

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE “DEBATE” METHOD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LESSONS

Komilova Muxtasar Abdunabi qizi,
Leading Teacher, Department of Languages,
M.S. Vosiqova Academic Lyceum under
Tashkent State University of Law
mukhtasarjumanova07@gmail.com

ANNOTATION

Interactive methods play a crucial role in developing students' communicative competence in foreign language teaching. One such method is debate. This article analyzes the significance of using the debate method in English language lessons, drawing on scientific-theoretical sources and the experience of developed countries. The research findings show that debates significantly enhance students' oral communication skills, critical thinking abilities, and readiness for interaction, while also boosting learning motivation and self-confidence. The article further explores the methodology and conditions for effectively organizing debates in the classroom and discusses, based on scholarly literature, the role of this method in shaping linguistic competences.

Keywords: Debate method, discussion, English language teaching, interactive learning, critical thinking, communicative competence, development of speaking skills.

Introduction

Today, one of the primary goals of foreign language teaching is the development of students' communicative competence, which requires the use of interactive methods in the classroom. Among such innovative approaches, the debate method stands out as an effective tool. In the education systems of developed countries, debates have long been recognized as a valuable practice that enhances students' communication skills and critical thinking abilities.

American researchers define debate as a structured and cultured discussion governed by strict rules, involving at least two opposing sides, where each party strives within a set time frame to persuade the audience of the validity of their arguments. During such discussions, participants are exposed to different perspectives, learn to listen attentively, and draw reasoned conclusions based on evidence.

The theoretical foundations of debate have been explored by many linguists. Local studies emphasize debate as an integral part of scientific inquiry, highlighting its role in generating new knowledge and fostering critical thinking. Similarly, European

scholars acknowledge debate as a powerful tool in foreign language learning, noting that it improves learners' fluency and enhances their Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Thus, incorporating debates into English lessons not only strengthens learners' linguistic abilities but also cultivates analytical thinking and helps shape their civic awareness.

The purpose of this article is to provide a scientific and theoretical justification for the use of the debate method in English language teaching and to illustrate its effectiveness with practical evidence. The article first examines interpretations of the debate method in scholarly literature and its application in the educational systems of foreign countries. It then outlines methodological approaches for effectively implementing debates in classroom settings and analyzes their impact on the learning process based on previous research findings. Finally, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are provided.

Method

This study employed an analytical-literary research method, focusing on both foreign and local scholarly sources to examine the significance of the debate method. In particular, academic articles, empirical studies, and materials from educational platforms related to Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) were analyzed. The facts, figures, and scholarly opinions presented in these sources were synthesized and summarized in this article. Additionally, educational practices from developed countries (such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and European Union member states) were reviewed and compared to provide a broader perspective.

The methodology of applying the debate method in English language lessons was also studied in detail. Scientific sources offer clear recommendations for organizing debates in classroom settings, outlining specific stages of implementation. For example, Halvorsen (2005) suggests the following stages for conducting debates in foreign language: Topic Selection and Group Division – The teacher selects a relevant and controversial topic for discussion and divides the class into two groups: one supporting the issue and the other opposing it. Each group is assigned an equal number of participants. Preparation (Research) Stage – Groups are given time to gather evidence, collect information, and consult together in order to justify their positions. At this stage, students conduct independent research on the topic, study necessary sources, and prepare well-grounded arguments. Conducting the Debate – At the designated time, groups present their theses and challenge the arguments of the opposing side. During the debate, each participant is allotted equal speaking time, while the audience follows and evaluates the arguments presented. Conclusion and Analysis – At the end of the debate, the teacher, acting as a moderator, summarizes the main points raised by both sides and analyzes their strengths and weaknesses. Feedback – Finally, the teacher and other students who participated as listeners provide feedback

on the debate process. They reflect on the identified strengths and shortcomings, discuss the outcomes, and give recommendations for improvement.

Debate can be applied in the classroom in a variety of formats. For example, it may be organized as a group debate among smaller teams or as a whole-class discussion involving all students. When selecting the format, factors such as students' age, level of language proficiency, and the nature of the topic must be taken into consideration.

One of the strengths of debate is its flexibility: it can be conducted effectively and engagingly with learners ranging from young students to university level. The key is to adapt the time limits, rules, and discussion topics to suit the learners' level. For instance, in the United States and the United Kingdom, debates are often taught as an independent subject or elective course, whereas in some European countries, debate is not considered a separate discipline but rather introduced as a cross-curricular method integrated into various subjects.

