

**POLICY ANALYSIS AND DEBATE IN IRD (TIU) CLASSROOM:  
A Collaborative Teaching/Learning and Assessment Strategy**

**Dr. Neville D'Cunha**

**D.Ed. (Preservice), Ph.D., HD.Ed. (Inservice)**

**Associated Professor**

**International Relations and Diplomacy (IRD) Department**

**Faculty of Administrative Sciences & Economics**

**Tishk International University-Erbil, Iraq**

**Email: [neville.dcunha@ishik.edu.iq](mailto:neville.dcunha@ishik.edu.iq)**

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**Abstract**

This paper will explore the application of Policy Analysis and Debate (PAD) as an in-class teaching/learning and assessment strategy that has the potential to achieve program/course learning objectives and at the same time develop students' self-confidence, higher order thinking, writing as well as collaborative debating skills. III-Year students of International Relations and Diplomacy (IRD) 4-year degree participated in PAD that linked International Political Economy (IPE) most relevant contemporary topics to theoretical content from their current course. The IPE course covered a range of theoretical and practical perspectives in relation to politics, economy and society. Therefore, the topics of PAD included the changing nature of the global economy, diversity of IPE related development strategies, relation between inequality and poverty and the differing ways in which global economy is perceived by IPE scholars. Data was collected using survey methods namely personal interviews and documentation reviews. This pilot study focused on evaluating students' participation in PAD activities. The study found students' mixed performance in collaborative learning or HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) assignments. The findings suggest that seven of the eighteen students in this study did not prefer the use of PAD in comparison to other teaching/learning and assessment strategies. This is because most students are not enculturated to participate in in-class activities and are content to just attend the prescribed classes and solely depend on the course-educator for their theoretical understanding. In spite of the inherent challenges, this paper concludes by considering recommendations for all lecturers of IRD to incorporate essential elements of PAD as a teaching/learning and assessment strategy to recreate classroom culture that ensures full participation of all students.

**Keywords:** Policy Analysis and Debate (PAD), collaborative teaching/learning, assessment, students self-confidence, subject-knowledge, higher order thinking skills (HOTS)

## 1. Introduction

The Egyptians as early as 2080 B.C.E. were one of the first cultures in recorded history to make use of debate. Protagoras is known to be the father of debate for implementing it as a teaching strategy in an educational environment back in 411 B.C.E. in Athens, Greece (Zare & Othman 2013; Ramlan et.al 2016). Despite its history as a teaching strategy in modern times, debates in the university setting have typically been restricted to students who are on competitive debate teams (Kennedy 2009). In spite of global interest resurgence in debate in higher education, many (if not most) high-profile efforts have not been rigorously evaluated. This has left critical gaps in knowledge about the outcomes of pedagogical debate interventions and, in particular, what is working and what is not. These gaps flow, in part, from the sheer heterogeneity of debate formats. Hence, to narrow the gap, the ability of debate to enhance collaborative teaching/learning and assessment in the classroom has been taken up for research in this introductory study.

The use of academic debate as a collaborative teaching/learning and assessment strategy in the classroom is expected to encourage proactive thinking, improve communication skills and facilitate immediate feedback from the teacher to the students. Classroom debate is a related teaching technique that may provide a significant learning experience for students and increase classroom participation. To engage in a debate is to discuss opposing views through social interaction. Preparing for a debate requires students to use library resources, take notes, define terms, formulate arguments and rebuttals, develop critical thinking skills, and work as a team (Fallahi & Haney 2007). According to Zare & Othman (2013), debate encourages students to learn course content better, since they are engaged in course content actively, broadly, deeply and personally. It also trains them to assess the data they get on a regular basis. In addition, debate provides a valuable opportunity to develop learners' oral communication skills.

Zare & Othman (2015) further state that, critical thinking skills and/or higher order thinking have been recognized as essential skills for the growing workforce of the 21st century. Activities like debates can enrich classroom environment, enhance meta-cognition and promote critical thinking. However, it is rather unclear if this activity can be implemented in TIU IRD classroom. This study aims to identify IRD III-Year students' perceptions and preferences on using Policy Analysis and Debate (PAD) as a collaborative teaching/learning and assessment strategy and specifically the impact of this activities on the participants' overall learning experience.

### Statement of the Problem

Tishk International University-Erbil founded in 2008 usually conducts debates as an ELT (English Language Training) activity for first year undergraduates. However, not all students are involved in these debates. Besides, only students who are proficient in English volunteer to join these debates thus depriving the other undergraduates from taking part. To overcome this gap, during the 2019-Spring semester, all III-Year IRD students were required to participate in PAD. This was to foster equity and diversity among all students and to cultivate and sharpen their debating skills. Yet, it was unclear if debating was an effective learning and assessment method for IRD students. The researcher noticed that usually, the very mention of debate activities tended to cause some fear and discomfort among students. This peculiar situation led the researcher to conduct this study mainly to ascertain if debates help IRD undergraduates to learn better.

