

# Developing Speaking Skill Through Debating: Undergraduate EFL Students' Perception

Syamdianita

*Teacher Training and Education Faculty of  
Mulawarman University  
Samarinda, Indonesia  
syamdianita@fkip.unmul.ac.id*

Amedea Cathriona Maharia

*Teacher Training and Education Faculty of  
Mulawarman University  
Samarinda, Indonesia  
amedeacathriona@gmail.com*

**Abstract**—The main focus for students to learn English is to be able to use English in oral communication. However, the problems of students who do not have enough good capability in English is because the students feel too shy to speak or afraid of making mistakes. Moreover, the students might also struggle with pronunciation or not have enough time to practice their English. Debating is one activity of problem-solving task (simulation) that encourages thinking skills and also offers motivating contexts for learners to communicate with one another. Debate can also enhance active learning where a speaking situation in which opposite points of view are presented and argued. This study aimed at answering two research questions, namely: (1) How is the undergraduate EFL students' perception about debate in speaking class?; (2) How do the undergraduate EFL students believe that debate can help them to improve their speaking skill?. To answer those research questions, a mixed method research was used, by having a questionnaire and an interview guide as the instruments. Sixty three students of fifth semester of English Department as the subject in this study The first result of the study showed students had positive perception toward the use of debate in speaking class because of some benefits they acquired. They could practice the elements and components of speaking well and be more confident to deliver their ideas. The second result of the study showed that students' perceived debate could help them to improve their speaking skill particularly the components of speaking (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency and comprehension). However, during the interview sessions, some grammatical errors could still be found.

**Keywords:** *speaking skill, debating, EFL students' perception*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The main focus for students to learn English is to be able to use English in oral communication on the other words students need to use their speaking skill well after they study about English [1]. For mastering English as foreign language, students should construct the basic of language competence such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The main focus of students who learn English as foreign language is to be able to use English in oral communication [2]. Speaking is a communicative procedure focusing on constructing meaning that associates in creating, processing and obtaining information. Speaking skill is one of the significant skills to communicate in a real world because it is an activity that is asking and giving information as if in doing conversation by two persons or more [3]. Students are expected to use English in various situations, both in and out of their classroom and with local and foreign communities. The problems of students who do not have enough good

capability in English because students feel too shy to speak [4], fear losing face or making mistakes they might struggle with pronunciation or not have enough time to practice their English.

There are 5 elements of speaking that must be mastered by students in order to be a good speaker [5]:

1. Connected speech: In connected speech, sounds are modified, or added. To improve students' connected speech, students must involve in activities. Not only producing phonemes, but students are asked to speak fluently.
2. Expressive devices: In native expressive devices, English speaker changes the pitch and the stress of particular parts of utterance, vary volume and speed and with other physical and non-verbal means how they are feeling. The use of those devices will contribute to convey meaning.
3. Lexis and grammar: Teachers should teach students variety of phrases for different functions, such as: greeting, agreeing and disagreeing.
4. Negotiation language: Negotiation language means that we try to find clarification and show the structure of what we say. We often need to ask for clarification when we are listen someone else talks.

Every language can be achieved with precision [3]. There are 5 components which usually recognize in analyses of the speech process [6]:

1. Pronunciation including the segmental features-vowels and consonants- and the stress and intonation patterns.
2. Grammar, the characteristic system of inflections and syntax of a language.
3. Vocabulary is one of the knowledge areas in language, plays a great role for learners in acquiring a language.
4. Fluency: The ease and speed of the flow of speech. It also includes accuracy and automaticity.
5. Comprehension.

For oral communication certainly requires a subject to respond to speech as well as to initiate it.

In this era there are some studies that investigate how students can improve their speaking skill [3]. Previous studies from Zare and Othman [4] and Somjal and Jansen [2] talk about how debate can improve students speaking skill. Debate is a constructive speech that makes students need to address their opinion about the issue. In debating, students speaking skill is challenged whether it can express students opinion smoothly or students have problem when they deliver their idea based on their perspective [1]. Having a chance to take a part in debate can also enhance active

learning. Debate is a speaking situation in which opposite points of view are presented and argued [5]. A debate is about the real or simulated issue. The students' roles ensure that they have basic information regarding issue and different point of view to defend their argument.

There are some items related to debate [3].

1) Motion. The topic of the debate is called a motion. Usually, motion starts with word like "this house" (TH) "this house believes that (THBT)", "this house would" (THW), and "this house regrets" (THR). Both affirmative and negative team should debate about the topic under the motion that is debatable and not partial or benefitting one side.

