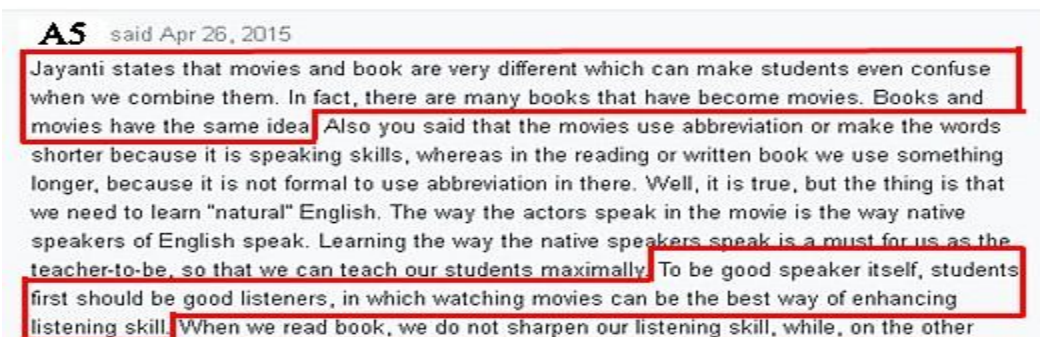
Second, the flexibility of time in online debate eased us to monitor students' discussion all the time. We acted as the facilitator rather than source of knowledge like in traditional classroom setting. We participated to clarify whenever the students found dead-end in their discussion. By using online debate we can pay attention to all postings and give appropriate feedbacks to all postings. In addition, the flexibility of the time enables the exploration of various sources to be presented as arguments in the debate. It seems impossible in classroom learning which has limited time. Therefore, online debate maximized the exploration of different sources to be discussed in the online debate. The students collect different sources to support their argument. We did not rely heavily on paper-based materials. We let the students find as many sources as possible to be presented in the debate from various sources such as book, articles in the internet, and online journals. And we can also access the source the students used in the online debate since the students should put a credit to every information they put in online debate.

The flexibility of online debate also promotes learning autonomy. Traditionally, the instructor is in charge of managing the whole class activity. Students as a passive learner do what are told by teacher, but in online debate, we gave the students autonomy of pacing their learning. We found out that the students were aware of their responsibility to be involved actively in the debate. The online debate maximized students' autonomy of pacing their learning. They managed their time to be able to replay and give addition to their friends' postings. They work collaboratively in which they supported the arguments of the members of their group or merely gave some additional facts regarding the issue. Using online debate as a part of blended learning in Argumentative Writing course, the students improved their critical thinking skills reflected in what they present on the debate. We found out that students exhibited higher order thinking during the online debate. The postings on the *Edmodo* group presented various orders of thinking skill exhibited by the students. The first thing we observed from students' postings was their ability to identify and retrieve information from other postings.

A14   said May 4, 2015

I do not think so if the opponent say that playing games are useless.if we want to play game, we identify the game first before playing. as English learners we have to play games that are related to improve our skill. today's games are classified as online or offline game. by looking at the classification of game, we can make learning process by using game is not addictive enough and more efficient.

Figure 2: Excerpts showing Remembering category

Figure 2 showed Student A14's response which reflects his ability to response others on the debate. It reflects his ability to retrieve his background knowledge. On this posting, he wrote the classification of online and offline games as the basis of his background knowledge/ memorization. In remembering category, the students exhibited the less complex thinking skill than the next higher thinking skill called understanding which can be seen in Figure 3.

A5   said Apr 26, 2015

Jayanti states that movies and book are very different which can make students even confuse when we combine them. In fact, there are many books that have become movies. Books and movies have the same idea. Also you said that the movies use abbreviation or make the words shorter because it is speaking skills, whereas in the reading or written book we use something longer, because it is not formal to use abbreviation in there. Well, it is true, but the thing is that we need to learn "natural" English. The way the actors speak in the movie is the way native speakers of English speak. Learning the way the native speakers speak is a must for us as the teacher-to-be, so that we can teach our students maximally. To be good speaker itself, students first should be good listeners, in which watching movies can be the best way of enhancing listening skill. When we read book, we do not sharpen our listening skill, while, on the other

Figure 3: Excerpts showing Understanding and Applying category.

