

Enhancing Students' English Public Speaking Skills through Debate Technique

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the debate technique on improving English public speaking skills among college students learning English as a foreign language. Conducting a Classroom Action Research (CAR) with 38 participants over 12 weeks, the researchers identified initial deficiencies in speaking abilities such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, highlighted by students' anxiety and low confidence. The intervention, implemented in two cycles, utilized British Parliamentary debate formats to develop critical thinking, argumentation, and public speaking proficiency. Results demonstrated substantial enhancement, increasing from 44.74% to 94.74% in students meeting required competency benchmarks, specifically being able to master public speaking with scores exceeding the passing grade. The findings affirm that debate techniques significantly foster confidence, fluency, and overall speaking abilities. This research highlights the importance of dynamic teaching methods in developing effective communicators in a globalized context.

Keywords: *English Public Speaking; Debate; Classroom Action Research*

INTRODUCTION

The English language assumes an increasingly significant role in global cultural, political, and economic spheres. This highlights an increasing demand for proficient English public speaking (EPS) abilities among college students. English public speaking (EPS) is progressively attaining significance and popularity in Indonesia, particularly among university students who are learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Lucas (2013) in Zhang et al (2020) stated that one reason is EPS competitions, including intriguing awards (e.g., scholarships, fellowships) that have facilitated EPS's evolution into a "grassroots educational movement," extending from local to regional and national levels. The growth in global competition and Indonesia's effective attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across several sectors, particularly education, are significant variables influencing individual competitiveness, resulting in numerous issues (Amelia et al., 2022). The success of SDGs in education is attributed to the quality of teachers and students, who now require foreign language communication skills such as English public speaking. It is crucial in today's competitive global environment.

According to Martiningsih et al (2024), public speaking is a communicative skill aimed at informing, influencing, persuading, or entertaining an audience, therefore positioning the speaker as the focal point of attention. Public speaking involves addressing an audience, often in meetings, conferences, or academic presentations. It requires proficiency and bravery, as speakers must not only address their anxiety but also possess clear, comprehensible skills that are easy to understand. A public speaker must articulate effectively and comprehensibly, without relying on formal

terminology, and must be able to adapt to various situations based on the context. In addition, public speaking is similar to presenting, with the exception that the latter is typically intended for business or academic contexts (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, 2021). Public speaking abilities will improve with further practice. Consequently, speaking skills are cultivated and enhanced to augment the capacity and proficiency in communicating with students.

Public speaking is categorized into three types based on the purpose: informational, persuasive, and entertaining speaking (Martiningsih et al., 2024). Informative speaking is the most common type of public speaking, aimed at conveying precise, clear, and relevant information to the audience. This type is commonly used in class presentations and business seminars to address specific topics or problems (Aswad & Sardi, 2023). Persuasive speech involves using verbal and nonverbal messages to influence behavior based on values, attitudes, and beliefs, aiming to alter how individuals perceive an idea or product (Ramli, 2022). Meanwhile, the “Entertaining speech” is a persuasive presentation that effectively engages the audience by delivering a clear and entertaining message, often incorporating a personal touch (Gruber, 2022). In this study, the primary purpose of public speaking is focused on persuasive and informative. Public speaking needs speakers to capture the attention of their audience. This can cause public speaking anxiety, which is a very typical issue in speaking lessons. Besides, Tiana et al (2023) also revealed that the student’s English speaking proficiency is influenced by various contextual and social factors, including the classroom environment, teacher role, linguistic elements, and affective factors like anxiety and shyness. One of the emotional elements that might make public speaking challenging is anxiety.

Indeed, the fear of public speaking is the most prevalent concern associated with it. Behnke, Ralph R. & Sawyer (2004) in Amelia et al (2022) stated that from the rest of the presentation to the beginning of the presentation, during the initial and closing minutes of the presentation, public speaking anxiety commonly strikes college students. The pressure to deliver their presentations well might cause students to suffer from public speaking anxiety. Students often experience anxiety in classroom oral English communication due to limited linguistic knowledge, inadequate preparation, fear of errors, and concerns about peer ridicule (Tiana et al., 2024). Lucas (2019) stated that nervousness during public speaking is normal (Apriyanti & Ramadhan, 2018). Public speaking anxiety can impede students' progress in speaking classes, hindering their full utilization of their English abilities. Besides, speaking anxiety is a significant challenge for students in foreign language classes (Pohan & Kusumawardany, 2023). The writer notes that while some students actively participate in class discussions, many remain passive and lack enthusiasm. This lack of enthusiasm makes engaging with their peers’ viewpoints difficult due to their limited language skills and lack of confidence in speaking English.