## 1.2. Research Questions

RQ1: Are classroom Policy Analysis and Debate (PAD) practices accepted as an effective teaching/learning and assessment strategy by TIU III-Year IRD students?

RQ2: Do PAD practices have an impact on IRD students' understanding of a subject, level of self-confidence and higher order thinking skills (HOTS)?

RQ3: Should PAD practices be incorporated as an integral part of teaching/learning and assessment strategy by all IRD lecturers?

## 1.3. Limitations and Significance of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, only two PAD sessions were conducted during this study. The researcher understood that two sessions might not be sufficient to evaluate PAD's efficiency as a teaching/learning and assessment strategy. Secondly, the research focused only on III-Year IRD students, thus limiting the scope to only one particular group of students.

Nevertheless, the researcher believed that encouraging IRD students to participate in PAD will foster better teaching/learning and assessment as students take on a more active role during the PAD sessions and the lecturer's involvement is much reduced. Lastly, this study's significance rests on the premise that it may help to throw some light on how PAD may be utilized to enhance teaching/learning and assessment among students not only in the particular subject but across all the subjects offered in the IRD program of TIU.

## 2. Relevant Literature

Basically, the use of debate as a teaching/learning and assessment strategy can make the classroom more student-oriented where students can take responsibility for their own learning. Debates foster students active learning by giving them responsibility to understand course content, an approach that completely transforms their perspective from passive to active (Ramlan et al. 2009). Carter (2010) defines PAD as: "The debate topics coincide roughly with content sequencing in [Oatley (2012)] and debates occur throughout the semester when the relevant course material is covered. Students must prepare their papers and debates prior to exposure to lecture material covering the relevant topic (e.g., underlying theoretical concepts, data motivating the policy question, etc.), so that preparation requires students to actively study the underlying concepts as well as the [International Political Economy (IPE)] literature outlining arguments and evidence related to the specific policy topic." Therefore, the in-class debate has the potential to motivate learners to take an active role in the teaching/learning and assessment activity/strategy with the objective of presenting facts in a logical and systematic manner.

In addition to promoting active engagement and mastery of the content, debates afford many benefits. Because debates require listeners and participants to evaluate competing choices, they follow the call for activities that develop critical thinking skills by moving up Bloom's Taxonomy. The lower-order thinking skills of knowledge, comprehension, and application focus on rote learning or what students should think, whereas the higher-order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation focus on how to think. 'The short-term objective of acquiring knowledge should be tempered with the long-term goal of training the mind to think analytically and critically' (Kennedy 2009). The development of such high level mental processes can help develop critical thinking abilities of students wherein they are able to analyze, evaluate and make informed decisions as well as to propose logical solutions to issues at hand without being encumbered by their own cultural and social prejudices and preconceived notions.

Strengthening the argument further, many experts and researchers (Zare & Othman 2017; Ramlan et al. 2016; Kennedy 2009; Omelicheva 2007; Zare & Othman 2013; Hesse et al. 2015) agree that classroom debate is an approach which involves learners in the learning process, give them the chance to express themselves, develop the higher order thinking (HOTS), prevent rote memorization and misunderstanding, motivate the learners, and assist them to stay away from prejudice and make informed decisions and judgments based on valid sources of data. In her study, Omelicheva (2007) found that classroom debate helped the learners get involved in the intellectual practices which illustrate critical thinking skills (HOTS). The participants of the study also states that classroom debate provided an opportunity for them to practice and promote their presentation and teamwork skills. Kennedy (2009) argues that classroom debate can get the students actively engaged in the process of learning and also place more responsibility of comprehension on them. In addition, the learners' role will noticeably shifts to a more active approach rather than a passive one, and it helps the students to realize the value of learning as they participate and play a role in learning rather than lectured at and getting information passively.

In their study, Fallahi & Haney (2007) discovered that students had difficulty discussing controversial issues. Students feared that they would "say the wrong thing" or that their beliefs might not be "politically correct." After the application of formal debates, they found that the use of debate provided an atmosphere where undergraduate students could become more open-minded about controversial topics, more openly participate in classroom discussions, and minimize self-censorship. Besides, debates stimulate and promote higher order learning, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Zare & Othman 2015). In addition, more advantages of debates consist of the possibility that "debaters come to realize that positions other than their own have value, and that reasonable minds can disagree on controversial issues" (see Zare & Othman 2015: 161).

Mohamed & Lebar (2017) made an attempt to explore assessment and classroom activity. Tasks in authentic assessments are based on performing complex cognitive assignments. Through authentic assessments, students play their role as they are given opportunities to justify and defend not only the solution but also the problem-solving process. Various instructions and instruments can be used for scoring. Scoring in authentic assessments enables students to master the desired performance. But Brown (2016) reported that the complexity of debate assessment represents issues on planning in-class debates.

