

The Value of Debates by EFL Tertiary Students

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Abstract

Speaking is significant for communication skill by English language learners because students must use language inside and outside classroom. English language has been learned for students since kindergarten up to university. However, the outcomes of learning language are not satisfied and most of students face difficulties towards communicating in English and most of them are not able to speak fluently in English. Thus, students should be trained having an opinion and introducing their ideas as well as explaining and supporting their points of views. This can be done by conducting a debate. Through directing debate students are anticipated to be more confident in presenting their points of view in different matters and circumstances. This paper highlights the importance of debate inside and outside classroom. It considers a classroom discussion as one of the most frequently used and often comprised pedagogical strategies. It aims to encourage students to improve participation quality and discussion effectiveness. This paper provides the relationship between debate and the enhancement of speaking skill. It displays the literature review that pertinent to debate in language learning and how students accomplish the process of learning English language. Moreover; it presents the concept of the debate as well as debate procedures and materials. This paper provides English Language Society (ELS), Faculty of Education, Al-Zaiem Al-Azhari University as an authentic example of the effectiveness of the debate in language learning. The conclusion is strongly encouraging students to train themselves in debate by explaining the benefits of debates to achieve the necessary speaking and presentation skills.

Keywords: debate, participation, critical thinking, method

INTRODUCTION

English has recently considered as a dominant language in the world. It is known as “lingua franca” which refers to the common language that utilized among people who don’t share the same first language (Asma, 2017). Learning of English language requires understanding the four language skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking). However, speaking skill is considered as the problematic and challenging skill to be learned by the learners. In EFL settings, most EFL learners face difficulties in communicating in English language appropriately and they have lack of confidence and unsatisfied with their achievements in speaking.

Using English language for communication has become gradually significant in the contexts of foreign and second language (ESL/EFL). Communication in English language is essential for learners especially who want to use English for communicative purposes. Thus, teaching speaking skill for learners is vital and necessary for ESL and EFL learners to perform their goals (Iman, 2017). "Speaking is a multi-sensory activity which includes paralinguistic actions such as body language, facial expressions, eye-contact as well as voice changes" (Thornbury & Slade, 2005, p. 9). Likewise, Richard (1990) asserts that the proficiency of speaking in English language is the main concern for many second and foreign language learners. In summary, speaking is an interaction technique that takes place between the one who speak and the other one who listen and both of them share and get the information that comprises certain features also it is significant for language learners to train themselves to participate with others in the conversation.

Teaching speaking skill in Sudan has been utilized traditional procedures to assist and facilitate learning English language such as books, chalks and boards. Recently teaching speaking skill has been used modern techniques such as pictures, music and other objects. Debate is one of these techniques which implemented by teachers to inspire and trigger students while learning English language in classrooms. Debate is implemented as an educational instrument in Athens, Greece over 2400 years ago by Protagoras who is known as the father of debate (Darby, 2007). In the 19th to 20th century in America, debate was first combined by the higher education, however, it loses its admiration till 1980s as a teaching and learning method (Redding, 2001). Recently, debate is emerged again in the United States and has trained over the current decades. It has been presenting a new learning experience for students in all educational levels (Williams, 2001).

Debate is seen as a dynamic learning procedure that used to train students to be more creative in their thinking while sharing their ideas with others. It describes as speaking events which involve two or more teams and both teams have speakers discuss out their opinions and agree or oppose the others in terms of topic content. Similarly, Hasibuan and Batubara (2012) also support debate method by asserting that debate is a language learning method which is utilized to enhance learners' speaking skill and critical thinking. Currently, debate in classroom has been used for students at all educational areas to teach them how to negotiate, support, discuss at different environments (Bellon, 2000). Debate is known as a cooperative learning method in which students are expected to perform and apply their own roles in teaching and learning English language (Pradana, 2017).

Classroom debates comprise several actions and take place in-class or online, it also can be practical to enormous subjects such as sociology, marketing, history, nursing, as well as biotechnology (Kennedy, 2007). Debates must involve viewpoints and arguments presented by students through valuable discussion towards specific topic. Students who have strong critical thinking have an excellent base of knowledge, they think judgmentally about what they are receive and present logical and valued ideas.

