Recreating Discourse Community for Appropriating HOCs in Law Undergraduates' Academic Writing

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Abstract

Like any other discipline, academic writing is equally crucial for law undergraduates to master. Project reports, argumentative essay writing on current socio-legal affairs and research paper writing comprise requisites in academia for law learners. Students' appropriation of higher order concerns in academic writing is a major challenge for teachers, as the physical classroom discourse community is typically passive and does not give enough opportunities to students to think critically about their writing processes. The teacher is expected to provide feedback to students on their writing, which often leads to the creation of only one feedback centre, restriction of the scope for varied perceptions and formation of multiple small discourses where the teacher is the central point of reference in every discourse. Consequentially, students can fail to develop self/peer-critiques in the ongoing discourse. The present paper has its focus on the recreation of discourse communities using a learning management system at the Law School, Bennett University, India, to promote peer-to-peer learning for honing higher order concerns in academic writing. The paper investigates how law students behave whilst interacting in a recreated online discourse community, benefit through peer feedback, and enhance their knowledge of the academic writing genre of argumentative essays, its subject matter and rhetoric involved. The methodological triangulation of pre-test/post-test analysis, student survey and conceptual content analysis of students' interaction transcripts support recreation of online discourse communities in academic writing instruction.

Keywords: academic writing, argumentative essay writing, discourse community, higher order concerns, law undergraduates

Law undergraduates, like students of any other discipline, are expected to have already acquired certain basic proficiency in writing in terms of expression and lower order concerns (LOCs) when they commence university education so that they can have a smooth transition into the world of academic writing – argumentative essays, project reports, and research papers among other forms of writing – across disciplines and contexts (Cumming, 1989; Griggs, 1996; Knight et al., 2018; Paltridge, 2018; Wingate et al., 2011). Writing instructors at law school expect students to understand what "specificity", "precision" and "concision" in academic writing are and also to understand the distinction between relevant and irrelevant knowledge in a context and to supply discretionary information in an academic writing context (Bacha & Bahous 2008; Horowitz 1986; Street, 2004; Wilkes et al., 2015). Academic writing involves recursive processes, comprising modifications and refinements at every stage of the writing process, with a major focus on higher order concerns (HOCs) in writing. These modifications are a result of continuous change in thought processes complying with feedback and self-analysis. A peer and self-feedback mechanism is thus integral to academic writing (DeJarnatt, 2001; Guasch et al., 2013; Huisman et al., 2018; Hyland, 2013; Magno & Amarles, 2011; Topping et al., 2000), and students usually participate in this through various interactions happening within what is referred to as the discourse community (DC) they are part of. Sometimes, however, either due to curricular constraints or being too teacher-centric, the mechanism of interaction in a classroom DC can become hindered. When this happens, students do not get opportunities to get involved in critical thinking concerning their writing processes and thus fail to refine the HOCs involved in their writing. These difficulties necessitate recreation of a classroom DC to incorporate new mechanisms of feedback and to fulfil the requirements of an academic writing course in terms of making students active contributors to the writing processes of not only their own, but also of their peers', writing. This also underpins a fundamental aim of higher education, to inculcate critical thinking habits amongst college students (Andrews, 2015; Bezanilla et al, 2019; Ghanizadeh, 2017; Liu et al., 2016) – acknowledging what others think, looking beyond and understanding how to internalise and refine thoughts, expression and writing.

It is also important to note that creation, recreation, and maintenance of DCs in academic writing classrooms require proper considerations by the instructor. DeJarnatt (2001) suggests integration of speech and writing for law undergraduates and advocates creation of a new DC where "they can talk to each other about their writing" (p. 489). To ensure that the writing process is meaningfully active within a DC, the instructor needs to understand key features of a DC. For the current study, the researcher aimed to recreate an active DC where students can work collaboratively for appropriation of their academic writing within the course of English II for law undergraduates. The academic writing in law as a discipline involves specific registers, writing process, formats, and contexts. These specific requirements of the discipline also demand a recreated DC where there could be special attention on specific goals, genres, writing conventions, formats, and writing style (Melzer, 2020). The current researcher selected the genre of argumentative essay writing, as the transferability and relevance of this genre to both law undergraduates and lawyers in their career is high. Moreover, this genre works on HOCs: a clear thesis with strong claims and supports in the form of reasoning and evidences which are also central to other specified legal writing genres such as case comments or memos (Cragg,1988).

The recreation of a DC in the present study also underlies the evolving nature of academia and pedagogy with technological advancements and needs (Swales, 2016). Physical classrooms can be easily supplemented and enriched with empowered online DCs on learning management systems (LMSs) or other free online platforms.