2) Debaters should see the current issue in society, because that is what debaters are going to debate about the issue that happens in society.

3) Theme line. Theme line is one of jobs that debaters should fulfill. Theme line will talk about why debaters finally agree with the motion or why they disagree. Thus both time need to proof and theme line can be the main reason to attack their opponent.

4) Argument, argument is also the gun that debaters have to attack their opponent. In their argument they should give further analysis about the motion that is being talked about.

5) Rebuttal, in debating debaters can not only have the strong argument and everything will be just fine. Rebuttal is a gun that debater can use to attack their opponent.

6) Sum-up/Closing, is the conclusion that debaters give at the end of the debate. There will be one debater who is the last speaker that will deliver about what have happened on the debate and also will give conclusion about the strength from their team and the weakness from their opponent team.

Debate includes an argument which is supported by reasoning and evidence and refutation. Argument is well-explained opinion. Students are who involved in debate must use argumentation and refutation [6]. Argument requires the debater to consider differing methods of criticizing reason, the decision making formula, the audiences and the criteria of decision making [7]. Classroom debate was an approach which involved students in the learning process, gave students the chance to express themselves [8]. Protagoras of Abdera is known as father of debate, he gives more credit for applying debates in an educational environment over 2400 years ago in Athens, Greece [9]. Classroom debate is an approach which involves students in the learning process, give students the chance to express themselves, develop the higher order thinking, prevent automatically memorization and misconception, motivate the students, and help students to stay away from prejudice, and make informed decisions and judgments based on valid sources of data [10].

Perception every person is different, by conducting this research we can finally acknowledge students' perception toward using debate to develop speaking skill based on students experience in classroom debate. The aim of this study is to know how students' perception about debate in speaking skill class and to know how students believe debate can help them to improve their speaking skill.

TABLE I. THE RESULTS OF QUESTIONARE

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I am interested with debate after having debate in speaking class.	7 (11.11%)	9 (14.29%)	30 (47.62%)	14 (22.22%)	3 (4.76%)
2.	Debate helps me to improve my vocabulary	2 (3.17%)	7 (11.11%)	9 (14.29%)	34 (53.97%)	11 (17.46%)
3.	Debate helps me to improve my grammar	2 (3.17%)	9 (14.29%)	19 (30.16%)	26 (41.27%)	7 (11.11%)
4.	Debate helps me to improve my pronunciation.	2 (3.17%)	4 (6.35)	8 (12.70%)	36 (57.14%)	13 (20.63%)
5.	I feel challenged to speak when my class conducts debate	1 (1.59%)	6 (9.52%)	14 (22.22%)	24 (38.10%)	18 (28.57%)
6.	Debate helps me to reduce my anxiety level to speak in front of the crowd.	8 (12.70%)	8 (12.70%)	20 (31.75%)	23 (36.51%)	4 (6.35%)
7.	After doing debate in speaking class I can deliver my ideas clearly.	4 (6.35%)	11 (17.46%)	30 (47.62%)	15 (23.81%)	3 (4.76%)
8.	Debate gives me benefit in understanding main ideas form others	1 (1.59%)	4 (6.35%)	13 (20.63%)	40 (63.49%)	5 (7.94%)
9.	Debate gives me benefit in recognizing new form of English	2 (3.17%)	3 (4.76%)	25 (39.68%)	30 (47.62%)	3 (4.76%)
10.	I can get better progress in learning speaking through debate	5 (7.94%)	4 (6.35%)	28 (44.44%)	19 (30.16%)	7 (11.11%)
11.	I can have more practice to speak through debate	1 (1.59%)	9 (14.29%)	15 (23.81%)	31 (49.21%)	7 (11.11%)
12.	My speaking fluency improved through debate	3 (4.76%)	7 (11.11%)	28 (44.44%)	21 (33.33%)	4 (6.35%)
13.	Through debate I can be more active to speak.	2 (3.17%)	14 (22.22%)	20 (31.75%)	25 (39.68%)	2 (3.17%)
14.	I can practice my fluency through debate.	1 (1.59%)	10 (15.8%)	21 (33.33%)	25 (39.68%)	6 (9.52%)
15.	Debate improves my argumentation skill.	2 (3.17%)	7 (11.11%)	17 (26.98%)	27 (42.86%)	10 (15.8%)
16.	I can practice my pronunciation through debate	3 (4.76%)	4 (6.35%)	16 (25.40%)	37 (58.73%)	3 (4.76%)