Debate is beneficial for students in which it assists them to improve their speaking ability and activate their rational thinking in conversation. In line with this claim, Roy and Macchiette, (2005, p. 265) declared that "debate involves not only determining what to

say but how to say it". In conclusion, debate trains learners to acquire content accurately, further learners involve in the topic to understand topic content in active and cooperative manner. It also encourages them to evaluate the data they receive and enhance learners' speaking skill.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been examined the value of debates in classrooms by EFL/ESL learners. Some of these studies concentrated on the benefits and usefulness of classroom debates, while others focused on the methods and materials utilized during debates. In addition, other studies carried out to explore the importance and significance of on online classroom discussion as one potential strategy for encouraging student's participation.

Latif (2017) conducted a study to clarify medical student's opinions and perceptions towards debates piloted during problem-based learning (PBL) program as a part of the Spiral curriculum at the Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. Debates sessions took place during PBL practical program for female second-year medical students. Students were distributed into groups and each one contains ten students who joined to weekly PBL session. Each group of students was divided into two halves as proposition and opposition. Students were given one week to prepare themselves for debate. During PBL practical session students were asked and their replies were recorded on an articulated questionnaire. The results showed that 69% of participants agreed that debate is useful for improving communication ability. 78% of participants reported that debate sessions enhanced their critical thinking. The results also indicated that sessions assist 61% of participants to acquire actual experience about argumentative topics. In addition, 71% of participants agreed that debate was promoted generation and interpretation skills. The results also revealed that majority of participants found that debates are useful in which they promoted logical decision-making as well as communication skills.

Iman (2017) carried out a research to determine whether or not utilizing debate improve student's critical thinking and speaking ability and to what extent debate contributed to each factor of critical thinking and speaking skill. The results demonstrated that there was high influence of the debate with regard to the whole aspects of critical thinking (0.821 or 82.1%). In addition, there was strong effect of the debate toward the whole aspects of speaking skill (0.961 or 96.1%). The results also clarified that there was a relationship between the factors of speaking skill and speaking skill achievement and it was as follows: fluency was received 67.4%, grammar was registered 13.7%, pronunciation was scored 8.3%, comprehension was registered 5.4%, and vocabulary was received 1.4%.

In the same respect, Tawil (2016) investigated the influences of debating towards the students' ideas of critical thinking disposition. The data collected through surveys, interviews, course assessment and observations. In addition, pre and post of the California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory test was utilized. For data collection procedure, the researcher presented explicit instruction, conducted a pre-post California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory, and involved student into two debates. The

results showed that students considered the exercise of debating beneficial especially when they debating opposition opinions. In addition, students showed strong logical thinking as a result of debating.

Brown (2015) conducted a study to determine the use of debates as teaching approach in class that has the impact to enhance students' critical thinking and collaborative learning abilities. The study followed weekly debates as a module used in the study which involves topics to theoretical content such as the altering nature of childhood and the variety of family relationships. Data was gathered by a card-sort and interview questions were designed. The study aimed to concentrate on retrieving students' perceptions on the use of these weekly debates. The results showed that majority of students detained opposing ideas on the valuable of promoting collaborative learning and critical thinking skills. However, the results indicated that fourteen of the total sixteen students did not agree with the use of debates as teaching strategy. This is due to certain students requiring more material in the use of debates in-class to enrich their theoretical thinking.

In addition, Noonan (2011) explored the ways in which students engaged in a Milwaukee Urban Debate League participating school have been influenced by the experience and self-esteem. It also examined the extent to which students involve themselves inside and outside classroom. In addition, the study also highlighted factors relating to how contributing in urban discussion influences student self-efficiency and to what extent they involve themselves in activities at school and the local community. Interviews and observations serve as the primary sources of data for the purposes of this study. The results showed that the participation on urban discussion has a significant effect on academic achievements, while some skill aspects are affected more than others. The results also addressed a positive influence on self-efficacy and self-esteem, however to a smaller amount of improvement with regard to social collaborations and personal expectations.