All in all, out literature review clearly indicate that classroom debates helps students develop higher order thinking skills as well as improves their self-confidence and positively develop both oral and writing communication skills. Students learn to synthesize, analyze, and evaluate statements and arguments. Last but not the least, debates also promotes active learning which allows students to participate in the learning process creatively and actively.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. The Participants and the Debate Procedure

The sample size consisted of both regular and add-drop all 18 IRD III-Year students. This experimental cohort was exposed to Policy Analysis and Debate (PAD) as a teaching/learning and assessment strategy in their classroom during the 2019 Spring Semester of their IRD B.Sc 4-Year Degree program.

The students were given exposure to the Basic Academic Debate Style of debating. This debating is sometimes referred to as “Classical” or “Platform” style debating. Basic Academic debate (that is, without the options of heckling or World Style Points of Information), which proceeds without interruption from Parliamentary opponents or from cross-examination, is the purest form of debate. When all else is stripped away, Academic debate remains. It is suitable for novice debaters, who might be intimidated by the prospect of Parliamentary interruptions or cross-examination. But it comes alive in the hands of an experienced debater, who, free from interruption, makes effective use of time to bring his/her remarks to a powerful and moving conclusion.

The structure and method of PAD based on the above method was taught explicitly in the classroom during the IPE classes so that all the students were familiar with mandatory debating mechanism that was to be used. The students were divided into nine groups of two students each. The lecturer and students agreed on the content based on the subject textbook authored by Oately (2012) to be taken as the foundational input of PAD with regard to textual resources.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

The data collection was done applying the survey method. The essence of survey method can be explained as ‘questioning individuals on a topic or topics and then describing their responses.’ Personal interviews and documentation review (see Carter 2010) were employed to collect the required data. They will be discussed in the following section.

##### 3.2.1 Personal Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the students at the end of the study. This particular format of data collection was deliberately selected because semi-structured interview is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to reflect emotions and experiences and explore issues with greater focus. Prior to every interview, the interviewees were briefly explained the objectives of the interview, the expected time it may last, and were orally asked to grant permission to write down their responses and use it for strictly research purposes. Besides, the interviewees were told that their responses and their identities will be kept strictly confidential.

##### 3.2.2 Policy Paper Assignment

At the beginning of the 2019 Spring Semester, the whole class was divided into teams, each consisting of two students. Two teams were selected to participate in each classroom debate. One of the two students in a given team were assigned the responsibility for researching the affirmative position of the policy question and the other team member was assigned the responsibility for researching the negative position. Students were to independently research their assigned position and prepare a short paper summarizing the arguments supporting only that position on the policy question at hand. Requiring students to independently complete the paper at this stage was to ensure individual accountability.

### 3.2.3 Policy Debate Assignment

After preparing their policy position papers, students were called to meet with the other member of their debate team, who was assigned to research and prepare a position paper supporting the opposite position. The team members then shared/discussed their findings with each other and worked together to ensure that both team members understood the affirmative and negative arguments for the policy question. Then, together as a team, they evaluated the strength of various arguments/evidence and worked out a strategy in preparation for the debate. Since student pairs were working together to prepare arguments for their debates, this phase of the assignment supported positive interdependence through output goal interdependence. Requiring all team members to contribute equally to the preparation in advance of the debate supported positive interdependence by explicitly generating learning goal interdependence.

### 3.2.4 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the personal interviews, policy paper assignments and policy debate assignments were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data is presented via tables and pie charts depicting categories, frequencies and percentages. A tabular data presentation facilitates representation of data in an attractive, easy to read and organized manner. Pie charts are a useful way to visualize information that might be presented in a small table. The Pie charts are presented at the end of the paper in the Appendix section.

## 4. Findings

**Table 1: Demographic Information**

Profile		Category		Frequency (N = 18)		Percentage (%)
Gender		Female		10		55.55
		Male		8		44.45
		Category		Frequency (N = 18)		Percentage (%)
	A	15-20		0		0
	B	21-25		11		61.11
	C	26-30		5		27.77
	D	31-35		2		11.11

**Table 1: Displays demographic information of the participants (students) involved in the study. The percentage of female participants (55.55%) is higher than that of male participants (44.45%). The age variance for the cohort involved ranges from 21 years to 34 years.**

Table 2: Prior-Debate Experience of the Participants

Profile	Category	Frequency (N = 18)	Percentage (%)
Debate Experience	Yes	14	77.77
	No	4	22.23
Analytical Writing	Yes	8	44.45
	No	10	55.55
Verbal Reasoning	Yes	6	33.33
	No	12	66.67

Table 2: Displays the various component of debate background of the participants (students) involved in the study. The percentage of students with debate experience came to Yes (77.77 %) and No (22.33%). The students were also exposed to analytical writing in their previous semesters; it was a mixed response with Yes (44.45%) and No (55.55%). Finally in Verbal reasoning skills was certainly disappointing with Yes (33.33%) and No (66.67%).

