

Modelling Argument Quality in Technology-Mediated Peer-Instruction

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ABSTRACT

TO DO

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing** → **Computer-assisted instruction**; • **Computing methodologies** → **Natural language processing**.

KEYWORDS

Peer Instruction, Learnersourcing

ACM Reference Format:

Sameer Bhatnagar, Antoine Lefebvre-Brossard, Michel C. Desmarais, and Amal Zouaq. 2021. Modelling Argument Quality in Technology-Mediated Peer-Instruction. In *Proceedings of LAK '21: Learning Analytics & Knowledge (LAK '21)*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 3 pages. <https://doi.org/10.000/0000.0000>

1 INTRODUCTION

Technology-mediated peer instruction (TMPI) platforms [2][15] expand multiple choice items into a two step process. On the first step, students must not only choose an answer choice, but also provide an explanation that justifies their reasoning. On the second step, students are prompted to revise their answer choice, by taking into consideration a subset of explanations written by their peers for another answer choice. In the case that the student wants to keep their original answer choice, but may be unsure of their own explanation, they are also shown peer-explanations for their original answer choice. The student now has three options:

- (1) Change their answer choice, by indicating which of their peer's explanations was most convincing
- (2) keep their answer choice, but *change explanations* by choosing one that is for the same answer as their own
- (3) choose "I stick to my own", indicating that their own explanation is best from amongst those that are shown.

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LAK '21, April 2021, UCI, CA

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ACM ISBN 978-x-xxxx-xxxx-x/YY/MM...\$15.00

<https://doi.org/10.000/0000.0000>

Whenever the student goes with either of the first two scenarios above, we frame this as "casting a vote" for the chosen peer explanation.

The design and growing popularity of TMPI is inspired by three schools of thought: firstly, prompting students to explain their reasoning is beneficial to their learning [5]. Second, classroom based *Peer Instruction*[6], often mediated by automated response systems (e.g. clickers), has become a prevalent, and often effective component in the teaching practice of instructors looking to drive student engagement as part of an active learning experience [3]. In discussing with peers *after* they have formulated their own reasoning, students are engaged in a higher order thinking task from Bloom's taxonomy, as they evaluate what is the strongest argument, before answering again. Thirdly, by capturing data on which explanations students find most convincing, TMPI affords teachers the opportunity to mitigate the "expert blind spot" [11], addressing student misconceptions they might not otherwise have thought of.

In many teaching contexts, however, teachers do not have the time to provide feedback to every student explanation for every question item. The feedback students receive is primarily based on the correctness of their first and second answer choices, not the *explanations* they write and choose.

Moreover, activities from online learning environments are often used for formative assessment, and carry little weight in terms of course credit. Framed as a low-stakes test, this can lead to low student motivation [18]. The expectancy-value model [12], which describes factors that influence the effort students will direct towards a task, includes "how important they perceive the test to be", and the "affective reaction to how mentally taxing the task appears to be" [19].

This further highlights the importance of providing feedback to students on the quality of their explanations, so as to emphasize the formative importance of the writing activity and promote engagement. The data at hand in TMPI environments enables scaling up how much feedback that can be given. We suggest that the "vote" data collected on each explanation, is a proxy for argument quality, along the dimension of *convincingness*, as judged by peer learners. These votes can be aggregated into a *convincingness* score, as a measure of how effective that explanation is in persuading peers to change their own answer.

We set out to examine the different measures of argument quality, along the dimension of *convincingness*, and model their role in the TMPI process. Our specific research questions are:

RQ1 What factors influence whether a student will choose a peer's explanation over their own in TMPI?

RQ2 What measures of argument *convincingness* are most useful in aggregating the "vote" data from TMPI?

We suggest that the results of our work can inform the design of TMPI platforms, in how feedback is generated and presented to students. In a broader context, we aim to contribute the growing body of research surrounding peer-review contexts where students do not provide holistic scores, but generate their evaluative judgments in a comparative setting. Peer-review platforms most often ask students to provide a score based on a rubric, but the difficulty lies in the ability of novices to generate useful feedback before they have gained expertise with the content. A growing number of peer-review platforms address this issue with pairwise *comparative* judgments. Notable examples include ComPAIR[14] and JuxtaPeer[1], both of which present students with a pair of their peers' submissions, and evaluate them with respect to one another.

2 RELATED WORK

2.1 Learnersourcing student explanations

This modality is a specific case of *learnersourcing*[16], wherein students first generate content as part of their own learning process, that is ultimately used to help their peers learn as well. Notable examples include PeerWise [7] and RiPPLE [10], both of which have student generate learning resources, which are subsequently used and evaluated by peers as part of formative assessment activities.

One of the earliest efforts to leverage peer judgments of peer-written explanations specifically is from the AXIS system[17], wherein students solved a problem, provided an explanation for their answer, and evaluated explanations written by their peers. Using a reinforcement-learning approach known as "multi-armed bandits", the system was able to select peer-written explanations that were rated as helpful as those written by an expert. Our research follows from these studies in scaling to multiple domains, and focusing on how the vote data can be used more directly to model argument quality as judged by peers.

