



Enhancing the Pupils' Speaking Abilities through Debate

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the debate method in enhancing students' English-speaking abilities while also exploring its impact on pupils, its influence on soft skills such as collaboration and empathy, and identifying the optimal duration and frequency of debate activities for maximum educational benefit. The research was conducted using a classroom action research design implemented in two cycles. Data were gathered through speaking tests, classroom observations, and pupils' interviews. The results demonstrate significant improvements in students' speaking performance. Specifically, pronunciation improved by 51.16%, vocabulary by 50%, fluency by 72.5%, grammar by 87.88%, and comprehension by 89.19%. These findings suggest that integrating debate into speaking instruction is an effective pedagogical approach that enhances students' English-speaking proficiency.

Keywords: Enhance, Debate, Speaking

Introduction

Language serves as a means of expressing meaning. According to (Bari Rahmany & Rizwan Khan, 2022), engagement and communication are its main uses. Humans utilise language to communicate with and comprehend one another. Given that God created humans with varying conditions and personalities, they must communicate with one another. Over the world, millions of people speak English. English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, starting in elementary school and continuing through university.

Most students who are taught and learn English as a foreign language struggle with pronunciation. There are a few complicating factors for this condition. Both external and internal effects exist. Internal pressures originate with the students themselves. These address components of personality. The students were cautious

to express their thoughts. They expected everyone to make fun of them. Students also revealed additional difficulties. This has to do with their school's teaching techniques, parents, and environment. Effective teaching strategies are essential for the success of language acquisition in all areas of school. However, the instructor does not choose the most appropriate way to teach speaking. She put these individuals to the test by having the students perform the exchange aloud in class. They were not allowed to directly express their thoughts through these activities. As a result, throughout the entire educational process, students cannot improve their speaking skills.

The researcher also observed that a large number of previous study initiatives have yielded good results when employing the debate approach to teaching English. The description below offers an overview of these investigations. According to (Lestari et al., 2021), adopting debate tactics in language education helps students improve their speaking skills. The study found that participating in conversation activities enhances spoken English fluency, accuracy, and confidence. It emerges that including debate methods in language training promotes critical thinking, student involvement, and overall language proficiency.

Students' speaking abilities are improved when discussion activities are included in language instruction (Sari et al., 2021). It was noted that students who took part in debates improved their speaking confidence, correctness, and fluency. The study concludes that employing debate as a teaching strategy can enhance general language competency, foster critical thinking in pupils, and actively involve them. According to (Laoli, 2021), using debate techniques in junior high schools enhances pupils' public speaking abilities. He noticed that pupils who participated in debating exercises showed improved confidence, precision, and fluency in their speech communication. This study implies that using debating techniques in the classroom might help students become more engaged, encourage critical thinking, and improve their general speaking ability in high school.

Based on the previous studies, the researcher finds some aspects that have not been explored in depth in previous studies regarding the use of the debate method in teaching English including: (1) Previous studies often focus on traditional school settings but few address the impact of debates on students from diverse cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. Studying the impact of debate in a broader context can provide deeper insight into the adaptability of this method, (2) Most studies focus on speaking skills, but few explore how debates might influence other skills, such as, collaboration, and empathy. Understanding debate's impact on these soft skills could add value to language education, (3) Previous studies have not clearly identified the optimal duration or frequency of debate activities to achieve maximum results. Researching the best frequency for debates in the classroom could help teachers establish the most effective. Thus, the current study examines the effectiveness of the debate method in enhancing students' English-speaking

abilities while also exploring its impact on students, its influence on soft skills such as collaboration and empathy, and identifying the optimal duration and frequency of debate activities for maximum educational benefit.

Method

A sort of qualitative approach called classroom action research was employed in this investigation. The goal of the data collection is to enable the researcher to characterise and clarify the study's selected problem. Two cycles are used in classroom action research, and each cycle has four phases consisting of Planning, Acting, Observing, and Reflecting (Ganesha, 2022). All of the subjects gave their informed consent before the research study started. In order to get informed consent, participants have to be fully informed about the goals, methods, possible dangers, and rewards of the study.