Table 3: The Impact Factors of Policy Analysis and Debate (PAD) Experience

Profile	Category	Frequency (N = 18)	Percentage (%)
Self-Confidence Level	Yes	8	44.45
	No	10	55.55
Subject-Knowledge	Yes	13	72.22
	No	5	27.78
Higher Order Thinking Skills	Yes	10	55.55
	No	8	44.45

Table 3: Displays the findings of the PAD process. The self-confidence score among students was nearly balanced with Yes (44.45%) and No (55.55%). The score for HOTS was nearly similar to Self-Confidence level with Yes (55.55%) and No (44.45%). The score for Subject-Knowledge was an eye-opener. Most students focused on this area as it was connected to assessment and improving their grade: the Yes (72.22%) offset the No (27.78%) by a huge margin.

### 5. Discussion

This study shows that the use of PAD as a teaching/learning and assessment strategy in the classroom gives positive impact to the students. In the current educational context, where students are widely exposed to technology, it is necessary to use a wide variety of instructional strategies because students learn in many different ways. The use of mundane methods of teaching most often leads to boredom and lack of interest in the topics being taught (Hesse et al. 2015). Teaching/learning and assessment relevant debates provide an opportunity for active participation of learners; because it allows direct interaction with the course material and collaboration with fellow students as the main medium of information transfer where they 'teach' one another through peer interaction while the lecturer plays the role of coordinator and advisor and remains in the background.

Through the study it became amply clear that PAD fostered students' active learning by giving them responsibility to understand course content, an approach that completely transformed their perspective from passive to active (Brown 2016; Carter 2010). Participants of the study viewed PAD in three positive ways which contributed to the improvement of critical thinking skills, avenue for gaining self-confidence and a way to increase specific knowledge on a particular topic and subject. Most students' responses were directed to a common finding that pointed to the three elements mentioned above.

The most significant outcome of the study was the awareness among students about the importance of working consciously to improve the level of confidence in classroom activities. Most of the students acknowledged that participating in PAD helped them to speak in public more confidently. In spite of being III-Year students, most of them admitted that often they encountered difficulty to express opinions and thoughts openly besides feeling intimidated by their peers. Participating in PAD, especially for students who had no prior experience in debate, provided a stage for them to speak and build-up their level of confidence.

The second impact of debating in the classroom is the development of higher order thinking skills (Wogu 2010) consisting of a combination of critical thinking and problem solving skills with balanced percentage between Yes and No. The students' responses and performance in PAD were surprising. Most of the students had to prepare for the debate in a forced manner. However, after the end of PAD sessions, many of the respondents pointed out that the debate experience combined with policy paper and policy debate assignments though difficult during the initial phase managed to help improve their research skills as well as enabled them to approach the given topic through diverse perspectives.

Additionally, some students in their face-to-face interviews complained that lack of time to prepare was one of the weaknesses of this strategy, but in the hindsight it indirectly contributed to the maximum use of critical thinking and problem solving skills. To elaborate further, if more time were to be given, students would probably have turned to Google to compile references and would then 'parrot' all the information found. Whereas in this particular debate (PAD) format, the lack of time in turn provided an opportunity for the debaters to think independently and process the information before using it for the debate in the best possible manner.

Analyses of the students writing assignments for assessment showed that the maximum impact of classroom PAD was on helping students to gain subject-knowledge. The results show that gaining subject -knowledge through PAD teaching/learning and assessment strategy was most significant compared to the other two outcomes. This was probably because all the debated topics/motions were directly related to the International Political Economy (IPE) field. The students stated that they learned quickly and critically through classroom PAD. The participants' written work proved that they learned to search for evidences and proofs to support their arguments, look for reasons, and see the issues from different angles and take multiple perspectives into consideration. In their interviews, the students added that rebuttals gave them the chance to put across their opinions and disagree with a viewpoint with much confidence. As a result, they appreciated it when they were granted the opportunity in the classroom PAD to speak and express their viewpoints and work in a team with their classmates.

Though there was overall positive feedback, a few shortcomings and weaknesses were also perceived by some of the students. Seven out of eighteen students found these strategies tiresome and time consuming. They expressed that too much of out-of-class time was taken up by these activities and they were also not keen to go through this grind to learn one subject while they were too busy with other personal and academic activities. Therefore, the researcher admits that there will always be daunting challenges when such novel teaching/learning and assessment strategies are put into practice from both the individual students as well as at the collaborative team level.

### 6. Conclusion

Generally the survey indicates that there is a positive perception and impression among the participants towards the use of PAD as a teaching/learning and assessment strategy in the IRD/IPE classroom. The overall experience of PAD and the processes that the students went through while taking part in the PAD activities increased the self-confidence level of the students to prepare and present their views in front of the audience on most relevant policy issues and definitely increased their ability to put forward ideas and opinions formed after much investigation, research and discussions within the team/group.

Though this activity did help them to increase the level of self-confidence and HOTS, the participants were fairly surprised that the more significant gains achieved through their involvement in PAD was their subject-knowledge. However, it has to be agreed that this survey was done on a very limited scale and has only investigated on a specific group of students who have had some limited exposure to this particular debate (PAD) mechanism. Besides the fact that the results of this research cannot be generalized to other situations, it has to be said that a more elaborate and encompassing research needs to be carried out to arrive at a more conclusive and acceptable outcome.

