



Role Of Debate Activities In Indian English Learning: A Mixed-Methods Intervention Study

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Abstract: Debate activities have been powerful teaching tools in language classrooms to develop oral communicative competence and critical thinking. It is a challenging task for Indian ESL learners to speak in a second language. Moreover, despite being a link language in India, many students cannot use English confidently for real-life communication. Students who get educated in the English language formally throughout their school-going years are unable to use the English language for communication outside the classroom. Textbooks in English set different questions in the exam every year, teaching-learning process. As a result, students memorize the text and various answers without comprehending the matter and remembering the correct answers to the questions. In addition, this system allows little space for any spoken communication in the language classroom. The research paper studies the possibilities of the use of debate activities in teaching-learning of English with special reference to Indian ESL learners. According to the findings of the research, the activities of debates can be an effective means to improve speaking skills, vocabulary, listening skills and build learner confidence.

Index Terms - debate activities, English language learning, Indian ESL learners, speaking skills, communicative competence.

Introduction

English is the language of education, administration, and communication in India. As such, English is given a special status in India. Most Indian colleges and schools teach English as a second language. Nonetheless, numerous students still struggle to utilize the English language for oral communication.

Even if you know the rules of grammar and spelling, you will not be able to speak. For example, he/she knows English but he/she is unable to speak English in academic and social settings. They also “read” and “write,” but do not “speak.” Teaching practice should engage that kind of phenomenon.

One of the main criticisms is that teaching of English in India relies heavily on lectures and examinations. The author emphasizes reading and writing over oral and visual language. Moreover, speaking and listening skills do not receive as much emphasis. Though English is one of the compulsory subjects in most of the schools in India, students rarely get opportunities for oral expression and negotiation of meaning. Debate activities are consistent with learner-centred approaches and can apply within a CLT framework.

Debates are basically a means of arguing things out in an organised style. We have to set up our point and back it up and then take on the argument of the other side. It trains us to be able to think on our feet, to line up everything logically and to say it all in English. Besides improving our oral skills, debates force us to sit through the ideas of the other side and actually listen, which is a huge part of a good conversation. In an Indian university context, where students come from all kinds of language and cultures, there is a possibility through debate to learn from each other, exchange their point of view and pick up different ways of expressing

ourselves. Still, the benefits appear to be eluding many classrooms. Many professors view debate as a time-sucking exercise or consider that it is just for the best-of-the-best in the class. This paper attempts to fill that void by discussing the impact of debate on various aspects of English on a group of Indian undergrads.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching and Oral Interaction

Communicative Language Teaching is concerned with the development of the communication skill, but not merely correctness of grammar (Hymes, 1972). Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence as the ability to use grammar properly, a chance to understand the social context, and skills to manage conversations, as well as strategies. Activities that allow classroom students to communicate, solve confusion, and apply real communications are thus very necessary in effective learning of language.

Quite a number of researchers have emphasized the significance of communicating with other people when acquiring a second language. According to the Interaction Hypothesis of Long, (1996), learners learn better when they interact with each other in a manner that necessitates them to change their language production. Equally, the Hypothesis of Output of Swain (1995) proposes that the generation of language causes the learner to identify the holes that lie in the knowledge and strive to achieve more precise results.

These concepts are inherently manifested in debate activities, since the learners have to engage the rest of the students, explain their thoughts, and solve the problem. These activities provide a communicative space in which language is grasped as an instrument of expression of meaning as opposed to being an object of study.

2.2 Debate as a Pedagogical Tool

In schools, debate has been used to enable students to think critically and be good in argumentation. It assists students in paying close attention to the content, thinking about various opinions, and drawing rational arguments. Debates in the language classes also provide students with numerous opportunities to speak.

It has been found that a debate makes students talk faster, learn new words, and have better pronunciation skills. With preparation the students learn new words and phrases concerning the topic. During the process of debating, they are applied in real sentences so that they can recall and apply them.

Students are also more independent and responsible in debates. They require conducting research, organizing facts and strategizing their arguments- this assists in self-learning. This is particularly crucial in university whereby students are supposed to be in control of their education.

2.3 Debate and Affective Factors in Language Learning

Emotions such as motivation, anxiety, and confidence are highly essential to language acquisition. In India, many students fear doing wrong things when speaking English and this may make them unable to attend the classes.

