

# An English Debate League Competition Among Lower Form Students: An Experiential Learning Activity<sup>\*</sup>

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This paper presents a study of an experiential learning debate program held among second language learners of a Malaysian boarding school. It was a co-curricular activity carried by the ELS (English language society) and the EDC (English debate club). The English panel felt that not everyone would have the chance to speak or voice their opinion in a 40-minute English lesson. Hence, the rationale to hold the debate tournament as this would create a real context for students to use English language. The British parliamentary debate was adopted. Thirty-two ELS members were briefed to run the tournament whilst 24 English debate members were trained to adjudicate. Two hundred and forty students (120 form one and 120 form two students) were grouped in pairs as debaters according to their sports house system. The debate lasted for three months and quantitative and qualitative data was drawn. A survey of participants' perception undertaken revealed that students felt they had improved their speaking and listening skills. They suggested that after each debate, the adjudicators should discuss the motion and inform them of their weaknesses. Later, data drawn was used to explain how debate helped students to develop their speaking ability.

*Keywords:* debate competition, experiential learning, speaking ability, voicing of opinion, peer support

## Introduction

Every ESL (English as a second language) learner aspires to speak fluently in English (Thornbury, 2005). However, students rarely get the chance to practice what more develop the habit of speaking the language (Shobha, 2011). Limited classroom time (Harmer, 2001), teacher-centered learning and grammar emphasis pedagogy are said to be the reasons for this sad state of affair (Thornbury, 2005). Oral communication is often neglected in second language classroom which is ironic for in real life listening and speaking is so basic and essential (Flowerdew & Lindsay, 2005). Imparting skills in oral communication should be the top priority in the teaching and learning of English (Shobha, 2011). Teacher needs to provide meaningful communication activities within and beyond classroom for acquisition to take place (Harmer, 2001). Debate offers such an experience as it is an interactive activity involving an authentic give and take communicative interchange where the speaking and listening skill is intricately integrated (Brown, 1994). During such an activity, students become familiar with the language and this indirectly helps build their working knowledge of it (Swain, 1985; Shobha, 2011).

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<sup>\*</sup> **Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank all the students and teachers who participated in this study. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not for profit sector.  
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According to *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* (2006), debate has several meanings: (1) It is discussion about a subject on which people have different views; (2) It is a formal discussion, for example in a parliament, in which people express different opinions about a particular subject and then vote about it; and (3) If people debate a topic, they discuss it fairly formally.

A common aspect in all the meanings is the concept of discussion or to discuss. However, in a debate competition, the element that is emphasized is the argument(s) put forth by two opposing groups or teams about an issue rather than the discussion. In the competition, two groups of debaters put across their argument(s) to a third party, for example, a panel of judges, who will then call for a vote to decide which team is better in its argument and spoken ability. Hence, debate involves the process of giving one's opinion and at the same time listening to the many views of others before making a decision (Freeley & Steinberg, 2005).

In fact, debate which is said to be the oldest activity of the Western civilization (Ericson, Murphy, & Zeuschner, 2003) is rooted in the tradition of democracy. It was introduced as a teaching strategy in Athens by Protagoras (481 B.C.-411 B.C.), "the father of debate" (Darby, 2007, p. 1). It is no surprise that debate is often linked to democracy and freedom of speech. Perhaps, this is the reason why many find debate appealing. Today, it is incorporated across the curriculum education at the tertiary level. It has been successfully used in a variety of discipline—sociology, marketing, psychology, biotechnology, maths, health, dentistry, nursing are examples of this (Jugdev, Markowski, & Mengel, 2004).

Another strength of debate is the claim made by many that debate offers many benefits (Tumposky, 2004). Among the advantages are enhancing oral, communicative skills (Combs & Bourne, 1994; Hall, 2011), bolstering teamwork (Gervery, Drout, & Wang, 2009), understanding content knowledge (Vo & Morris, 2006), fostering leadership quality (Christudason, 2003), improving listening and research skills, cultivating persuasive public speaking (Oros, 2007), enhancement of critical thinking skills (Colbert, 1995; Freeley & Steinberg, 2005), personal skills and critical understanding (Moon, 2005; Kennedy, 2007). As Christudason (2003) asserted: "Debate offers all in one go" (p. 1).