Literature Review

Discourse Community

Swales (1990) gives six features of a DC: a common public goal; a mechanism of intercommunication; use of its mechanisms primarily to provide feedback and information; use of any genre/s for continuation of the communication; use of a lexis pertaining to a particular discipline; and a minimum number of members, with some required level knowledge pertaining to the area of that DC. Subsequent research by Swales (2016) emphasised re-imagining the concept of a DC. With the evolving nature of academia and pedagogy, he added two more features to a DC: a DC develops shared understanding, which Swales (2016) quotes as "silential relations" (p. 16), and a DC also develops a close rapport among its members, which Swales (2016) refers to as "horizons of expectation" (p.16). These features align the components of traditional unities – writer, audience, and text – and Swales (2016) further explains that this addition makes it workable for all the three types (local, focal and folocal) of DCs. According to Swales (2016), the concept of a DC is useful in language classrooms with both academic and specific purposes. In addition, it also helps the educationists to impart oracy and literacy skills among students, which subsequently makes them capable of accomplishing many interdisciplinary academic tasks.

Research into DCs has shown it can also have further applications. For example, Martín (2003) cites the educational benefits of a DC as given by Swales, but adds that a DC may possess considerable distance among its members and the distance could be in terms of their background as well as place. Despite this, a DC can work on maintaining and extending knowledge collaboratively, as acknowledged by Duszak (1997), who stresses the socio-rhetorical aspect of DCs, and emphasises that a DC having its focus on verbal skills helps in co-creation of knowledge to a great extent, with additional benefits being freedom of time and space. Edens and Gallini (2000) experimented creating a DC in a technology-mediated environment, comprised of in-service and beginning preservice teachers of educational psychology, for constructive discussion and meaning-making that is not limited by space and time. Benz (1996) relied on creating a DC for eleven non-English speaking college students who were required to establish effective relationships with their teachers and their peers, to help manage their performances in content courses. Benz's study also utilised a DC as a pedagogical tool for honing college level English as a second language. Similarly, Abdi et al. (2010) worked on creating an academic DC discourse community to benefit the multilingual members in the use of metadiscourse markers.

A Discourse Community in Composition Classrooms

Beaufort (2008) gave a succinct definition of a DC while emphasising its importance in written communication, "a social group that communicates at least in part via written texts and shares common goals, values, and writing standards, a specialised vocabulary and specialised genres" (p.179). Borg (2003), while discussing the nuances of a DC, specifically conveys that DCs have significant pedagogical implications in teaching of writing and more importantly in writing genres of English for specific purposes. According to Pogner (2005), a DC that has developed from an interpretation community became popular in writing research mainly in technical writing among engineering academic and non-academic context. The involvement of individuals in the community is established by the individuals using text. This amounts to collaborative explanation of the issue/question/topic in hand and production of text around it. The medium of discourse for such written texts has been various online platforms. Martín (2003) also elaborates that a DC extends a group's knowledge and writing of a text. The collaborative review of linguistic and textual features helps the group members to understand and imbibe how, as writers, they need to understand the importance of audience analysis.

Basturkmen and Bitchener (2014) examined the bearing of an academic discourse community on supervisors' feedback on draft dissertations and analysed their feedback comments on various aspects of writing. Duff (2010) talks of academic discourse communities helpful in language socialisation in classrooms and tells that DCs are "highly intertextual", "multimodal" and "multilingual" in contemporary contexts (p.169). He adds that language socialisation happening in a DC could be very transformative for a few individuals. Pogner (2003) tested a DC for writing tasks with Danish consulting engineers, with findings that suggest writing as a social action happens through feedback and revisions in a DC, as constructed by the collaborative work of its members. Li (2006) highlights the importance of a DC into the EAP classroom, where students enhance their awareness of epistemological features of disciplines and higher order thinking skills. Parkyn (1999) emphasised the importance of students learning from each other and that this learning could be done by creating discourse communities for facilitating collaborative engagement. Parkyn also suggests that teachers and students may make use of technology for computer-based assignments, as done in their study of writing for an electronic journal.

As teachers of academic writing at undergraduate level, teachers seek to shift the focus of their teaching from accuracy and expression (LOCs in writing) to rhetorical functions and to larger societal discourses (HOCs in writing). So, while addressing the concerns related to genre approach or process approach of writing, it is important that DCs are recreated to support such instructional shifts. University composition classes also need to focus on micro-genres such as framing an argument. If such DCs start focusing on writing genres, and specifically micro genres (Watanabe, 2016), they will gradually appropriate the macro-genres and the registers of the discipline. The teachers, thus, would be able to provide scaffolds to the students in the form of a DC that can be used to signal a focus on written texts, and where students can work toward appropriating texts.