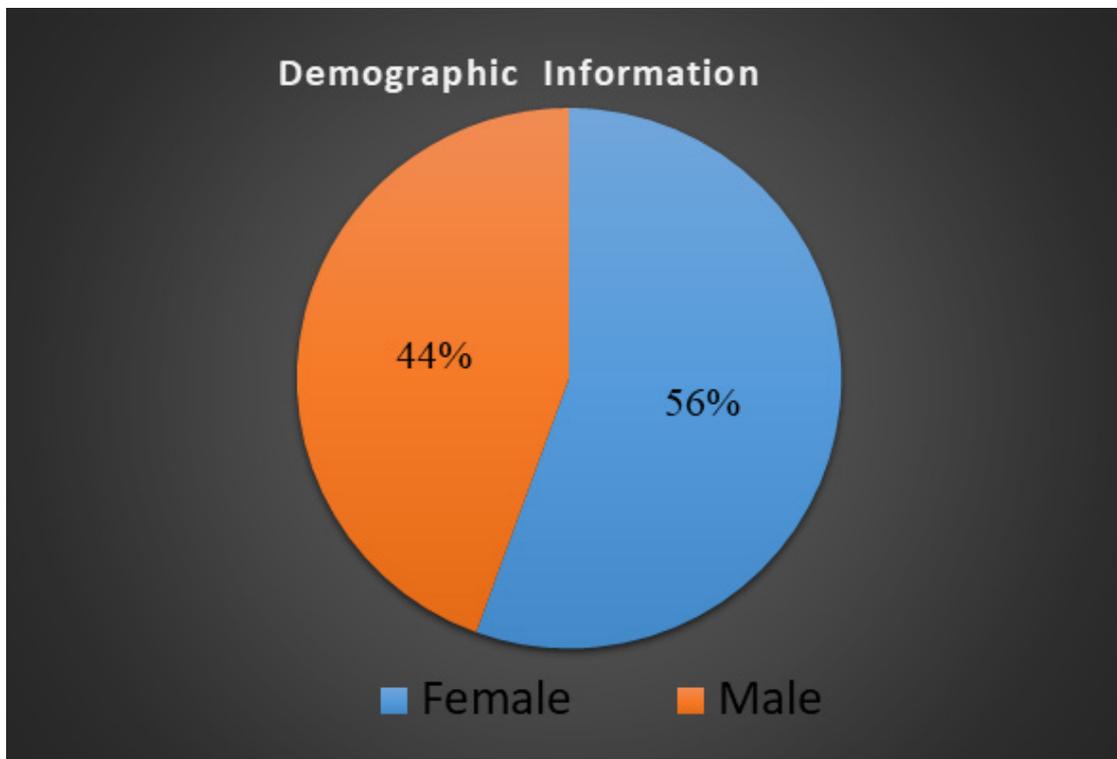
Hence, PAD creates a classroom space in which students abandon their passive roles and start to be active participants in the learning process. Students can use the abilities and skills gained through participation in PAD in various situations. Therefore, it is recommended that PAD or similar debating methods should be introduced and available to IRD students in nearly all courses to not only develop the students' academic performance but to achieve particular course and overall program objectives. In addition, enough time need to be granted to every student to get acclimatized to debating form of teaching/learning and assessment classroom strategic practices. Finally, it can be stated that classroom debate (PAD) is a constructive tool which can make definitive difference to the traditional lecturing approach. Debating form of teaching/learning and assessment strategy if fairly accurately practiced, appropriate and interesting topics are selected, and students are coached and instructed properly with the debate processes can go a long way in making transformative changes in the way IRD is taught in the IRD department. It can also motivate other faculties of Tshik International University to try such collaborative teaching/learning and assessment practices in their own classrooms..

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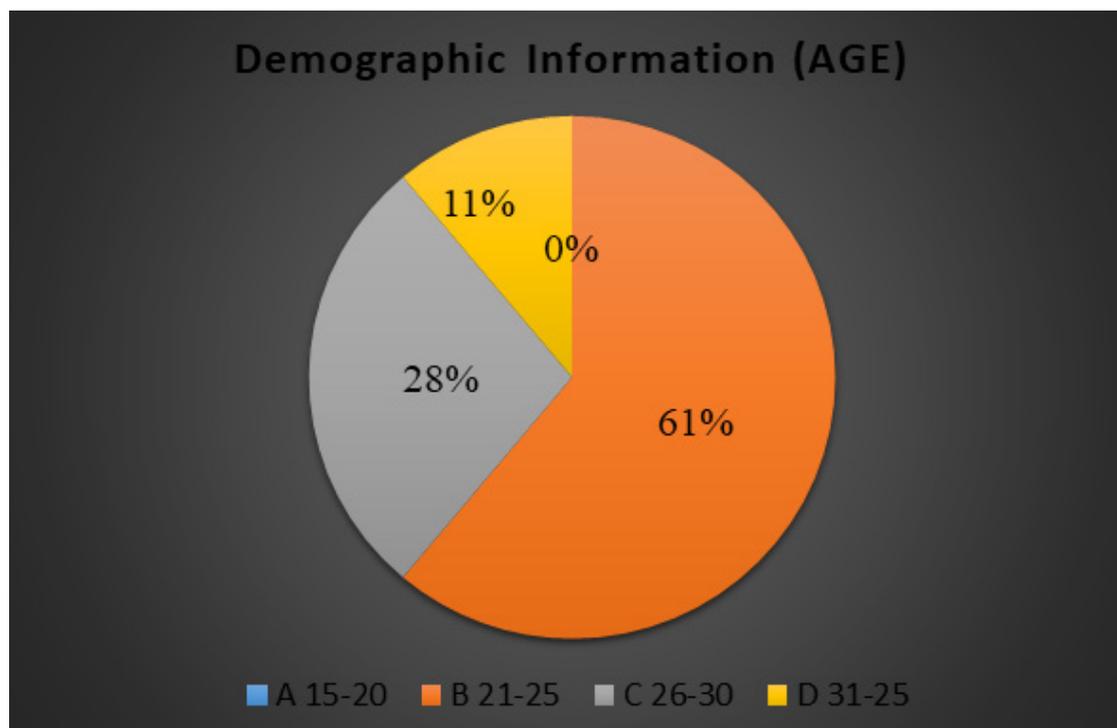
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APPENDIX

