

Speaking Through Argument: Analyzing EFL Learners' Oral Performance in Classroom Debates

Rachmi rachmi* , Luqman Hakim

Universitas of Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta, Indonesia

STIT Misbahul Ulum Gumawang, rachmi@stitmugu.ac.id-, ²Universitas of Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta, Indonesia Luqman@upnvj.ac.id

*Corresponding Author : Rachmi

Abstract: Debate is a process that involves formal discourse, discussion, and oral addresses on a particular topic or collection of topics, often with a moderator and an audience. with the aim of practicing finding arguments based on strong and accurate data. In addition, debates aim to foster speaking skills in expressing opinions well against conflicts that are pro and contra. Thus, this article will raise the theme of debate in a speaking performance conducted by second semester students of the English study program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. The purpose of this article is to find out the extent of students' speaking development through the author's analysis. There are 4 debate groups that will be studied with 4 to 5 students. The method used in this research is descriptive quantitative, things that are examined such as students' linguistic intelligence, statements and arguments issued, and debating manners.

Keywords: Speaking; Performance; Linguistic; Debate

1. Introduction

Speaking is the second language activity that humans do in language life after listening. Students' speaking skills can be expressed in the debate method. Debate is a powerful tool for discussing controversial topics as it promotes critical thinking and inspires individuals to consider alternate viewpoints. In particular, debating is ideal for tackling and resolving by evidence and consensus, complex issues such as healthcare reform and healthcare economics.¹⁻⁴ It has been suggested that trainees who participate in debate have better academic performance than those who only attend lectures (Blumenau, 2021). In the academic world, public speaking skills are essential in the learning process. In lectures, students are often asked to present their research results or group assignments in front of lecturers and classmates. Good public speaking skills will help students convey their ideas or arguments clearly and persuasively, thereby increasing the understanding and acceptance of classmates.

In addition, public speaking skills are also important in the professional world. In the workplace, students who have good public speaking skills will be more easily recognized and trusted by superiors and colleagues. They can confidently convey new ideas, lead presentations or meetings, and overcome nervousness or anxiety when speaking in front of a crowd (Bashori et al., 2022). As in most arenas of life, there are many issues today that experts and clinicians have polarising opinions on and, hence, scientific arguments and debates are inevitable. However, a major difference of debate in science compared to debate in other fields is that in the latter you could rightfully chalk the outcome to a difference of opinion. In contrast, science is based on a hypothesis or theory that is either supported, in which cases the theory is accepted, or is refuted, in which case an alternative theory or hypothesis is proposed to better account for the data. In science, data and evidence rather than opinions really matter. Thus, debates can never help resolve a scientific controversy as it only reinforces whatever bias we have going into them. However, the key value of scientific debates is that it helps to focus and identify the issues that need to be clarified in order to determine the answer. Hence,

Received: date

Revised: date

Accepted: date

Published: date

Curr. Ver.: date



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.
Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

differing opinion can raise scientifically valid debate, but the only solution to settle this is bringing the critical evidence to it (Fouad et al., 2021).

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review Debate

A debate is a formal or informal discussion of a topic, in which different opinions or arguments are presented. Debates can be used for various purposes, such as learning, persuading, competing, or entertaining. In its implementation, debates can have different rules and formats, depending on the context and the participants. Debate is the development of ideas and a discussion conducted by more than one person or group to analyze a case in depth. Debate activities tend to ask the speaker to provide an overview of the possibilities of a case, not only that, the speaker is also required to strengthen in depth analysis. Moreover, because the debate is carried out in groups, cohesiveness in discussing arguments is needed to decide the right strategy Pertiwi (2022) . In the student world, debate is a form of argumentation skills by comparing and contrasting opinions face to face. This method emphasizes the ability to defend opinions logically or reasonably. In this method, what is shown is cleverness in finding reasons and word games so that the opponent does not move. (Amar-Gavrilman & Bentwich, 2022). This debate learning will train students in creative thinking. In debate, we are required to understand the opinions of others. Then we are also required to provide opinions on other people's arguments. According to Musfirah (2017: 213), a debate is a debate that develops communication skills by giving opinions, opposing given topics, thinking critically about problems, and expressing ideas in English. For this reason, learning debate is very beneficial for students. Students will be trained in speaking English. Debate learning will make students become better speakers in their daily life. As Widiawati et al. said (2020: 268), there are many benefits of using debate in teaching English, especially teaching speaking skills. This debate learning can also increase their vocabulary, grammar, and also their skills in using English. This is also said by Firmansyah et al. (2019: 891) that the debate techniques taught to students will improve their pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency (Pratiwi et al., 2022) .

