

## English Language Education | Full Research Article

# Challenging the Mind: Debate as a Catalyst for Speaking Performance

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### Abstract

While debate is a widely utilized pedagogical tool in EFL speaking instruction, its efficacy must be assessed through learners' perspectives to determine its perceived value in language acquisition. This study investigated EFL students' perceptions of the utility of debate techniques in enhancing speaking proficiency. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study collected quantitative data from 50 participants and qualitative insights from 4 purposively sampled students. The findings revealed a strongly favorable disposition among participants toward debate-based instruction, confirming that debate significantly enhances EFL learners' speaking competence. Analysis demonstrated that debate not only increased students' speaking time and articulation of viewpoints but also cultivated higher-order cognitive engagement and learners' motivation. Moreover, the technique was found to facilitate the development of critical thinking, argumentative reasoning, and oral fluency. These outcomes underscored debate as a pedagogically impactful strategy in EFL contexts, aligning with contemporary communicative language teaching paradigms.

**Keywords:** debate technique, speaking skills, critical thinking, communication skills, argumentative skills

## Introduction

English, as an international language, holds a pivotal position in global communication and is a core component of educational curricula worldwide, spanning both formal and informal learning contexts (Laisouw, 2019). In Afghanistan, English retains its status as a foreign language, yet its mastery is increasingly recognized as an essential skill for academic, professional, and social success. Haycraft (1978) delineates the four foundational language skills—speaking, writing, listening, and reading—categorizing speaking and writing as productive skills (oral and written expression) and listening and reading as receptive skills (comprehension). Among these, speaking is often prioritized by EFL learners, as it facilitates direct communication and the articulation of ideas (Laisouw, 2019).

To enhance speaking proficiency, various pedagogical techniques are employed, one of which is debate. Debate is a structured discourse in which two opposing teams

engage in reasoned argumentation on a given topic, requiring participants to defend their stance with evidence while countering opposing views (Somjai & Jansem, 2015). This technique not only fosters oral fluency but also cultivates critical thinking, active listening, and persuasive communication. In EFL contexts, debate has gained recognition as an effective method for improving students' speaking abilities, argumentative competence, and self-confidence in public speaking (Alasmari & Ahmed, 2013). Moreover, structured debate participation enhances learners' ability to articulate ideas coherently and respond to counterarguments—skills integral to language proficiency (Zare & Othman, 2015).

Despite its documented benefits, the implementation of debate techniques in Afghan EFL classrooms, particularly at Herat University, remains limited. Traditional rote-learning methods, which emphasize memorization over interactive engagement, continue to dominate instruction (Rahimi & Shams, 2012). Additionally, many instructors lack training in facilitating debate-based activities, resulting in a gap in students' communicative competence. While studies in other Middle Eastern EFL settings (e.g., Hosseini & Khodaeifard, 2019) demonstrate that debate significantly improves fluency and coherence, empirical research on its efficacy in Afghanistan is scarce, highlighting a critical need for further investigation.

Existing literature corroborates the pedagogical value of debate (Cobuild, 2006; Laisouw, 2019; Rahma Bar, 2019), yet its underutilization in Afghan academia persists. Many students remain hesitant to participate in speaking activities due to fear of errors or lack of motivation, further necessitating innovative approaches like debate (Colbuild, 2006). Without intervention, learners may continue to struggle with structured argumentation and persuasive communication.

Globally, debate has been widely endorsed as a transformative pedagogical tool. Krieger (2005) asserts that debate promotes active engagement, encouraging learners to explore diverse perspectives and refine their analytical and speaking skills. Similarly, Inada's (2020) research in Japanese EFL classrooms revealed measurable gains in students' speaking proficiency and confidence following structured debate activities. These findings suggest that integrating debate into Afghan EFL curricula could yield comparable benefits, provided appropriate training and resources are available. This study examined the potential of debate as a means of enhancing speaking skills among EFL learners at one of the public universities in Afghanistan, while also exploring students' perceptions of its effectiveness. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How does the debate technique influence students' speaking performance?
2. What are students' perceptions of debate as a learning tool in EFL classrooms?

## Literature Review

### Language Skills Development

Language is fundamentally a communicative competence rather than a content-based discipline like Mathematics, Science, or Social Studies, which primarily focus on transmitting factual knowledge (Husain, 2015). As a system of communication,

language comprises four core skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking—with the latter being the primary focus of this study. These four language skills serve multiple pedagogical purposes in the classroom: they provide scaffolding for learning, create opportunities for authentic language use, demonstrate learner competence, and crucially, build students' confidence (Sadiku, 2015).