In Figure 3, Student A5 summarized the previous posting to begin her argument. He started the response by refuting the arguments presented by the opposition. Then, he compared the contribution of books and movies to English learning as he wrote "Books and movies have the same idea". The ability to summarize, paraphrase, and comparing reflect the understanding category. In addition, he implemented his understanding into solution which reflects the higher order thinking skill renamed applying: "To be a good speaker, students first should be a good listener …" In applying category, students apply their experience to a familiar situation. Figure 4 shows Student B12 used her own experience to support her argument. In Figure 4, Student B12 applied information based on her experience in another familiar situation. She took her cousin experience that played n English for about nine year but ended up unable to use English.

B12 said May 5, 2015
Let me give you a real example.
My brother (my cousin), from junior high school he has been playing many games and it's been for 9 years He plays games that use English, but he cannot really use it in real life. Well, I mean he knows everything about gaming and also the language, but then when he goes back to the reality, he cannot apply what he has learnt in the game. Beside that, in early years of elementary school, he was very bad. He tried to imitate what he had saw in the game. He remembered the action not the language.

Figure 4: Excerpts showing Applying category

Figure 4 is categorized as applying since the student applied the concept of her experience to respond certain situation. There are also students who took the credible data or researches in analyzing the problem instead of using merely experience or background knowledge. Figure 5 below showed a student broke up the information into parts and determining how the parts are related to her arguments.

B15 said Apr 30, 2015
which are considered to be effective way in English learning process. I honestly disagree with the writer opinion here. It is because excessive playing of games actually just interferes with brain development because most interactive games use only parts of the brain associated with vision and movement, or other parts, especially the frontal lobe that are not stimulated. Across a research from Dr. Ryuta Kawashima at the University of Tokyo, he found that the greatest threat from computer games was not their tendency to arouse aggression, as previously thought, but the lack of mental stimulation they provided. So I think it is clear enough that games actually not really suitable for English learning process due to underdevelopment of the brain itself.

Figure 5: Excerpts showing Analyzing category

Figure 5 showed Student B15 took research as an evidence to support the argument. She exhibited her background knowledge related to the topic discussed and demonstrated her understanding by organizing the facts/ evidence to support her arguments. She did not just copy and paste the sources she got, but also analyzed the opposition's arguments to connect her arguments with other side's argument. In this posting, the student exhibited the higher order thinking skill named analyzing. The next order thinking we found from students' postings is evaluating category. Evaluating is defined as making judgments based on certain criteria.

B4 said May 2, 2015
Maria claims that the use of movies as media in ELT can decrease the effectiveness of learning itself since it replaces the use of textbooks and so on and so forth. However, she didn't explain what kind of effectiveness replaced by movies from textbooks clearly. Indeed, don't you think it's just too good that movies or other media non-textbooks can save the paper. This is just the first layer of my arguments since I wait you guys answer my rebuttals and questions. Maria also didn't explain how come learning from textbooks can be far more effective than learning from media non-textbooks.
How can you separate the feeling of enjoyment or fun and the moment of learning? To what extent is it not effective or wrong that you learn English by watching movies and you enjoy the movie itself at the same time? How will you measure that from the student? Hence, the opponent's arguments are based on not logical thought and careful examination of evidence; rather, it is merely assumptions and suppositions since they can't admit that watching movie is just too good and effective to help the students learn English. less...