II. METHOD

The research design of this study was mixed method research that its purpose to provide more complete understanding of research problems. The research subject for this research was English Department students who were in fifth semester who already had debate classroom experience. There were 63 participants from 2 classes. The research instrument used questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was close ended questionnaire. The questionnaire that researcher used was adapted from Zare and Othman [4]. There were 20 items of questionnaire and 5 questions of interview guide. The instrument consisted of 20 items with a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree=1 to Strongly Agree=5). The items of the questionnaire were focused on learners' perceptions about the classroom debate experience; whether they liked it, how they found the experience, whether they believed it could improve their speaking ability. Interview was conducted with a number of six students, two students who get high mean score of questionnaire, two students who get moderate mean score of questionnaire, and two students who get the low mean score of questionnaire. The aim of this interview was to get more detailed description on students' perceptions and reflection in classroom debate. Interview was conducted by the researcher.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Fifth Semester Students' Perception about using debate in speaking class

The finding of the questionnaire showed 63.49% students agreed debate could give them benefit in understanding main idea from others, it followed with the high percentage 58.73% students' belief they could practice

their pronunciation through debate and also it had slight different number of result of students who agreed debate could help them to improve their pronunciation with (57.14%). It showed by the result of interview from student 2:

“For me, I feel improved in pronunciation. My pronunciation improved after having debate because the words that I had not known before how to pronounce it at the end I know how to pronounce it and time by time I also gain some vocabulary. How to deliver idea is also one of the improvements, but know still afraid a little bit.”...(pg.56 line.3).

Based on the statement above students had chance to practice their pronunciation and agreed that they had improved their pronunciation through debate. Another benefit student gets from debate, students agreed debate could practice their fluency (39.68%). student 5 stated he could practice his fluency.

“Well, I think debate can be as a good tool to improve our speaking skill because we have to pay attention to some aspects such as our fluency, the vocabulary that we use, our speed to talk in limited time, which is really good to improve my speaking skill.”...(pg.61 line.14).

Students also agreed that their fluency improved through debate (33.33%). It is added by student 3.

“If we do debate for more often it can improve speaking skill I think. For me, when I was following debate I wasn't confident enough to talk in English although it is ungrammatically wrong. In part of fluency I feel improved. Because in debate we are forced to think about our argument which will we deliver and rebut others argument. So we have to think fast what we will say next”...(pg.58 line.1).

Beside pronunciation and fluency, students also agreed debate could help them to improve their vocabulary (53.97%), Student 1 stated:

“It is really useful for me because when I did debate in class. I can increase my vocabulary, losing my fear, and then push my brain to think fast haha. How we speak in the good grammar, something like that.”...(pg.52 line.11).

Student 1 result also in line with student 4 answered:

“Yes, especially in vocabulary, we can know more about vocabulary because we have to find and construct the words with the time that is already given to us.”...(pg.59 line.16).

Student 2 also believed she could collect some vocabulary. “For me, I feel improved in pronunciation. My pronunciation improved after having debate because the words that I had not known before how to pronounce it at the end I know how to pronounce it and time by time I also collect some vocabulary. How to deliver idea is also one of the improvements, but know still afraid a little bit.”...(pg.56 line.3).

Student 1 also agreed after having classroom debate she could improve her grammar, the result of the questionnaire showed 41.27% students chose agree debate could increase their vocabulary.

“It is really useful for me because when I did debate in class. I can increase my vocabulary, losing my fear, then push my brain to think fast haha. How we speak in the good grammar, something like that.”...(pg.52 line.11).

Students 1 also added that:

“I can be more confident to talk in front of the class, I wasn't brave enough but now I'm brave and say my ideas, grammar also improved because we can't talk ungrammatically wrong. That will be embracing for us. In debate the vocabulary, the word choice is also different, it is more academic we can't use slang word in here.”...(pg.53 line.17.).

Student 6 stated they she should speak in a good structure when she did debate.

“Yes, of course debate can be a media to train our speaking skill and I think the different is that in debate we are pushed to use our speaking skill in a good structure because in debate we speak but we don't have any script that is too long.”...(pg.64 line.1).

They also showed other positive perception about the use of debate in speaking class; they agreed that debate gave them benefit in recognizing new form of English. Student 2 also stated her mind will led her to the words she had not known and she had to look for the meaning of the word that she wanted to talk. The finding of the questionnaire showed 47.62% students chose agree debate helped students recognizing new form of English.