Higher Order Concerns in Academic Writing

In this respect a piece of academic writing is judged at two levels: higher order concerns (HOCs) and lower order concerns (LOCs) in writing. It is essential to differentiate between meaningful writing and accurate writing (Jacobs & Karliner, 1977). Introduction of academic writing to college undergraduates is done to engage them in critical thinking and make them work on their HOCs in writing (Ali, 2016; Min, 2016; Van den Bos & Tan, 2019; Winder et al., 2016). The recreated DC in the present study will allow students to contemplate and interact on specific aspects of HOCs: focus/thesis/purpose, audience, organisation, and content development; and of LOCs: grammar (sentence structure, punctuation, prepositions, articles, verb tense), word choice and spellings (cf. Purdue OWL, 2020).

Recreation of a Discourse Community

English II offered at Bennett Law School focuses on academic writing skills of year-I law undergraduates. The present research has its basis in two difficulties that the instructor faced while delivering the course. Firstly, the removal of tutorial sessions from the course plan due to some curricular changes which resulted in negligible individualised attention and feedback on students' writing. Secondly, the habit of students to rely on the teacher as a panacea for their writing issues. These difficulties led the instructor to seek pedagogical changes aimed at addressing the difficulties and assisting students to increase their writing abilities. These changes also underpin the aim of higher education, which is to inculcate critical thinking habits among students: moving ahead and looking beyond, understanding more, and internalising and refining thinking process as an academic writer. Keeping this in mind, recreation of an online DC was done as a supplementary to the existing classroom DC.

The notion of recreation of discourse community is directly related to the basic features of a DC proposed by Swales (2016). The mechanism of intercommunication in a classroom DC found space on forums on "i-learn" LMS (based on Moodle). Students generated content/ information by posting on the given topics and by giving feedback to each other. This recreation is not only just associated with changes in the components of basic features that constitute a DC but is also embedded in enhancing its dynamism and visibility.

The visibility of DCs could be even more obvious in a digital world. The integration of technology is common practice these days and is done to enhance the teaching and learning experience in the traditional regular education as well as distance education. Teaching writing skills at college needs a shift from "leading-children" to "leading-adults" in web-supported environments and peer-to-peer learning that is better known by the term "paragogy" (Bassendowski, 2016 Mulholland, 2019). Paragogy has the underlying principle of self-directed and anti-didactic learning process with ubiquitous web 2.0 (Alfuqaha, 2013; Corneli & Danoff, 2011). Recreation of a DC emphasises devising such new teaching methodologies for the introduction of self-directed and peer-to-peer learning, and for the integration of technology for increased collaboration that works on merging traditional skills and knowledge with digital working practices and can help building new recreated classroom DCs with enhanced dynamism and visibility. Swales (2016) also suggests that with the advancement in computers and computer-based communication, there is a need to rethink and revisit the features of a DC that he gave in 1990. He also mentions that there were some inherent flaws in those features like it was overly static and did not give much information about how members of the DC enter or leave a DC. Incorporating these ideas from Swales and others, the following features are discussed in relation to the recreated DC as used in the present study:

Common goal. The recreated DC in the present research involves the set of students who are collaborative learners on an online platform of "i-learn" LMS trying to appropriate the skill of argumentative essay writing.

Intercommunication mechanism. Swales (2016) emphasises the need to recognise new online modes of communication like blogs and emails and many others which can be helpful in creating a real dynamic community. The mechanism of intercommunication in the study is recreated online DC where written interaction happens.

Participatory mechanisms. A DC uses its mechanisms primarily to provide feedback and information. Students in a recreated DC generate content on the given argumentative topics and give feedback to each other. To manage the proper functioning of the DC, the course instructor works as a moderator who initiates the activity of written interaction by providing topics and guidelines.

Genre. The genre in the present research is argumentative writing on some relevant socio-legal issues. As Swales (2016) suggests, the genre in a DC is "performed, re-performed and refined" (p.15), students in the recreated DC also work towards appropriation of argumentative writing.

Lexis. For generating content on argumentative topics of socio-legal issues the registers are mostly sui generis which differ with different types of claims – fact, policy, cause and effect, and with different types of evidences – testimonial, physical, and anecdotal among others.

Members and expertise. In a DC, members often come as novices and they change, evolve, and attain appropriation. It is also true that there must be a ratio of beginners to experts for the community to exist, continue, and appropriate knowledge. In the present study, the instructor moderates the process of entry and progression in the online DC by creating access and moderating the interaction.

Rapport and rhythm. Once the instructor briefed students on their roles in a DC, the students were not reminded of the task of developing arguments with proper claims, reasons, and evidences, counterclaims, and rebuttal.

Shared understanding. After being briefed on the activity by the teacher, students moved into the flow and rhythm of the task and kept posting their content and feedback from time to time.