Figure 6: Excerpts showing Evaluating category

In Figure 6, student B4 judged Maria's claim by stating that Maria's argument was not clear as he stated: "… she did not explain what kind of effectiveness replaced by movies from textbook". Students B4 believed that to prove that books are better media to learn, Maria should explain the potential of books which cannot be obtained if the media used is movie. Student B4 did not just evaluate his friend's argument, but also tested the arguments from previous postings by asking some questions: "To what extent is it no effective …? How will you measure …?" Those questions actually attempted to judge rather than to ask. It is shown from his judgment that the other opinions were based on illogical thought and merely an assumption. To confirm our analysis of the potentials of online debate, the results of the questionnaire also showed flexibility and critical thinking as the major potentials of online debate in Argumentative Writing course. Students think that it was easier to learn at their own time and pace; online learning does not bound to time and place. They also stated that by using online debate, they had an opportunity to gather and filter compatible yet trusted information. The flexibility on online learning gave them extra time to think of the arguments and select sources to strengthen them. It helped the students to prepare strong and organized responses to counter/ attack the other side's arguments. In online debate, the students found it more challenging in which they gathered, filtered, and expressed idea from what they read to find support of their argument. One of the participants, student A16 said that in online debate she should decide which relevant information to support her argument so it cannot be easily argued.

The theme that emerged from student responses also acknowledged the benefit of online debate in increasing their confidence. Student A8 mentioned that online debate also motivated her to participate since the more the opposite side argued the more she was eager to criticize them back. She did not hesitate to rebut her friends' argument since it was in the written form. As an introvert student, she prefers to have interaction in written form rather than in face-to-face interaction. Introvert students are likely to avoid speaking without preparation. Therefore, online debate really helped those introverts take an active part in the discussion without hesitation like they always do in face-to-face activity.

The Challenges in the Application of Online Debate in Argumentative Writing Course

We highlight the challenge of using online debate in Argumentative Writing course into two: fostering participation and creating actual critical thinking.

The online debate aimed to see students' critical thinking; therefore, there is no winner of the debate. However, as it was described before, from 48 students, only 30 were participating in the online debate. The number has shown the challenge we encountered in applying online debate. All students are internet literate; computer and internet become the students' daily use. However, some students did not join the *Edmodo group*. We regard this as a challenge since the key to make a good debate is active participation. There were only about one third students who joined the *Edmodo* group in the first week of the debate. They mostly joined in the week after since it was the deadline. Some students responded to their friends' arguments in the last three days before deadline. The students' who posted earlier seemed to lose their enthusiasm. The late response is presented in Figure 7.

A23 said Apr 30, 2015

I think we took it wrong. The essay believes that we shouldn't use concept map. And you should take the contra side which is you are agree that we use concept map. But I think it's okay to do debate.

B21 said May 3, 2015

I do agree with cintia, besides it is time-consuming students are often not familiar with concept mapping assessment and may find it intimidating.

Figure 7: Excerpts showing student's ignorance toward some postings.

In Figure7, student A23 only responded the previous argument without strengthen his argument with relevant data. On the other hand, student B21 ignored student A23's argument by skipping his post and responding to Cintia's post instead. We assume that the students lost their enthusiasm for other friends did not respond quickly. As we see in Figure 7, the response was sent three days after the previous posting. Another challenge is presented in Figure 8. We found some very short responses from the students. There were students who just replied "I have the same opinion with …" or "I agree with …"

B15   said May 4, 2015
I do agree with Gita!

B11   said May 5, 2015
I agree with nadia opinion, (y)

Figure 8: Excerpts showing students' very short responses.

Although Figure 8 reflects the process of thinking in which the students recognize others' argument, but it did not indicate students' effort to think critically. This implied that sense of responsibility becomes potential as well as challenge in implementing online debate. There were some students who thought that one posting from the member of the group was enough to represent the arguments of all members.

The second thing that we consider as the challenge in using online debate in Argumentative Writing course is how to stimulate the students to create the actual critical thinking. As it is described on the introduction, the highest order of thinking skill is creating category. Creating category involves having students to combine all elements (problem, hypotheses, solution) resulted from the online debate to produce a product such as writing. In creating category, the students will likely to identify the problem and try to generate the solutions based on the result of the debate. In this category, we expect the students to link and incorporate the outcome of the debate together in one product such as an essay. In online debate, the students mostly showed their critical thinking in form of questions and responses toward the topic. We do not think it is enough since there should be a way where the students can explore their arguments resulted from the online debate to then put them together to form a new pattern of writing. Therefore, there should be a way to make the students not only write the argumentative essay, but also explore what they got from the debate to form a solid arguments with relevant data.