Participants were made aware that their participation was completely voluntary and that they may stop at any moment without facing any repercussions. They were also informed of their rights to anonymisation of their data and confidentiality. Each participant received a permission document outlining the goals of the study as well as the procedures for gathering and analysing data. Before giving their permission to participate, the participants were invited to ask any questions they had and were given enough time to read and understand the material. Participants demonstrated their awareness of the study's specifics and their desire to participate by freely signing the permission form (Ginting, 2022).

A cycle for carrying out action research in the classroom consists of four parts. They are planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The model adapted by Mertler (2025) is followed in this action research. The researcher used two cycles in the study. There are four meetings in every cycle. There are ninety minutes in each meeting. The premise of this classroom action research is that speaking instruction was not taught and learnt optimally in the first cycle due to inadequate usage of the debate approach. Ultimately, the utilisation of the discussion approach lacked organisation. Students started to take an active role in their education during the second cycle. The students' actions in the classroom demonstrated this.

Speaking assessments and observation forms were employed by the researcher to gather data. A test is a tool used to assess an individual's performance, knowledge, or aptitude in a certain area that is measurable. An instrument is a collection of methods, steps, or components that someone taking the test must do in order to pass the tests. While some examinations concentrate on highly particular talents or objectives, others analyse broad ability. When it comes to ability tests, the domain is general language proficiency—a competency shared by all language abilities—even when actual performance on the test only comprises a sampling of skills. An oral presentation was the form of speaking test that was utilised. (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

Results

Cycle 1

During the first cycle, the researcher asked several questions and allowed students to express their ideas. The researcher then explained the rules of the conversation. Rules were an important part of the debate because they taught us how to debate. Every speaker and student should know what they wanted to do. It helped students understand the methods or norms for discussing motions. Students simply engaged in teaching and learning activities throughout the debate. The researchers separated the students into two groups. Each group contained a few students to make the discourse more fruitful and effective. The researcher then divided the team into affirmative and opposing groups.

The researcher provided numerous subjects for debate, as follows: 1) Students should not be allowed to carry mobile phones to school; 2) Having a boyfriend or girlfriend improves student achievement; 3) Students should be prohibited from riding motorcycles. Motions should be considered as thoroughly as possible by the team before the debate begins; they should develop an outline to express their team's argument or point of view when arguing. Researchers assigned the team 15 minutes to create a movement system while allowing students to give their points and begin the discussion in sequence. The conversation continues until all members had expressed their opinions.

Following the conclusion of the first set of arguments, the researcher requested the second group to demonstrate to the class how to begin their discussion, followed by the last group. After all, the groups rehearsed their discussions, and the researcher assessed and evaluated the exercise. Several observations revealed the following: Students paid close attention to class activities. Students that were excited about studying do well, but their communication abilities remained low. The kids lacked sufficient words to explain their arguments. Moreover, some pupils are still hesitant to talk in front of their peers. In this cycle, the students were learning to collaborate in discussing and building critical thinking.

Cycle 2

The researcher demonstrated how to convey agreement and disagreement by using several terms. The teacher asked pupils to agree or disagree. Then the teacher divided the class into two groups. The groups were different than previously; therefore, pupils were not bored. The researcher separated the team into affirmative and opposing groups. Researchers presented a motion that would be debated. The debating motions are: 1) Teachers should not assign homework, 2) Social media is harmful, 3) Happiness is more important than success. The teacher instructed the students to sit in groups. The teacher asked pupils to outline the motion, which took about 15 minutes. Each group created an outline, which was necessary since it helped them establish their argument. The researcher permitted students to propose their views and began the discussion in order.

The conversation continued until all members had expressed their opinions.

Following the conclusion of the first set of arguments, the researcher requested the second group to demonstrate to the class how to begin their discussion, followed by the last group. In the second round, the pupils appeared cheerful and ventured to dispute. The debate's teaching and learning process came to an end with common conclusions. The conclusion was to identify some challenges faced when learning to speak using the debate approach.