Sometimes interactive lessons like debates have the potential to reduce speaking anxiety because learning becomes supportive and cooperative. As students engage in practicing the ability to share ideas in the English language, their confidence will improve with time.

Moreover, controversial issues that are close to the life of the students and social circumstances can promote motivation and interest. Learners will be more willing to participate when they believe that their views are valued.

2.4 Studies in the Indian Context

There are a number of studies conducted in India on communicative methods of teaching English, however, very few studies have concentrated on activities involving debate. Certain authors have given positive results of applying group discussions, role plays, and presentation in Indian classrooms. Such studies imply that oral proficiency and oral confidence of the learners can be enhanced through interactive strategies.

Nevertheless, the effects of systematic debate activity on various aspects of learning English require further systematic research. The given research proposal will aim to contribute to the given field by means of the empirical evidence in Indian undergraduate classrooms.

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework linking debate activities, context, mediators and outcomes

Debate (Classroom Group Panel debates)	Activities debates, debates,	Mediators • Teacher facilitation • Peer interaction • Student motivation • Language input • Learning materials	Outcomes • Speaking fluency • Vocabulary development • Listening skills • Confidence • Communicative competence
Context (Indian ESL Classroom) • Urban / Rural colleges • Undergraduate learners	Interaction		Overall English Language Proficiency

2. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The design of this study was that of mixing numbers and stories. The researcher believed that numbers alone could not reveal the impacts of activities associated with debate on English learning. Meanwhile, the result would be weak due to stories alone. The two were then employed together to have a better picture.

The numbers section was used to determine the extent to which the speaking of the students is improved using test scores pre- and post-debate activities. The part of the stories considered the feeling of students, their experience, and their behavior in the classroom when debate occurred.

The research is primarily related to the description of what has occurred, yet the research also experiments change activities of debate. The combination of the two parts assisted in the connection of classroom practice to real learning outcomes.

3.2 Sample

The number of sample was 100 undergraduate students who were chosen in two-degree colleges in India. The learners were pursuing Arts, Science and Commerce courses and were taking mandatory English classes. Simple random sampling was used to select the participants so that all the students would have an equal opportunity of being selected.

The students were of the age 18 to 21 years. Male and female students were invited to take part in the study. There are also students who had a rural background and others with an urban background which made the sample more representative of the Indian ESL environment. Majority of the students had studied English in the school and some of them had been taking several years in school yet most of them lacked the confidence of speaking.

3.3 Instruments

There were three primary instruments, which included a speaking test, learner perception survey, and a classroom observation checklist.

The speaking test was administered twice (pre-test and post-test) once before the program and once after the program. Students were asked to discuss a certain topic briefly. Their fluent speaking was evaluated by the level of their fluent speech, vocabulary, the extent of linking ideas (coherence) and their pronunciations.

The learner perception survey required the students to respond to their perception of debate activities and their usefulness in learning English. It consisted of some statements with a five-point rating scale which are closed-ended and a few open-ended questions.

The researcher followed the classroom observation checklist when the debate sessions took place to observe students in terms of their participation, English use, confidence, and communication between themselves. Two English teachers checked all the tools in regard to basic validity.

3.4 Procedure

This went on for eight weeks. During the first week, the students were informed about the purpose of conducting the study and spoken pre-test was administered. Afterward, the activities in the classroom were introduced as debate activities.

There were one debate each week in which students participated. The subjects were selected to suit the level and interests of the students such as education system, social media, online learning, and youth problems. There was time during which students prepared in groups before each debate.

The class was primarily assisted by the teacher who guided the students and encouraged them to participate. Eight weeks later, the post- test was administered and a questionnaire was distributed. The whole process was observed in the classroom.

3.5 Data Analysis

The simple statistics such as the mean and standard deviation were used to examine some of the quantitative data of the speaking tests. We aimed to compare the pre- and post-tests results of the test scores.

Thematic sorting of the qualitative data in questionnaires and our notes took place. I read the answers several times and identified patterns. These patterns were defined in themes such as confidence, motivation, participation and the improvement of speaking. The analysis was rapid, yet it revealed the primary trends and was beneficial in the study objectives.