The questionnaire results highlighted different problems encountered by the students. Students provided some insightful responses regarding the problem in online debate. The students' answer revealed some problems such as delayed response, confusion and technical problem in using online debate. The most crucial problem found from most participants is the delayed response from the other side of debate. Since this is debate, they could not go further without response from the other side. Student B17 was disappointed when students from the opposition side did not show up after she posted her arguments in the online debate. It influenced her enthusiasm on having debate. Student A8 added that she had to wait until the students from opposition side response which was tiring. She commented that "… it is good to set a certain time when the students from two class should open the *Edmodo* and do the online debate (together) rather than give us so much time (to have online debate)." This problem happened because some students believe that they think best in the last minutes.

Another problem which hindered some students from being active participant in online debate is the confusion. Although we already gave them guidelines which explained how to join the group, how to start the debate, and how to create good arguments, some students found it frustrating to participate on the online environment especially those who did not have any experience joining online forum. Student B9 was not sure how to post her refutation on the online debate. The confusion also happened because the students worked as a team but did not meet face-to-face. Normally, a team has a discussion before having debate. In online debate, the discussion seems unmanageable.

Another problem mentioned by the students was the technical problem of using *Edmodo* account. Two students who did not participate in the online debate mentioned that it was difficult to log in to *Edmodo.* The member of the *Edmodo* group should be accepted by the administrator of the group. They claimed that their requests to join the group did not appear on the instructor's notification which made us unable to add them to the group. They also thought that their voices were already represented by their team in the debate.

Apparently, both instructors and students encountered the same challenges in which we demand higher participation to create a conducive online learning environment. It is worth considering that the passive students did not intentionally miss the conversation on the debate. The confusion and technical problem in online debate hinder them from participating actively on the online debate.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings in term of the potentials and challenge of online debate in Argumentative Writing course.

The potentials of online debate in Argumentative Writing course can be listed in two big topics: flexibility and critical thinking. Flexibility of time and space are highlighted to be the major potentials for both instructor and students. With the flexibility of time, the instructors are benefited from online debate in monitoring the students' activity in the group. The flexible nature of online debate promotes leaning autonomy and opportunity for students in exploring various sources from both paper-based materials and electronic-resources. Thus, this finding indicates that online debate has relatively the equal potentials as other online forum as the previous studies reported that online learning environment offers flexibility of class participation time (Jeffrey, et al., 2014; Petrides, 2002; Yang, 2004) which enabled students and instructors to manage their own time doing the task without having face-to-face meeting and flexibility of self-paced study (Liang & Chen, 2012; Petrides, 2002) in which the students maximizes autonomous learning including the flexibility to explore more sources due to the extra time to process the materials before responding to other arguments. Nevertheless, the role of instructors is important in online learning since the lack of instructor presence in online discussion can cause anxiety for students especially for the discussion that revolve around problem solving (Arend, 2009) and make the students jump idea into solution without deep consideration (Garcia et, al, 2008).

This result intensifies the potential of online debate in students' critical thinking. The examination of students' postings indicates that the students occupied higher order thinking skills that reflected their critical thinking skills. It is in line with the findings of some researchers who studied critical thinking in online debate in supporting students in giving logical evidence to support the arguments (Tu, 2004), thinking more deeply in writing compared to giving verbal responses (Petrides, 2002), performing analysis in rebutting argument (Scott, 2008), and improving ability to take a stance on the debate (Khalsi, 2013; Park, Kier, & Jugdev, 2011). These studies indicate the potential role of online interaction and discussion in promoting students' critical thinking.