Debate third strength is student-centered and students are actively engaged. In fact, debate becomes appealing due to the paradigm shift in the teaching methodology of teacher centered to student centered and the requirement of active engagement by the learner in the subject content. Debate offers the learner to do just this. During debate, the student has to take full responsibility of his learning "while the teacher takes a back seat and the students teach each other in giving ideas" (Walker & Warhurst, 2000, p. 41). At the same time, while the debate process takes hold, students' approach of learning changes from passive to active with active engagement of students' brainstorming ideas (Snider & Schnurer, 2002). According to Bonwell and Eison (1991): "Students are doing things and thinking about things they are doing" (p. 2).

Despite the above positive comments, a drawback was identified: Gervery et al. (2009) reported that undergraduates involved in his case study found debating uncomfortable and was a source of anxiety.

However, based on its student centered and student engagement learning environment, debate has the potential to be used in language classroom for oral development. An interactive classroom is essential for a lively speaking session (Thornbury, 2005). Classroom interaction depends on the nature of pedagogy and classroom behavior. An interactive classroom offers opportunities for students to use the language (Shobha, 2011; Noor, Aman, Mustaffa, & Seong, 2010) and this helps in oral development (Swain, 1985). Researchers Henzl (1979), and Brown and Yule (1983) had discussed the limitation of the classroom where only one person

(usually the teacher) controls the whole conversation. Usually the teacher also determines who will speak, how long it will last and even when it should end. With such a scenario, students have less chances to practice the language and therefore progress slowly. Debate in this case has a lot to offer to compensate for this. It relocates the control of the conversation and allows other models of language of different forms of speech situations and variety speech acts such as apologies, excuses, treats, and compliments to be experienced.

Other reasons on how debate can improve students' speaking skills include: comprehensible input, reshaping and expanding schemata, communication strategies, and cultural understanding. Lastly, debate will push students to use the target language in their output. This is essential according to Swain (1985), language learning is far more effective if learner is pushed to use the target language in its productive tasks and this sits well with debate competition.

The potential of debate in Malaysian school has never been exploited in its language classroom unlike in tertiary studies reported in the literature review. Teachers are reluctant to use debate as a pedagogy tool due to the constraints of time, the large number of students per class (usually 40-50 students), and teacher's lack of expose of debate. Only in co-curricular activity is debate used and it is an exclusive affair since three or four upper secondary students are involved at the district or the national debate competition (Malaysian Institute for Debate and Public Speaking, 2013). As in the universities, those who participate in this competition are members of the debate team (Bellon, 2000). Rarely, do students aged 13 or 14 are given the chance to participate at the district or national debate competition.

Thus the purpose of this study, is to give every 13 and 14 year old student a chance to debate and to generally determine the effects it has on them and to specifically determine if debate improves students' speaking ability. This study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What effects does debate have on students who participate in this program?; and (2) Does debate improve speaking skills of these ESL learners and if it so how does it come about?.

## **Methods**

The method involved in this study was a debate competition which undertook a community service learning approach. Service learning is a teaching method where students will apply their knowledge and skills to solve a problem or address a real need of their own community (Ohn & Rahima, 2009). This debate competition project combined experiential learning and service learning in a co-curricular activity where members of the students peers (seniors aged 16) would organize, oversee, and adjudicate the debate.

### **Participants**

The school involved in this project was a co-ed school. The project started in July and ended by October.

There were three different groups involved in this Inter House Debate League Tournament. They were: (1) the debaters; (2) the organizers; and (3) the adjudicators.

All the form one and form two students (aged 13 and 14 respectively) participated in the debate competition as debaters. From each form, 120 students took part in. Altogether there were 240 participants.

The organizers and the adjudicators were the form four students aged 16. Thirty-six of these students, mostly members of the English Language Club (ESL), were selected as the organizers. They ran the debate competition and were responsible for setting the venue and deciding the debate fixture.

Another 24 of these form four students were selected as adjudicators to judge the debate. They would

be trained in a workshop on how to adjudicate. These students were selected by their English teachers based on two criteria: (1) their English proficiency or their recent performance in their English test paper; and (2) their experience as debaters.

### Debate Procedures

In any debate there are two teams involved: proposition and opposition team. In this project, the competition adopted a British parliamentary debate style. In British Parliamentary, there are four groups involved: (1) opening proposition team; (2) the closing proposition team; (3) the opening opposition team; and (4) the closing opposition team. Hence, in this competition, at any venue, there would be four teams debating or competing simultaneously, at one go (see Figure 1).

