



Differentiated Instruction Strategies to Support Mixed-Ability ESL

Students in Academic Writing

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Abstract: This article presents a classroom-based study that explores how scaffolding method, peer collaboration, and debate-driven instruction can help upper-secondary ESL learners in mastering argumentative writing and speaking abilities. The target groups are 10th and 11th grade students in a specialized English-focused public school in Uzbekistan, with learners ranging from B2 to C1 on the CEFR scale. The lesson plan integrates receptive (reading and listening) and productive (writing and speaking) skills, focusing on a discussion-centered topic: *Should students be allowed to use mobile phones in school?* To cover mixed proficiency levels in the class, the teacher uses differentiated scaffolding strategies such as sentence framework, vocabulary banks, guided reading, and structured group debates. The lesson culminates in a formal writing task helped by planning sheets and checklists. The findings highlight the importance of providing well-formed linguistic support, enhancing critical thinking through debate, and integrating real-world tasks that focus academic language use. The study shows how aligning scaffolding with collaborative learning can help learners' confidence and proficiency in persuasive discourse.

Keywords: Scaffolding, argumentative writing, debate-based instruction, English for academic purposes (EAP), ESL secondary students, speaking and writing integration,



productive language skills, CEFR B2–C1, peer learning, differentiated instruction, academic language development, lesson planning, language objectives.

1. Introduction to the class

This target group is teaching English to students in the **10th and 11th grades** at a **state school** where students are **specialized in English**. English is a major subject for them, and they study it more deeply than regular students. Most of my students are between **15 and 17 years old**. We have English lessons 4 times a week, more pay attention to enhancing all four language skills **listening, speaking, reading, and writing** as well as **grammar and vocabulary**. Additionnaly, 50% of my students are **high-achievers**. Many of them have scored between **7.0 and 8.0 on the IELTS exam**, which give a proof that they are already at a **B2 to C1 level** according to the CEFR. They are usually self- confident when using English in both academic and outside of the classroom. Some of them are preparing for **study abroad programs, language competitions, or university entrance exams** that require a strong command of English. Surprisingly, 6 of my students have been already accepted in foreign universities and got grants. But, not all students in the class are at the same level. A few are still improving their skills, particularly in **academic writing, complex grammar structures, or public speaking**. Because the class includes students with different levels, it is sometimes **difficult to teach one lesson that suitable for different level of learners**. Some my students can comprehend quickly, while others need more time to acquire this language. To solve this problem, I prefer to use the **scaffolding method** in my lessons. I provide **different types of support** based on each student's needs. For example, I give **sentence frames, model answers, or vocabulary banks** to students who need more support. For advanced students, I prefer to provide with difficult **tasks, group discussions, or challenging writing prompts**. I also focus on **peer learning** through



pair and group work while my class, which assists to improve my students speaking skill in the public eye.

To sum up, the classroom atmosphere is **positive and cooperative**. The students are **motivated, active, and most of my students have passion to use English** in meaningful and effective ways. They enjoy **interactive activities** like debates, role plays, and projects that connect English to real-life situations. I have planned to help every student to be a **fluent speaker, confident, and independent English user** who can succeed in both school and their future academic or professional aims.

Language Objectives for a Lesson on Argumentative Writing and Debate

Lesson Overview:

The lesson will emphasize on improving learners' skills in argumentative writing and speaking through a debate activity. Students will first work on understanding the structure and key elements of an argumentative essay, and then they will use this understanding to join in a discussion. The lesson will integrate both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (writing and speaking). The topic for the debate could be something like, Should students be allowed to use mobile phones in school?

Language Objective:

Students will produce an argumentative essay that clearly states an opinion, provides supporting reasons, and uses appropriate academic language.

Productive Skill (Writing): Students will write a short argumentative essay on the same topic given in the debate. They will emphasize on clearly stating their opinion in the introduction, supporting their position with at least two reasons or examples in the body



paragraphs, and providing a summary that strengthen their argument. The essay must demonstrate clear use of formal academic language, such as complex sentence structures, suitable vocabulary, and cohesive tools. Writing an argumentative essay strengthen the language forms and vocabulary which learned while the discussion. It also allows students to organize their thoughts in a more structured, formal format. This skill is important for academic writing in higher education and formal sites, where clear and persuasive writing is often required.

Summary of the Lesson Plan:

1. Warm-up (3minutes):

Begin with a discussion on the topic of mobile phone use in school. Ask students to share their opinions. Introduce key vocabulary for the debate (argument, counterargument, evidence).

2. Reading (10 minutes):

Give support students with a model argumentative essay on mobile phone use in schools. Students read the essay personally, highlighting transition words and identifying the introduction, body, and summary.

3. Debate Preparation (5 minutes):

Divide students into two groups (for and against mobile phone use in school). Each group brainstorms points for their argument and prepares to give them using the target language elements.

4. Debate (5 minutes):



Students engage in a structured debate, presenting their arguments, responding to counterarguments, and using appropriate transition words and phrases.

5. Writing (15 minutes):

After finishing the debate, students individually write an argumentative essay on the same topic, ensuring they use the language structures and vocabulary discussed earlier.

6. Wrap-up (3 minutes):

Review the main points learned in the lesson, answer any other questions, and give proper feedback on students' essays and performance in the debate. By the end of the lesson, students will have developed both receptive and productive language skills through reading, speaking, and writing activities that are interconnected, ensuring that they are prepared for real-world argumentative situations.

Instructional outline

The instruction for this lesson will emphasize on assessing students developing both their receptive and productive language skills through guided reading, structured speaking, and organized writing activities. To begin, the teacher will give the topic of mobile phone use in schools and lead a short warm-up discussion. This will activate students' background knowledge and get them thinking about the issue. The teacher will then introduce important topics related to argumentation, such as *argument*, *evidence*, *counterargument*, *opinion*, and *reason*. Students will give ideas together and write them down in their notes with explanations. And then, students will read a model argumentative essay about the topic. The teacher will guide them in finding the structure of the essay introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion and assist them in finding useful language elements such as transition words (*firstly*, *however*, *therefore*), opinion markers (*I believe*, *in my opinion*), and



examples that support the argument. Students will highlight these elements and work in pairs to discuss what makes the essay strong. This reading activity will prepare them for analyzing texts and using similar language in their own writing and speaking. After this, students will prepare for a class debate. I will divide the class into two groups: one group in favor of mobile phone use in school, and the other against it. Each group will work together to plan their arguments using brainstorming and an argument planning sheet. The teacher will model how to use polite phrases for agreeing and disagreeing (*I understand your point, but I disagree because*) and show how to speak clearly and logically using transition words. Students will practice these expressions in short speaking assignments before the real debate. Then, students will take part in a planned debate. Every group will give their arguments, respond to the other group's points, and use polite, academic language. This activity will assist students apply the speaking skills they learned and use logical reasoning in real-time conversation. After the debate, the teacher will give guide students in reflecting on how they used the language features during the debates. To conclude, students will write their own short argumentative essay on the same topic. I will give a writing template and checklist to assist them form their ideas clearly. Students will be inspired to use an introduction with their opinion, at least two reasons with supporting examples, and a conclusion that make conclusion their opinion. I will provide essential academic words and sentence structures before students begin writing. The essay will show whether students can apply the language they used while the debate in a more formal written form. This step will prepare them for the final writing assessment and writing their overall academic oral skills.



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