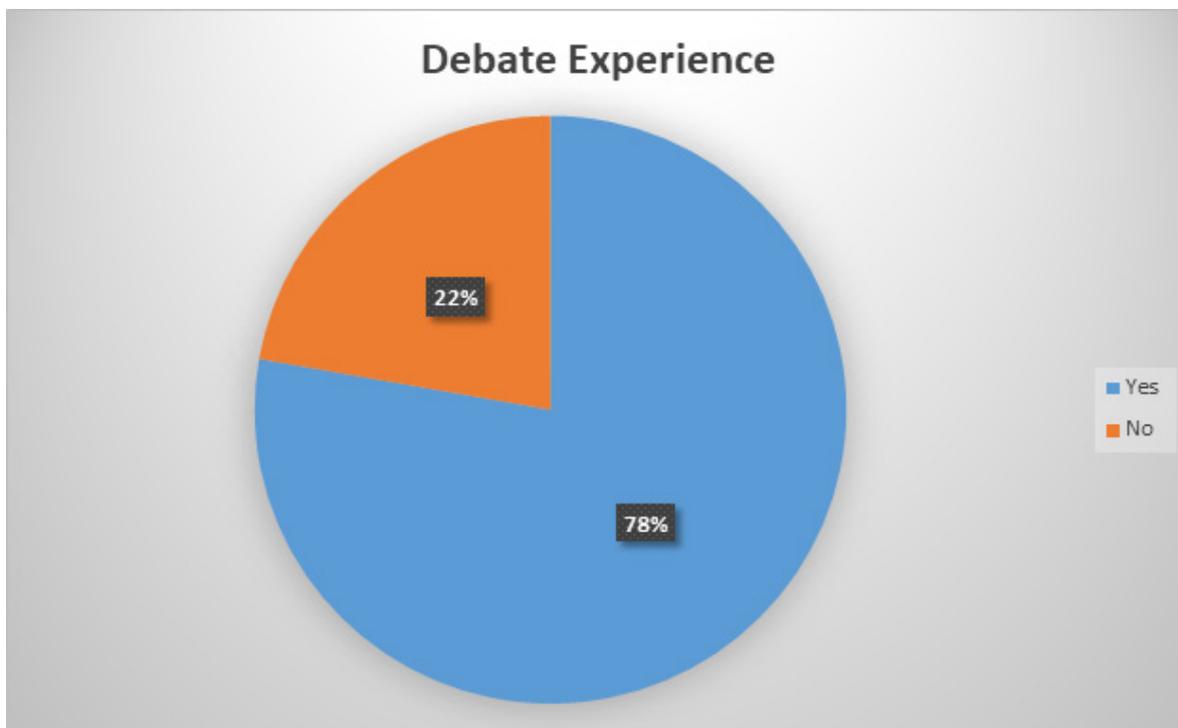
Pie Chart 1: Participants Demographic Information (Gender)