Teachers and students need to enhance their foreign language literacy skills to keep up with the times and compete globally. They must utilize an effective methodology to promote active student engagement in their learning experience, while students’ skills should be continuously developed to meet the demands of the times. Besides, Fry et al. (2003) in Yulianti & Sulistyawati (2021) highlighted the importance of effective methods and learning strategies

in public speaking learning, emphasizing the need for understanding how students learn. Regular and continuous improvement of teacher quality is crucial for teachers to adapt to the times.

Several methods can be employed in the process of acquiring English public speaking skills, including communication games, conversations, surveys, simulations, role-playing, and debates (Arung & Jumardin, 2016). This research employed the debate technique. Debate is a structured dialogue or discourse aimed at examining a topic in depth. Krieger (2007) in Tiana et al (2019) characterized debate as a notable activity for language acquisition due to the engagement of students in several cognitive and linguistic aspects. A formal discussion, problem-solving, and presenting opposing viewpoints are all considered forms of debate. Additionally, it significantly enhances speaking abilities and is crucial in creating persuasive arguments and involves discussing real or simulated issues, with the learner's role ensuring they have a comprehensive understanding of the issue and diverse opinions to defend (Afri et al., 2021). Debate involves analyzing, evaluating, comparing, contrasting, identifying arguments, and distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information (Ban et al., 2023). Thus, the debate is a dispute of arguments by opposing teams striving to persuade others of their positions. A proficient debater must conduct thorough research, formulate strong arguments, explain and defend their positions, and effectively counter opponents' arguments. Debate techniques in speaking classes can help students overcome English fear and enhance pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency.

Pritchard (2009) in (Timbu et al., 2023) identifies seven debate models: debate, cross-examination, parliamentary style, British parliamentary style, academic style, national style, and world style. Debating is a highly effective strategy for students to develop critical thinking, specific skills, and strategies. The study by Setiawan et al (2024) found that debating activities significantly enhance students' critical thinking and public speaking skills. These activities increase confidence, encourage critical thinking, and connect students to real evidence, making them more aware of their social life and engaging in public speaking.

In addition, Arung & Jumardin's (2016) study suggests that debate technique can be beneficial in teaching speaking, as it encourages active participation and cooperative learning. This technique can enhance students' speaking skills, making it an enjoyable and beneficial experience for both teachers and students. Another study was carried out by Ban et al (2023), and the result revealed that debates positively impacted respondents' English language speaking skills and critical thinking abilities, indicating a positive impact on their overall performance. Debate is an engaging and beneficial experience for high school or college students, enabling them to investigate, formulate pertinent questions, and structure arguments into coherent and convincing presentations.

This research used the British parliamentary style because of the increasing popularity of the British Parliamentary Debate (BP) in recent years, making it suitable for modern college students or Millennials. They benefit from the BP debate due to its accessibility and global argumentation skills,

making it a valuable tool for competitiveness in a globalized society (Eckstein & Bartanen, 2015). Debating aims to provide recognition and honor for speaking English fluently. It helps students practice their English public speaking skills by allowing them to express their ideas and build arguments. However, there are still many students who struggle with building arguments and making their ideas more understandable. The students' low public speaking skills resulted in poor fluency, multiple-word repetition, and insufficient use of vocal production elements like volume, clarity, and variety to effectively convey their opinions. Therefore, problems with public speaking that impede student learning processes serve as the foundation of this research. This study aims to improve students' English public skills by employing debate techniques.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized Classroom Action Research (CAR), a crucial educational inquiry, to understand teachers' efforts to improve or rectify their performance in the classroom learning process, emphasizing the importance of CAR in education. Stringer (2010) in Timbu et al (2023), Classroom action research is a method that teachers may employ to enhance their pedagogical abilities and facilitate effective student learning strategies. Kemmis & Taggart in Nunan (1993) defined action research as a descriptive activity conducted by a teacher in their classroom without others' involvement, aimed at understanding rather than changing the phenomenon under investigation. The primary motivation for action research is to change the system (Arung & Jumardin, 2016). Arikunto (2008) in Arung & Jumardin (2016) revealed that action research involves reflective participation, collaboration, and a spiral approach to enhance systems, methods, processes, content, competence, and situations through a systematic and collaborative study. In addition, action research is a self-reflection process used by participants in social education to understand their practices, their understanding, and the situation in which they were carried out (Tiana, Wibowo, et al., 2023). In conclusion, classroom action research is an investigative practice conducted by teachers, researchers, or collaborative educators with a group of students, aimed at improving the teaching and learning process or enhancing students' comprehension of the material.