Most importantly, when integrating debate into the learning process, the teacher must carefully plan its structure and manage the discussion impartially. Only under such conditions will all participants engage equally and actively, ensuring that the educational objectives of the debate are successfully achieved.

Results

The analysis of scholarly literature confirms that the debate method produces a range of positive outcomes in English language lessons. First and foremost, debates lead to significant improvement in students' language skills. Since learners are required to speak extensively and frequently during debates, their oral fluency increases noticeably. Experimental studies show that students in debate-based classes demonstrate better mastery of pronunciation and intonation, a broader vocabulary, and greater precision in expressing their ideas. For example, Ali Alasmari and Sayed Ahmed (2013) observed that students engaged in classroom debates became more active in conversations, showed a stronger motivation to research in order to defend their positions, and eventually began to speak English more confidently and fluently. The authors therefore emphasize that well-organized debate activities can help students develop into individuals capable of using English freely in diverse academic, social, and professional contexts.

Another study by Krieger (2005) described debate as an excellent learning activity for language acquisition, since it simultaneously engages multiple cognitive and linguistic skills. During debates, students practice meaningful listening comprehension, speaking, and written communication, while also cultivating the ability to argue politely and persuasively.

Numerous studies have also highlighted the effectiveness of debate in developing students' critical thinking abilities and logical reasoning skills. During debates, each

participant is required to logically justify their arguments while analyzing and responding to the opposing side's points. As a result, learners acquire the ability to structure their ideas coherently, critically evaluate and compare evidence, and provide well-reasoned counterarguments.

Cinganotto (2019) emphasizes that debate fosters a wide range of skills: working with sources, oral communication, argumentation, critical thinking, and teamwork. Similarly, Barkley et al. (2005) identify three main didactic benefits of debate: It motivates students to engage in active communication and express their ideas. It encourages critical and independent thinking. It promotes respect for others' opinions and openness to different perspectives through analyzing opposing views.

Students engaged in debate also develop greater consistency and evidence-based reasoning in both spoken and written communication, alongside enhanced independent analytical thinking.

Practical experiments confirm these outcomes. For instance, in a pedagogical study conducted at a medical institute in Saudi Arabia, students were divided into groups and practiced critical thinking and communication skills through debates and role-play. Results showed that 78% of students reported an improvement in their critical thinking skills, while 69% indicated enhanced communication abilities. Similarly, research in Indonesia revealed that students exposed to debates outperformed the control group in English speaking proficiency, showing significant improvement in fluency, grammatical accuracy, and enthusiasm.

Firmansyah and Vegian (2019) demonstrated that the debate technique boosted learners' fluency, accuracy, and self-confidence in expressing ideas. Lubis and Siregar (2021) also found that incorporating debate elements in lessons helped students overcome anxiety in oral performance, leading to better pronunciation and longer speech production. Laoli (2021), through an experimental study, confirmed that the debate method improved high school students' speaking skills, noting that regular participation enabled them to speak with greater fluency and accurate pronunciation.

Another important outcome of debates is their ability to help students overcome psychological barriers and build self-confidence. For many foreign language learners, speaking in front of an audience and expressing ideas in a non-native language can be stressful. Debate creates a meaningful environment for discussion, providing learners with both encouragement and opportunity to voice their opinions.

A study by Pezhman Zare and Moomala Othman (2015) found that students who participated in debates felt more at ease in class, gradually overcame stage fright, and began to speak with greater confidence. Because students present as part of a team, they receive peer support, which helps them overcome feelings of embarrassment and engage more actively in argumentation. For instance, an experiment conducted in Japan revealed that before debate activities only 30.8% of students felt comfortable

speaking in front of the class, whereas after debates this number rose to 56.7%—indicating that debates significantly reduced students’ fear of public speaking. Thus, debates help diminish anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and other emotional barriers, while making learners more prepared for communication.

In addition, debates foster the development of teamwork skills. Since participants collaborate with their teammates throughout the process, they learn to work collectively, coordinate effectively, and share responsibilities. Research shows that students engaged in debates experience growth in teamwork, cooperation, and leadership. Hering (2007) notes that debate is both an enjoyable and beneficial activity: on one hand, it creates a lively and engaging classroom atmosphere—students often perceive debates as fun and playful competitions—while on the other, it fosters friendly rivalry that encourages peer learning and collaboration.

Debates also stimulate leadership qualities and creative thinking. Each team must develop strategies to succeed, explore innovative approaches, and employ original reasoning to persuade the audience. In this way, debates not only improve linguistic and cognitive skills but also nurture creativity, problem-solving, and leadership among learners.