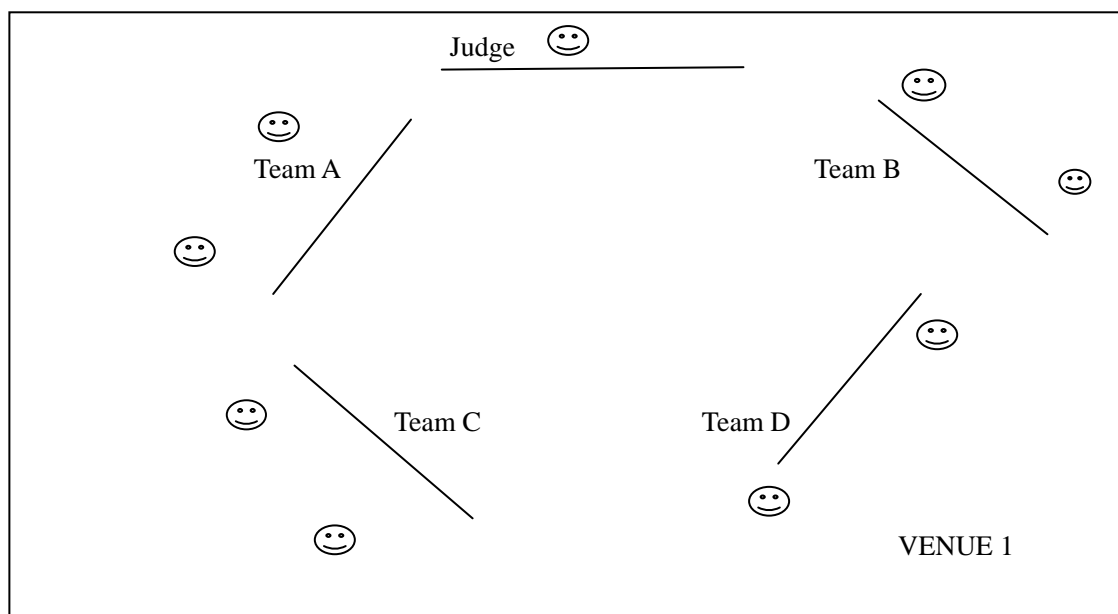


Figure 1. Sitting position of debaters at each venue.

Another feature of the parliamentary debate is the use of POI (point of information). A POI is a request by any member of the rival teams to the debater or speaker who holds the floor to give some of his or her time for a query made on any POI (Edwards, 2008). This is done by extending one's hand or rising and saying, "point of information".

In this study, the debate competition involved sports houses. The sports houses are official houses set by the school which a student belongs to. The school has four different school houses: House A, House B, House C, and House D.

In this competition, all the form one students were grouped in pairs according to the four sports houses. Thus at each debate venue, four debate teams each representing the respective sports house would be competing. Similar steps were undertaken for the form two students.

### Debate Stages

The execution of the debate project involved three stages: (1) pre-debate tournament: During this stage, workshops and briefings about debate were given separately to organizers and adjudicators. Subsequently, organizers gave briefings to participants on how to debate; (2) debate tournaments: Participants of each team would debate at least four times. Upon the release of a motion, each team was given 20 minutes to discuss. After

which the actual debate would begin; and (3) post debate: A survey to find out the students' perception of the debate was undertaken at this stage. The purpose was among others to gauge their satisfaction of participating.

### Survey

Since this study was exploratory in nature, a survey which used a questionnaire to elicit the students' response was specifically constructed. Wherever possible, the construct of the survey used were adopted or modeled upon items described in published work that examined debates. This included work by Kankanhalli (2007), Hall (2011), and Rear (2010).

The survey of the questionnaire looked at five aspects: (1) strategies used; (2) ideas; (3) confidence; (4) students satisfaction debating; (5) benefits of debate in listening and speaking; and (6) suggestions.

The questionnaire items used a Likert scale ranging from 1—strongly disagree to 5—strongly agree. The midpoint rating of “3” was defined as “not sure”. An SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) descriptive data analysis was run on the data obtained from the survey.

### Interviews, Adjudicators' Score Sheet, and Observation

Apart from the questionnaire, other sources of data included were interviews at random, the adjudicators' score sheet, and the researcher's observation based on a check list. The interview was carried out at random to determine the adjudicators' and participants' opinion of the overall performance of the participants and what they felt of the program.