Each skill plays a distinct role in language acquisition. Listening, a receptive skill, serves as foundational input for developing other language competencies, particularly productive skills (Kholmurodova, 2021). Speaking is regarded as the most critical skill in second language acquisition, serving as the primary indicator of language proficiency (Rao, 2019). Writing, a complex, multi-dimensional productive skill rooted in linguistic competence (Myhill & Fisher, 2010), represents a crucial academic and professional asset—the written manifestation of one's intellectual capacity (Sadiku, 2015). Reading, the complementary receptive skill, facilitates language input and comprehension.

These four competencies constitute the essential toolkit for language acquisition. As Sadiku (2015) observes, while language learning presents both challenges and opportunities, mastery of these skills is indispensable for effective communication in our globalized world. Historically and contemporaneously, language proficiency has always been measured through these four interconnected abilities.

The skills are conventionally categorized into two groups. Productive skills (speaking and writing) require active language production and self-expression, while receptive skills (listening and reading) involve comprehension and interpretation of language input (Ilankumaran, 2018). This classification reflects the complementary nature of language processing—while distinct in their operations, these skills are fundamentally interdependent in actual communication contexts.

## **Students Challenges in Developing their Speaking Skills**

Comprehensive themes and sub-themes were found, as Abrar (2018) claimed these themes are including language barriers (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency), Psychological factors (fear, attitude, lack of motivation), Learning environment (topics of teachers, peers, speaking modules); and Language practice (self-practice, language with teachers and peers) Practice, practice language with media and technology, and maintain positive motivation. Several efforts, such as practicing the language and maintaining positive motivation. Most participants felt that there was no better way to improve their English skills than practicing English. Meanwhile the majority of students said they found it difficult to practice their English skills outside of formal English classes.

In a similar vein, some common categories of student's challenges that has been discussed in past studies, as Namaziandost (2019) reported that inhibition is one of the most common problems of students. And one of the main problems is that when students try to say things in a foreign language in class, they are restrained. Much of their worries come from making mistakes, fearing criticism, and losing their faces. They move away from the attention that their speech draws. Similarly, Ramamurthy (2022) declared that learners are terrified of making mistakes or of being criticized in the classrooms.

In addition, Lack of up-to-date knowledge is one of the challenges which is also covered by past studies. As Namaziandost (2019) also claimed that it is very important

for teachers to involve students in oral communication on familiar topics. Students usually complain that they say nothing about a particular topic just because the topic is not suitable for them.

Moreover, Lack of motivation as one of the most common challenge for students in learning speaking as reported in past studies by Ihsan (2016) reported that from the idea of motivation, there are some points in drawing the concept of Motivation. They are: the motive is different and cannot be seen, but it is psychological Build; actions or efforts, attitudes, interests and values or desires. And the motivation can be seen as a successful aspect of learning the target language is speaking a language.

And also using the mother language during the class observation, can create challenges for students as Al-Esaifer (2018) also mentioned in his research that it was noticed that students are used to speak in Arabic or use Arabic words when they discuss or express their ideas of different tasks, and when they were asked in the interview about the reason of doing that; they answered (We do not know how to say it in) which means that they do not know how to discuss their ideas in English, consequently, they used their mother tongue (Arabic). Therefore, the inadequate vocabulary repertoire and weak sentence building skills are the reasons for using the mother tongue.

## College Students' Speaking Perceptions

Speaking is something that has been widely discussed among various authors and scholars across the globe. According to Alsahli (2020), speaking is defined as the act of generating and sharing meaning through both verbal and non-verbal codes in a variety of settings. As highlighted by Babu and Akbari (2022), speaking is the use of a language for communication in daily interactions, rather than in specialized forms such as singing. Besides, speaking is a skill, which involves language aptitudes and sociolinguistic competency as well as the knowing of when, why, and how to produce language in order to state thoughts. Spratt (2005) states that, like writing, speaking is also a productive skill, which includes using speech in order to define meaning to other folks. Speaking is about putting a message together, communicating it, along with interacting with other people (Lindsay, 2006). Sari (2008) states that speaking utilizes the word and generates the sound in order to orally describe our thoughts, ideas, arguments, feelings, needs, etc. Speaking skill is a demanding skill among the foreign language learners; this is because to have an efficient oral communication, it is necessary to use the language properly in social interface (Richards, 2002). To conclude the above definitions, speaking is used for a variety of purposes such as communicating or interacting with people, describe views, feelings, etc. This major skill is one of the most important skills to learn for the English language learners.

