

## Argumentación, retórica y pensamiento crítico: pilares del proceso educativo

Argumentation, rhetoric and critical thinking: pillars of the educational process

Irma Constanza Gómez<sup>1</sup>  
*Universidad de San Buenaventura*

Recibido: 10.03.2024

Aceptado: 15.05.2024

### Resumen

En la actualidad, las habilidades comunicativas son de suma importancia en todos los ámbitos sociales, académicos y laborales. Estas herramientas son fundamentales porque permiten una correcta integración en estos espacios, proporcionando la seguridad de ser agentes activos y transformadores de realidades a partir de sus acciones, pensamientos e ideas. Cuando estas habilidades no están bien desarrolladas o no existen en los individuos, se enfrentan desventajas que dificultan su progreso en diversos procesos. Ante esta realidad, se hace necesario que haya una buena competencia comunicativa. Los colegios deben dar prioridad a la formación de seres humanos competentes, con sólidas bases retóricas, argumentativas y reflexivas, capaces de aportar en los entornos en los que se encuentran y de transformar su realidad. Considerando lo anterior, este texto tiene como objetivo presentar algunas reflexiones sobre la importancia que las instituciones académicas deben dar al desarrollo de la argumentación oral, la retórica y el pensamiento crítico como bases fundamentales de la educación.

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<sup>1</sup> [cgdoc29@gmail.com](mailto:cgdoc29@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0408-0501>

**Palabras clave:** educación, comunicación, competencias sociales, pensamiento crítico, habilidades interpersonales

### **Abstract**

Nowadays, communication skills are of utmost importance in all social, academic and work environments. These tools are fundamental because they allow a correct integration in these spaces, providing the security of being active agents and transformers of realities based on their actions, thoughts and ideas. When these skills are not well developed or do not exist in individuals, they face disadvantages that hinder their progress in various processes. Faced with this reality, it is necessary to have good communicative competence. Schools must give priority to the formation of competent human beings, with solid rhetorical, argumentative and reflective bases, capable of contributing to the environments in which they find themselves and of transforming their reality. Considering the above, this text aims to present some reflections on the importance that academic institutions should give to the development of oral argumentation, rhetoric and critical thinking as fundamental bases of education.

**Keywords:** education, communication, social skills, critical thinking, interpersonal skills

## 1. Orality: A Basic Tool in Social Relations

Discourses are not just words, but words ‘about something’ and, above all, words with which ‘we do something (Soler & Baquero, 2014, p. 15).

In an increasingly digitalized and visually oriented world, the ability to express oneself orally remains a fundamental characteristic that defines our humanity. It is a necessary communicative competence for human beings since all the spaces they inhabit are mediated by this skill (Ochoa, 2022). It is concerning that while media acquire more relevance, reaching and being seen by thousands of people, oral language progressively deteriorates, and there is a decline in the quality of communication (Trigo, 1998). Undeniably, the dissemination of language through the media presents challenges for the preservation and practice of the distinctive linguistic forms, both spoken and written, unique to various cultures (Quilonez & Bacilio, 2024). In view of this reality, it is crucial to pay attention to how this skill is addressed in different educational contexts, given that it is a fundamental need for human beings.

Oral communication has played a vital role in the evolution and development of communities throughout history. It is thanks to orality that new possibilities and meanings of distant worlds have been discovered (Santillán, 2022). The transmission of knowledge through oral stories, such as myths and legends, has been fundamental to the progress of civilizations. These stories have not only facilitated the preservation of values but also the explanation of natural phenomena that puzzled our ancestors, who narrated them through fantastical tales (Marchan, 2023).

Orality, as a primary form of interaction, has played a fundamental role in the evolution of society and culture. Since the beginnings of civilization, it has become the main vehicle through which knowledge is shared, stories are transmitted, and deep relationships are established with others. It is through the acts of speaking and listening that individuals can

forge genuine connections, resolve conflicts, and build stronger and more cohesive communities. Orality, therefore, stands out as an indispensable tool that has driven the progress and evolution of our species.

According to De Saussure Cobos et al., (2021):

Language has the potential to express innumerable thoughts, and it is the medium through which people interact. Thus, the ability to speak and understand what others say becomes fundamental for giving meaning to social behavior and the relationship between environment, speaker, and listener. Speech, then, is the means by which an individual engages with the world around them, and this world demands not only knowing or understanding but also creating, arguing, and dissenting. (p. 50)

In this context of continuous advancement and constant challenges, it is essential for people to cultivate strong skills in various areas, with communication being one of the most prominent for both personal and professional growth. Communication skills go beyond the simple transmission of information; they also include the ability to persuade, negotiate, and resolve conflicts constructively. Individuals with superior communication abilities can establish better relationships, lead teams effectively, and significantly contribute to the success of their lives and organizations. These skills become a crucial advantage in an increasingly interconnected world.