The recreation of an online DC as a supplement to classroom teaching is done to allow students to get engaged in critical thinking and get attentive to HOCs in writing. It is an attempt to recreate a dynamic DC and give indications on how an instructor can decide entry and exit form a DC meant for appropriation of any specific academic writing genre.

Methodology

The research design for the present study is a quasi-experimental design - non-equivalent Control group design (NECG) with pre-test and post-test – and the sampling technique is consecutive sampling as in educational settings, as it is mostly impracticable to randomly allocate the participants (Fife-Schaw, 2006; Park & Han, 2018). A total of 80 active students participated in the study. These students were enrolled in English II course offered to first year undergraduates in the School of Law, Bennett University, India during even Semester 2019-20. The present research employs methodological triangulation – pre-test/post-test, content analysis and student survey – as multiple qualitative and quantitative methods (Ghahari & Farokhnia 2017). The study focuses on recreating a DC on the university LMS "i-learn" and analysing the impact of this pedagogical change from various standpoints.

Research questions

The present study attempts to recreate an online DC as a supplementary to the physical classroom so that students can get involved in critical thinking process for appropriating argumentative essay writing. The study was designed to address three research questions:

RQ1. Does the recreated online DC help students enhance their proficiency in HOCs of argumentative essay writing?
RQ2. What is the nature of written interaction in the recreated online DC?
RQ3. What are the students' perceptions of the recreated online DC?

Data Collection and Analysis

Pre-test/post-test. A total of five groups of 8 students each (total 40) were made parts of an online DC for the experimental group and 40 students of the control group continued with a physical classroom DC. Students in both the control and experimental groups were given topics to write argumentative essays individually, as pre-test and post-test components. The pre-test was conducted after teaching argumentative essay writing to both groups in the classroom. The post-test for the experimental group was conducted after they did written interaction in their online DC, while the control group's post-test was conducted without any recreated DC treatment (figure 1).
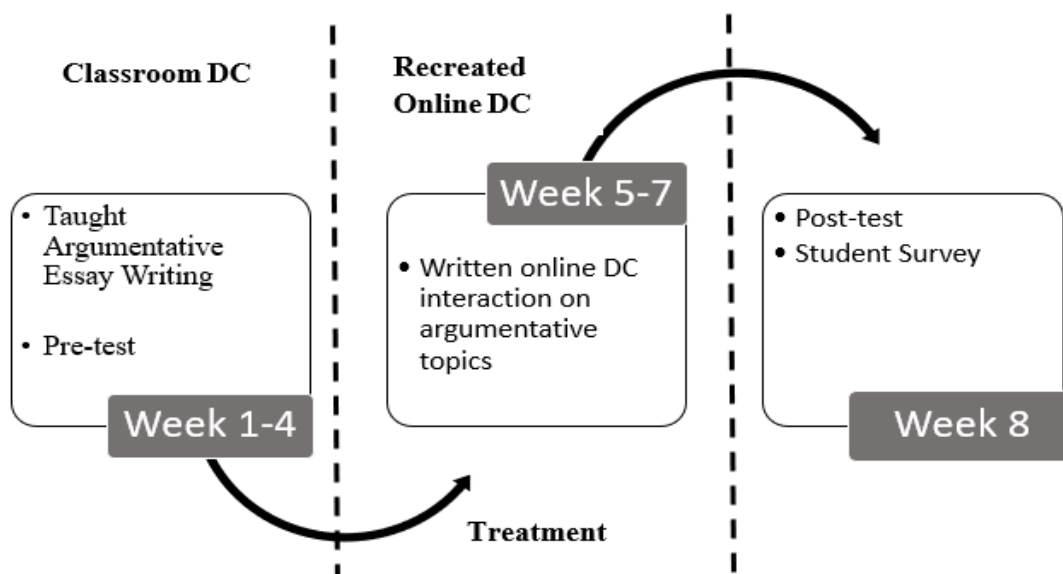
Figure 1. DC Recreation Timeline

An analytical rubric was designed to test the pre-test and post-test scores on 6 parameters of HOCs in argumentative writing (table 1). The rubric defined a range of levels from 0 to 3, with 0 (unacceptable), 1 (developing), 2 (accomplished) and 3 (exemplary) - for befitting completion of each component of an argumentative essay. The total number of items in the rubric is six, which sets the highest score for the marking rubric at 18. Three academic writing experts were used to check the validity and reliability of the rubric. These experts agreed on 78.33 % level of ratings. Cohen's Kappa Coefficient of reliability was .69 (p <.0.001), which is a good level of inter-rater reliability.

