



## The Effect of Classroom Debate on Students' Academic Achievement in Higher Education: an Overview

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### ABSTRACT

The use of classroom debate as an instructional technique is prevalent, particularly in secondary and higher education. There have been several studies examining the effects of classroom discussion in areas such as second language acquisition, philosophical thinking, psychology, and pure science, there is a lack of particular research in the subject of administrative science. Multidisciplinary fields that focus on critical and analytical examination of administrative ideas, management principles, and methods. The review papers covered organisational and leadership theories. Therefore, the study aims is to provide a thorough examination of how classroom debate affects students' academic performance in higher education, in various academic settings, and across all departments and disciplines of study. The research findings indicate classroom debates are beneficial and relevant to many academic subjects because they allow students to think more critically and express creative ideas, which improve their academic performance. A theoretical framework shows a clear connection between student academic success and the advantages of conversation in the classroom.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Debate is a time-honoured tradition that dates back 2,400 years (Garrett et al., 1996). Protagoras, known as "the father of debate," first established it as a teaching approach in Ancient Greece (Darby, 2007). Later, in the twelfth century, Muslim academics at colleges used this pedagogy to instruct Islamic jurisprudence (Makdisi, 1981). Debate is an intellectual exercise that entails engaging in discussions with others who have divergent and/or conflicting viewpoints. In order to effectively vote on their thoughts, participants must possess open-mindedness, enabling them to carefully consider and evaluate various viewpoints presented during discussions. Having an open mind is a fundamental characteristic of being a critical thinker. Another characteristic of debate is the audacity to express one's views. Some people believe that debate is connected to democracy and freedom of expression, which may explain why (Ericson et al., 2003). "Innovation refers to the inclination to produce or identify concepts, options, or opportunities that may be beneficial in problem-solving, communication, and entertainment" (Franken, 1994, p. 396). The capacity to surpass traditional concepts, systems, patterns, relationships, or similar entities and to generate significant novel ideas and information using human sensory perception and evaluative capabilities. Creativity is the ability to think and create in a way that is unconventional, using both insight and intellect, and resulting in the highest quality results. Creativity is an essential characteristic for educators in the field of education. Nowadays, teaching heavily relies on statistics, such as test results, and guides instructors with established methods, causing them to doubt their own ability to be creative (Bunting, 2006). Facilitating communication and collaboration between both teachers and students is a crucial first step in integrating creativity into education. Teaching at the tertiary level necessitates lecturers having a closer connection with the learners rather than just delivering lectures. Educators should demonstrate adaptability in embracing ideas and enriching the topics to facilitate discussions and express perspectives (Collard & Looney, 2014). Instructors get advantages from reflecting on their initial motivations for pursuing a career in teaching. What objectives do they anticipate achieving? What satisfaction do they expect? When creating lesson plans, educators should possess the ability to discern the long-term impact these plans will have on the learners for the remainder of the semester. Therefore, instructors must possess the ability to premeditate and cultivate originality in advance. Alternative resources, such as audio-video substances, innovative distribution via technological advances, and interactive presentations, should be organised in a suitable manner. To successfully execute this, faculty members must be open-minded and willing to explore unconventional and innovative ideas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The utilization of classroom debate as a pedagogical approach is widespread, especially in secondary and tertiary education. While numerous studies have explored the impact of classroom discussions in domains such as second language acquisition, philosophical reasoning, psychology, and pure science, there is a noticeable gap in research concerning administrative science.

This interdisciplinary field involves the comprehensive and analytical scrutiny of administrative concepts, management principles, and methodologies. Existing literature reviews have predominantly focused on organizational and leadership theories. This study endeavors to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the influence of classroom debate on the academic performance of higher education students, encompassing diverse academic environments and spanning all departments and fields of study.

## **RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### *Utilise Debate As A Method Of Fostering Imaginative Education*

Classroom discussions cultivate creativity in the learning process. Debating has a long and significant history since it promotes students' ability to advocate for their ideas and express themselves via competitive debates between schools. Debate is a competitive activity involving two teams: the positive team, which supports the resolutions, and the negative team, which opposes them (Noonan, 2011). Debate is a structured method of presenting and discussing arguments that facilitates direct contact and representation. Debate inherently involves the use of manipulation, with each argument including an element of persuasion. Persuasion often relies on evoking emotional responses from the audience, which ultimately influence their reactions and interactions with the subject at hand. Debate is considered a pedagogical approach that involves taking a definite stance, in favour of or in opposition to, on a subject, topic, or problem with the aim of teaching and learning.