The findings of the previous studies showed that students acquire language through diverse approaches. Thus, teachers and instructors need to apply different educational techniques to prepare students with different learning styles. Previous studies also revealed that learners become better when teachers employ techniques that assist them to engage in collaborative learning. In addition, the findings of the previous studies asserted that using classroom discussion as a teaching and learning method brings several benefits for learners which comprise progression of their critical understanding, acquiring the course content and enhancing the speaking abilities (Zare & Othman, 2013).

However, other studies have focused on the effectiveness of online discussion forums at tertiary level. For instance, Ryan (2013) examined the efficiency of online discussion forums of student's achievement among an upper science course at university level. The results showed that the combination of online discussion forums and individual written reflections were successfully enhanced student understanding with regard to scientific topics such as Microbiology. In addition, the results revealed that the students' perceptions were positive towards the online debate forum as a cooperative learning. The results also asserted that the utilization of online discussion forums as courses at the university level is effective for enhancing students learning.

Similarly, Willam and Mostert (2005) carried out a research aimed to suggest a fundamental epistemological perspective and notifying learning theory of online discussion and to determine its effectiveness as an educational strategy to encourage students' collaborative learning. The study recorded the opinions of students and staff towards online discussion at a South African university. Online discussion used in this study during a BEd (Hons) course. The results emphasized the importance of using explicit techniques to facilitate student's involvement and to explain the potential significance of an online discussion as an instructional strategy to support the enhancement of argumentation and to encourage participation.

Based on the findings of the above studies specifically, both studies which relate to online classroom discussion. It can be noted that the utilization of computer assisted communication in higher education institutions present an excellent chance for students to enroll online learning activity nonetheless of their geographical circumstances. However, not all students are motivated to participate in this pedagogic approach, thus, it is necessary to create one potential strategy for encouraging student's participation such as using the structured presentation of online debating.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the debate in classroom as instructional strategy. It also clarifies debate materials and procedures utilized by instructors in order to make learning of English language effective and comprehended by students. In addition, this section displays English Language Society (ELS) which located at Faculty of Education; Al-Zaiem Al-Azhari University as an authentic example of the effectiveness of the debate in language learning

Debate Method

Debate is an excellent process which encourages students to think and discuss a certain topic in various sides, and it also forces them to interrelate with the details of a given topic and related one (Somjai & Jansem, 2015). In the same respect, Al-Mahrooqi and Tabakow (2015) stated some objective to be achieved by students through using debate, these are: (a) encouraging students to speak in English, (b) improving students' motivation and interest towards speaking, (c) practicing speaking skill without focusing on grammar, and (d) students can realize that they can acquire English from individuals such as classmate, friend and parents. Therefore, debate is an argumentative process in which students display their opinions that include analytical and critical thinking between two groups and each one support their thoughts by using cognitive skill.

Debate Procedures and Materials

To teach English language through debate, Cahyono and Widiati (2011) discusses that debate in the classroom might be practical as the following points: (a) the students are classified into two groups, (b) the first group is pro side and the second one is the contra side to the topic content, (c) both groups discuss their own opinions, (d) thereafter, the teacher requests each group to provide their thoughts, (e) the teacher may report the

opinions of the students on the board, (f) at the end of the debate session, the teacher and the students come up with the conclusion.

Similarly, Suhendra (2017) claimed that there are various procedures need to be employed by teachers in order to make the learning of the English language effective through debate. First, the teacher presents debate through video player and inform the students with the elements of debate such as participation rules, time factor and so on. Teacher also must assist students to understand the debate topic and distribute handouts for them. Handouts help students to get more information and questions related to debate. Second, the teacher selects topics in daily life and requested some students as volunteers to explain their ideas to show debate systems for the students. Third, teacher gives certain time to each group to prepare themselves for argument. Fourth, students present their ideas in turns. Finally, teacher provides feedback together with the students and makes a conclusion.

In addition, the selection of the debate materials is significance to achieve the goal of language learning, it also important to assure that learners are discussing about topic they really know about. In other words, if the learners comprehend the topic, it will be easier for them to involve enthusiastically to the activity. EFL instructors need to prepare the proper materials before conducting the debate. It is suggested that they can provide students with some materials such as texts, books, newspaper, magazines, videos, role play, etc. Instructors also can ask students to search the suitable materials through the internet.