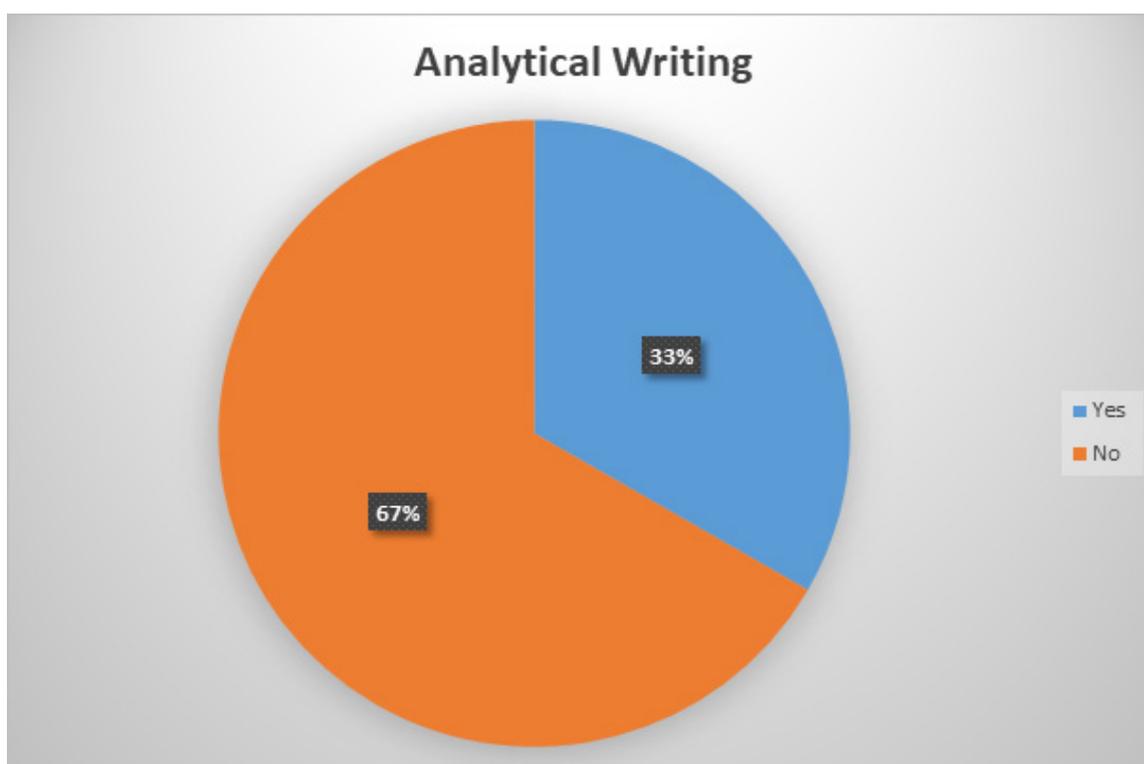
Pie Chart 2: Demographic Information (Age)



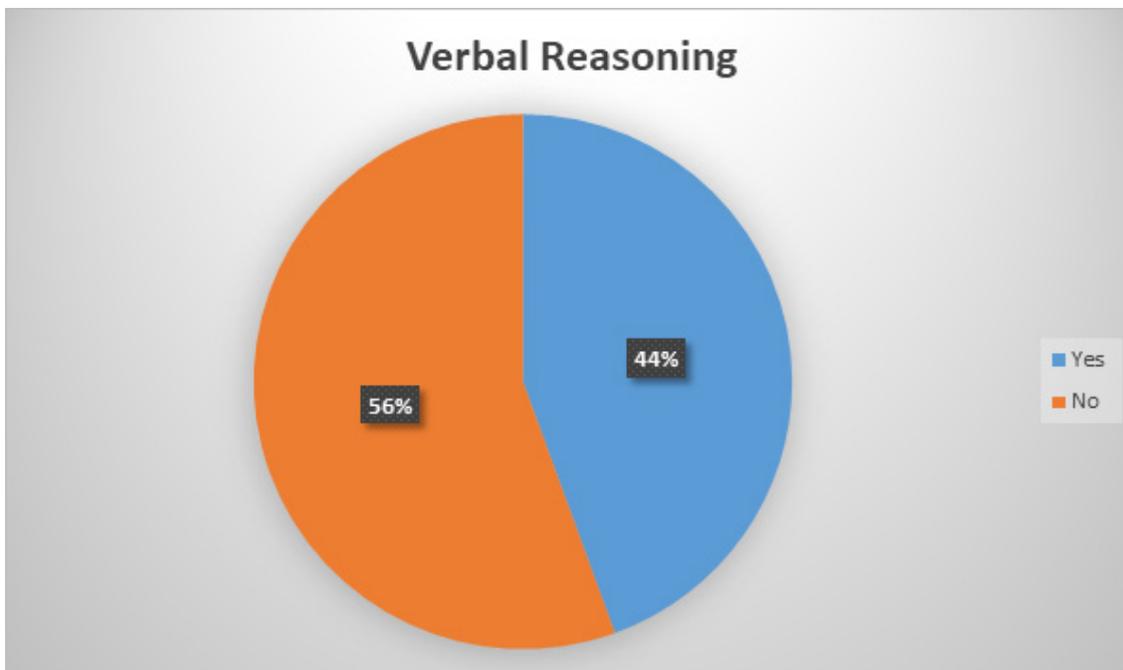
**Pie Chart 3: Participants prior-Debate Experience**