The research followed Kemis and MaTaggart's 1988 action research model, involving two cycles. Each cycle has four stages: *planning*, *action*, *observation*, and *reflection* (Tiana & Apriani, 2021). Planning is the initial step researchers take to prepare for potential problems. Acting applies this planning to teaching methods or techniques, a debate in this research. Observing captures classroom influences and is a fundamental part of reflection. Reflecting involves analysis, synthesis, interpretation, explanation, and conclusion, which can be used to modify teacher performance in the future. This process ensures the research is realistic and flexible, allowing for early problem-solving. Each stage is concluded based on the previous one, allowing researchers to reflect and determine the next cycle.

This study aimed to improve the English Public Speaking (EPS) skills of English major students. There was no population, thus, this study was based on a real class that was assigned the public speaking subject. So the research took place in one class with the actual situations. This research involved 38

students in the age range of 20 to 23 years old, from the fourth semester of the English Department of a private university in Jakarta. They participated in the Debating class for 12 of the 14 weeks of the semester, based on the provided syllabus. Each meeting took two and a half hours. The researcher employed some intriguing motions based on current events for speaking tests during debate activities, such as THBT the tourism industry does more harm than good for the citizens of developing countries, THBT sex education should be taught in schools, THBT corruptor should be sentenced to Death, THBT the artificial intelligence poses an existential threat to humanity and THW make the directors of multinational companies personally liable for environmental abuses committed by their companies in the developing world. These motions are given alternately every few meetings in two research cycles.

The British Parliamentary debate comprises four teams of two members, a chairperson, and an adjudicator (Nurhidayat, 2016). Each round has four teams representing the government and the opposition, with the government supporting the resolution and the opposition opposing it. Teams are divided into the opening and closing halves. Each team comprises two speakers. Every speaker possesses a title. Teams consist of the following members: *Opening Government* consists of the "Prime Minister" and "Deputy Prime Minister". *Opening Opposition* consists of the "Leader of the Opposition" and "Deputy Leader of the Opposition". *Closing Government* consists of "Members of the Government and "Government Whip. *Closing Opposition* consists of "Member of the Opposition" and "Opposition Whip". Debaters have 7 minutes to speak, with the first and last minutes being protected, limiting POIs (Points of Information) to 1 minute.

Kemmis and Taggart's model outlines action research as a pre-cycle or preliminary study to identify classroom challenges faced by students (Tiana, Wibowo, et al., 2023). Data is collected through observation, interviews, tests, and documentation. Data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant information, describing both quantitative and qualitative data, and using verification or interpretation to analyze the data in this study. The public speaking rubric used to evaluate students consists of various components that are assessed, namely: delivery, organization, content, and purpose. The criteria must be the minimal standard score set by the university, which is a C within the score range of 60-69. This passing grade is calculated using the minimal passing criterion for each course at the university where the study took place. The final grade is the total of project assignment grades based on students' performance.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first stage in classroom action research is to undertake a pre-cycle study to determine student competence levels. An observation was undertaken to examine the students' speaking challenges, which revealed that they had low competency in spoken English. They had difficulty articulating their views and suffered from a lack of confidence, anxiety, and nervousness in verbal communication in front of the public. The pre-cycle occurred between meeting 1 and meeting 2, indicating that the primary areas for enhancement are public speaking proficiency and self-assurance. This can be accomplished by intensified practice, vocabulary mastery, and the improvement of fluency and

accuracy. The subsequent table presents the speaking scores of students in the pre-cycle study.