“Of course, because without we realize it or not, our mindset is automatically trained and of course will lead to the words we haven't known before and we must look for the meaning of the word from the word that we want to talk in debate later on.”...(pg.55 line.11).

Students also agreed through debate they can be more active to speak, and they have more practice to speak through debate (49.21%). Student 3 stated debate was good and effective to train her speaking habit in English and learn new things.

“I think the use of debate in speaking class is really good. Because we are taught to speak fluently, to deliver our argumentation even though there are a lot of error in grammar, but overall it is really effective to train our speaking habit in English, and learn new things.”...(pg.57 line.10).

Although most of students answered with agree to strongly disagree there were some items that were answered with neutral in a big percentage. Most of students found neither interested nor interested about having interest in debate after having debate in speaking class 47.62% students chose neutral regarding this item. They also chose neutral about they could deliver their idea clearly after doing debate in speaking class (47.62%).

Beside debate could help them in their speaking skill. Students also agreed that debate also helped them to reduce their anxiety level to speak in front of the crowd. Student 4 stated she can increase her confident.

“Use debate in speaking class I think is good because it can increase our confident and make us learn how to construct words and can increase our fluency in English.”...(pg.59 line.8).

Student 2 added she can train her audacity to speak in front of a lot of people.

“I think the existence of debate in speaking skill subject really trains our audacity to speak in front of a lot of people

and it is more useful for people who have less vocabulary just like me.” ... (pg.55 line.7).

Student 1 said that she wasn't confident enough to deliver her idea, and now she feels that she is confident enough to tell her idea in front of class.

“I can be more confident to talk in front of the class, I wasn't brave enough but now I'm brave and say my ideas, grammar also improved because we can't talk ungrammatically wrong. That will be embracing for us. In debate the vocabulary, the word choice is also different, it is more academic we can't use slang word in here.” ... (pg.53 line.17).

### *B. Students' Belief Regarding the Improvement of Their Speaking Skill*

From data that were collected from questionnaire and interview. The result of the questionnaire showed high percentage, it meant that debate helped students in their speaking skill. Students agreed debate could encourage them to be more active in speaking and give them more chances to practice speaking through debate (49.21%). Student 3 stated debate was good and effective to train her speaking habit in English and learn new things.

“I think the use of debate in speaking class is really good. Because we are taught to speak fluently, to deliver our argumentation even though there are a lot of error in grammar, but overall it is really effective to train our speaking habit in English, and learn new things.” ... (pg.57 line.10).

Students 3 said that her improvement also in her confidence and her fluency.

“If we do debate for more often it can improve speaking skill I think. For me, when I was following debate I wasn't confident enough to talk in English although it is ungrammatically wrong. In part of fluency I feel improved“... (pg.58 line.1).

She also added that debate motivated her to think fast “Because in debate we are forced to think about our argument which will we deliver and rebut others argument. So we have to think fast what we will say next.” ... (pg.58 line.5).

Student 4, 6, and 5 also agreed that their vocabulary and fluency improved they also added that their confident improved through debate. Different with students 4, 6 and 5, students 2 feel her improvement in pronunciation. She had not known how to pronounce certain words but after did debate she felt her pronunciation improved.

“For me, I feel improved in pronunciation. My pronunciation improved after having debate because the words that I had not known before how to pronounce it at the end I know how to pronounce it and time by time I also gain some vocabulary. How to deliver idea is also one of the improvements, but know still afraid a little bit.”... (pg.56 line.3).

From the findings of the study we could conclude that students believed their components of speaking were helped through debate and they found some other benefits of debate

which could help them to improve their confident and reduce their anxiety level.

From the findings we can see that students believed their components of speaking such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and comprehension could be trained well through debate. There are five components of English could be used to analyze of the speech process [6,7]. Becoming a good speaker was not only excel at components of speaking such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension but students also need to also excel at the elements of speaking. The components of speaking and elements of speaking were connected because the components of speaking were the basic step to become a good speaker and the elements of speaking was the implementation of speaking knowledge that students already had.

There were four elements of speaking that made students a good speaker of English [5]. There were connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, and negotiation language. These four elements of speaking would be used by researcher to discuss and interpret the result of the data to know how debate could train students' speaking skill well.

Connected speech was modifying or adding sound. To make students' good at their connected speech, students should involve in activities. Not only producing phonemes, but students were asked to speak fluently. The findings showed that students agreed they could practice their fluency through debate and students also believed that they feel challenged to speak when their class conducted debate.