2.2 Ranking Arguments for Quality

Rank aggregation is the task of combining the preferences of multiple agents into a single representative ranked list. It has long been understood that obtaining pairwise preference data may be less prone to error on the part of the annotator, as it is a simpler task than rating on scales with more gradations. (This is relevant in TMPI, since each student is choosing one explanation as the most convincing in relation to the subset of others that are shown.)

A classical approach for rank aggregation from pairwise preference data is using the Bradley-Terry model, which has been extended to incorporate the quality of contributions of different annotators in a crowdsourced setting when evaluating relative reading level in a pair passages [4].

When evaluating argument convincingness, one of the first approaches proposed is based on constructing an "argument graph", where a weighted edge is drawn from node A to node B for every pair where argument A is labelled as more convincing than argument B. After filtering example pairs that lead to cycles in the graph, PageRank scores are derived from this directed acyclic

graph, and the PageRank scores of each argument are used as the gold-standard to rank for convincingness [9].

More recently, a relatively simpler heuristic Win-Rate score has been shown to be competitive alternative, wherein the rank score of an argument is simply the (normalized) number of times that argument has been chosen as more convincing in a pair, divided by the number of pairs it appears in [13].

Finally, a neural approach based on RankNet has recently yielded state of the art results. By joining two Bidirectional Long-Short-Term Memory Networks in a Siamese architecture, and appending a softmax layer to the output, [8] show that we can jointly model pairwise preferences and overall ranks publicly available datasets.

We will explore two of these options as part of our methodology in our rank aggregation step: the probabilistic Bradley-Terry model, and the simple heuristic scoring model. (We leave the neural approach for future work, as the additional work required to address make the models interpretable enough for the educational context is out of the scope of this study)

3 METHODOLOGY

We borrow our methodological approach from research in argument mining (AM), specifically related to modelling argument quality along the dimension of *convincingness*. A common approach is to curate pairs of arguments made in defence of the same stance on the same topic. These pairs are then presented to crowd-workers who label which of the two is more convincing. These pairwise comparisons can then be aggregated using rank-aggregation methods so as to produce an overall ranked list of arguments.

We extend this work to the domain of TMPI, and change the prediction task: using only vote-data on student explanations, can we effectively predict when a student will choose a student explanation as more convincing than their own?

The raw data emerging from a TMPI platform is tabular, in the form of student-item observations. The fields include the item prompt, the student's *first* answer choice, their accompanying explanation, the peer explanations shown on the review step, the student's *second* answer choice, and the peer explanation they chose as most convincing (None if they choose to "stick to their own"). At each observation, we aim to predict whether the student will choose a peer's explanation over their own. We build interpretable predictive models for this task, and inspect the relative feature importances in order to address our research questions from above.

Our feature sets include

- *Surface level* features, including: the word count of explanation that the current student wrote; word counts of explanations that were shown on the review step; the number of explanations shown that were much shorter, or much longer than the student's own explanation; whether the student's first answer is correct;
- *Question and Student level* features, including: the difficulty of the question; the strength of the student (Both of these are defined by overall success rate on getting the correct answer on first attempt);
- *Convincingness* features, including: **win-rate**, defined as the ratio of times an explanation is chosen to the number of times it was shown; **BT** score, which is the argument "quality"

parameter estimated for each explanation, according to the *Bradley-Terry* model, where the probability of argument A being chosen over argument B is given by

$$P(a > b) = \frac{e^{\beta_a}}{e^{\beta_a} + e^{\beta_b}}$$

where β_i is the latent strength parameter of argument i . We decompose each student-item observation into argument pairs, where the chosen explanation is paired with each of the other shown ones, and the pair is labelled with $y = +/ -1$, depending on whether the chosen explanation is first/second in the pair. The latent argument strength parameters are estimated by maximizing the log-likelihood of the m explanation-pairs:

$$\ell(\beta) = \sum_{i=1}^m \sum_{j=1}^m [w_{ij} \ln \beta_i - w_{ij} \ln(\beta_i + \beta_j)]$$

subject to $\sum_i \beta_i = 0$. Once these parameters are estimated for each student explanation, they are set as features for the prediction task, as are related statistics with respect to the shown explanations (e.g. maximum, minimum and mean BT scores of shown explanations).

We experiment with classification models that are interpretable, but limit our selection to the most linear (linear regression), to the most acceptably non-linear (Random Forests).

4 DATA

5 RESULTS

6 DISCUSSION

7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

- (1) Students are not explicitly directed on how to evaluate their peers' explanations. This may have an impact <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-017-0220-3>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding for this research was made possible by the support of the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council *Insight* Grant. This project would not have been possible without the SALTISE/S4 network of researcher practitioners, and the students using myDALITE.org who consented to share their learning traces with the research community.

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