Table 1: HOCs evaluation parameters for argumentative essays

S.no.	HOCs	Evaluation parameter for HOCs in an argumentative essay
1.	Analysing Audience	Attention getter/ rhetorical elements
2.	Thesis	Thesis/purpose statement
3.	Organisation and coherence	Use of cohesive devices
4.		Arrangement of paragraphs in the format of introduction, main body, and conclusion
5.		logical order of claims/counterclaims, reasons, and evidences
6.	Content development	Quality and quantity of Claims/counterclaims, reasons, evidences

Variables for the pre-test and post-test analysis were:

- The independent variable (IV): Discourse community (Classroom DC for the control group and Online DC for the experimental group)
- The dependent variable (DV): Argumentative essay writing achievement levels

Online transcripts of DCs and content analysis. Online transcripts of the written interaction of online DCs provided the data to analyse the nature of interaction process through conceptual content analysis: identifying and defining a concept and tallying its presence (Busch et al., n.d.). The students were given separate argumentative topics on contemporary socio-legal issues, with starting instructions regarding the content of their posts: focus on thesis statement, each thesis having at least three claims, and each claim further being supported by at least one evidence and reason each (figure 2). These are further enriched by counterclaims and rebuttals further supported by appropriate reasoning and evidence (figure 2). The given content guideline also served as the basis for coding the posts.
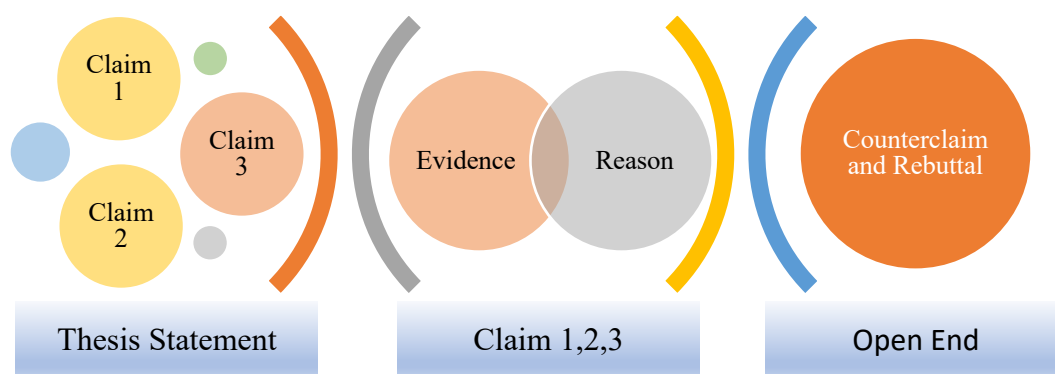

Figure 2: Content division and coding criteria for recreated online DC

The raters were asked to code the online DC transcripts such that:

- Each post is considered a unit
- Each post is identified on a single or multiple parameter: thesis, claims, evidences, reasoning, counterclaim, and rebuttal.

The kappa statistic for inter-rater reliability was 0.708 (p< 0.001), which is a good level of inter-rater reliability. The transcripts of online DCs were coded following the content coding scheme (figure 2). If any content did not fit into any of the given coding criteria it was considered irrelevant.

Student Survey. For analysing students' experience of their participation in an online DC, a student survey was also conducted. The participation in the survey was voluntary and involved informed consent of the students ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Approval for the study and its publication was granted by the Dean, School of Law, Bennett University, and the Vice Chancellor. As the survey only focused on analysing the efficacy of an online recreated DC for better educational practice in the future, it did not cause any kind of physical, informational, or psychological harm to the students. The responses of the students were anonymised and numbered, thus, diminishing the possibility of leaking any personal information about them.

This survey included eleven closed-ended and four open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were framed to find if the online DC interaction helped the students to enhance HOCs in writing. All closed-ended questions were framed on five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree. The open-ended section in the survey contained questions on beneficial factors, problems faced, improvement and other aspects the students wanted to share. The Chronbach's alpha reliability score for the survey was .89, which is considered good.

Results and Discussion

Pre-Test and Post-Test
Pre-test and post-test scores were analysed by performing descriptive and inferential statistics. The mean scores of the pre-test and post-test of experimental and control groups were analysed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the argumentative essay writing performance of the students before and after the recreation of online DC. The descriptive statistics analysed the tests on the mean, standard deviation and percentages and finds out students' frequency shift for each of the six components of HOCs of argumentative essay. The inferential statistics analysed the difference in the mean gain scores of HOCs of argumentative essay writing of the students in the post-tests of experimental and control group.