3.6 Sample learner perception questionnaire

Sr. No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Debate activities helped me speak English more confidently.				
2	I feel my vocabulary has increased after participating in debates.				
3	Debate activities improved my ability to organize ideas logically.				
4	I am less afraid of making mistakes while speaking English.				
5	Debate sessions are more interesting than traditional lectures.				
6	I feel motivated to prepare and participate in English class.				
7	Debate activities helped me listen more carefully to others.				
8	I would like more debate activities in English classes.				

3. RESULTS

The findings are divided into qualitative and quantitative parts. The sources of quantitative data are the speaking proficiency pre- and post-tests (out of 100, and components out of 25). The qualitative data are based on the survey of the learner perception (Likert-scale and open-ended answers to questions) and classroom observation checklist.

4.1 Quantitative Results

The post-test scores recorded remarkable improvement on every speaking component following the eight-week debate intervention. Mark of 25/ component (maximum 100).

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Proficiency Scores (N = 100)

Component	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Mean Gain	Percentage Improvement
Overall Speaking Score	58.2 (7.9)	73.6 (7.1)	+15.4	26.5%
Fluency	14.8 (2.1)	18.5 (1.8)	+4.1	27.7%
Vocabulary	15.1 (2.3)	19.5 (1.9)	+4.1	27.2%
Coherence	14.5 (2.0)	18.7 (1.7)	+4.2	29.0%
Pronunciation	13.8 (2.4)	16.8 (2.0)	+3.0	21.7%

Gains indicate the repetitive oral practice, interaction with peers, and preparation of the topics during debates. Scores out of 25 per component (total 100).

Figure 1: Improvement in Speaking Performance After Debate Intervention

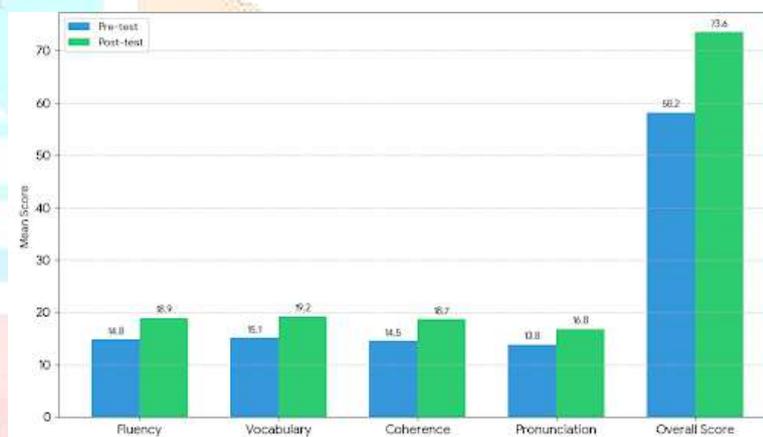


Figure 2: Mean Overall Speaking Score by Pre- and Post-Intervention

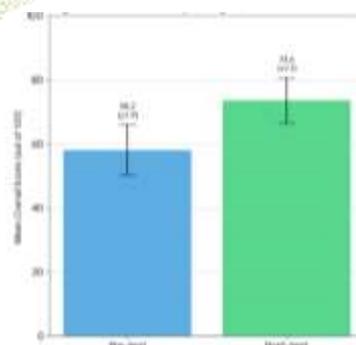
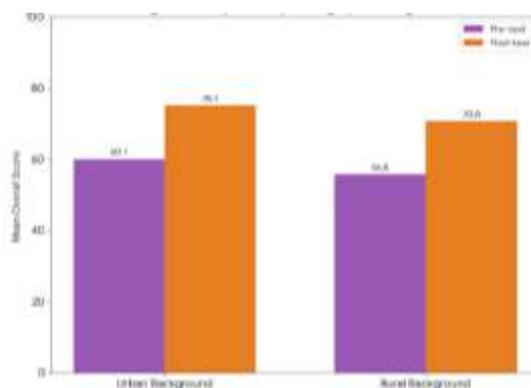


Figure 3: Comparison by Demographic Background



4.2 Qualitative Results (Likert-Scale Summary)

The questionnaire of the learner perception (5-point Likert: Strongly Agree = 5 to Strongly Disagree = 1) showed that the positive perceptions were high.