Our investigation of the students' postings in online debate found out that the students established some categories of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of higher order thinking. We acknowledged some categories in students' posting such as (1) remembering category in recognizing others' argument and recalling their memory towards the topics, (2) understanding category in paraphrasing, summarizing, and contrasting others' argument, (3) applying category in implementing certain procedure in a given situation, (4) analyzing category in selecting and deconstructing idea to form an argument, and (5) evaluating category in making judgments and searching for flaws and weaknesses towards others' arguments (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The category of understanding, analyzing, and evaluating are considered to be the most frequently used higher order thinking in online debate. This is due to the nature of debate which allows students to enhance critical thinking through investigating arguments, researching issues, analyzing information, and assessing arguments since they are formulating rebuttal to the opposition (Scott, 2008).

Online debate has shown its powerful contribution in promoting students' critical thinking in online environment compared to another activity in online environment such as online discussion. Online debate is different from most common online discussion forum which merely comparing and sharing information and does not foster critical thinking skill (Luca, 2000). The structured format of online debating assigns the students particular roles and procedures to ensure students' meaningful learning. Ill-considered, poorly articulated or hasty responses (William & Mostert, 2005) usually happen in online discussion since common online discussions are likely to be "the noisier, the better", but this is not the case of online debate. The assigning role and clear procedure directed the students to submit their best thinking and create thoughtful and considered responses to defend their beliefs.

Although the postings have shown students' higher order thinking from remembering category to evaluating category, yet the last highest order thinking - creating category – has not been accomplished. To create the actual critical thinking, the students should explore their ability in putting element together to form new pattern or structure (Krathwohl, 2002). Asking students to write an argumentative essay based on the result of the online debate is one of the ways to motivate the students to create their own writing product. Consequently, our challenge is in ensuring that the students are able to exploit their higher order thinking in writing the argumentative essay using the data obtained from the online debate, such as using the arguments of opposition team to make the refutations on the debate.

Other challenges in online debate were attributed to the synchronous nature of online environment. The nature of online debate where the students do not need to meet face to face turned out to be barriers for the students in arranging the time to do the online debate together. This is in contrast with the result of a study conducted by Petrides (2002) which reported that the students can work collaboratively in easier manner using online learning as they do not need to schedule the meeting. The delayed response also deals with the technical problem in using online debate and *Edmodo* account. This confirms a study by Yang (2004) that when the technical support from the instructor was not available, negative experiences will be brought up. Despite our expectation of online debate to be a means of establishing students' interaction, participating on the debate seems only obligation for some students. Some students assumed that their voice has been represented by their team. A study by Vonderwell (2005) reveals the same thing in which the students may not always feel obligated to respond to every message in an online environment. Thus, the findings indicate that the problems in online debate are common problem found in online learning environment.

Conclusion

This article has presented the result of investigation on online debate in Argumentative Writing course. It valued online debate for its potentials in providing flexibility of time and space, autonomous learning, and critical thinking. In addition, it describes the challenges in term of delayed response, confusion, and technical support from the instructor. The findings confirm some theories related to the potentials and challenge of online learning environment. To examine students' critical thinking, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy was used to identify students' category of thinking order. The students are proved to exhibit higher order of thinking reflected by the postings in online debate. Students' postings are included in some categories: remembering, understanding, applying, and evaluating. However, highest thinking order, creating category has not been researched in this research. Since the investigation toward students' critical thinking in online debate is under-researched, the finding of this study may contribute to fill the gaps of the body of knowledge. In this regard, we suggest instructors be available in facilitating students' discussion in online debate and assist them in time of confusion and technical problem. Area of future research may focus on (1) how online debate improve students' critical thinking in argumentative writing, (2) intensity of students' learning autonomy, and (3) investigation of conceptual model of higher order thinking in online debate context.

References

Anderson, L., W. & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy*. New York: Longman Publishing.

Arend, B. (2009). Encouraging critical thinking in online threaded discussions. *Journal of Educators Online,* 6(1), 1-23.

Conrad, R. M., & Donaldson, A. (2004). *Engaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction.* San Fansisco: Jossey-Bass.

Flores, R. D. (2006) Thinking skills reflected in the argumentative essays of freshman college students: A descriptive analysis. *The Asia Pacific-Education Researcher,* 16(1), 33-44.

García, B., Márquez, L., Bustos, A., Miranda, G. A., & Espíndola S. M. (2008). Analysis of patterns of interaction and knowledge construction in online learning environments: A methodological strategy. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa,* 10 (1), 1-18.