Table 1: Pre-cycle Score Summary

Criteria	Percentage (%)	Mean Score	Maximal Score	Minimum Score
Passed	44.74	64.08	82	50
Failed	55.26			

Table 1 shows that the pre-cycle mean is 64.08. Only 17 students (44.74%) obtained a score that was above the minimal benchmark score. It means that over half of the students (55.26%) failed, with a minimum score of just 50. Furthermore, they were uninterested and unmotivated to learn English, especially speaking, because the teaching technique had never been changed. Public speaking is a demanding talent, resulting in most students struggling to attain the minimal acceptable score. Students encountered difficulties with voice modulation, hand gestures, and linguistic clarity, exhibiting inadequate fluency and pronunciation. They exhibited a lack of confidence, presented an illogical argument, and their speech was poorly organized. Consequently, there must be a resolution to address the issue. Consequently, the researcher employed a debate technique to enhance their English Public Speaking Skills (EPS), executing the activity throughout two cycles.

The initial cycle was conducted from meeting 3 to meeting 6. The planning phase encompassed the creation of a lesson plan and instructional materials aligned with the curriculum, which included the introduction of debate, the concept and speakers' roles of British parliamentary debate, team division, and utilizing teaching media for student performances, along with a grading sheet and observation criteria. The researcher meticulously executed planned activities using resources and media during the action phase. At the end of the class, the speaking evaluation was conducted using a speaking and debating rubric. The results indicated that students' voice modulation and hand gestures were commendable; however, their language lacked clarity. Their fluency improved compared to the pre-cycle. Their confidence increased in cycle 1, yet they still did not make eye contact with the audience while speaking. They attempted to present data or facts but continued to struggle with organizing their speech. The results indicated that certain students continued to exhibit reluctance in articulating their opinions and experienced anxiety.

The data indicate that speaking anxiety is a considerable problem for students in foreign language courses (Pohan & Kusumawardany, 2023). Furthermore, it aligns with Tiana et al (2024) assertion that students frequently encounter anxiety during oral English communication in the classroom owing to insufficient linguistic understanding, poor preparation, fear of making mistakes, and apprehensions regarding peer mockery. However, students are encouraged to speak English bravely through the use of the British parliamentary debating method. They should take the stage and share

their knowledge on the subject with the audience. Observations were conducted about the classroom environment, the teacher's efficacy, and the students' engagement. The researchers reflected on the first cycle based on their observations. It includes the classroom atmosphere, the students' interest in practicing public speaking, the teaching and learning process through debate, and the results of the tests.

It was determined that several students failed to get the minimal benchmark score of 60. Yet, there was an enhancement relative to the score of the pre-cycle study. The subsequent table and graphic illustrate the students' performance in public speaking during the initial cycle.

Table 2. Cycle 1 Score Summary

Criteria	Percentage (%)	Mean Score	Maximal Score	Minimum Score
Passed	76.32	68.08	85	58
Failed	23.68			

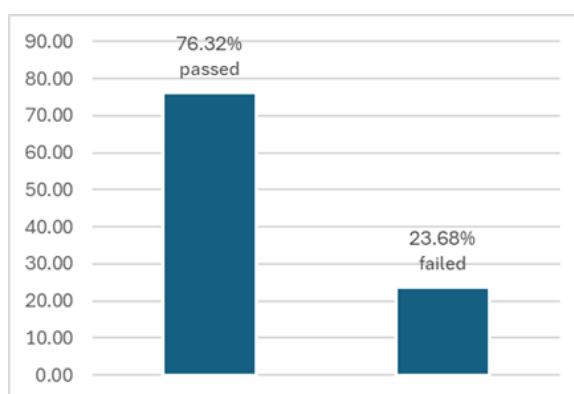


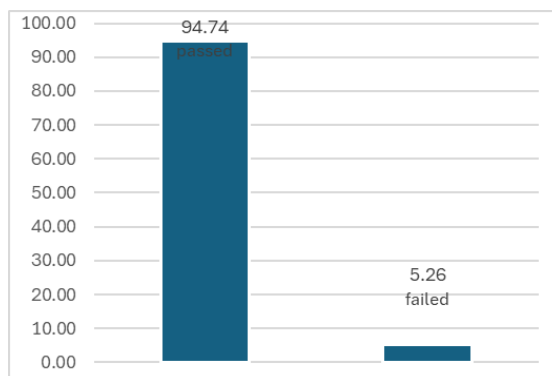
Figure 1. Students' Public Speaking Achievement in Cycle 1

The graphic indicates that students' English public speaking skills are enhanced by the implementation of debate techniques as a teaching strategy. The findings indicate a substantial difference from the pre-cycle, with 76.32% of students achieving the minimal required score, while 23.68% did not. Further enhancement is needed for the next cycle, as the average score is 68.08.

