

## Debating as a systematic teaching technique to promote HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skill)

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### ABSTRACT

Enhancing speaking skills is essential, especially for EFL learners who find it challenging to perform English well since it is not their native language. In this case, a debate is promoting a new perspective among the EFL learners that this technique gives them opportunities to have discussions; they can use the language freely; without any forces and strict rules that make them be motivated to speak actively. The instructors can employ this technique to accommodate students with differing learning styles. Debating as a systematic teaching technique brings many advantages to EFL learners, including promoting higher order thinking skill, mastering the course topics, increasing the speed of learning, enhancing social skills, promoting evaluation power, promoting mental health, and leading to creative learning. However, this technique carries its own opponents, is limited, and is challenging to apply. Therefore, this paper aims to introduce debate as an instructional technique, review earlier studies on it, compare it with other similar procedures, and discuss its limitations and challenges as well as its benefits, especially to EFL learners.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language brings its own challenges since the language is not the students' native language. The EFL students should have bigger motivation to learn English compare to the native speakers themselves. Therefore, debate technique is introduced to increase motivation of speaking and create an active classroom interaction. Harmer (2001) demonstrates one of the ways to improve students' motivation to speak in English is rehearsal which means the idea of giving students opportunities to have discussions where they can use the language freely. Using language, especially English, without any forces and strict rules will make them be motivated to speak actively.

According to Goldin & Katz (1999), debate was originally developed in American higher education during the 19<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it did lose its popularity as a learning or teaching technique in the 1980s (Freeley, 2009; & Redding, 2001) until it became popular again in the United States that has been practiced over the last three decades. Some educators believe that debate technique has been providing a unique educational experience for students in high schools and universities since it is different from any other technique (Williams et al., 2001). The classroom debate has been used to expand students' abilities in all

subject areas regardless of their academic level. Bellon (2000) and Gervey et al. (2009) highlight that through debate, students are automatically learn how to use the reference, to argue, to analyse, to clarify, to stand on and to present arguments.

In academic purposes, debate is a formal forum where people can deliver their arguments and stand on it. Freeley (2009) indicates that formal debate is a structured academic activity and has a special role to play in education. Through debate, students are challenged to examine issues of public policy in terms of their legal, social, economic, political, moral, and ethical implications. Debate technique addresses not only set up such communicative activities in the classroom, but also promote students' higher order thinking skill (HOTS).

According to Ciardiello (2000), HOTS is defined as a new idea or concept. He stated that someone activating higher cognitive domains means that they are capable in producing a unique characteristic in communication, a unique idea and employ critical and innovative knowledge. Therefore, an old lecturing format is no longer suitable to conduct an active interaction with the students, since student does not speak at all. The study by Maiorana (as cited in Duron et al., 2006) found that it is very difficult to increase a student's critical thinking skill with the lecture format. Topics are discussed sequentially rather than critically and students are placed in a passive role rather than an active one since the teacher does the talking, the questioning, and, most of the thinking.

By conducting debate in the classroom would give a lot of exercises which could be used by the students to improve their ability through language especially English. In a study, Leuser (2003) indicates that classroom-debates are exercises designed to allow the student to strengthen their skills in the areas of higher order thinking, leadership, interpersonal influence, teambuilding, group problem solving, and oral presentation.

Previous studies have demonstrated that debaters consistently value and highly rate the development of speaking skills, communication skills and critical thinking skills (Williams et al., 2001; Gervey et al., 2009; Bedir, 2013; & Hall, 2011). Since several previous studies show when the students were tested at the end of the lesson, their score significantly higher than those who were not taught using this technique, thus, further research of how this technique is successfully conducted by the teacher in the classroom is enormously needed to analyse. Hence this research is accomplished to analyse the teacher's debate technique implementation in the classroom along with the students' response at the end of the session.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This was a descriptive qualitative study that describe the implementation of debate technique in an EFL classroom. A qualitative study is designed to describe the observed phenomena with words rather than with numbers (Johnson and Christensen, 2019). The subjects were third semester students of English Language Teaching Department of Tarbiyah Faculty, Universitas Darussalam Gontor. The number of students were 15. They were purposively chosen under two considerations. First, all students have to speak in English all the time during the lesson. Therefore, this supports the implementation of debate technique where the ability in speaking is required. Second, the lecturer of the class has implemented debate technique in teaching speaking for academic subject.