Golpour. F. (2014). Critical thinking and EFL learners' performance on different writing modes. *Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics,* 18(1), 103-119.

Hashemi M. R., Behrooznia, S., & Mahjoobi F. M. (2014). A critical look into Iranian EFL university students' critical thinking and argumentative writing. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)*, 17(1), 71-92.

Heer, R. (2009). *A model of learning objectives–based on a taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.* Retrieved September 27, 2015, from http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching-resources/effective-practice/revised-blooms-taxonomy.

Jeffrey, L. M., Milne, J., Suddaby. G., & Higgins, A. (2014). Blended learning: How teachers balance the blend of online and classroom components. *Journal of Information Technology Education Research*, 13, 121-140.

Khalsi, I. (2013). Knowledge construction and gender in online debates. *AWEJ,* 4(2), 310-326.

Kennedy, R. (2007). In-class debates: Fertile ground for active learning and the cultivation of critical thinking and oral communication skills. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education,* 19(2), 183-190.

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's taxonomy. *Theory into Practice,* 41(4), 212-218.

Liang, R., & Chen, D. V. (2012). Online learning: Trends, potential and challenges. *Scientific Research,* 3(8), 1332-1335.

MacKnight, C. (2000). Teaching critical thinking through online discussions. *Educause Quarterly*, 4, 38-41.

Mont, M. (2014). The use of debates in higher education classrooms. Proceedings for the 2014 Adult Education Research Conference. Retrieved May 15, 2015, from: http://www.adulterc.org/Proceedings/2014/roundtables/Mont.pdf.

Murphy, E. (2004). Graduate students' experiences of challenges in online asychronous discussion. *Canadian Journal of Learning and technology,* 30(2). Retrieved September 27, 2015, from www.cjlt.ca/content/vol30.2/cjlt30-2_art-2.html

Nikou, F. R., Bonyadi, A., & Amirikar, N. (2015). Investigating the relationship between critical thinking skills and the quality of Iranian intermediate TEFL students' writing. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(2), 57-64.

Park, C. Kier, C. & Jugdev, K. (2011). Debate as a teaching strategy in online education: A case study. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology,* 37(3), 1-17.

Parkin, L., & Henderson, M. (2014). Mid-semester student satisfaction feedback: reducing confusion and anxiety. In B. Hegarty, J. McDonald, & S.-K. Loke (Eds.), *Rhetoric and Reality: Critical perspectives on educational technology. Proceedings ascilite Dunedin* 2014 (pp. 456-460).

Petrides, L. A. (2002). Web-based technologies for distributed (or distance) learning: Creating learning-centered educational experiences in the higher education classroom. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 29(1), 69-77.

Samanhudi, U. (2011). *Researching students' critical thinking in argumentative writing: A case study in one state University in Serang, Banten (*Unpublished Thesis). Indonesia University of Education, Bandung, Indonesia.

Shahsavar, Z. (2012). *Developing critical thinking skills in the argumentative writing of tertiary level students in a blended learning environment* (Unpublished PhD Thesis). Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia.

Scott, S. (2008). Perception of students' learning critical thinking through debate in technology classroom: A case study. *The Journal of Technology Studies,* 34(1), 39-44.

Song, L., Singleton, E. S., Hill, J. R., & Koh, M. (2004). Improving online learning: Student perceptions of usefuland challenging characteristics. *Internet and Higher Education*, 7, 59-70.

Song, L., & Hill, J. R. (2007). A conceptual model for understanding self-directed learning in online environments. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning,* 6(1), 1541-4914.

Tu, C-H. (2004). *Online collaborative learning communities: twenty-one designs to building an online collaborative learning community*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, Greenwood Publishing Group.

Vonderwell, S., & Turner, S. (2005). Active learning and preservice teachers' experience in an online course: A case study. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(1), 65-84.

Williams, C. H. & Mostert, M. (2005). Online debating to encourage student participation in online learning environments: A qualitative case study at a South African university. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT),* 1(2), 94-104.