From an academic perspective, the benefits of debate are equally noteworthy. Students who participate in debates tend to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter, as preparation requires them to read supplementary materials, search for facts, and gather evidence relevant to the discussion topic. According to Zare and Othman (2015), debates not only enhance general skills but also increase students’ mastery of course content, fostering their ability to engage in independent learning.

Osborn (2005) also emphasizes that debates encourage learners to take responsibility for their own studies while supporting one another throughout the process. Since debate preparation demands independent inquiry, students acquire valuable research and source analysis skills. For instance, in preparing for a debate, a learner must read multiple sources on the topic, identify essential information, and incorporate these findings into their arguments—an exercise that mirrors the process of conducting a small-scale research project.

Consequently, debates stimulate learners’ motivation for independent investigation. Researchers have observed that students who engage in debate become more active in mastering other subjects as well, and they develop a stronger inclination toward analyzing real-life problems critically.

The evidence presented above demonstrates that the debate method fosters the comprehensive development of all four English language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As noted by scholars such as Alasmari and Ahmed (2013) and Krieger (2005), debate activities are particularly effective in strengthening both oral and written communication skills. This is because students are required not only to

present arguments verbally with supporting evidence but also to prepare written texts and notes to structure their ideas. Debates also enhance student motivation, as learners engage in speaking activities with enthusiasm and derive enjoyment from the learning process. Interestingly, several studies report that even students who were previously passive or hesitant in class became significantly more engaged after participating in debates. In fact, 75% of these students stated that debate had become their favorite classroom activity, illustrating that this method can effectively attract and motivate even less confident learners.

Discussion

The findings presented above indicate that the debate method is a proven and effective approach in foreign language teaching, supported by a range of scientific and theoretical evidence. First and foremost, debates stimulate maximum student participation in the classroom. In traditional lessons, the teacher often dominates the speaking time, while students remain passive listeners. In contrast, debates shift the focus: students do most of the speaking and thinking, while the teacher assumes the role of an observer and facilitator. Research suggests that this shift promotes deeper and more independent learning. As Bellon (2000) and Cinganotto (2019) emphasize, it is the students themselves who generate ideas and attempt to find solutions during debates, thereby fostering deep learning. Debate represents a clear example of student-centered education, where each participant feels personally responsible for mastering the lesson content and contributes actively to the process.

Debates also contribute to the development of multifaceted competences. As noted earlier, students not only enhance their language abilities but also acquire critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and leadership skills. In today's educational context, fostering the so-called 4Cs of 21st-century learning—critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration—is considered a key objective. Debate is particularly valuable in this regard, as it simultaneously nurtures all four skills within a single activity. For instance, during debates, learners engage in critical analysis of arguments, generate alternative ideas through creativity, practice effective communication, and work in collaboration with peers to achieve common goals. This process ensures that each student makes an active contribution, thereby instilling a sense of responsibility for collective success.

Another important aspect of the debate method is its alignment with the principles of inclusivity and equity. When properly organized, debates provide every participant with the opportunity to express their ideas—even those students who are usually less active in class are encouraged to contribute their opinions on the discussion topic. As noted by AnnMarie Baines et al. (2023), debates are especially beneficial for English Language Learners (ELLs), as participation helps them practice defending their needs and viewpoints, while gradually overcoming the fear of making mistakes or feeling

embarrassed when speaking in public. Because debate rules apply equally to all and each side has the right to defend its position, students experience the activity in a fair and safe environment. This, in turn, encourages them to express their ideas more freely. Of course, proper facilitation is essential. The teacher must guide the process to maintain a culture of respectful discussion and prevent any instances of disrespect or disorder. Classroom debates differ fundamentally from political debates or confrontational disputes—their goal is not to determine a winner or loser but rather to analyze issues from multiple perspectives, explore diverse viewpoints, and enrich students’ worldviews through constructive dialogue.

Debate also fosters the development of culturally significant skills. During debates, students learn to follow specific ethical and etiquette norms when expressing opposing views—for example, listening attentively while an opponent is speaking, addressing arguments rather than personalities, relying on evidence, and maintaining a respectful tone. These practices cultivate a culture of civil discourse.

Many educators note that debate prepares young people to participate actively in civil society. Through such activities, students are exposed to diverse perspectives on social issues and learn to demonstrate respect and tolerance toward others. As Van Jones (2020) emphasized, “debate is, in fact, the lifeblood of democracy.” The presence of differing opinions and even heated discussions teaches societies to value diversity of thought and to develop compromise-building skills. By contrast, in environments dominated by uniformity of thought, people tend to avoid debate; whereas in free societies, only through healthy discussion can genuine ideas emerge. Thus, by fostering a culture of debate within the educational process, we are not only teaching a language but also cultivating independent thinkers who possess civic awareness and are prepared to contribute responsibly to democratic life.