Descriptive statistics for HOCs. The results show that on average students in the experimental group performed better in the post-test than pre-test for the composite scores of HOCs. In the composite scores of pre-test and post-test of the experimental group (table 2), the mean score for pre-test was 10.075 and 12.85 for the post-test. The percentage increase in the mean score for the experimental group is 27.54%. For the control group, the mean score of HOCs in pre-test was 9.975 and 10.45 for the post-test. The percentage change in the HOCs mean score was 4.75% which is much less than the percentage change of 27.54% for the experimental group.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for experimental and control group on HOCS

		Mean	Std. Deviation	% change
Experimental Group	Pre-test	10.075	2.795	27.54% increase in post-test score
	Post-test	12.85	3.453	
Control Group	Pre-test	9.975	2.645	4.75 % increase in post-test score
	Post-test	10.45	2.308	

Component wise frequency change analysis (table 3) shows that frequency shift of students' performance sets a trend from unacceptable (0) and initial level (1) to intermediate (2) and advanced level (3) in the experimental group. The '-' sign indicates a reduction in the number of students at the corresponding level of proficiency in HOCs; the '+' sign indicates that the number of students falling under that level of proficiency has increased and 'N' indicates no change.

Table 3: Component wise frequency shift of students in HOCs

HOCs	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Attention Grabber	-	+	-	+	N	-	+	N
Thesis Statement	-	-	+	+	N	+	-	N
Organisation and coherence	N	-	+	+	N	-	+	N
Content Development	-	-	+	+	N	N	N	N

Frequency shifts are very less and more stagnant in the control group's performance, suggesting that this group did not experience the dynamism experienced by the experimental, online DC group. The online DC thus resulted in improvement and a positive shift in the experimental group students' proficiency in HOCs of argumentative essay writing. Frequency shift for the control group's students to advanced level (table 3) is "no change" for all components of HOCs whereas, for the experimental group there is increase in students' proficiency for all components of HOCs.

Inferential statistics for HOCs. The research hypothesis for analysing pre-test and post-test results is:

H_1: $\mu_{experimental}$ > $\mu_{control}$

The average score of HOCs for students who received the recreated online DC treatment is greater than the average score of students who did not receive the treatment.

The results from an independent samples t-test indicate that students who received the recreated online DC treatment (table 4) (M = 12.85, SD= 3.453, N =40) show that this group scored higher than students who did not receive the treatment (M = 10.45, SD = 2.308, N =40). Cohen's effect size value (d = 0.817) suggested a "large" effect size and high practical significance.

Table 4: Group statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Cohen's d
Test score	experimental group	40	12.85	3.453	.546	0.817
	control group	40	10.45	2.308	.365	

The Levene's test for equal variances yielded a p-value of .265. This means that the difference between the variances is statistically insignificant. Thus, the independent samples t-test (table 5), which showed that the difference in performance of students on HOCs of argumentative essay writing of experimental and control group, was statistically significant, t(78)= 3.654, p = .0005, 95% CI (1.092, 3.707).

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test HOCs

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
HOC	Equal variances assumed	1.257	.265	3.654	78	.0005	2.400	.657	1.092	3.707
	Equal variances not assumed			3.654	68	.0005	2.400	.657	1.089	3.710

Inferential statistics shows that the magnitude of treatment is large for the components of HOCs in argumentative writing. It also implies that students who are engaged in a recreated online DC may improve significantly by shifting towards intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency in academic writing.

Student Survey Results

The recreated online DC was well-received by students, and they agreed that it helped them to focus on HOCs in argumentative writing by being reflective, interactive, and explorative. They posted their claims, reasons, and evidences with more care. The online DC appeared to better support their higher order thinking skills, which got reflected in their arguments. Students agreed that incorporation of online DCs with other academic writing components would allow them to practice writing outside classroom boundaries. Descriptive statistics results (table 6) show mean values ranging from 1 - 2.5, which supports the positive perception of the students. Responses from students to open ended questions of the survey also support the results obtained on closed ended questions:

> *"It made me focus on my points and frame them more appropriately".*
> *"Peer feedback has influenced my arguments as their points didn't necessarily match my points and I had arguments to prove them wrong or correct them whenever I feel that they are wrong".*
> *"I got to know their stand which was an advantage while forming my arguments".*
> *"Yes, by their feedback I was able to think in a different perspective which made my argument even stronger".*
> *"It made me understand that the reasoning and evidences should not deviate from the claim".*
> *"By contradiction and rebuttals, I could refine my thinking ability".*
> *"It has helped me in learning how to frame an answer and present it so that it remains relevant and adds on to the discussion".*

Students also acknowledged the advantage of getting enough time to think, research and draft their arguments logically. They found peer feedback (Huisman et al., 2018; Guasch et al., 2013) to be highly beneficial. Through peer feedback they realised that the reasons and evidences should never deviate from their claims and that helped them to formulate stronger arguments.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for questions based on HOCs