This research focused on the extension of teaching speaking competence using debate technique. The data were in the form of transcribed conversations during the learning process in the classroom. Those were collected through observation and focus group discussion. The researcher took part in the classroom as an observer. The observation included how the debate technique, which was conducted by the lecturer, helped the students' ability in giving, rebutting arguments, and thinking critically. The data from the classroom activities followed by FGD results then being analysed qualitatively in the presentation.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Systematic Technique of Debating

This section includes the description of debate technique implementation in the classroom. Before starting the sessions, the lecturer made the students prepare the materials include setting the classroom (giving space for all students to participate in by moving the tables, and getting two rows of chairs put in the centre of the classroom, facing one another), taking soft ball or another item of soft texture (in this case was a plush toy). Then the lecturer opened the session by introducing some common terms use in debating, role of debating and goal of the session. Then she played a video of debating example thus the students' saw how debating should be done. Ensured that all students got every detail, she was then selecting a debate topic or common as motion that students have some preliminary/basic knowledge about it. The students were sufficient to form arguments and discuss about it. The lecturer wrote the motion on the board. She divided the

students randomly into two groups, one agreeing with the statement on the board, and the other group disagreeing with it.

The groups were given 10 minutes for quick discussion, case build, and brainstorm on different arguments, perspectives to explore, stakeholders, analysis, reasoning, example, etc. All students were required to perform AREL (assertion, reason, example, and linkback) in order to create a good argument. After 10 minutes had passed, the students took their seats in the two rows, were ready to take their turn to speak.

However, only the student holding the ball might speak (there were no interruptions). It aimed to train the students to play fair, waiting for their chance to share their idea. The students should indicate their willingness to speak by holding their hand up (to receive the ball next), when there were no volunteers to speak, the ball should be thrown at random to the next speaker.

The arguments were offered consecutively by the opposing side, starting from student from affirmative or government team first, followed by student from negative or opposition team, then went back to student from affirmative team, continuously in turn up to the last student from negative team.

During this session, the lecturer monitored that the arguments were not being repeated, and that there was engagement – that the students were responding to each other’s argumentation (by refuting it, or enhancing it with further examples or evidence where appropriate). At the end of the session, the lecturer gave score to each student’s performance considering 3M criteria: manners, matters, methods. Manners deal with students’ gesture or body language, expression, stress, pronunciation, and fluency. While matters were related to what they said or the contents of students’ speech, whether or not their arguments were critical enough. Methods were the organization or structure of students’ speech, clear order of first argument, second, third, etc.

### 3.2. Focus Group Discussion

After completing the debate technique session, FGD was conducted which aimed to investigate students’ perspective whether or not their critical thinking and speaking skill enhance after finishing debate session during the classroom. Therefore, all students were given chances to share their feeling. The following table 1 are some students’ opinion taken from FGD process:

Table 1. Students’ Opinion

<i>I couldn’t speak English well, but I start to think that English is fun since I can argue with my friends, talking about some current issues is interesting. [Datum 1]</i>
<i>The rejection against my arguments is annoying, that’s why I need to talk more and more. [Datum 3]</i>
<i>I learned a lot of things from debating, composing ideas, gaining some data, reasoning and arguing it with various people. [Datum 6]</i>
<i>I think we can speak stronger when I get more data, it was so exciting. [Datum 8]</i>
<i>The more I read, the more I can argue. This debate benefits me in both ways. [Datum 10]</i>
<i>Debating forced me to speak more and more since I don’t want to be rebutted by my opponents. It made me want to learn more to present a good argument. [Datum 11]</i>
<i>I started to think that I gained my motivation to speak when someone share their opinion against mine. Debating session is interesting because it taught me a lot of things starting from building an idea, finding a problem and how to solve it. [Datum 14]</i>
<i>I believe that I can be more confident in sharing my idea especially during the debate session. I am accustomed to read more sources to gain accurate data thus I can compose a reasonable reason for my arguments. [Datum 15]</i>

In the end of the classroom activities, the researcher concluded that the course was a great success and she claimed that the students felt they had gained something that would help them in their future both in studies and careers. It was proven by the enthusiasm of all students during the lesson and their positive responses that debating helps them gaining their motivation in speaking.