Speaking skill

Speaking is the second language activity that humans do in language life after listening. Speaking is a language skill that is developed in a child's life. This speaking skill can be acquired through listening. When children listen, they will learn speaking skills at the same time. Speaking or speaking ability in English has an important role in communication (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). Speaking is described as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information. Speaking is an important skill and by mastering it, one can communicate. Speaking skills are defined as the skills which allow us to communicate effectively. They give us the ability to convey information verbally and in a way that the listener can understand. Children will learn English speaking skills as well as speaking skills in other languages, in primary and secondary school. Learning how to develop English speaking skills is so important for ESL students and EAL students too. It's one of the most important parts of language learning as speaking is how we tend to communicate in everyday life. Speaking is an interactive process where information is shared, and if necessary, acted upon by the listener. So, it's important to develop both speaking and listening skills in order to communicate effectively (Riski et al., 2018) . The focus of speaking skills is not developing the accuracy of pronunciation but adequacy of fluency and communicative effectiveness (Karpovich et al., 2021) As EFL student's speaking ability plays an important role in building connections with others and should be mastered by students. Mastery of students' speaking skills will positively impact students' outcomes. Students who speak English fluently will also affect other English skills such as reading, writing, and listening. According to Abdullah (2017: 98), a person's success in learning a language can be measured by their ability to use the language to communicate. Students who often practice speaking skills will find it easier to pronounce English words or sentences correctly. Brown and Yule (1983:6) stated that teaching foreign languages to students is to make them able to speak English effectively (Pratiwi et al., 2022) . The ability to speak confidently and fluently is

something which children will develop during their time at school, and something that will help them throughout their life.

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is a way to think and criticize something by questioning an idea or problem. Critical thinking is an assessment with the aim of examining a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to derive a hypothesis or conclusion that integrates all available information so that it can be justified with confidence (Sutoyo et al., 2023). To examine the argument that the cultures of Asia work against the kind of critical enquiry valued in Western education, we first need an idea of what critical thinking entails. While there are many specific definitions of the term, they tend to be broadly similar in substance. Critical thinking has also been broken down into taxonomies of skills that attempt to define it in a more detailed form. For example, lists six broad categories of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation, which include within them sub-skills such as categorisation, clarifying meaning, examining ideas, analysing arguments, assessing claims, drawing conclusions, stating results, justifying procedures, presenting arguments, self-examination and self-correction (Rear, 2017). Literature on critical thinking spans the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, and education. While definitions of critical thinking sometimes overlap across disciplines, this review will focus on the field of education. Thinking is limited, consequently, providing the rationale for the current review. Nevertheless, some studies propose that children from as early as 3 years demonstrate early critical thinking. Additionally, from an Irish context early years education concerns children from age 0–6, while some countries include children from age 0–8, therein, we limited the review to studies conducted in early childhood settings with children aged 0–8. Therein, the first part of this section regards critical thinking as a broad concept as we seek to explore the literature to expose what is known about critical thinking in early childhood education (O'Reilly et al., 2022).

Linguistic Skill

Each human language is a complex of knowledge and abilities enabling speakers of the language to communicate with each other, to express ideas, hypotheses, emotions, desires, and all the other things that need expressing (Alduais et al., 2022). Linguistics is the study of these knowledge systems in all their aspects: how is such a knowledge system structured, how is it acquired, how is it used in the production and comprehension of messages, how does it change over time? Linguists consequently are concerned with several questions about the nature of language. Linguistics is often called "the science of language," the study of the human capacity to communicate and organize thought using different tools (the vocal tract for spoken languages, hands for sign languages, etc.) and involving different abstract and tactile components (Van Dijk et al., 2022). Linguistic skills are attributes that individuals use to express themselves and understand others. They include soft and hard skills, which can obtain through training and experience. Soft skills often involve transferable interpersonal skills, while hard skills are technical attributes, such as translation and foreign language fluency. Linguistic competence refers to the unconscious knowledge of grammar that allows a speaker to use and understand a language. It is also known as grammatical competence or I-language (Quillen et al., 2021). Linguists typically study multiple languages, including those not native to them. They can speak certain languages fluently or translate from one language to another. Linguists may also study the histories of certain cultures, regions, and influences to understand the change and evolution of a language. For example, the English language contains different words and phrases from various cultures due to British imperialism, conquest, and cultural influence (Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2022). Linguistics is an extensive career field that offers many opportunities to career seekers. Linguists often need to develop specific skill sets to excel in the linguistics industry, and it's important to understand what those skills are. Understanding what skills you need as a linguist can help you seek the correct programs and decide on a specialization for your linguistics career.