Based on the activities in cycle two, the data showed that the students increased their English abilities. Most of the students were active enough to talk. They find their motivation to work hard effectively. When the debate was conducted, the students followed this learning process and felt happy with the lesson. In cycle 2, students can work together with each team, other groups, and researchers. They provide opinions, ideas, and points of view regarding the motions submitted. They pay attention to the researcher's instructions, to the achievements of other students, and also, they give different opinions through the opinions of other teams. All students pay attention to each other and learn about empathy.

The comparison of the scores in cycles 1 and 2 shows an increase in students' speaking skills. It can be seen in the results of the students' pre-test and post-test which is done in every cycle. The following table shows the debate technique can enhance students' speaking skills.

Tabel 1. The Improvement of Speaking Abilities

No	Components	Means Score			Improvement
		Pre-Test	Post Test of Cycle I	Post Test of Cycle II	
1	Pronunciation	2.15	2.6	3.05	51.16%
2	Vocabulary	2.2	2.5	2.9	50.0%
3	Fluency	2	2.4	2.95	72.5 %
4	Grammar	1.65	2.1	3.1	87.88%
5	Comprehension	1.85	2.15	3.5	89.19%

Table 1 shows that students' speaking abilities have improved. The improvement in students' pronunciation is 51.16%, the improvement in students' vocabulary is 50. %, the improvement in students' fluency is 72.5 %, the improvement of students' grammar is 87.88%, and the improvement in students' comprehension is 89.19%. Based on the result above, it can be concluded that debate can enhance the pupils' speaking abilities.

The optimal frequency of debate activities conducted during two cycles of classroom action research aimed at improving students' speaking abilities. It outlines weekly implementation and its impact on student engagement.

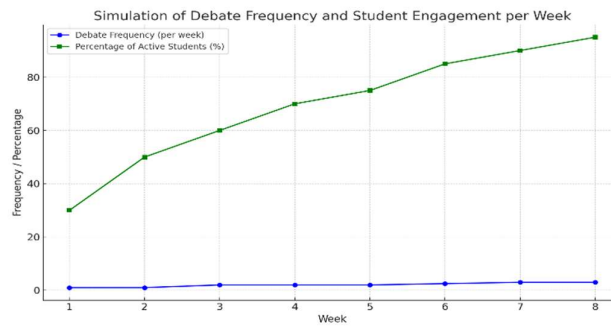
Table 2. Debate Frequency

Week	Cycle	Debate Frequency (per week)	Main Activity	Outcome
1	1	Once	Introduction to debate, group division	Students begin to understand debate format
2	1	Once	Simple debate on light topics	30% of students active, 50% still passive
3	1	Twice	Ongoing debate with scoring rubric	50% active, growing confidence
4	1	Twice	Group debates, learning reflection	60% active, speaking skills start to improve
5	2	Twice	Complex topics, debate with moderator	75% active, increased engagement
6	2	2–3 times	Team debates, peer evaluation	85% active, vocabulary and arguments improve
7	2	Three times	Competitive debates, formal language use	90% active, clear improvement in speaking skills
8	2	Three times + final reflection	Final debate, feedback and reflection	95% active, significant improvement observed

In Cycle 1, conducting debates once or twice per week helps students build confidence and understanding. In Cycle 2, increasing the frequency to 2–3 times per week significantly enhances speaking engagement and proficiency. Regular debates held at least twice a week across both cycles prove highly effective in increasing student speaking activity.

The chart below illustrates the relationship between debate frequency and student participation rates over the eight-week period, supporting the effectiveness of sustained debate implementation.

Chart 1. The Relationship between Debate Frequency and Student Engagement



Discussion

Throughout the teaching and learning process, a large number of pupils eagerly attended class. They paid attentively to the instruction, but as many of the students had never debated before, many of them were still unsure about the technique. The majority of pupils seemed to appreciate the exercise, according to the researcher. Additionally, the researcher discovered that using debate to teach speaking was effective since it was a fun activity that gave students lots of chances to practise speaking in front of the class. Students actively participated in the debating process to voice their thoughts and defend them.

To analyze the results, researcher also use questionnaire and interpret it to assess the overall agreement with the statement. A mean score of 4.3 indicates that the majority of students agree or strongly agree with the statement. 10 students (50%) are strongly agreed, showing high confidence or satisfaction. 6 students (30%) are agreed, indicating general agreement, 4 students (20%) are neutral, showing neither agreement nor disagreement.

