



From the Experience of Using Debates for Developing Speaking Skill

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Abstract: The presented article deals with the issues of developing speaking skills of learners through debates. There given the scholars' points on the importance of developing speaking skills in a foreign language classroom, as well as the value of debating technique. The author shares her experience of using debate and her students' impressions of its results. She comes to the conclusion that classroom debate is an active method to teaching and learning which increases learning in various domains.

Key words: meaningful speaking, debate technique, teams, pre-debate, during-debate, post-debate, speech, rebuttal, clash, stance, opposition side.

One of the most important conditions for the development of any country is a well-structured educational system. Uzbekistan's policy of openness, active entry into the world market, expansion of international cooperation in all areas increase the need for knowledge of foreign languages, pointed the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev at a video conference on measures to improve the system of teaching foreign languages was held on 6 May, 2021 [2;1]. It is important not only to know a foreign language, but also to be able to meet the requirements of world standards. At present, foreign language teaching is widely practiced in our country, mainly in accordance with the requirements of the CEFR test system, and foreign language acquisition is developed at the stages A1, A1 +, A2, B1, B1 +, B2, C1 [1;2].

In order to reach these language levels one should master the main four skills in learning English they are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The main focus of students who learn English as foreign language is to be able to use English in oral communication. Speaking is very essential because speaking and human being cannot be separated from each other. Speaking is used to express their ideas and to communicate to people in civilized world. Speaking is a communicative procedure focusing on constructing meaning that associates in creating, processing and obtaining information. Speaking skill is one of the significant skills to communicate in a real world because it is an activity that is asking and giving information as if in doing conversation by two persons or more. Speaking skill is very important in the context of English learning. Richards (2008: 19) states "the mastery of speaking skill in English is a priority for many second language or foreign language learners". In speaking, students should master the elements of speaking, such as lexis, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. As a foreign learner in Uzbekistan, many students have amount lexis and learning the grammatical structure, but they still have difficulty in speaking. Students' speaking problem can be solved by giving lots of chance to them for practicing English either in the classroom or out of classroom. Practicing speaking English in the classroom should be interested with appropriate technique in order to make students speaking skill can be improved and the process of learning can be enjoyable.

There are many kinds of technique to improve speaking skill and one of them is debate technique. Debate has been considered a potentially effective pedagogical tool for speaking, which can scaffold and feed the learning process in ways that can lead to language development (e.g. Lustigova, 2011; Stewart, 2003). Debate is a recognized method of interactive and representative argument aimed at persuading the audience. It is an excellent activity for language learning because it engages students in a variety of cognitive and linguistic ways. It is provided that meaningful speaking, reading and listening practice, debate is also highly effective for developing argumentation skills for persuasive speech and writing. The use of debate technique in speaking classes, the learners will first of all drive out students' fear about English language. Moreover, debate technique will improve their pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar as well. In our learning classes we often use this technique, as our students have the fear of talking in front of their classmates and have no confidence to speak in public.

Debate can present opportunities for students to engage in using extended chunks of language for a purpose: to convincingly defend one side of an issue. The debate is probably more often used in content area classrooms than in EFL classrooms. Debates are most appropriate for intermediate and advanced learners who have been guided in how to prepare for them. Debates require extensive preparation by learners, call for interaction in groups and make use of at least the following language functions: describing, explaining, giving and asking for information, agreeing and disagreeing. [3:27]

Debate in speaking class is aimed to improve students' critical thinking and students' communication skill. By performing debate students have a lot of opportunities in practicing speaking. Students' involvement is very important in implementing debate. Debate as a communicative and an interactive technique is an interested activity to be practiced in the classroom.

Further we'd like to share our experience of using debated with the students of the first year students of English majors.

The topic of debate (e.g. phones should be banned for young children) was selected in consultation with the debating students, who received one week of preparation time for the debate. We consider that the topic can play a very important role on students' motivation to have a full participation in debate. Students will not fully participate in debate if the topic is not interesting and controversial enough. It is also helpful and a good idea to involve students in selecting a debate topic. As they take part in selecting the topic, they realize their opinions and suggestions have been valued and respected, so it is more likely that their participation and performance would be elevated significantly.