Speech is the instrument through which individuals connect with their environment, not only to understand it, but also to actively participate in it. Through language, individuals can interact with the world around them, question it, and contribute to its transformation through creation, argumentation, and discussion. The ability to reason in various situations is essential for understanding them in depth and contributing to their transformation. This skill, inherent to human beings, grants the possibility of adopting different perspectives and playing an active role in society. According to De Saussure (1995), language and speech are fundamental communication tools that allow for the expression of an infinite diversity of thoughts and

emotions. They act as the primary vehicle enabling people to interact and communicate with each other, thereby contributing to the development and enrichment of human relationships in all areas of life.

Communication is a fundamental pillar that not only facilitates the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships but also contributes to the creation of an environment conducive to the exchange of ideas and conflict resolution. According to Bascón and Salguero (2015), “on the interpersonal level, it is manifested in communicative situations, but discourse also has an effect on the feelings, actions, or thoughts of the speaker” (p. 421).

Effective communication is characterized not only by the ability to accept others' opinions, understand and respect their viewpoints, but also by the capacity to express one's own opinions without resorting to aggression and in an atmosphere of calm. Additionally, it provides the opportunity to express emotions in social interactions that occur in different spaces and communicative situations between individuals.

Orality must be regarded as a fundamental element of pedagogy and conceived as a social interaction that involves both the individual's adaptation to communication situations and the use of socially constructed forms of expression (Pereira & Cunha, 2020). Verbal interactions not only involve the individual's adaptation to various communication contexts but also require the use of forms of expression that have been socially constructed. By fostering the development of these communicative skills in educational processes, students are prepared to successfully face challenges and seize opportunities in an ever-evolving environment. This is because the ability to communicate effectively in diverse social contexts not only facilitates understanding and knowledge exchange but also strengthens adaptability and the ability to collaborate in multidisciplinary teams—skills that are essential in a globalized and constantly changing world.

Oral communication is the first and most significant form of learning, which begins from childhood. This process starts at home, through relationships with the closest people, and then

solidifies in school, becoming the privileged space for the development of oral skills in a deeper and more meaningful way. These skills not only allow students to access new sociocultural spaces, but also provide experiences that contribute to knowledge construction and offer better opportunities for human development. It is relevant to recognize the fundamental role that oral communication plays in the educational process, as it significantly influences the integral development of individuals and their ability to participate actively in society (Ríos, 2008).

The main objective of the entire educational system should be to provide students with the necessary skills to navigate autonomously, confidently, and competently in the various fields they will encounter in their lives, whether academic, professional, or social. These skills, known as 21st-century skills, encompass fundamental aspects for the lives of learners.

As presented by Albarracín (2023):

The internationalization of the curriculum is not limited solely to the inclusion of global content in teaching but extends to promoting an international mindset and integrating intercultural experiences into the educational process. This approach emerges as a key catalyst for the development of 21st-century competencies, among which critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, effective communication, and adaptability stand out. (p. 2)

It is undeniable that all educational institutions must seek ways to strengthen social, communication, and argumentative skills, which are crucial in interacting with other individuals and presenting ideas persuasively and convincingly. The academic process should not only aim to impart knowledge but also cultivate skills that enable students to confidently and effectively tackle the challenges of the current world (Ducasse & Brown, 2023).

## 2. Oral Argumentation: A Necessary Skill for Life

Only virtue has powerful arguments against pessimism  
(Leopoldo Alas "Clarín").

Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen oral argumentation, rhetorical skills, and critical thinking in students in elementary and middle education, who will soon find themselves immersed in social and work contexts that will demand a critical and participatory approach from them. The ability to argue in different scenarios emerges as an invaluable tool that can enhance success both in the workplace and in academia, as it allows one to influence others significantly. As stated by McNeil and Malaver (2010), “arguing involves the use of one of the most abstract and complex levels of thought, as it involves judgments with their respective positions that generate linguistic distinctions” (p. 130).

By empowering students with these skills from an early stage, they are prepared to effectively confront the challenges, they will encounter in their different social and professional circles in the future, enabling them to participate in any scenario with greater confidence (Majidi et al., 2021).