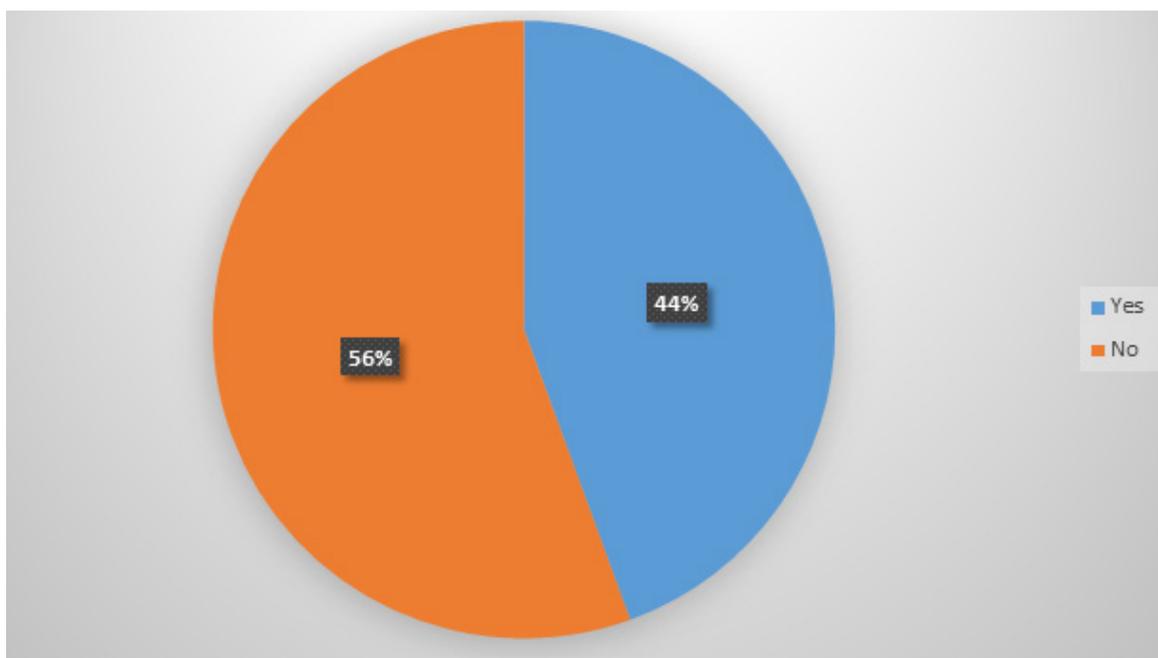
**Pie Chart 4: Participants Prior-Analytical Writing Skills**



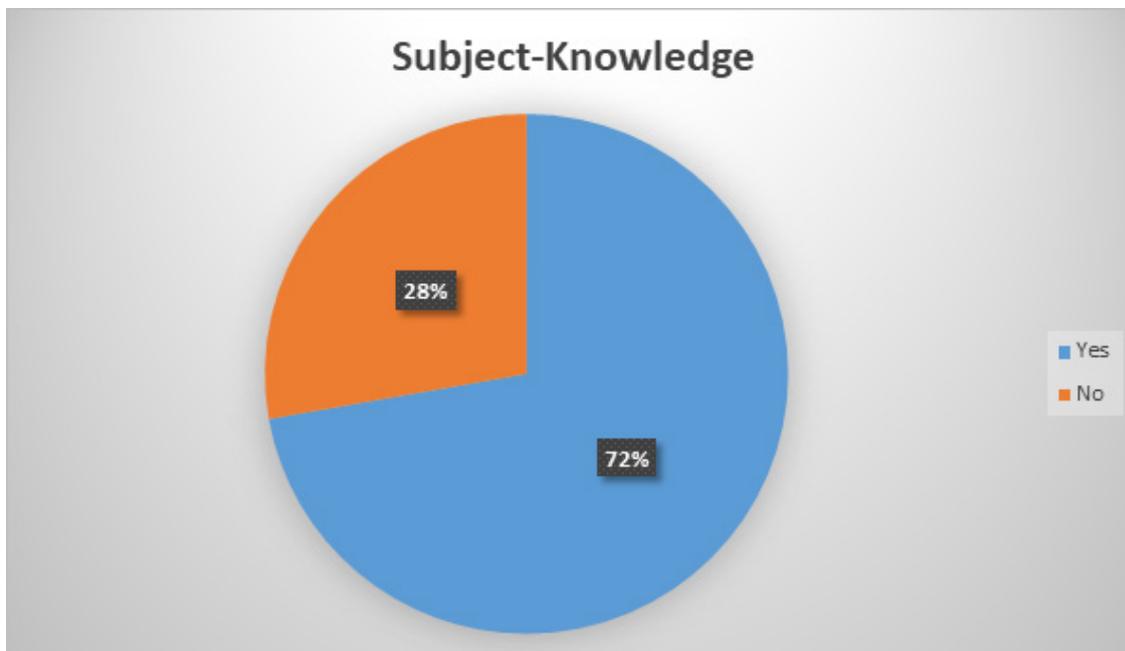
**Pie Chart 5: Participants Prior-Verbal Reasoning Skills**



**Pie Chart 6: Post-PAD Participants Self-Confidence Level Percentage**



**Pie Chart 7: Post-PAD Participants Subject-Knowledge Percentage**



**Pie Chart 8: Post-PAD Participants HOTS Percentage**