Researchers integrated the use of artificial intelligence to gather scientific data by providing more engaging motions and gathering learning materials from 9–14 meetings from several online sources. Planning for Cycle 2 was predicated on the results of Cycle 1, and preparation was carried out in the same manner. The acting portion was carried out according to the previous lesson plan. Every student had a turn performing after the students were divided into groups according to the British Parliamentary debate format, which consists of four teams representing the opposition and the government in a single debate session. The second cycle showed positive results, with clear, eloquent language, high confidence, lower nervousness, supporting evidence, and improved speech organization, resulting in improved communication, presentation, and public speaking skills. They enjoyed participating in public speaking through debating activities since it significantly improved their score. The following table and graphic illustrate students' public speaking achievements in the second cycle.

Table 3. Cycle 2 Score Summary

Criteria	Percentage (%)	Mean Score	Maximal Score	Minimum Score
Passed	94.74	80.24	95	59
Failed	5.26			

**Figure 2. Students' Public Speaking Achievement in Cycle 2**

The table and figure above indicate that students' English public speaking skills have improved from the last cycle. Most of the students, 94.74%, succeeded, with only 5.26 % failing. The average score is 80.24. The actions implemented in cycle 2 can be considered successful.

The enhancement of students' public speaking through debate techniques is obvious, as the research conducted by Setiawan et al. (2024) demonstrated that debating activities substantially increase students' critical thinking and public speaking abilities. Debating improves public speaking abilities by offering a controlled environment for training communication, critical thinking, and reasoning. Key variables include active listening, concise communication of ideas, engagement with opposing opinions, and developing confidence through organized practice. It enhances confidence, promotes critical thinking, and connects students to facts, enhancing their awareness of social dynamics and public speaking skills. The improvement of each cycle is influenced by factors such as practice, confidence building, active listening, critical thinking, knowledge and research, body language and nonverbal communication, and adaptability and feedback. Regular engagement in debates improves fluency, confidence, and communication skills while overcoming stage fright and enhancing critical thinking and argumentation. It also fosters adaptability and responsiveness to unexpected challenges and audience reactions.

The result of this study is in line with Arung & Jumardin's (2016) study that suggests the debate approach can be beneficial in teaching speaking due to its promotion of active participation and collaborative learning. The study's findings are also supported by Ban et al (2023) prior research, which shows that debates favorably influenced respondents' English speaking skills and critical thinking abilities, hence enhancing their overall performance. Debating is an effective instructional technique for students, requiring active engagement and skills in researching, constructing arguments, engaging with diverse viewpoints, and distinguishing between subjective and evidence-based information.

The final benefit of debate is the acquisition of a new speaking manner. The majority of the students were interested in the debate technique as a means of improving their public speaking abilities. The debate technique introduced them to an engaging method of learning to speak, which allowed them to think more critically and speak with greater confidence in front of a large audience. Consequently, debate serves as a remarkably efficient technique to promote students' English public speaking skills.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study employs the Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology to identify the issue with students' English ability to speak in public. The pre-cycle phase involves identifying students with limited English public speaking skills. Debate is a valuable method for English teachers to address this issue. Implementing debate techniques in the teaching-learning process can enhance students' public speaking skills. This is seen by the enhancement of students' speaking proficiency in each cycle. The benefit of debate in teaching oral communication has been repeatedly demonstrated by earlier studies and associated ideas. Additionally, after participating in the debate, the students exhibited increased originality and freedom in articulating their logical arguments, consistent with the results of observations and interviews. Therefore, their English public speaking proficiency and confidence in speaking increased.

Speaking can still be taught using a variety of methods, strategies, and media. The role of a teacher is critical in identifying the most effective technique to teach speaking, investigating the long-term impacts of debate practice, and comparing its efficacy to other speaking courses. It is advised that teachers use several ways to enhance English public speaking based on students' requirements and conditions. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to utilize these findings as a reference and comparison to research teaching using different format debate strategies and other teaching techniques.

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