Within communication, argumentation emerges as a fundamental component of critical thinking and the effective expression of ideas. According to Iordanou (2013), “successfully performing these functions requires the ability to comprehend, decide, or persuasively argue, whether verbally or in writing, through the process of argumentation”.

These skills allow individuals to express their viewpoints, defend their opinions, and actively participate in the exchange of ideas, establishing themselves as a crucial competence in the formation of informed and participatory citizens in a democratic society. Trigo (1998) poses a question that needs to be addressed in all educational spheres: “how can one participate in a plural and democratic society if they do not know how to speak and listen well, with appropriate levels to do so with efficiency, effectiveness, and critical sense?” (p. 5).

This questioning should prompt reflection with the aim of finding solutions to the difficulty students face when participating in spaces where they are expected to contribute with their ideas supported by clear arguments and critical stances, but where the school has not adequately prepared them for this type of activity.

Oral argumentation should be considered a mandatory competency at all levels and grades of education; however, unfortunately, this is not the case. Instead, there seems to be the mistaken belief that simply being human implies that everyone knows how to speak and express themselves, and therefore, it is unnecessary to strengthen these skills.

As Cobos et al. (2021) state:

There seems to be an assumption that today's youth know how to express their ideas, speak, and argue their points of view about what happens in their immediate environment. This reflects that, in some cases, the importance of working on argumentation from orality in the classroom is not given the relevance it should have.  
(p. 3)

In the educational field, orality and argumentation have been widely underestimated skills, without giving them their true value. It is vital to recognize the importance of preparing students with the essential competencies to face the challenges of the contemporary world. In this sense, it is necessary for educational institutions to recognize the relevance of oral argumentation and allocate the necessary resources and time for its teaching and continuous practice. However, this task is hindered when teachers lack the skills and experience required to teach these communicative tools. Therefore, it is necessary to provide teachers with the appropriate training and support so that they can effectively transmit these skills to students, thus preparing them more effectively to enter higher education or the professional world with better skills.



It is evident that interaction among students should not be limited to mere superficial conversations; rather, it should be an enriching exercise that fosters the expression of feelings, emotions, and experiences, thus contributing to active knowledge construction. The classroom should become a dynamic space that promotes open communication, reflective discussion, contrasting ideas, and reasoned argumentation (Calero, 1993). Through this process, students learn to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and construct solid arguments based on logical reasoning and analysis of their context. Therefore, oral practices should be a fundamental pillar in the teaching of all educational institutions, from preschool to university, as it is a way to ensure the participation of all students in different participation spaces.

Despite acknowledging the significance of oral argumentation, it is common to see academic institutions strengthening written argumentation skills while neglecting oral argumentation. As mentioned earlier, there is a mistaken assumption that human beings, by their social nature, already possess this competency developed, leading to its neglect in the educational environment. Oral argumentation not only enables students to effectively express their ideas but also stimulates critical thinking, the ability to listen and understand diverse perspectives, as well as the skill to defend and support their viewpoints persuasively. Knowing how to firmly and knowledgeably articulate one's viewpoints is an indispensable requirement for all individuals in any social group (Cobos, 2021).

A student who properly develops their reading and oral expression skills has a greater likelihood of achieving better performance in their professional and social life. Therefore, it is crucial to give equal importance to discursive work as to strengthening written competencies. Argumentation is fundamental in every society as it enables the expression of ideas, mutual understanding, and participation in social life. According to Cruz and Carmona (2014), “through argumentation, processes of thought and reasoning are made explicit, and in this way, students support their assertions through evidence and evaluate different options, contributing to the regulation of knowledge”.

Therefore, argumentation is a skill that allows for the formulation of critical opinions, serving as a fundamental basis in the development of a democratic and pluralistic society where the diversity of viewpoints is appreciated, and constructive dialogue is encouraged.

The ability to produce arguments exerts a significant influence on various aspects of students' academic and professional development, enabling them to express and defend their viewpoints clearly and coherently. This not only allows them to participate actively and constructively in classroom discussions but also contributes to greater engagement with learning and the development of critical thinking. Furthermore, the ability to produce compelling arguments is closely related to students' academic success. In the words of Majidi et al. (2021), “weaknesses in argumentative reasoning can have serious implications for success in academic and professional careers and therefore deserve to be fostered” (p. 2).