### Analysis

For quantitative data such as the survey descriptive output, an SPSS data analysis was run. To answer the research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data would be analysed and via triangulation and the researcher's experience and understanding of debate, interpretations would be made and general conclusions would be drawn.

## Results

### Questionnaire

Section A and B would look at debating strategies used and the thinking aspect related to ideas.

#### Section A: Strategies Used

The survey looked into four strategies used during debate. Table 1 shows the mean for each strategy of each form.

Table 1

#### *Debating Strategies*

No.	Strategy	Form one		Form two	
		Mean	Most favored	Mean	Most favored
1	Discussion with debate partner	4.02	2	4.05	2
2	Writing down their speech in complete sentences	2.6	3	3.15	3
3	Writing down ideas in point form	4.15	1	4.04	1
4	Repetition (Repeated what I said)	1.7	4	1.72	4

As shown in Table 1, both forms had the same favorite strategy: writing down their ideas in points, was the most favored, followed by discussion with debate partner, and then writing down their speech in complete

sentences. Repetition as a strategy was last. Repetition here referred to repeating the same statement as a strategy to buy time. This was seldom used as a strategy by the students during debate.

#### Section B: Ideas

Table 2

##### *Ideas*

No.	Item	(Form one) mean	(Form two) mean
1	I had ideas	4.01	4.0
2	I could elaborate my points/ideas	3.3	3.2
3	I gave more than one idea	3.5	3.48

Both forms had high mean for ideas (see Table 2). The mean was 4.01 and 4.0 respectively for the form one and form two. For elaboration of ideas, the mean for both forms was moderate: For the form one, it was 3.3 and subsequently for the form two it was 3.2 respectively. Similarly, the means to give more than one idea, was moderate too: For both forms, it fell within the range of 3.5.

#### Section C: Confidence

The overall mean for confidence was moderate for both forms. It was 3.05 and 3.17 for the form one and form two respectively. The mean for each of the following items was moderate for both forms except for the first item where the mean was low among the form one: They were not confident when it was their turn to debate (see Table 3).

Table 3

##### *Confidence Level (Positive Aspect)*

No.	Item	(Form one) mean	(Form two) mean
1	I was confident when it was my turn to debate	2.8	3.2
2	I was loud	3.2	3.5
3	I gave POIs (points of information)	3.11	3.5
4	I was not worried about making grammar mistakes	3.14	3.15
5	I confidently raised questions	3.5	3.55
6	I was not scared to accept queries or POIs from the opponents	3.5	4.05

For both forms the mean score was low for the following items (see Table 4).

Table 4

##### *Confidence Level (Negative Aspect)*

No.	Item	(Form one) mean	(Form two) mean
1	I was not nervous when others could speak	2.8	2.7
2	I could answer the POI given	2.53	2.4
3	I find it easy to debate	2.9	2.9

Half of the students could not answer well when enquiries were made or when the POI was given. About half of them felt nervous when others could speak. Similarly, the mean for those who stated that debate was easy was moderately low.

#### Section D: Students Satisfaction

Even though both forms gave positive effects of debate, the overall mean was from mid moderate to low moderate.

Among the positive effect items are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

*Satisfaction Aspect*

No.	Item	(Form one) mean	(Form two) mean
1	I found debating fun	3.5	3.6
2	I am glad I had debated	3.6	3.37
3	I would want to participate again	3.37	3.05
4	I want to debate again	3.01	3.07

Section E: Benefits of Debate in Listening and Speaking

This looks at the benefits of debate from the language aspect. Students were asked if they felt any improvement of listening and speaking while debating. Listed in Table 6 are the areas of improvement the students felt. As shown, the improvement in means were from moderately high to high.

Table 6

*Benefits of Debate*

No.	Item	(Form one) mean	(Form two) mean
1	Debate improves my listening skill	4.2	3.9
2	Debate improves my speaking skill	4.2	4.5
3	Debates builds my confidence in speaking	3.82	3.9
4	Debate makes me think of points to argue	3.95	4.05

In conclusion, both forms found debate helped in language improvement particularly in listening and speaking.

Section F: Suggestions

The survey also looked into two suggestions: (1) If adjudicators should inform debaters of their weaknesses after each debate; and (2) If adjudicators should discuss the motion of the debate after each debate.