3. Proposed Method

This type of research is descriptive analytical quantitative research. Analytical descriptive quantitative is a technique or method used is descriptive analytical quantitative method,

analytical descriptive method is a method that functions to obtain in-depth data. The point is which data contains meaning and can affect the substance of significant research (Ekonomi et al., 2023). Descriptive Analysis is the type of analysis of data that helps describe, show, or summarize data points in a constructive way such that patterns might emerge that fulfil every condition of the data (Mahendran et al., 2022). The research participants were 2nd semester students from the English education study program at Tangerang Muhammadiyah University. The focus of this research is the linguistic intelligence of students, statements and arguments issued, and debating manners. The researcher will see and give an assessment based on what the researcher sees regarding the debate performance of the 4 groups of students.

4. Results and Discussion

The definition of debate is the exchange and discussion of opinions related to a matter by presenting arguments or reasons with the aim of defending opinions and even winning opinions. In general, debate can be understood as a strategy in debating opinions or arguments with the aim that our opinion can break the opponent's opinion, and vice versa, our opinion is not broken by the opponent. (Bond et al., n.d.) . In the student world, debate is a forum for developing ideas and voicing opinions. The debate method is a learning method that activates students' reasoning and speaking skills through an atmosphere of constructive debate. Students are faced with issues of controversy and must develop cases to defend their opinions in accordance with the instructions and objectives to be achieved. Researchers are trying to find the meaning of debate in debate activities. There were 4 debate groups and each group consisted of 2-4 members. Group 1 raised the topic of "Al-Zaytun pesantren controversy", group 2 discussed "family vs friends", group 3 discussed "reading and watching", and group 4 also discussed "reading vs watching".



Figure 1. Debate Performance of Group 1

In the performance of group 1, there were 4 people talking about the scandal experienced by the Al-Zaytun boarding school opened by the moderator. The statements issued by each student are quite good plus good pronunciation as well. The linguistic intelligence of students in this group is quite qualified, they can process words to convey ideas and ideas clearly and straightforwardly so that their discussion has content. They also know how to debate by defending their statements without having to put others down. It can be ascertained that they already have the basics of speaking English therefore the debate they bring is easy to understand and reach the audience.



Figure 2. Debate Performance of Group 2

The second group talked about family and friends, and they started the discussion by throwing out statements and refuting each other's statements. However, this group still had many shortcomings in many ways, such as too much looking at notes, many wrong pronunciations, no eye contact. Rather than debate, their performance was more like reading aloud. They ignored the etiquette of debating and were very perfunctory. The video also shows them laughing during the debate [1]. These mistakes can be caused by the debater's lack of mastery of the material or the influence of other factors. The consequence is that the debater may lose points and make the argument seem boring.



Figure 3. Debate Performance of Group 3

In the third group's performance, the theme was reading and watching, where they discussed which was better between reading and watching. There was only one student who could master the course of this debate while the others only focused on the notes below them. There were also many mistakes in the pronunciation.



Figure 4. Debate Performance of Group 4

The last group carried the same theme as the third group, reading and watching. They started by giving a statement and then explained why their choice was the best. The language they used was easy to understand and their pronunciation was quite good. They knew what to talk about and kept emphasizing their statements. With the explanation related to their performance, it can be concluded that the linguistic intelligence of students is only mastered by a few people and not evenly distributed. Those who are intelligent in language are very good at debate performance and those who do not understand language are very poor in debate performance. Of the 4 groups there are only 2 that have good performances in terms of material presented, statements, pronunciation. Some of the students also still do not understand the ethics of debating, they often do not make eye contact with their interlocutors instead they are busy reading their respective notes on the pieces of paper under them, this shows that the ethics and soft skills of students are still lacking and really need to be improved again [2]. At this point we know that soft skills are still often ignored by many students, this is quite bad because soft skills are an additional value for finding a job later.

5. Comparison

This study highlights students' speaking performance in debate assignments, focusing on aspects of linguistic intelligence, clarity of articulation, and mastery of debate material and etiquette. In this case, the findings showed that only a small number of students demonstrated good language skills, while most still struggled with aspects of soft skills, such as eye contact and natural delivery [3].