It is clear that those lacking good communication skills face significant disadvantages in many aspects of life, both academically and socially and professionally. This leads to missed opportunities, as communication represents a fundamental element in all human interactions.

Effective communication skills not only facilitate the transmission of ideas and emotions but also contribute to establishing strong relationships, resolving conflicts, and achieving goals both personally and professionally. Those lacking these skills face significant obstacles in their pursuit of success and satisfaction in various areas of their lives. When students graduate from schools with deficient argumentative foundations, they encounter a series of difficulties that affect various aspects of their lives, limiting their participation in social, academic, professional, and even personal domains. Moreover, it is evident that they will have fewer opportunities to excel in environments that require solid social and argumentative skills. These deficiencies make them more prone to accepting information uncritically, rather than developing a reflective and critical approach to knowledge, as they are not accustomed to analyzing and evaluating different perspectives, questioning assumptions, and crafting coherent arguments. Effective communication will mediate all these interactions, underscoring the importance of fostering these competencies in pedagogical processes. Osana

and Seymour (2004) argue that strengthening students' ability to express their opinions, make value judgments, and contribute with their critical opinions is a responsibility that falls on the entire educational system.

To ensure that students learn how to argue is to teach them to think and engage in discussions with others about the various situations they encounter daily (Osborne, 2012). Therefore, the implementation and application of pedagogical tools that foster students' ability to reason critically and support their different positions with clarity and confidence should be a priority in all academic domains.

### **3. Current Perspectives on the Transformative Role of Rhetoric in Education.**

Rhetoric is based on words, and words are  
humanity's best communication tool  
(Juan Rey).

In the educational process, all activities and experiences should be designed to facilitate learning and the comprehensive development of individuals, focusing on communication and interaction among various elements. In this context, the teacher plays a fundamental role in exchanging knowledge and involving various additional actors, such as students, guest experts, and online resources. During this exchange of knowledge, language acts as a facilitator of learning. The teacher seeks to persuade students through discourse to accept what he considers necessary knowledge. Subsequently, students strengthen this knowledge with their contributions and reflections, resulting in true learning. It is important not only what is said but also how it is said, how arguments are made, and how positions are defended to achieve effective communication (Otero, 2009).

In the educational setting where the aim is to encourage student participation in discussion spaces and strengthen their communication skills, rhetoric plays an essential role in shaping participatory citizens by promoting dialogue and the exchange of ideas from an analytical

standpoint. As Brännström (2024) states: "Rhetoric is about reflecting on how to choose to communicate to help receivers make the best choice" (p. 205). Therefore, by introducing students to this tool, reflection on communicative processes in various contexts is promoted, allowing for a more comprehensive and well-founded exchange of ideas and opinions with solid and truthful information.

The main goal of education should be to form reflective, ethical, critical, and participatory individuals capable of expressing their ideas clearly and coherently. Rhetoric is closely linked to these fundamental educational objectives, as it encompasses everything from the development of critical thinking to the shaping of participatory citizens. By fostering dialogue and the exchange of ideas from an analytical standpoint, rhetoric helps choose language in the most constructive and effective way possible.

By reflecting on communicative acts, discourse analysis is promoted, leading to reflection on language use in the various social situations in which individuals are immersed daily. This analysis strengthens inclusive and collaborative learning environments where the diversity of perspectives is valued, facilitating participation in discussions, debates, and dialogue spaces, thereby promoting cooperative learning. Thus, they contribute to the construction of a participatory society that promotes respect, and tolerance towards individual differences, and decision-making through dialogue. Brännström (2022) expresses: "Rhetoric is about reflecting on how to choose to communicate to help receivers make the best choice" (p. 205). The possibility of reflection allows for communicative processes to take place with greater awareness of the diverse interactions experienced at every moment, recognizing the importance of strengthening communicative competencies.

Rhetorical skills play an important role in academic environments by facilitating effective communication among all involved actors (Albaladejo, 2005). The academia must work on creating educational spaces where all students feel heard, respected, and valued, regardless of their backgrounds or personal characteristics. In this sense, an essential initial step is to clearly incorporate rhetoric into teacher training to explore the opportunities for innovation and

observation that this system offers (Rodríguez, 2019). In this regard, proper teacher training is fundamental. If they are not prepared and lack the necessary skills to establish a true connection with students, any attempt to teach and strengthen these skills will be in vain. Therefore, it is essential that all processes in educational institutions are interconnected.