The interpretation of the result above is as follows: 1) The majority (80%) of students positively perceive the statement, 2) The high mean score (4.3) suggests that the activities using debate are effective and well-received by most participants, however, 20% of students are neutral, which could indicate areas for improvement or students who are not significantly impacted.

During the observation process, the researcher saw that when teachers exhibit a pleasant attitude, it fosters an environment where students feel respected and cared for. Students participate more actively in the learning process when they feel valued. Furthermore, students become more comfortable voicing their thoughts and opinions when they get support and encouragement from their teachers. Their confidence encourages them to actively participate and contribute during language sessions, which increases their interest in studying English. The emphasis on active involvement and communication, the respectful and encouraging environment between teachers and students, and the pleasant teacher-student interactions all contribute to engagement. These elements support motivation, self-assurance, and a supportive learning environment, all of which improve student involvement.

Moreover, by requiring students to articulate and defend positions—sometimes contrary to their personal views, debate encourages the development

of perspective-taking and a deeper understanding of diverse social, cultural, and ideological standpoints. This process cultivates empathy, as students must engage with and appreciate arguments grounded in experiences different from their own. Furthermore, debate necessitates teamwork, wherein students collaborate to research, construct arguments, and anticipate counterpoints. Such interaction promotes active listening, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, all of which are essential components of effective collaboration. Consequently, regular participation in debate significantly contribute to the development of emotionally intelligent and socially competent learners.

Most importantly, teachers are now empowered to motivate students to study by offering them support, appreciation, and a general sense of optimism. Because their teachers guided them in speaking during each learning cycle and were helpful, the students felt appreciated. It motivates individuals to acquire English, particularly to convey their thoughts and opinions. Student engagement is linked to praising pupils and maintaining a positive outlook to encourage them to study. By doing this, the teachers and researchers highlight the importance of encouragement. Students feel inspired and encouraged in their learning process when teachers use this effective teaching technique. By doing this, the teachers and researchers highlight the importance of encouragement. Students feel inspired and encouraged in their learning process when teachers use these effective teaching techniques.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that the debate method is an effective strategy for enhancing students' English-speaking abilities. Significant improvements were observed across all assessed speaking components, including pronunciation (51.16%), vocabulary (50%), fluency (72.5%), grammar (87.88%), and comprehension (89.19%). These results indicate that debate activities offer meaningful opportunities for students to practice and develop their speaking skills in an engaging and supportive environment.

Beyond language improvement, the study also revealed the broader benefits of debate in the classroom. Despite initial uncertainty due to unfamiliarity with debating, students demonstrated enthusiasm, active participation, and a willingness to voice their opinions. This process fostered soft skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, empathy, and confidence. Additionally, the role of the teacher was shown to be crucial in cultivating a positive and respectful classroom climate. When teachers offered encouragement and showed appreciation, students felt more motivated and empowered to participate.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of consistent teacher support and constructive feedback throughout each learning cycle. These elements contributed to students' sustained interest in learning English and increased their

willingness to express themselves in the target language. The study suggests that the debate method, when implemented with a focus on frequency, supportive teacher-student interactions, and emotional encouragement, can significantly enhance both linguistic and interpersonal skills.

Considering the findings and limitations of the current study, several avenues for further research are recommended. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of debate activities in enhancing speaking skills across different levels of English proficiency, such as comparing beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners. Additionally, longitudinal research may offer deeper insight into the long-term impact of debate on students' speaking fluency, coherence, and confidence. The integration of technology—such as virtual or online debate platforms—also presents an opportunity for exploration, particularly in remote or blended learning environments. Moreover, researchers could focus on specific components of speaking, such as pronunciation, grammar accuracy, or vocabulary use, to better understand which aspects are most influenced by debate. Qualitative studies examining teacher and student perceptions of debate-based instruction could also enrich the field by revealing practical challenges and perceived benefits. Finally, further research could extend to different age groups or subject areas, examining how debate functions not only in language classes but also across disciplines and educational levels.

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