This finding is in line with research by Andini et al. (2020) who stated that many students did not understand the ethics of debating and relied more on written text, indicating weaknesses in spontaneity and interpersonal communication. Andini also emphasized that *soft skills* are often overlooked, even though they play an important role in success in the world of work.

When compared to literature from Gardner (1983) on Multiple Intelligences specifically linguistic intelligence, this study supports that not all students have the same linguistic intelligence, and this ability greatly affects debate performance. In addition, a previous study by Al-Tamimi & Shuib (2009) which examined EFL students' speaking skills, emphasized the importance of continuous practice and rhetorical strategies in improving students' confidence and speaking quality. This is also reinforced by [4] who highlighted that speaking practice through argumentative activities such as debates can accelerate the improvement of speaking competence if coupled with structured feedback.

However, different from previous studies that emphasized more on strategies to improve speaking skills, this study also raised the dimension of soft skills as a supporting factor, which has not been discussed in depth in similar studies. Therefore, the main contribution of this study is to highlight the importance of integrating linguistic ability and soft skills in formal speaking tasks such as debates, and the need for a more holistic teaching approach to facilitate both

6. Conclusions

The world of education is very broad and there are many learning activities that can be carried out by the learner or student who studies the knowledge. Demanding knowledge is carried out from the lowest level to the highest level and from a young age to old age. (Barba-Sánchez et al., 2022). The highest level of learning something is at the stage of becoming a student. Student is a status that a person has because of his relationship with a university which is expected to make him an intellectual candidate. Students become the benchmark of society in a local neighbourhood group. To be able to find out about what a student is, it will be explained as follows. At this stage, students are required to be able to bring about change. What this means is that if something happens in the environment and it is the wrong thing then students should be able to change it according to what is expected (Islam et al., 2022). Students' critical thinking marks a vital role in the dynamic map of modern education, touching on various aspects relating to its profound contribution to individuals and society more broadly. In this context, critical thinking does not only mean the analytical ability to dive into academic material, but also encompasses the role of being a major catalyst for change and innovation (Fikriyatii et al., 2022). What is done by students of the English education study program at Tangerang University is one way to improve and hone skills, namely debating or discussing. some students do not debate as they should, they just read and read. however there are still students who use this debate opportunity to hone and develop themselves in speaking and language skills.

Author Contributions: All authors are doing the research together

Funding: no finding from any institution

Acknowledgments: We thank you to all the subject of the research

Conflicts of Interest: No conflict of interest

References

- [1] Alduais, A., Al-Qaderi, I., Alfadda, N., & Alfadda, H. (2022). Pragmatics: Mapping Evidence on Enhancing Children's Use of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Capacities for Interactive Communication. *Children*, 9(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9091318>
- [2] Amar-Gavrilman, N., & Bentwich, M. E. (2022). To debate or not to debate? Examining the contribution of debating when studying medical ethics in small groups. *BMC Medical Education*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03124-0>
- [3] Arjulayana and S. Ansoriyah, "Why EFL Students Understand the Language Assessment?," *Int. J. Soc. Sci. Hum. Res.*, vol. 03, no. 12, pp. 403–408, 2020, doi: 10.47191/ijsshr/v3-i12-06.
- [4] A. Arjulayana and R. Rachmi, "The Issues of Academic Literacy in Conversation Practice During Online Learning," *VELES Voices English Lang. Educ. Soc.*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 440–452, 2022, doi: 10.29408/veles.v6i2.5137.
- [6] Barba-Sánchez, V., Mitre-Aranda, M., & Brío-González, J. del. (2022). The entrepreneurial intention of university students: An environmental perspective. *European Research on Management and Business Economics*, 28(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ieceen.2021.100184>
- [7] Bashori, M., van Hout, R., Strik, H., & Cucchiarini, C. (2022). Web-based language learning and speaking anxiety. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 35(5–6), 1058–1089. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1770293>
- [8] Blumenau, J. (2021). The Effects of Female Leadership on Women's Voice in Political Debate. In *British Journal of Political Science* (Vol. 51, Issue 2). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000334>
- [8] Bond, R., Bastianelli, K. M. S., Gunaseelan, S., Chamberlin, K. W., & Shealy, K. M. (n.d.). How Debate Could Facilitate Group Function in Pharmacy Schools.