While there have been some studies conducted on the advantages of debates, there is currently a lack of research that directly connects debates with enhanced academic achievement (Omelicheva & Avdeyeva, 2008; Onen, 2016). Hence, given the multitude of advantages that arguing offers in terms of students' academic performance, this research seeks to evaluate the influence of debate on students' scholastic achievements. Debate creates an environment of active learning and encourages cooperation among teams by presenting convincing facts (Doody & Condon, 2012). According to Warner & Brusckie (2001), classroom arguments have the potential to enhance students' academic achievement by promoting active participation and involvement among learners. Catterall (2002) found that learners who participate in debate events have a 25% broader spectrum of academic abilities compared to their counterparts who do not engage in such activities. Debate activities foster competitiveness, motivating students to deepen their knowledge in order to confidently defend their points. Participation in debating events enables students to enhance their writing abilities. Oral conversations will significantly enhance their reading comprehension compared to their counterparts who do not engage in such activities. Colbert and Biggers (1985) were among the first to claim the positive effects of engaging in debating activities on one's well-being. Carr (2002) claimed that students engaged in arguing were more adept at understanding new ideas and foreign terminology. Additionally, they had the capability to acquire a broader range of knowledge, including subjects such as history, philosophy, laws and regulations, and current events at the collegiate

level. They gained confidence, improved their listening skills, and enhanced their strategic ability. Students who participate in discussion events are more likely to seek out leadership roles in their communities and schools. Better yet, they are known to take the lead on their debate teams (Bradley, 1959).

#### *The Influence of Debating Skills on Students' Academic Performance*

According to Doody and Condon (2012), there are six essential abilities required for engaging in an argument. The abilities included are analysis, interpretation, assessment, deduction, clarification, and autonomy. Interpretation skill refers to the aptitude of students to recognise and elucidate fundamental matters in a conversation. Analysis entails the capability to collect and arrange information. Evaluation, on the other hand, involves the ability of students to assess the worth of information based on its precision, relevance, and the existence of diverse perspectives. Meanwhile, inference pertains to the capacity of pupils to draw conclusions, understand values, and express perspectives. Explanation pertains to the logical clarifications provided by students on a particular matter, whereas self-regulation involves the capacity to evaluate and critique the performance of others while actively being part of the team. This article will focus on discussing three out of the six talents. The talents include interpretation, analysis, and inference. The subsequent sections will elucidate these talents. The study, on the other hand, found a statistically significant link between learning through discussions and the development of important graduate skills like analytical thinking and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, the study revealed that intellectual difficulties, motivation, and learning in depth facilitated the learning process. Not all pupils have a favourable disposition towards debate. (D'souza, 2013)

#### *Competence in the area of communication*

The ability to understand or clarify the significance of a message, subject, or piece of information is referred to as an interpretation skill. Tilus (2012) described interpretation skills as the ability to understand and successfully communicate the meaning of supplied information to others. Students must actively participate in the interpretation of the information via discussion and reasoning activities in order for classroom debate to take place (Collard & Looney, 2014). Furthermore, students must acquire the skills to research current topics, formulate well-reasoned arguments, consider multiple perspectives, differentiate between subjective and fact-based information, and incorporate relevant data (Darby, 2007). During a debate practice, students are expected to analyse a topic critically and comment on it. Debate improves a student's ability to critically evaluate a subject, provide reasoned arguments, and articulate their points of view (Tumposky, 2004). In addition to developing their persuasive skills and organising their ideas for efficient delivery and acceptance, students are urged to convey and present their ideas in the most captivating manner possible. Students must study a certain curriculum in order to do this.