Of course, there are several important considerations when applying the debate method. For instance, the topic selected for discussion must be clear and engaging for students. Group sizes should be kept manageable to ensure that every participant has an equal and active role in the debate. For learners with lower levels of language proficiency, teachers may provide linguistic scaffolding in advance—for example, introducing useful vocabulary and expressions for giving opinions, agreeing, or disagreeing. Additionally, to prevent the debate from turning into unnecessary tension or conflict, the teacher should consistently remind students of debate etiquette and skillfully diffuse any emerging disputes. When these conditions are met, debates can be conducted in a way that is both enjoyable and highly effective, creating a lively yet respectful classroom environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of the debate method in English language lessons brings numerous positive transformations to the learning process. Research has consistently

confirmed its effectiveness in developing learners’ fluency in a foreign language, enhancing their critical and logical thinking, and strengthening their ability to defend opinions with confidence. Debate lessons encourage active student participation, deepen understanding of subject matter, and cultivate habits of independent inquiry beyond the classroom. The knowledge, skills, and competences acquired through debates extend beyond language learning, supporting success in other academic disciplines as well as in future professional and social contexts.

The experience of developed countries demonstrates that debate has become an integral component of educational standards, applied from school to higher education. In the United States, for example, cultivating a culture of public speaking and debate is embedded in curricula, with the expectation that students in higher grades are able to critically analyze complex social issues from multiple perspectives. Students who participate regularly in debates tend to stand out from their peers by virtue of their communication abilities, critical reasoning, and leadership qualities. For this reason, it is highly advisable to expand the use of interactive methods such as debate in foreign language teaching practices in our context as well.

This article, drawing on an analysis of scholarly sources, has highlighted the main advantages of the debate method and provided methodological recommendations for its classroom implementation. The evidence shows that debate is a powerful tool for shaping learners’ linguistic and communicative competences while simultaneously fostering independent and critical thinkers. Ultimately, incorporating debate into English lessons enables students to express themselves freely, practice the culture of constructive discussion, and apply the foreign language in meaningful contexts—outcomes that not only improve the effectiveness of education but also contribute to the all-round development of young learners.

REFERENCES:

1. Alasmari, A., & Ahmed, S. S. (2013). Using Debate in EFL Classes. *English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 147–152.
2. Zare, P., & Othman, M. (2015). Students’ Perceptions toward Using Classroom Debate to Develop Critical Thinking and Oral Communication Ability. *Asian Social Science*, 11(9), 158–170.
3. Cinganotto, L. (2019). Debate as a Teaching Strategy for Language Learning. *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 30, 107–125.
4. Barkley, E. F., Cross, K. P., & Major, C. H. (2005). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
5. Halvorsen, A. (2005). Incorporating Critical Thinking Skills Development in ESL through Debate. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 11(2).
6. Hering, B. (2007). Debate: A Challenging and Rewarding Instructional Activity.

7. Osborne, M. (2005). Teaching Critical Thinking via Classroom Debates.
8. Williams, D. E., McGee, B. R., & Worth, D. S. (2001). University Students' Perceptions of Classroom Debate. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 37(4), 198–209.
9. Mumtaz, Y., & Latif, R. (2017). Learning through Debate during Problem-Based Learning: An Active Learning Strategy. *Advances in Physiology Education*, 41(3), 390–394.
10. Iman, J. N. (2017). Debate Instruction in EFL Classroom: Impact on the Critical Thinking and Speaking Skills. *International Journal of Instruction*, 10(4), 87–108.
11. Litan, R. (2020). *Resolved: Debate Can Revolutionize Education and Help Save Our Democracy*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
12. Baines, A., Medina, D., & Healy, C. (2023). Using Debate as an Educational Tool. *Edutopia* (26-yanvar, 2023).
13. Krieger, D. (2005). Teaching Debate to ESL Students: A Six-Class Unit. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 11.
14. Turabova, S. K. (2024). Munozara – ilmiy bilish faoliyatining tarkibiy qismi sifatida. *Innovatsion Society*, 3(2), 111–116.
15. Firmansyah, E., & Vegian, D. (2019). Debate Technique in Improving Students' Speaking Skills.
16. Lubis, M., & Siregar, A. (2021). Incorporating Debate Activities in Language Learning and Teaching.
17. Laoli, N. (2021). Implementing Classroom Debate in Junior High School to Enhance Speaking Skills.