Rhetoric is considered a central tool in Swedish curricula, as presented by Skolverket (2011), "throughout the state curriculum for Swedish, rhetoric and its meta-language are seen as central tools for reflecting on the terms and outcomes of communication" (p. 15). Although this approach stems from the Swedish curriculum, it is a clear example of the importance that should be given to academic curricula. It should be a priority for academic institutions in all countries to include rhetoric as compulsory education if a comprehensive education of their students is genuinely sought, as it plays a fundamental role in facilitating assertive communication among all actors involved in the academic environment.

Addressing this need in students from an early age and training them with these skills from childhood will enable them to become individuals capable of making decisions and expressing opinions with total freedom and responsibility.

Cobos et al. (2021) argue:

Today's teachers and schools must understand that individuals today need to learn the complex task of knowing what to do with the information they are subjected to every day, how to contrast it, how to choose what serves them or not. (p. 53)

Without these basic skills that allow them to discern between true and false information, it will be difficult for them to adopt a critical stance, leaving them susceptible to manipulation due to the large amount of information that does not always align with real facts.

Rhetoric was long excluded from academic spaces because its use was considered to focus solely on persuading and convincing the audience based on arguments that were not truthful,

seeking only personal benefit. According to Hernández and García (1994): "Words, even though they do not serve to represent or transmit reality, are useful for persuading men" (p. 22). With this idea, rhetoric was removed from teaching. However, paradoxically, emphasis was placed on argumentation, disregarding that rhetoric and argumentation are interdependent components of the communication process.

Rhetoric strengthens arguments, allowing for logical and coherent reflection on language use. Argumentation, by presenting logical ideas, validates and strengthens the different rhetorical assertions made in communicative acts. This shows that rhetoric and argumentation enable more complete and effective communication, so their separation is not possible.

#### **4. Critical Thinking in Students' Cognitive and Personal Development**

In the educational context, teaching argumentation and rhetoric not only promotes the effective expression of ideas but also stimulates critical thinking by providing students with tools to analyze, evaluate, and respond reflectively in various communicative situations in which they must constantly interact. Within this teaching process, the most important competencies to develop are oral and written communication since they allow for closer relationships with others, facilitating interaction and understanding of the environment (De Zubiría, 2011). This training enables them to navigate more confidently and clearly, thus enhancing their ability to analyze and construct critical arguments and opinions. Those who acquire these skills can better justify their thoughts and ideas (Bauman, 2013).

For society, an individual making their own decisions and being responsible for them is synonymous with adulthood. Before reaching this stage, individuals are subject to the decisions of family, teachers, government, among others, often allowing them to act without assuming the responsibility their actions entail (Kant, 2013). In the current context, it is easier to teach young people to obey than to think, as it is simpler to control and manipulate them. Chomsky (2016) asserts that in schools, "The focus is not on the development of critical thinking; on the contrary, it is instrumental and accumulative knowledge. [...] Critical and

independent thinking is not sought; reasoning is anesthetized" (p. 10-11). It is also more comfortable for them to let others assume their responsibilities, leading them to accept without judgment everything they see, hear, and read, as is happening today with the use of social media and technology (Zuleta, 1991).

In this scenario, the school assumes a significant responsibility in shaping students with critical thinking abilities, fostering an understanding of the surrounding environment, and emphasizing the relevance of their opinions and actions in the current context. It is evident and undeniable that young people are immersed in a technologized world, where they are bombarded daily by a deluge of messages and information so instantaneous that they barely have time to process it before it is replaced by another (Cobos et al., 2021). This dynamic often limits the proper review of incoming information. Moreover, considering the limited development of critical thinking skills in students, serious obstacles can be foreseen in their ability to form well-founded and accurate opinions.

It is evident that the development of critical thinking must be one of the main concerns in current educational systems. It cannot be assumed that there is a set age for adopting critical stances towards actions in the various communicative activities carried out in everyday life. Strengthening critical thinking emerges as a priority need that must be promoted at all educational levels, regardless of students' grade or age. This action not only aims for students to understand and contribute to the various topics addressed in the classroom but also equips them to be conscious decision-makers, form their own criteria, and assume the consequences of their actions. In this way, it is hoped that they can contribute significantly to society, benefiting not only themselves but the entire community (Robles, 2019).

Finally, not fostering good communication processes in students means limiting them in many areas where these skills will be indispensable for achieving their goals in professional, academic, and even social life. Individuals who do not know how to communicate correctly and confidently will be condemned to live in anonymity and often accept the stances, decisions, and opinions of others, even if they do not agree with them.

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