### *Abilities in Analyzing*

Analytical skills are another set of abilities that might have an effect on the performance of pupils. Students' analytical abilities are characterised by their capacity to make connections between concepts and to critically examine the significance of those ideas. One of the most important criteria that should be considered when evaluating a debate programme is the extent to which it helps its participants improve their analytical skills. The demands of a changing society necessitate students to assess and evaluate ideas, and these abilities are accessible in debating activities (see Doody & Condon, 2012; Omelicheva & Avdeydeva, 2008). Many writers believe that students should be able to demonstrate these skills through debates. In a society where there is an abundance of information, the capacity to think critically serves as an exceptionally important skill. Bellon (2000) suggests that students can develop and form intellectual curiosity by engaging in "thinking" with their classmates. Through a comprehensive thinking process that indirectly fosters critical thinking, students will gain experience in reasoning processes and develop practice in using those reasoning processes. Their research conducted in 1999 supports this conclusion. Participating in debating activities enhanced students' capacity to reason and defend topics relevant to their subject areas, as discovered by Mike, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Loudon (1999). According to Bellon (2000), Tous, and Haghighi (2016), critical thinking is one of the most essential skills because it compels students to engage in rigorous thought processes in an effort to establish connections between phrases and concepts that give them a deeper level of significance. Overall, the students saw the classroom discussion as a beneficial educational exercise. The learners held the belief that the discussions contributed to the enhancement of their critical thinking abilities and proficiency in oral communication. Furthermore, according to the students' assertions, the discussions also yielded advantages such as acquiring proficiency in the subject matter, enhancing self-assurance, conquering performance anxiety, and refining collaborative abilities. Zare & Othman (2015). Novice and medium ESL learners often avoid debate due to the perception that it is an activity only suited for advanced learners. Nevertheless, this research primarily concentrated on using argument as a means of enhancing the speaking abilities of students who have a lesser level of competency in the English language. As a result, the study selected two Malaysian ESL learners from a boarding school: a male student with a low level of English proficiency and a female student with an intermediate level of ability. The study admits the restriction of having just two samples, but it provided valuable insights into the experiences of these students as participants in the debate competition phenomenon.

### *Skills in Making Inferences*

Inferential abilities refer to the capacity to develop a systematic approach that leads to the accurate recognition of a consistent pattern via repeated exposure to both examples and non-examples, with subsequent feedback provided after each answer (Shafir et al., 1990, p. 506). Students with advanced

inferential skills possess the capacity to recognise problems or disagreements and may provide resolutions based on important occurrences (Doody & Condon, 2012). Debate activities require students to engage in active listening to the logic and arguments of others. This process trains students to assess and contrast arguments from many viewpoints before formulating their own opinions (Omelicheva & Avdeydeva, 2008). This approach encourages students to pay close attention to specific elements, engaging in the simultaneous practice of several abilities, including active listening, effective communication (both verbal and non-verbal), and analytical thinking (Onen, 2016). Developing inferential abilities will improve students' capacity to draw logical conclusions about a given topic. During group conversations, the ability to make inferences is crucial, as it enables students to form judgements and draw conclusions (Doody & Condon, 2012). The authors argue that the advantages of participating in debate exercises may be implemented into a variety of programmes as a teaching tool to develop proficiency with these soft skills. This is in response to the fact that higher education is continuing its attempts to fulfil the expectations of employers. The debate in a particular course on organisational issues includes the perspectives of the educational institution's participants and the earliest indications of how this experience has positively influenced their talents. (Chikeleze et al., 2018).

Likewise, it is appropriate to expose students to debates since they encompass many contextual situations, including both official and informal settings, as well as both one-on-one and group interactions. Debate may facilitate learners expressing their opinions by integrating understandable input along with results (Othman et al., 2013). Debate is an organised form of communication that enables learners to assume different roles and develop fundamental interaction abilities. During this phase, students will acquire the capacity to begin and sustain a discussion and articulate their viewpoint. Brice (1992) conducted research indicating that ESL learners typically struggle with their speaking abilities.