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Recreated Online DC provided favourable environment for practising writing	40	1.97	.897
It led to increase in the genre and content knowledge	40	1.97	.695
It aided reflection in collaboration with readers	40	2.09	.856
It helped in recognising issues and asserting position	40	1.69	.535
It promoted dynamism in interaction and writing	40	2.09	.734
It worked on independent thinking with interdependence	40	1.81	.693
It facilitated adequate time to organise thoughts in a logical order	40	1.75	.762
It helped in evaluating and constructing strong arguments	40	2.03	.782
Peer feedback aided in self-reflection in argumentative writing	40	2.31	1.091
It helped in learning how to organise content coherently	40	2.09	.777
It helped in drafting well-organised argumentative essay	40	2.41	.979
Valid N (listwise)	40		

Students enjoyed the dynamism of online DCs and experienced a sense of achievement and fulfilment. Some students felt more comfortable as it was easier for them to write their views than to speak up in the class. Some students while acknowledging the usefulness of the online DC, gave suggestions to make online DC interaction more structured in the way that it clearly describes and restricts the format in which arguments had to be posted by each student along with maximum post criteria to ensure fair chance of participation by every member.

Conceptual Content Analysis

Conceptual content analysis was conducted for the online DC transcripts by tallying the presence of the identified codes. It was observed that almost 75-85 percent of the interaction on argumentative topics was centred on content development in the form of reasons, evidences, and rebuttals (figure 3 and table 7) for all the four groups on the recreated online DC. Out of these three, formulation of reasons to support the proposed claims contributed to the maximum in majority of the groups. After reasoning, rebuttals were also abundantly posted, even in response to lower numbers of counterclaims.

Conceptual Content Analysis

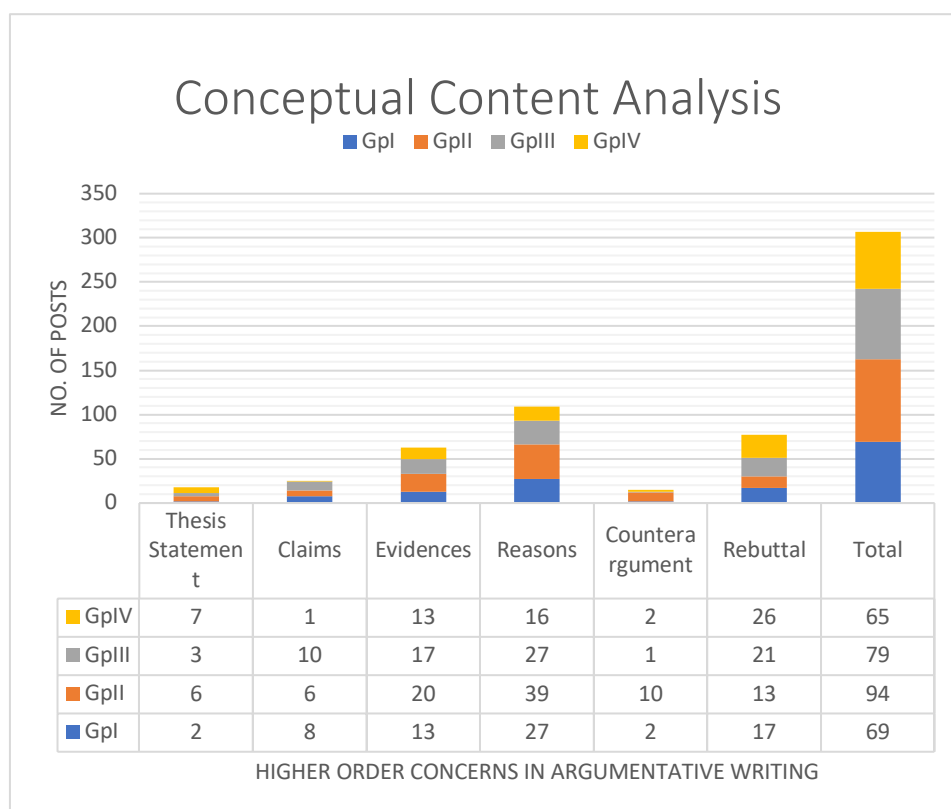|	Thesis Statement	Claims	Evidences	Reasons	Counterargument	Rebuttal	Total
GpIV	7	1	13	16	2	26	65
GpIII	3	10	17	27	1	21	79
GpII	6	6	20	39	10	13	94
GpI	2	8	13	27	2	17	69

HIGHER ORDER CONCERNS IN ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Figure 3: Conceptual content analysis of online DC transcripts

Table 7: Percentage contribution of posts related to reasons, evidences, and rebuttals

DC Group	Percentage Contribution
Group I	82.60% (reasons= 39.13%, evidences= 18.83%, rebuttals=24.64%)
Group II	76.59% (reasons= 41.48, evidences= 21.27%, rebuttals= 13.83%)
Group III	82.27% (reasons= 34.17, evidences= 21.52%, rebuttals= 26.58%)
Group IV	84.16% (reasons= 24.16%, evidences= 20%, rebuttals= 40%)