Yang, Y., & Cornelius, L. F. (2004). Students' perception towards the quality of online education: A qualitative approach. *Association for Educational Communication and technology,* 27, 861-877.

Zare P.. & Othman M. (2015). Students' perceptions toward using classroom debate to develop critical thinking and oral communication ability. *Asian Social Science,* 11(9), 1911-2025.

Appendix 1: Students' guide in using online debate

Guide to the Online Debate

Based on the Objective of the Argumentative Writing (IGB613) course:
The course is designed to develop the students' ability to present **logical reasoning, strong, convincing argument**, as well as **critical analysis** and **judgment** in the form of an argumentative essay.

Your Last final project for this course is showing your critical thinking in the form of online Debate.

1. Go to Edmodo.com, then choose log in as student, and insert the code **7xrbpm**. You will automatically join the argumentative essay group. (You should use your real complete name to ease me record your score)
2. There are two classes that join this group: Class A and Class B. Class A in on the Government side (positive side) and Class B and as the Opposition (Negative Side)
3. You will debate the essay made by the Government side. There are **four** Essays in the Edmodo. Each essays should be debated by both parties.
4. Since you (Class A) are the government side, what you should do is waiting for the opposition side comment on your essay and you should show your critical thinking and counter their argument. You can counter argument, add your friends' opinion, serve more fact, give more resource from the Internet.
5. The lecturers will act observers in case you need assistant.

Please see the essay in the Edmodo group. Every essay has your name, so you need to check it:

Online debate 1: Improving Students' English Proficiency by Watching Movies

Government (From Class A)	Opposition (From Class B)
Student A1	Student B1
Student A2	Student B2
Student A3	Student B3
Student A4	Student B4
Student A5	Student B5

Online debate 2: Game as a strategy to enhance students' English skill

Government (From Class A)	Opposition (From Class B)
Student A6	Student B6
Student A7	Student B7
Student A8	Student B8
Student A9	Student B9
Student A10	Student B10

Online debate 3: Game-based English learning

Government (From Class A)	Opposition (From Class B)
Student A11	Student B11
Student A12	Student B12
Student A13	Student B13
Student A14	Student B14
	Student B15

Online debate 4: Comprehending novel by watching the movie

Government (From Class A)	Opposition (From Class B)
Student A15	Student B16
Student A16	Student B17
Student A17	Student B18
Student A18	Student B19
	Student B20

Online debate 5: Concept mapping in the English writing class

Government (From Class A)	Opposition (From Class B)
Student A19	Student B21
Student A20	Student B22
Student A21	Student B23
Student A22	Student B24
Student A23	Student B25

If you still have things to ask, just post it to Edmodo. Good luck and show that you are truly a critical generation.

Appendix 2: Students Questionnaire (Sent by E-mail)

This questionnaire is administered to see your perspectives regarding the potentials and challenge of online debate in Argumentative Writing course. Please try to answer each question. Answer exactly as you think and feel. Your thoughtful and complete responses will be most appreciated. Responses that include specific examples and illustrations will provide the most useful data.

Questionnaire

1. What do you think about the use of online debate in Argumentative Writing course? How does your experience of online debate compared with traditional in-class instruction?
2. What do you think the contribution of online debate to your argumentative skill (you can tell your experience in making and refuting arguments in online debate)?
3. Online debate enabled you to have interaction in different time and different place, what do you think about this?
4. Did you prepare some arguments or data from other sources or just straightforward answers without putting in much thought in online debate? Please Elaborate.
5. Do you think online debate gives you time to think more and express ideas better? Can you give the example? Please elaborate.
6. What do you think about your independent learning strategy after using online debate?
7. Are you an introvert or extrovert person? How do you think online debate help you to cover your shyness?
8. Did you feel any confusion in using online debate? Could you give an example?
9. Did you reply your friends' postings as soon as they posted it to the online debate? Please elaborate.
10. Do you think you need the presence of your lecturer in the online debate? Why?
11. Is there any more problem in using online debate? Please elaborate.