#### *The Impact of Critical Thinking Ondebate*

Recently, academics, employers, educators, and the media have all paid close attention to the idea of critical thinking skills and higher-order thinking. Indeed, having the capacity for critical thought is becoming increasingly important for workers in the twenty-first century. Advanced critical thinking skills, negotiation and problem-solving abilities, and outstanding communication talents are becoming more and more valued in staff members and workers (Gervey et al., 2009; Halpern, 2004). In academic and professional contexts, people with strong critical thinking abilities and effective communication skills display behavioural tendencies that are highly appreciated and valued (Mason, 2007; Rudd, 2007; Kosciulek & Wheaton, 2003). Training future workers in communication and critical thinking techniques is still a contentious and continuing matter of discussion. Researchers and academics have started looking into various methods and techniques that could improve and cultivate oral communication and critical thinking skills in the classroom setting, given the increasing emphasis on these abilities and their

increased demand in the changing job market (Halpern, 2003). According to Browne & Freeman (2000), subjects that concentrate on enhancing critical thinking skills have to include a significant number of evaluative learning exercises. Bringing up controversial subjects in the classroom, according to Browne & Freeman (2000), creates an atmosphere of cognitive tension that encourages the investigation of other viewpoints, logical reasoning, and critical thinking. According to research, having discussions is a good way to develop and preserve your ability to think critically and communicate orally (Camp & Schnader, 2010; Paul & Elder, 2007; Ryan & College, 2006; Roy & Macchiette, 2005; Ng et al., 2004). Getting ready to contribute to a conversation is necessary in order to improve a thorough comprehension of the topic and promote active learning. Preparation for a debate improves the capacity to arrange and communicate information clearly, acquire and use facts and evidence to support a concept, critically assess and refute opposing arguments, and articulate an argument using exact language. Critical thinking skills are in line with these competencies (Rudd, 2007; Kosciulek & Wheaton, 2003).

Since critical thinking is such a broad topic, experts have provided several definitions and terminologies. Finding a widely accepted precise definition can be challenging, and the variety of interpretations can sometimes pose problems for teachers when explaining it to their pupils (Rear, 2010). Ennis (1987) offers an often-used definition of critical thinking as "sensible contemplation that is centred on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 10). Comparably, critical thinking is the logical process of choosing what to accept or not believe, according to Norris (1985). Critical thinking is the process of being cautious and introspective while forming opinions about ideas or behaviours, according to Ennis and Norris. According to Gieve (1998), students must investigate and assess the justifications for their behaviours, beliefs, and expertise claims in order to participate in critical thinking. In this process, they must defend and critically examine their own health as well as the health of others, including experts, teachers, and authoritative texts (p. 126). Certain experts consider critical thinking to be the same as scepticism. McPeck (1981) described critical thinking as the propensity and capacity to engage in an activity with deliberate scepticism and analysis (p. 8). According to Sofo (2004), critical thinking entails challenging and reassessing our widely held assumptions and views. Critical thinkers, according to Sofo (2004), are also individuals who evaluate their behaviours to improve how they approach things. They are people who attentively consider other points of view and have an open mind.

#### *Verbal Communication Proficiency as a Catalyst for Initiating Debates*

According to Burns and Joyce (1997), speaking is a communication activity that focuses on meaning-building and entails the creation, acquisition, and processing of information. Speaking ability, on the other hand, refers to the capacity for accurate, precise, and useful verbal communication in the target language. Speaking is a crucial ability and the primary means of communication for instructors and ESL/EFL students alike. Colleges and

universities have recently given oral skills, also known as communicative competency, a specific position in the English teaching curriculum. However, throughout the semester, instructors allocate minimal time and effort to assignments and activities that necessitate students to engage in communication with each other in a second or foreign language. Liao (2009) states that oral abilities are evaluated more highly in real-world scenarios, particularly speaking. Speaking is essential for daily communication, and most of the time, one's capacity to communicate clearly and concisely forms the basis of one's first assessment of that person (Liao, 2009).

Rebecca (2006) claims that speaking is the first method by which youngsters begin to learn a language. According to Rebecca (2006), speaking has a significant role in driving changes in a language and encompasses a substantial part of daily engagement in language-related activities for almost all individuals. Liao (2009) asserts that the primary objective of ESL learners is to achieve proficiency in speaking, since there is a prevailing notion that English language acquisition is closely associated with oral communication. When someone claims that some language learners excel in English, it is often assumed that they possess a high level of proficiency in the language. Furthermore, the acquisition of oral proficiency may greatly facilitate the development and enhancement of other essential abilities. Nevertheless, the speaking skill holds great importance and significance for students, particularly those learning English as a second or foreign language. However, various studies conducted by Kim (2006), Cheng et al. (2004), Morita (2000), and Ferris (1998) have raised concerns about the overall speaking ability of students, especially ESL learners. Ferris (1998) conducted a study examining the perspectives of ESL students from three American tertiary institutions regarding the difficulties they encounter with listening and speaking skills. The study found that the learners expressed the highest level of anxiety towards oral presentations and whole classroom discussions. However, the students reported minimal difficulties when engaging in small-group discussions. In her research, Kim (2006) aimed to investigate the perspectives of Asian foreign graduate students on their academic speaking and listening abilities in university courses, as well as the difficulties they encounter in attaining these standards.