The debate consisted of three stages: pre-debate, during-debate and post-debate. In the pre-debate stage, the students received reading assignments relevant to the topic under debate and were asked to find and read more additional information. During actual debates, each student presented a speech and a rebuttal (in which the arguments of opponents were addressed) and participated in a clash. We used the following debate format: debating in a group of eight debaters (four students in favor and four against). The debate had three phases: speech, rebuttal and clash. In the post-debate stage, the students are asked to write a reflective paper.

First, the students were randomly divided into the two teams. Then, one team was randomly assigned to represent the doctors and another to represent teachers. The doctors usually are in favor of the resolution, and the opposition is against the resolution. Afterwards, the first speaker of the doctors starts the debate by introducing and defining the debate topic, declaring their stance, and presenting their speech. Next, the first speaker from the opposition side starts his/her speech by rebutting the argument of the doctors' first speaker. Then he/she continues by declaring the motion again and presenting their stance and their argument. After that, the second speaker from the doctors takes turn and rebut the statements of the opposition's first speaker, reaffirms the teams' stance, and present his/her argument and speech. The debate continues in the same fashion until all the speakers from both sides present their cases. However, the final speakers from both sides make concluding statements and make the closures, in case they want to end the debate.

After the debate we asked our learners to write a reflective paper in order to learn their attitudes to debating. One of the outcomes of the study which has been highlighted by almost all the participants was that the debates helped the students lose the fear of talking in front of their classmates and boost their confidence to talk. Before the debates the students feelings looked in this way “I felt scared in the beginning, as I don't have any exposure to debate before and I thought that it is going to be tough.”

“At first, I was a little bit nervous hearing the word debate. I have never had any experience in debating. However, after going through the first debate, I had gained my confidence in speaking in front of others and expressing my views clearly.”

As a result, they have been able to express their opinions freely, talk without anxiety, and practice their speaking and oral communication skills. The students believed that their speaking ability has been improved due to the classroom debate experience. Some of the respondents' statements are presented below.

“It reduces the level of my anxiety in speaking in front of the crowd. I guess, in order for one to have the confidence in speaking, they need to experience it.”

“Debate really helps me to boost my confidence as it improves my speaking skills in front of others. It is important for me as a teacher in the future to be confident.”

“I feel it is necessary to arrange this activity regularly so that the students can practice their communication and thinking skills. This activity helps me polish my skills in communication and critical thinking. It is a very good exposure for me in developing my speaking skills as well as to be a quick thinker.”

As a matter of fact, the researcher believes that nervousness and the fear of talking in front of other people (stage fright) is debilitating, get in the way of learning, and also influences students' performances. These negative feelings put a barrier in front of students, block their way, and do not allow them to start talking. As these feelings are weakened or vanished, the students find it easier to talk, express their points of view, and participate actively in classroom discussions. In fact, a learner might have a good command in spoken English, but these barriers and affective factors stop them and will not allow them to function properly. Classroom debate, though, has the potential to help students overcome these obstacles and barriers; reduce stage fright and boost confidence so the students can proceed with language learning in a more efficient manner. Actually, as shown in the present study, the classroom debate helped students overcome these barriers, feel more confident to talk using the target language, lose the anxiety and nervousness, and as a result improve speaking ability.

Classroom debate is an active method to teaching and learning which increases learning in various domains. For instance, it helps learners in mastering the course content, improving critical thinking, and oral communication skills. Specifically, debate helps learners to develop critical thinking by looking into arguments, getting involved in research, collecting information, conducting analysis, challenging assumptions, evaluating arguments, and illustrating interpersonal skills. It creates an atmosphere in which learners abandon their passive roles and start to be active participants in the learning process. Learners can use these abilities and skills in various situations.

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