For both forms, the mean for each of the above was moderately high. The form one students wanted the adjudicators to discuss the motion after each debate (the mean was 3.77) and they also wanted to be informed of their weaknesses (the mean was 3.87). Similarly, among the form two, they wanted the adjudicators to discuss the motion after each debate. The mean was moderately low, i.e., 3.09. They also wanted to be assessed and informed of their weaknesses after debating. The mean was moderately high: It was at 3.7.

**Feedback From the Interview**

**Form four adjudicators.** The feedback for this session came from the interview and from the adjudicator's score sheet.

Most of the discussion were held among themselves. Discussions held before debate were predominantly in the first language although there were in between a mixture of English words or terms being used. When writing out their scripts, students were observed to refer to their friends or the "adjudicator". This occurred when they had uncertainties or were seeking clarifications. The delivery of their speech, the output were all in English.

According to the adjudicators, most of the participants lacked ideas, were repeating the same point and could not elaborate much. Overall, they saw at the initial stage, the students were unsure, hesitant, and scared but at later rounds they improved and were more confident.

The most sought after role was the last speaker: summing up.

The score sheet showed that the average time taken by each speaker was about two minutes where the shortest time taken was 42 seconds and the longest was four minutes 49 seconds.

The adjudicators and organizers felt the debate program was a worthy program for the lower form students as it gave them a chance to speak out in public and build their confidence. They believed that if the program were to be carried out each year, students would improve and so they all agreed that the program should be carried out again the following year.

**Feedback from the debaters (form one and two).** The students interviewed said debate was interesting but at the same time it was not easy as they had to come up with points in such a short time. It became more challenging as some times the adjudicators merely gave 10 minutes to discuss. This was one of the few things they complained about. Even if they had books to refer to (which they did not ), they claimed they would not have the time to look up for any information.

They also claimed that they could see the improvement in their friends over time. Some who were quiet in class could really speak. As for the weak ones, some merely repeated the motion and not elaborate on their points. Despite, this even then they became more confident to deliver their speech at later rounds.

Contrary to what the adjudicators claim, the debaters did not believe they were repeating the same points in debate. They insisted that their points were different.

**Teacher's observation.** Overall, everyone made improvement. Students who made the most improvement were the proficient ones followed by the average.

In the first two debate rounds, most read their prepared written text. They were reading and were thus dependent of their text. As for the weak students, often the text they had written merely had assertions of the motion that they had agreed or disagreed upon. They would immediately take their seat, once they completed making assertions. They did not elaborate nor support an argument with proofs. After many repetitions, it was observed that they knew the "introductory line" and was not dependent on the text they had earlier prepared.

Among the debater's role, it was observed that the first two speakers had problems elaborating their ideas. Their statements would often consist of points with not much elaboration. The statements were short. The next student, speaker Three, would repeat the same point and would add one or two sentences further as explanations or elaborations. This pattern would be repeated with subsequent speaker (speaker Four)—repeated points, repeated statements of explanation and an additional one or two sentences. There was no extension of arguments and generally any clash in the arguments was lacking or if there were any they would rebut not on the main argument or idea but on the examples given.

In the POI session, normally there were none given during in the first round. In later rounds, teamwork was observed when the student could not answer the accepted POIs. The student would appeal for help where he would consult his teammates for replies. Sometimes negotiation was seen. Time was taken up when the student tried to make sense of their team's arguments. Discussion was also seen among teammates in raising POIs to their opponent. In a group, they would listen, try to detect a fault in the opponent's argument, and then together they would discuss it before one of them would offer a POI.

The most sought after role was the last speaker doing the summing up. Giving the summary was deemed easy as the speaker did not have to come up with any points. The student merely had to say again the points

given by each speaker. Often, the weaker member would take up this role. Teamwork was often observed here: Their friends or partners in the team would help to jot down the points of the opponent if the last speaker had missed any or failed to grasp the points made by the opposition. The least sought after role was giving the rebuttals (also known as the “whip”). It was difficult as he/she had to listen to points raised by the opposition and think of ideas to counter the arguments put forth.

### **Discussion**

The survey data reveals several aspects. The strategies and idea looked at the cognitive development while confidence, students’ satisfaction debating and debate benefits looked at their affective aspect. For each of the survey findings, the researcher will use feedback from the interview and observation data, to gauge a better understanding. This will give a holistic view of the actual debate in progress.