Expressive devices, in expressive devices, English speaker changed the pitch and the stress particular parts of utterance, vary volume and speed and with other physical and non-verbal meant how they are feeling. The use of those devices would contribute to convey meaning. Classroom debate was an approach which involved students in the learning process, gave students the chance to express themselves [9]. The findings also showed that students could deliver idea clearly after following classroom debate.

Lexis and grammar, in lexis and grammar students were demanded to use variety of phrases for different function, such as: greeting, agreeing and disagreeing. In debate [1], in debate there was theme line; theme line was one of jobs that debaters should fulfill. Theme line would talk about why debaters finally agreed with the motion or why they disagreed. Thus both time needed to proof and theme line could be the main reason to attack their opponent. Through this statement we could conclude that lexis and grammar in speaking could be trained through debate. Students could learn how to agree or disagree about the motion that they had. Negotiation language, in negotiation language students tried to find clarification and showed the structure of what students said. Students often needed to ask for clarification when they listen someone else to talk. Students who were involved in debate must use argumentation and refutation [6]. Students who were involved in debate is required [7] to consider differing methods of criticizing reason, the decision making formula, the audiences and the criteria of decision

making. Eventually it would lead to student improvement in argumentation skill.

Based on the statements above, it meant that all elements and components of speaking could be applied well through debate which eventually helped students to practice and develop their speaking skill. After discussing about the elements of speaking that could be applied well through debate, the researcher would like to compare her study to the previous studies.

We found the similarities and differences of the result between present study and previous studies. The similarities of the result with the previous studies Zare and Othman [4] and Somjal and Jansen [2] were students showed positive perception toward using debate in speaking class and students could reduce their anxiety level after following debate.

Even though there were some similarities with the previous studies, the researcher also acknowledged two differences between present study and previous studies in challenging part and the findings of the result. In present study students believed finding the right vocabulary was the main challenge in debate. Meanwhile in Zare and Othman [4] the challenging part for students was their anxiety and in Somjal and Jansen [2] students found motion as challenging part. In the findings of the results, present study showed students could practice and believed their components of speaking and their elements of speaking could be applied well through debate. The findings of result in Zare and Othman [4] students could beat their nervousness and debate helped them to enhance their critical thinking, in Somjal and Jansen [2] the findings of the result showed students improved their academic, critical thinking, and social skill.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings of the study, the researcher concluded that students' perception toward debating to develop speaking skill in speaking class showed positive perception. The mean score was 3.428, it was high

from 2.49. It meant students have positive perception toward debating in speaking class. Students had the positive perception because they believed they got several benefits through debate, the first result of the study showed students could practice the elements and components of speaking well and be more confident to deliver their ideas. The second result of the study showed that students' perceived debate could help them to improve their speaking skill particularly the components and elements of speaking proven by the interview and questionnaire. However, some grammar errors still found when students did interview, even though they felt improved in their grammar. Even though students believe they had improvement in their speaking skill, what they believe not always similar with their ability.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] V.A. Ramirez, Students' perceptions about the development of their oral skills in an English as a foreign language teacher training program, Pereira: Technology Pereira University, 2010.
- [2] S. Somjal and Jansen, "The use of debate technique to develop speaking ability of grade ten students at Bodindench (Sing Singhaseni) School," *International Journal of Technical Research and Application*, 2015, pp. 27-31.
- [3] F. Arung "Improving students' speaking skill through debate technique," *Journal of English Education*, 2016.
- [4] P. Zare and O. Othman, "Students' perceptions toward using classroom debate to develop critical thinking and oral ability, *Asian Social Science*, vol. 11, 2015, p 158.
- [5] J. Harmer, *The practice of English language teaching*, Pearson Education Limited England, 2002.
- [6] D. Burek and C. Losos, *Debate: where speaking and listening come first*, Voices from the Middle, 2004.
- [7] J. Parcher, *The value of debate: adapted from the report of the philodemic debate society*, Georgetown University, 1998.
- [8] R. Rubiyati, *Technique, improving students' speaking skill through debate*, Walisongo: State Islamic Studies Institute, English Language Teaching Department, 2010.
- [9] M. Darby, "Debate: a teaching-learning strategy for Developing competence in communication and critical thinking," *Journal of Dental Hygiene*, 2007.
- [10] F.M. Othman, *An English debate league competition among lower from students: an experiential learning activity*, US-China Foreign Language, 2013.