Lower number of posts relating to thesis, claim and counterclaim may suggest that once students decided their stand (for or against the argumentative topic), they focused more on proving their position with multiple perspectives, reasons and examples in the form of data, facts and testimonials. Students also developed a habit of acknowledging the sources of their evidences (figure 4). Being students of law, their evidence mostly comprised relevant sections, articles, and cases. For example, Group I was given the topic related to content censorship on internet and for proving their claims students referred to section 66(A) of IT Act 2008, Article 19(2), the case of Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (Writ Petition Criminal No.167 of 2012), the case of Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (Writ Petition Civil no. 1031 of 2019) among others.
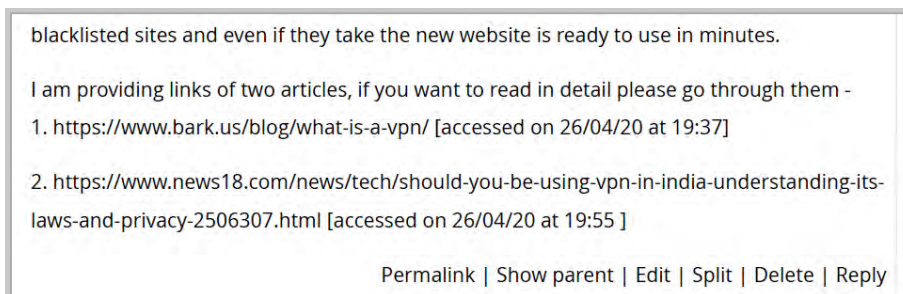
blacklisted sites and even if they take the new website is ready to use in minutes.

I am providing links of two articles, if you want to read in detail please go through them -

1. https://www.bark.us/blog/what-is-a-vpn/ [accessed on 26/04/20 at 19:37]

2. https://www.news18.com/news/tech/should-you-be-using-vpn-in-india-understanding-its-laws-and-privacy-2506307.html [accessed on 26/04/20 at 19:55]

Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Figure 4: Source citation by group I on online DC

Students were also careful in maintaining coherence in their written interactions for the online DC. This was evident from the kind of words and phrases they used while interacting: "*It is true that…*", "*I agree with…*", "*I continue in support of…*", "*firstly…, secondly…*". Overall, conceptual content analysis results show that students experienced an enriching interaction as members of the online DC, and touched upon all aspects of HOCs, such as thesis, organisation and coherence, and content development. Audience analysis could not be witnessed much as they were instructed to have written interaction on argumentative topics and no real situation for composing a complete essay was given.

Conclusion

In agreement with Watanabe (2016), the overall results of this methodologically triangulated research suggest that recreated online DCs can be highly effective in engaging students as active contributors to their own, as well as their peers', appropriation of academic writing processes. DCs enabled them to engage in critical thinking and self-regulation that, consequently, positively influenced their performance in HOCs in writing. Pre-test and post-test results show significant improvement in HOCs in argumentative writing of law undergraduates and they gradually evolved in considerations of audience, thesis, organisation, coherence, and content development during the interaction process on online DC. They acknowledged the impact on their ability to understand coherence and strong and weak argument better than what they could imbibe in the classroom. Freedom of time and space on asynchronous mode of posts helped students in precise drafting of arguments with a lot of research and thinking on the topic. One very important element that was noticed in the conceptual content analysis of DC's online transcripts was that the students focused more on justifying their positions through a lot of reasoning and ample legal instances. Counterclaims and rebuttals challenged them to come up with stronger reasons and evidence every time. The survey findings also supported the idea that the online DC helped them to realise that there is little scope for their arguments' survival if they deviated in their reasons and evidences from the logic of their claim. In this respect a deviation from thesis and claims could prove to be disastrous to their arguments' strength. Evasion of such nonconformity entailed a lot of reflection, self-regulation, peer review, and idea generation.

DCs have had high pedagogical relevance in academic writing classrooms (Watanabe, 2016) and if the instructors devise new ways of recreating DCs across disciplines and contexts utilising various online platforms as per the micro-genres of academic writing (Swales, 2016), students can certainly benefit from peer-feedbacks (Huisman et al., 2018), further hone their critical thinking (Bezanilla et al., 2019) and contribute original and innovative ideas. The results of this study suggest that participation in online DCs infuse confidence among students in ways that alleviate their apprehensions about academic writing. The study implies that students' collaborative involvement in online DC interaction helps them to improve their

higher order thinking skills in general and in their writing more specifically. Writing instructors are thus encouraged to embrace variety in DC recreation, to focus on enhancing HOCs in academic writing of undergraduates across disciplines. Future research in this area should study the use of DCs and online DCs in other academic writing micro-genres, with a larger population and across multiple semesters, in order to investigate the impact of DCs on the development of HOCs and LOCs more widely.

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