Table 2: Learner Perception Questionnaire – Likert-Scale Results (N = 100)

Sr.No	Statement	% Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean (SD)	Interpretation
1.	Debate activities helped me speak English more confidently.	82%	4.12 (0.78)	Strong agreement
2.	I feel my vocabulary has increased after participating in debates.	79%	4.05 (0.82)	Strong agreement
3.	Debate activities improved my ability to organize ideas logically.	85%	4.28 (0.71)	Very strong agreement
4.	I am less afraid of making mistakes while speaking English.	78%	4.01 (0.85)	Strong agreement
5.	Debate sessions are more interesting than traditional lectures.	89%	4.45 (0.65)	Highest agreement
6.	I feel motivated to prepare and participate in English class.	84%	4.18 (0.76)	Strong agreement
7.	Debate activities helped me listen more carefully to others.	79%	4.06 (0.80)	Strong agreement
8.	I would like more debate activities in English classes.	91%	4.52 (0.62)	Overwhelming support

4.3 Qualitative Results (Thematic Analysis)

Open-ended questionnaire responses and observation notes were thematically analyzed and three broad themes (including quotations and observation observations) were identified:

Theme 1: More Confidence and Less Anxiety.

78% of students also reported that they were less afraid of making errors or strongly so.

Open-ended: “Initially I felt afraid to speak due to grammatical errors, but after argumentation, I now do it without fear. (Many other students also said the same thing.)

Observations: During week 1, approximately 40 percent of students were active speakers, whereas, during week 8, the number grew to an approximate of 85 percent. Students paid increased attention via their eyes, talked more and responded to questions more frequently.

Theme 2: Ideas and Creativity

85% of the students responded that they had enhanced logical organization.

Open-ended: How to say. Secondly... and provide examples of life in India, including advantages and disadvantages of social media.” “The arguments in debates compelled me to think on my feet and organize my thoughts, as opposed to memorizing.

Observations: It was observed that the frequency of discourse markers (e.g. however, on the other hand) and rebuttals as well as evidence-based points in arguments increased as the sessions went in.

Thematic analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses and observation notes identified three main themes (with example quotes and observation insights):

Theme 3: Motivation

Debates were more liked by 89-91 percent of the participants than UVEI lectures and they would prefer more of that.

Open-ended: “Online learning and youth issues are topics that are of interest to us and therefore I did more research and liked arguing. Challenges: “The first time to prepare was very difficult, however, it became easier.

Notes: Lots of energy, encouragement of peers, willingly undertakes roles (e.g. team leader); listens attentively to opposing speeches.

On the whole, the obtained fluency, vocabulary, and organization gains were in line with the statements about the increased confidence, motivation, and real communication made by the students. The results reveal that the debate is an effective method of Indian ESL students, that moves them to the active mode of language application.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper examined the issues of debate activities that assist the Indian college students in learning English. It put emphasis on speaking skills, organizing ideas, vocabulary, listening and confidence. The findings reveal that the process of debating provides a facilitative and interactive environment in the real language use. Students that regularly debated succeeded in fluency and clarity. The reason is that there are numerous opportunities to speak without preparation, develop meanings collaboratively, and converse in increased amounts of time.

In India, debates allow the students to express their social and cultural opinions. The students are more connected to the content when they are discussing the ideas of local or national matters. Such relevance enhances their interest and engagement hence learning becomes significant. Such findings indicate that teaching language ought to be grounded on the real-life scenarios that are relevant to what the students are going through.

As a teacher, the study indicates the applicability of debate exercises into the normal English classes. Easy, guided debates can be started by the teachers and then gradually shift to more challenging ones. The aspects that could be considered when assessing could include the effectiveness of students speaking, the clarity with which they speak, words used by them, the articulation of words and interpersonal interactions. Debate running and adjudication should also be taught to teachers during training.

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations of the research. It utilized students of only two schools and the project was brief. More diverse students, longer projects and experiments, could be used in future works to demonstrate cause and effect. The researchers were also able to test the influence of debates on writing and reading capabilities.

The research indicates that discussions can be of good assistance to Indian people who speak English as a foreign language. Debates simplify the process of speaking, makes it easier to listen, develops new words, enhances thinking and increases confidence. Debate teaching meets the requirement of teaching language by communication since it involves the shift of memorizing to talking and listening. In India, therefore, English teachers must have debates in their classes every time to enable students develop all language skills.

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