- [10] Ekonomi, P. P., Pertumbuhan, D., Kerja, A., Kurniawan, P. C., Khilmiana, N., Arifin, S., Maisaroh, A., Kunci, K., Ekonomi, P., & Pengangguran, D. T. (2023). The Effect of Economic Growth and Labor Force Growth on Unemployment Rates in Pekalongan City. *Journal of Economics and Management (JECMA)*, 5(1), 95–103.
- [11] Fikriyati, A., Agustini, R., & Sutoyo, S. (2022). Critical thinking cycle model to promote critical thinking disposition and critical thinking skills of pre-service science teacher. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, 17(1), 120–133. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v17i1.6690>
- [12] Fouad, Y., Elwakil, R., Elsahhar, M., Said, E., Bazeed, S., Ali Gomaa, A., Hashim, A., Kamal, E., Mehrez, M., & Attia, D. (2021). The NAFLD-MAFLD debate: Eminence vs evidence. In *Liver International* (Vol. 41, Issue 2, pp. 255–260). Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1111/liv.14739>
- [13] Islam, S., Akter, R., Sikder, T., & Griffiths, M. D. (2022). Prevalence and Factors Associated with Depression and Anxiety Among First-Year University Students in Bangladesh: A Cross-Sectional Study. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20(3), 1289–1302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00242-y>
- [14] Karpovich, I., Sheredekina, O., Krepkai, T., & Voronova, L. (2021). The use of monologue speaking tasks to improve first-year students' english-speaking skills. *Education Sciences*, 11(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11060298>
- [15] Mahendran, M., Lizotte, D., & Bauer, G. R. (2022). Quantitative methods for descriptive intersectional analysis with binary health outcomes. *SSM - Population Health*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2022.101032>
- [16] Olmedo, A. B., & Juan-Garau, M. (2022). Linguistic Transgression in Society as Seen Through Spanish Linguistic Landscapes. *Oceanide*, 15, 36–47. <https://doi.org/10.37668/oceanide.v15i.76>
- [17] O'Reilly, C., Devitt, A., & Hayes, N. (2022). Critical thinking in the preschool classroom - A systematic literature review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101110>
- [18] Pertiwi, P. A., Setya, A., Ningrum, B., & Rosyid, F. (2022). DEBATE, SELF-EFFICACY, AND DECISION MAKING IN EAST JAVA ENGLISH COMPETITION (Vol. 9, Issue 1).
- [19] Pratiwi, R., Maisarah, I., & Harahap, A. (2022). The Correlation between Students' Interest in Speaking Materials and Debate Speaking Competence and Achievement at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. *Linguistic, English Education and Art (LEEA) Journal*, 6(1), 177–191. <https://doi.org/10.31539/leea.v6i1.5069>
- [20] Quillen, I. A., Yen, M., & Wilson, S. M. (2021). Distinct Neural Correlates of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Demand. *Neurobiology of Language*, 2(2), 202–225. https://doi.org/10.1162/nol_a_00031
- [21] Rear, D. (2017). Reframing the Debate on Asian Students and Critical Thinking: Implications for Western Universities. In *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education* (Vol. 12, Issue 2). <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>
- [22] Riski, H., Rahman, F., & Sadik, A. (2018). IMPROVING THE STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY THROUGH SILENT WAY METHOD AT SMU NEGERI 12 MAKASSAR. 303 | *JURNAL ILMU BUDAYA*, 6(2).
- [23] R. P. Andini, E. Y. Mulyana, and A. Arjulayana, "Group Investigation Technique on Indonesian High School Students' Writing Skill," *Globish An English-Indonesian J. English, Educ. Cult.*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2020, doi: 10.31000/globish.v9i1.2333.
- [24] Sutoyo, S., Agustini, R., & Fikriyati, A. (2023). Online Critical Thinking Cycle Model to Improve Pre-service Science Teacher's Critical Thinking Dispositions and Critical Thinking Skills. *Pegem Egitim ve Ogretim Dergisi*, 13(2), 173–181. <https://doi.org/10.47750/pegegog.13.02.21>
- [25] S. D. Anggini and A.- Arjulayana, "Analysis Student's Speaking Performance as an Academic Speaker's Practice," *Globish An English-Indonesian J. English, Educ. Cult.*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2021, doi: 10.31000/globish.v10i1.3943.
- [26] Van Dijk, C., Van Wonderen, E., Koutamanis, E., Kootstra, G. J., Dijkstra, T., & Unsworth, S. (2022). Cross-linguistic influence in simultaneous and early sequential bilingual children: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Child Language*, 49(5), 897–929. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000921000337>
- [27] Wahyuningsih, S., & Afandi, M. (2020). Investigating English speaking problems: Implications for speaking curriculum development in Indonesia. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 9(3), 967–977. <https://doi.org/10.12973/EU-JER.9.3.967>