## Speaking Elements

In speaking, there are three elements that are very essential and important to be mastered by the English learners. Both teachers and students are supposed to comprehend these three elements to apply for the enhancement of students' speaking skill by using English debate. Those three elements are accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. In speaking, accuracy is the using of correct forms of grammar,

pronunciation, and vocabulary. Besides, grammar defines in what way we organize, combine, change the words and parts in order to build meaning". We can also use it to describe how words are shaped, these grammatical structure, and parts of speech. Vocabulary is the very initial step to speak English, and without this, we are not able to convey our purpose via sound. Learning a lot of vocabularies is a way to sound more communicative and accurate when speaking. Pronunciation is also another crucial part in learning English. In this language, the pronunciation scheme of a word is unique. Considering the accent and pronunciation differences among non-English speaker, they may not pronounce exactly like the native ones. This is why they say it is difficult to master pronunciation. However, there are some good suggestions we can follow like watching English movies, listening music, etc. in order to improve pronunciation (Musfirah, 2017). Consequently, fluency is also very important as it is something when speakers are capable to communicate their points of view about a particular topic without pauses or thinking too much about it. Nunan (1991) states that fluency refers to having a normal speed, without self-correction, hesitancy, but to speak smoothly using connected speech in the right way. Comprehensibility similarly bonds with the awareness of the general sense or meaning expressed by the speaker. Besides, it is not limited to pronunciation and unsuitable vocabulary every time. Thus, it deals with the larger picture, so comprehensibility is something when the meaning of the speech is conveyed generally.

Based on the above descriptions, the three elements of speaking (accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility) are significant to be discussed since the students' speaking skill are being evaluated based on these elements; meanwhile, it can assist the study to follow these patterns for conducting this research.

## **College Students' Debate Perceptions**

Debate is a communication procedure that participants discuss on a particular topic for and against. Debate is one of teaching method to improve the academic students' ability (Kennedy, 2007). Moreover, debate can lead students to think critically regarding a problem. It also helps them to be able to disclose new ideas and solutions in English for different problems and arguments.

The students, in debate, pick one side of pro-against by using their thoughts regarding a particular subject. So, this means that they are demanded to provide and defend their viewpoints based on their position". The teachers have to inspire the learners maintain communicative proficiency by generating the class atmosphere that is full of communication. Also, teachers practice debate technique in order to improve the students' language abilities.

## **Affordances of Debate in the Language Classroom**

One of effective speaking activity is debate that can inspire students to develop their communication skill. This is because in debate, students can view topics in several viewpoints. Also, debate can be a very useful tool to learn a foreign language as it involves students in a diversity of linguistics and intellectual ways (Pezhman et al, 2013). According to Freeley and Steinberg (2013) debate is the process of inquiry and advocacy, a way of arriving at a reasoned judgment on a proposition to reach a decision

in their minds; alternatively, individuals or groups use it to bring others around to their way of thinking. Debate is a particular form of argument. It is not a way of reconciling differences – that is a misconception. Debate is a way of arbitrating between differences. The purpose of a debate is not for two disputing parties to leave the room in agreement. Instead, through the debate between them, others will form a judgment about which of the two to support (Smith, 2021). Besides, Budesheim and Lundquist (2000) argue that people will change their perspectives if they have to defend a viewpoint that is contrary to their original perspective.

Furthermore, since an activity needs a lot of speaking practice and oral conversation among debaters, debate has the potential to enhance speaking skill. According to Freeley & Steinburgh (2013), debate is a game or a contest where two or more speakers convey their opinions in order to convince one another. There are some benefits of in-class debate as discussed by Kennedy (2007) from Blooming University of Pennsylvania; they are as follows:

- a) Improve cooperative learning skills. Students learn better by keenly examining, arguing, and practicing content in significant ways instead of gaining information in passive way.
- b) Develop the quality of their answers since they are given thinking time and they can construct on their own thoughts.
- c) It is more beneficial to be improvement of students' higher order thinking abilities rather than traditional instructional policies, e.g. teacher.

Recent studies corroborate these advantages. For instance, Iman (2017) found that debate instruction significantly improved students' critical thinking and speaking skills in an EFL context. Similarly, research by Alasmari and Ahmed (2013) demonstrated that training EFL learners in debating enhanced their oral performance across various metrics, including vocabulary, cohesion, and fluency.