### 3.3 Systematic Debating to Promote HOTS

The debating session conducted by the lecturer presented the goal of this research. This systematic technique has positive effects on teaching and learning which distinguishes it from others. This technique includes the systematic program of preliminary study; preliminary debate, attending classes, studying, and debating that are done in several stages.

### 3.3.1 The First Stage

The first stage of the debate that has great impact on the speed of learning and developing, and flourishes the learners' talent, begins with two phases; preliminary study and preliminary debate. This has a positive impact on the speed and the classroom administering process. It also makes the learners getting more curious during the learning process (Mohammad et al., 2016). Aforementioned above, the process begins with a review of the following specified topics:

#### *Step One: Preliminary Study*

This stage is accomplished when the lecturer gave a short opening on debate terms, role of debate and goal of the session. It can be a great help in understanding the case and bring up some questions in the learners' mind. At this point the students need to take notes that help them organize their idea. A study that includes written text provides helpful planning in the human mind to master course content (Rezaie and Lashkarian, 2015). Here the students obtain the mastery of the theory to make them able to review, criticize and defence, and finally to summarize and make conclusion (Velea and Farca, 2013).

This leads the students to have a whole image of the course in their mind. Moreover, to cause curiosity and strengthen inner potentiality, preliminary study brings a mental concentration in learners as well as creates a question that increases their motivation to understand the vague points.

#### *Step Two: Preliminary Debate*

Preliminary debate is done after the preliminary study when the lecturer made the students' see how debate works in a video. This step has important impact on the readiness of the mind to accept the lesson and to focus on the content. In this step, all students acted like they were the adjudicator, paid attention and took some notes from the match and discussed the result with their friends about which team deserved the winning. Here, divergent views put together, and each of the students review what the other decision and opinion. Hence, the students will be aware of their own weaknesses and strengths (Gervy et al., 2009). They also will be able to understand and tolerate the others' capabilities (Mohammad et al., 2016).

### 3.3.2 The Second Stage

Following the earlier aforementioned steps, it is then important to follow the lecturer's instruction to have a brainstorming and build case of the motion being chosen to discuss. Then the lecturer divided the students into two teams; affirmative and negative. Here the students' demand is clearer. Transition from the earlier stages helps learners achieve the purpose of finding answers to the uncertainties associated with the role of debating that have been achieved in the first phase. According to Narmaditya et al., (2019), this step is crucial since it will determine their critical thinking goes to the right direction. While the lecturer ensured that the motion was familiar or at least, they have background knowledge towards that case, thus students' motivation to speak increases and their mind get to explore the content (Handayani, 2016). Before that, the students were also involved in classroom setting (they moved chair, table, prepared the tools, etc.) they knew exactly what they are going to do. Therefore, this students' involvement is mandatory in this learning and teaching technique.

Building case with their team and knowing exactly where their positions were whether as the affirmative or negative is very effective in the students' inclusive growth. The aroused questions may even affect and change the students' mind (Green and Klug, 1990). According to Wahyuni et al. (2019), this case build determines the students' ability in giving critical opinion to later perform it against the opponents' argument. Therefore, this step aims to create a spirit, to enhance their ability of higher order and critical thinking, and to gain criticism behaviour in the whole generation.

### 3.3.3 The Third Stage

The final or the stage after presence in the class includes further study and complementary debate.

#### *Step One: Further Study*

The active students who have passed the previous stages, this step help them to overcome any other remaining ambiguous points after all these steps. Pervasive thinking is more important at this stage of the study. Here the students need to analyse, do some research and gain more data related to their arguments thus they can perform their arguments well (Zare and Othman, 2013). This also boosts their HOTS skills.