Thus, based on the above discussion, it can be observed that teaching debate is rational teaching in which students express opinions, analyze and evaluate them. To enroll students in debate activity they must have thoughts about the topic content, they must display their opinions in convincing way and offer more influential support. The following section presents the efficiency of classroom debate by Sudanese EFL learners. Specifically, it reviews the implementation and the outcomes of the debate that carried by teachers and students of the English Language Society (ELS) at the Faculty of Education, Al-Zaiem Al-Azhari University

English Language Society (ELS)

Teachers and instructors address some objectives of using debates in classroom. These objectives need to be implemented through utilizing interesting materials to activate and trigger the cognitive thinking of the students. In EFL context in general and Sudanese context in particular, the implementation of the debate for tertiary level as an educational pedagogy receives an excellent outcome and reflects significant impact in learning English language. Students and teachers registered positive perceptions towards utilizing debate in classroom discussion. In this respect, English Language Society (ELS) which established (2004) at the Faculty of Education, Al-Zaiem Al-Azhari University is considered as an authentic example of the importance and competence of the debate in language learning. Instructors at the faculty of education designed some objectives to be achieved through classroom debate, these are:

- (a) Enhancing students' speaking ability.

- (b) Improving self-confidence of students.
- (c) Showing higher ability in sharing ideas.
- (d) Improving cognitive analysis.
- (e) Motivating students to read books and texts other than university course work.
- (f) Assisting students to control their reactions during discussion especially when their opinions are pressed by opposing ideas.

Instructors of ELS utilized different materials during debate discussion in classroom. They prepare videos, newspapers, books, presentations, role play to encourage students' speaking skill. Besides, instructors of ELS enrolled in collaborative learning with students, they create weekly wall paper which involves social, economic and educational topics and they ask students to read about these topics. Instructors of ELS are aware of the selection of the topics, this is because topics utilized comprise changes in debate setup and preparation for diverse university levels; how to involve students who have various talents through actual team and role management and points of assessment. Thereafter, instructors make a discussion timetable which comprises date and name of the topic. On the specific date of the discussion, instructors prepare handouts, pictures and questions to assist students to express their thoughts and clarify their opinions towards the topic content.

The outcomes of the ELS indicated that debate activity solve students' problems towards learning English language, they become fluent in speaking and committed to present their ideas and arguments courageously and properly. In addition, debate activity in ELS classrooms also promote students' skills for evaluating, reasoning, supporting and opposing the argument. In conclusion, classroom debates make improvements in which it allows students to improve their communications and expressions inside and outside classroom.

CONCLUSION

In fact, there are essentially many techniques to enhance cognitive thinking; one of the techniques is utilizing debate pedagogy. As has been discussed earlier, debate technique has been demonstrated to be a dynamic and advanced method that provides activity of the learners. Debate is considered to be effective due to the reason that it can encourage the majority of learners in one class to be participated actively in the language learning session. Previous studies conducted on the effectiveness of debate showed that this method is significant for almost English language abilities such as speaking, listening, observing, evaluating, expressing opinions and other skills. In tertiary level for instance, debate will activate reading practices for learners because they should seek for correct information and ideas through reading. Therefore, these overall abilities will positively make an improvement in language learning.

According to Alasmari and Ahmed (2013), debating in EFL classroom helps students to utilize language abilities along with the skills of presentation and delivery of opinions. It also requires learners to prepare themselves to get knowledge about the debate topic in order to be able for them to convince judges and audiences. In addition, through debate

in EFL classroom, students can improve their speaking, reading, listening and writing skills. Moreover, debate assists students to ice-break in EFL classrooms. Ice breaking is a hard job for teachers especially in the first classes because students are found unwilling to speak in English and they may refuse to come in front of the class and speak. In this situation, teachers should encourage and motivate students by introducing simple but argumentative topic and ask students to comment and share their opinions while they are sitting on their own seats. Thus, students will feel free to speak in English and participate in discussion.

EFL learners encounter difficulties of using English language outside classroom. In addition, in most of the cases teachers fail to perform the proper teaching method to teach students English language skills. Consequently, EFL learners need to implement some English language practices in actual situations. Debate is one of these practices in which students can use all English language skills inside and outside classrooms. Moreover, students can also acquire presentation skills which will make them confident learners in various settings.

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