#### *Debate in the Classroom*

Debate serves to develop proficiencies in critical thinking, analysing, synthesising, and spontaneous speaking. According to Krieger (2005), several students demonstrated significant improvement in their capacity to articulate and justify their views by engaging in debate exercises. Furthermore, the students often and promptly identified the shortcomings in one another's arguments. This talent is regarded as a fundamental aspect of critical thinking abilities, whereby students are anticipated to review and scrutinise the information they acquire in a critical manner. According to Nisbett (2003), debate is a significant educational technique that helps develop analytical thinking abilities and encourages individuals to critically evaluate the validity

of their views (p. 210). Facione & Facione (2008) state that critical thinking abilities consist of analytic thinking skills and the ability to consciously reflect on and monitor one's own ideas. In the conventional method of instruction, such as using a chalkboard and lecturing, students adopt a passive role and receive lectures from their educators. Thus, learners have limited opportunities to actively engage in the learning process, express their perspectives, and enhance their critical thinking skills. According to Paul (1990), learners in these educational institutions only acquire lower-order learning, namely associative learning. This style of learning focuses on memorising course knowledge, which may lead to biases, misunderstandings, and confusion. As a result, students may get demotivated and lose their enthusiasm for studying, leading them to rely on short-term memorising techniques and prioritise immediate performance. According to a study conducted by DEROUICHE (2019), classroom debate improves students' ability to comprehend topics from many viewpoints, engage in critical thinking, and thus arrive at clear conclusions and produce reliable evidence. These talents are the primary characteristics associated with critical thinking. Many first-year master students and their lecturers hold the belief that classroom discussion is a good method for promoting critical thinking. Based on these findings, educators should enhance students' understanding of the significance of critical thinking ability and facilitate its development by including classroom debates.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Classroom discussion facilitates the development of critical thinking and oral communication abilities, among several other talents. Students acquire the skills to combine, examine, and assess claims and arguments. Debate also fosters active learning, enabling students to actively engage in the learning process. Additionally, it aids kids in developing their oral communication abilities. Furthermore, the findings validate that students had a positive inclination towards the debate experience and recognised it as a novel and captivating method. Participating in discussion events boosts students' self-confidence and cultivates their creative thinking. Through the implementation of efficient oversight, the inclusion of discussion activities has the potential to enhance the educational setting for students. This is because engaging in debate requires students to pay close attention to the arguments and defences presented by their classmates. Undoubtedly, participating in discussions is an exceptional platform for nurturing creativity. It improves students' skills and self-assurance, namely by using their ability to understand, analyse, and draw conclusions. These skills provide students with an edge when they transition into the professional domain after graduation. Classroom debate is a dynamic instructional approach that enhances learning across several disciplines. For example, it assists learners in acquiring proficiency in the course material, enhancing critical thinking abilities, and developing oral communication skills. Debate facilitates the development of critical thinking skills in learners via activities such as examining arguments, engaging in research, gathering information, doing analysis, questioning assumptions, assessing arguments,

and demonstrating interpersonal abilities. It fosters an environment where learners relinquish their passive positions and become actively involved in the educational process. Learners can utilise these talents and skills in various settings. Similarly, engaging in classroom debates facilitates the development of oral communication skills, which are important for success in almost any occupation.

#### **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

Classroom debate is a valuable instructional technique that positively impacts students' academic performance in higher education. It promotes critical thinking, enhances communication skills, and fosters a collaborative learning environment. As such, it should be incorporated into the curriculum across all departments and disciplines of study in order to maximize students' learning outcomes and prepare them for future success.

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