#### *Step Two: Further Debate*

This step is accomplished when the students took turn in order to present their arguments. Basically, the order was pretty clear when they have to wait for their turn to speak. It can be done comprehensively and scholarly. This helps them manage their role in their team (Chen et al., 2022). This also helps the teacher to ensure that everyone's arguments matter in this situation.

At this stage of the debate, the student who was going to present the argument should be serious enough in his job, and those who were listeners on the other team should actively participate in the issue by

taking some notes and giving some rebuttals. According to Lestari (2018), expressing the problems, giving limitation, protesting, and presenting critical designs should be done by the participant in order to solve problems and overcome weaknesses. Therefore, this step can strengthen the learners' reasoning power, problem solving ability, and the pervasive perception.

### 3.3.4 Special Benefits of Debating Technique

Not only debating technique is used to promote HOTS, but also is carrying some special benefits as the following:

- a. Mastering the course topics  
This technique involves both lecturer and students' mind, especially active students, thus it is an effective teaching technique through which the students can discover and tackle the uncertainties better. Since the beginning of the session, the students realize their shortcomings and are able to achieve mastery skill on the content and how to express them (Leuser, 2003; Zare & Othman, 2013; Maulina & Siregar, 2023).
- b. Increasing the speed of learning  
This technique is efficient to apply and can be done fast since all students already know their position and the topic being discussed. Systematic process of the debate boosts the learning speed and causes accuracy in language acquisition (Mohammad et al., 2016; & Hall, 2011)
- c. Enhancing social skills  
Systematic process of debate takes part in maintaining behaviour and social skills since this session requires the students to work in group. This improves their active interaction and communication skills (Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006). Besides, they can help one another to achieve the same goal within a team, winning their team position. As the group was randomly chosen, it might consist of students with lack and high language skills. This mixing will make them learn to work together and certainly leadership and management ability will follow after (Duron et al., 2006).
- d. Promoting evaluation power  
By the time the students realize their shortcomings and gain mastery skill on the issue being discuss, they will be able to have a comprehensive evaluation of the course. Here they are faced with self-assessment thus they need to control their own ability (Andrade, 2019).
- e. Promoting mental health  
The students have the equal opportunity to take part in debating technique, gain relationship with their teammate, discuss a topic with others, and show their talent as time goes by. According to Othman et al. (2015), those activities lead to self-confidence that sometimes a student feels inferior, but during the debate, he will realize that he is part of the team, has the same chance, and knows himself in better way. It also helps them be more confident (Bedir, 2013)
- f. Leading to creative learning  
Not all of motion being presented in one debate session is a prepared motion. Somehow, they are impromptu motions. Therefore, not only the students need to understand the concept but also impose spontaneous and innovative questions about the issue thus they become more creative learners (Nanlohy and Monica); & Ciardiello, 2000).

Therefore, this debate technique encourages students to learn course content better, since they are engaged in the course content actively, broadly, deeply and personally. It also trains them to assess the data they get on a daily basis. In addition, debate provides a valuable opportunity to develop learners' speaking ability.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it can be concluded that systematic debating is an effective teaching technique particularly because it promotes active students' interactions. Obviously, active learning cultivates multifaceted thinking procedures and develops maintenance, absorption, appropriate use and comprehension of course content; as a result, learners benefit much when lecturers make use of educational techniques that encourage students' active involvement. It is discovered that debate technique empowers students' speaking competence and leads them to perform higher order thinking skill.

The result of focus group discussion also revealed that students couldn't agree more that debating technique helps them to perform speaking skill and to be more critical. As a result, participating in debate exercises must not be restricted to those level only but must an experience offer to learners in a broad diversity of university classrooms. However, some teachers may find it difficult and challenging to apply in

the classroom since this technique requires higher level of speaking skill. Therefore, the next research may need to conduct to examine the challenges faced by the teacher during the implementation of this technique.

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