#### **Section A and B: Strategies and Ideas**

In strategies, discussion with their teammates was the favorite. Students were only given 20 minutes to discuss after the release of a motion. Since time was short, it made sense to discuss or brainstorm the motion. In a group discussion, there are more heads thinking. This could probably be the reason why they felt that they had no problem with getting ideas. The second finding was that students used points and did not write in complete sentence their text. There are many reasons why this occurred. Firstly, during any brainstorm session, they would be getting a lot of ideas and so it was out of expedience that they jotted those ideas down in point form. Secondly, the limitation of time allocated, forced these students to adopt this strategy. Thirdly, writing in complete sentences, would take up a lot of their time. Without realizing, they indirectly were picking two skills: (1) the skill to identify main points in their discussion; and (2) the skill to transfer the information from one form (oral) into another (written). Later these students used the points annotated (written) to express their understanding of the matter in their delivery (spoken).

However, despite the high mean of getting ideas through discussion, the mean for elaboration of ideas was moderate. This agrees with observation made by the adjudicators and researcher. The feedback of the participants shed light on this matter. The participants (debaters) complaint often the time given to discuss was not 20 but 10 minutes. Thus, within that short time, they grouped to get ideas and there was not much time to elaborate. As observed by the researcher, this affected the first and second speakers a lot since they immediately had to deliver their points and subsequently, these two speakers were most of the time merely giving the points but with not much elaboration. This also explained the observed fact why subsequent speakers (the third and fourth) had more ideas and could elaborate. These speakers had more time and also after hearing the points of the first and second speakers, they had more ideas and so could elaborate more.

None of them claimed that they had repeated their points as a strategy to prolong their speech time. This explained why the average time taken by each student fell within the recorded range of two minutes.

An important aspect here is the strength of group dynamism or group support during the brainstorming session. The discussion they carried before the actual debate allowed everyone to participate in the group. The debate activity had a clear language outcome—everyone must deliver his/her speech and it was essential that each had his/her points. And so overall, students were strongly motivated—for a common cause they needed to work together. This ensured that everyone participated to come up with ideas and it was an effective way to ensure a higher degree of commitment to the task. Teamwork was also observed when a team member could

not answer the accepted POIs or when giving POIs. Similarly, when giving summary, once again teamwork was involved. This was especially if the last speaker was unable to get the points made by the opponent. All of these were observed in the observation data.

The discussion during the pre and while debate stage (acceptance and offering of POIs) and the help offered by teammates during POI or the summation stage, offers psychological benefits. Speaking in front of everyone in a second language can be frightful and these discussions help to reduce stress. This observation agrees with finding of Gervery et al. (2009) that debate bolsters teamwork. Via discussion, brainstorming, and debate, students have a better understanding of the topics discussed.

### **Section C and D: Confidence**

This will look at the affective factor. The mean obtained was lower when compared to the cognitive aspect (of strategies and ideas). This aspect looks at the while debating stage, i.e., at the individual performance aspect. Among questionnaire items are: giving of POIs, responding to POIs, manner of delivering their text, and fear of making mistakes or being nervous. At this stage, each student was completely on his/her own unlike in strategies and ideas where the student relied on group discussion for support.

Undergraduates involved in classroom debates found debating uncomfortable and a source of anxiety (Gervery et al., 2009). Since this was the first time the students in this study had to deliver their speech publicly, it was as expected that the overall mean for confidence was lower. Anxiety brought about with audience watching and it was a debate competition and so could have further affected their performance. This was especially among the form one students who were new to the school system. This explains the low mean (2.8) for the item “I was confident when it was my turn to debate” and “I was not nervous when others could speak”.

The mean for giving POIs and answering POIs was low for both forms. Giving POI is a multi skill effort—a learner has to listen carefully the arguments made by the opponent, compares the facts with his existing information, analyses, comes up with a relevant question, and finally be bold enough to stand and inquire. Likewise, with answering POIs on the spot. The student has to listen carefully the question posed, comprehend it and be fast enough to respond or answer it logically. Both require high thinking skills and in this study, it is no surprise that students found debate challenging. As observed by the researcher, often the students appealed to their teammates in responding to POIs accepted. Similarly, in offering POIs, it was often a team effort. Thus based on all these factors, the students did not find debate easy—the mean obtained was low (2.9). This tallied with the interview feedback of the debaters.

Despite the above, students were not scared to accept POIs from their peers or concerned about making grammar mistakes. Here, the environmental was non judgmental to errors as adjudicators merely determined the ranking position (one to four) of each team after each debate session ended. As observed by the researcher, when a participant could not answer a POI given, he/she would appeal help from their team members. All these factors made the learners feel safe when accepting POIs.

### **Section E and F: Effects and Benefits of Debate**

The means for benefits of debate was higher than the positive effects of debate. From the language aspect, the students felt debate improve their listening skills and speaking skills, improve their confidence in speaking, and increase their thinking skills as they had to think of arguments or give counterarguments. All of these were observed by the researcher and confirmed by the adjudicators and the feedback from the interview. This was

especially in terms of improvement of speaking and boosting of confidence even among the weak students. Despite these benefits, the mean for positive effects was lower. The number of students who felt glad they had debated was lesser. Similarly, those who found debate fun was lesser.

As indicated from the interview feedback, it was felt that debate was challenging and thus not easy. The observation by the facilitator and the researcher of the students' performance confirmed this. The less proficient ones who had difficulty to elaborate mostly repeated the opening line. No doubt familiarity of role gave them confidence as they repeated their task each round.

Giving arguments or counter arguments required high thinking skills. Students needed to think fast to respond to inquiries made or to identify faults in the opponent's argument. Individually, it was challenging. As observed, group support was a strategy adopted by the team to overcome individual shortcomings. All of these are possible factors why the survey response to debate again was moderately low. Individually, debate was challenging.

### **Section G: Suggestions, Feedback, and Assessment**

There was also a mismatch of perception from the interview data. The debaters felt they could elaborate on their ideas but this contradicted with the adjudicators' feedback who felt they lacked ideas, could not elaborate and they were repeating points. The observation made by the researcher was in agreement with the adjudicators. It was observed that the debaters actually did not elaborate much nor made extension of their argument.

Another item of the survey was suggestions to improve future debate competition. Students felt the adjudicators should tell them of their weaknesses and to discuss the arguments put forth by both teams. The survey response to both these suggestions was moderately high. This was because throughout this competition, the adjudicators did not give feedback of the team or students' performance after each round. The workshop provided merely explained the structure and roles of each participant. The debaters were not shown how to elaborate effectively, how to extend arguments, or how to use evidence at the beginning. Nor was there any effective assessment or feedback to improve after each debate round. Probably, in future, these aspects need to be incorporated in its debate workshop and the adjudicators need to be trained how to give positive feedback or comments on the manner of the overall argument put forth by both teams.

### **Section H: Critical and Creative Thinking**

Colbert (1995) claimed debate promotes critical thinking. The study shows some of the thinking strategies employed by students during the activity. In this study, the various thinking strategies identified were: (1) brainstorming of ideas before actual debate; (2) discussion of arguments/ideas before and while debate stage; (3) writing down their speech ideas in complete sentences; (4) writing down ideas in points; (5) appealing help from team members (in answering POIs); (6) discussion and team effort in identifying faults in opponent's arguments or in offering POIs; and (7) collaboration in summation.

As shown above, team work or group support plays a significant role as it is present in five out of the eight item listed above. Team work is found in items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7.

## **Conclusions**

This study shows that debate has a positive effect on the students. The positive effects are that it promotes teamwork, boosts confidence, fosters critical thinking, and improves speaking and listening ability by allowing students to experience real and autonomous language use. It agrees with the literature review that debate has a lot to offer. As claimed, debate offers all in one go holds true (Christudason, 2003). However, the study

revealed students found debate not easy. It was challenging. This agrees with finding by Gervery et al. (2009). Since debate involved public speaking and students were not given enough know how to elaborate and substantiate an argument with evidence, it was no wonder they felt anxious. Despite that, as shown above, this program provides a lot of opportunities for speaking and listening as well.

This study shows that debate improves and offers maximum listening and speaking opportunity for these students, and this is due to the positive support of team spirit. This was observed before the actual debate, i.e., during the brainstorming session (pre-debate stage) and during the debate session, i.e., during the stage of offering and answering of POIs and at the summation stage. The teamwork plays a crucial role to reduce anxiety when the student as an individual delivers his speech.

A safe environment is an important factor for learners to try to communicate. Dynamic group support and the presence of adjudicator being non-judgmental to errors play a crucial role. However, adjudicators could play a more significant role if they had given suggestions on how to improve. Encouragement and positive feedback from them could reduce the anxiety and instead motivated these students to strive better, and this would be good for their development.

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