## **The Improvement of Speaking Skill through Debate Technique**

In English learning classrooms, speaking activities and practice ought to impact students' capability particularly in spoken communication. When students develop their speaking skill, it will make them to a sense of liberalism to apply their knowledge in speaking. Utilizing debate technique is one of the effective ways to persuade learners to expand their speaking skill. And also, debating provides argument and it is a formal technique of communication and interaction, plus helps students practice speaking English language. Krieger (2005) states that debate is an outstanding activity to learn language as it involves students in a wide range of linguistics and intellectual ways. Debate is also very important for improving arguments skills for writing and convincing speech. According to Choiriniyah (2012) classroom debate gives the opportunity for students to brainstorm concepts, enhance vocabulary, read to provide support for an idea, and to work cooperatively. Roy & Macchiette, (2005) states that "Debate involves not only determining what to say but how to say it" Another advantage of debate technique in speaking classrooms is that it develops students' communication and critical thinking skills; also, students will find a lot of chances to practice and improve their speaking skill.

## **Educational Theories Supporting Debate in Language Learning**

The implementation of debate in language learning is increasingly supported by contemporary educational theories that emphasize learner agency, interaction, and cognitive engagement. Two central theoretical frameworks—Vygotsky’s Social Constructivism and Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy—continue to underpin the pedagogical value of debate, but recent research has refined and extended these concepts within modern learning environments. By integrating these theories with current evidence, educators can justify the use of debate not only as a communicative activity but as a catalyst for deeper cognitive and linguistic development.

### **Vygotsky's Social Constructivism in Modern Language Learning**

Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory remains relevant in 21st-century pedagogy, but its application has been revisited through the lens of collaborative dialogue, scaffolding in online learning spaces, and the development of critical language awareness. Vygotsky (1978) originally emphasized that cognitive development occurs through social interaction within a learner’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Modern scholarship extends this idea by exploring how structured dialogic tasks like debate foster not only language acquisition but also intercultural competence and critical thinking (Storch, 2021).

Debate, as a form of collaborative discourse, provides a dynamic platform for learners to negotiate meaning, co-construct arguments, and receive immediate feedback from peers—all of which support the internalization of linguistic structures and the development of discourse competence. Furthermore, in multilingual classrooms, debate encourages students to draw upon their sociocultural backgrounds, aligning with Vygotsky’s emphasis on the cultural mediation of learning (Mercer & Howe, 2016).

Recent empirical studies confirm these benefits. For example, Tien and Liu (2020) demonstrated that structured academic debates in EFL settings significantly improve learners’ fluency, lexical complexity, and argumentation strategies. These findings reinforce the idea that dialogic interaction, central to Vygotsky’s theory, is effectively operationalized through debate.

### **Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy and Higher-Order Cognitive Engagement**

Debate also engages learners in the higher-order cognitive domains outlined in Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy. Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) restructured framework places analyzing, evaluating, and creating at the top of the hierarchy, reflecting a shift toward active, student-centered learning. In addition, debate inherently requires these complex cognitive operations: students must interpret information, assess opposing viewpoints, and generate original arguments in real time.

Recent pedagogical research has emphasized the role of debate in fostering critical literacy and argumentative competence, particularly in second language learners. According to Nguyen and Yang (2021), engaging students in debate significantly enhances their ability to synthesize information and articulate nuanced perspectives, both orally and in writing. This aligns with the metacognitive component

of Bloom's taxonomy, as students monitor and refine their reasoning throughout the debate process.

Moreover, debate tasks promote formative assessment opportunities, allowing instructors to evaluate students' cognitive and linguistic development across multiple levels of the taxonomy (Bøhn & Hansen, 2023). This multidimensional assessment is particularly valuable in communicative language teaching, where proficiency is not limited to grammar accuracy but extends to critical discourse practices.

By anchoring debate within these well-established yet evolving theoretical frameworks, language educators can harness its full pedagogical potential. Social constructivism highlights the collaborative, interactive nature of debate, while Bloom's taxonomy reinforces its value in developing higher-order thinking. Together, these theories—bolstered by recent empirical research—underscore debate as a transformative practice in language education, capable of fostering linguistic fluency, critical reasoning, and academic identity formation.

## Cultural Considerations in the Afghan Context

Implementing debate techniques in Herat or broader Afghan educational settings necessitates sensitivity to cultural norms and values. Cultural dimensions, such as those discussed by Alqarni (2022) in the context of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, play a crucial role in shaping students' learning behaviors and responses to debate. In Afghan society, where respect for authority and collectivist tendencies are strong, students may initially be hesitant to engage in open debates, particularly when challenging opinions expressed by teachers or peers.

Additionally, gender norms influence classroom participation. Female students in conservative regions may face societal constraints that limit their willingness to speak publicly or challenge opposing viewpoints. However, structured and moderated debates can create an environment where students feel safe to express their ideas while respecting cultural sensitivities.

A study by Khan, Iqbal, & Jumani, (2023) on debate practices in South Asian classrooms highlights that culturally responsive teaching strategies, such as integrating debate topics relevant to local issues, can enhance student engagement and confidence. Therefore, adapting debate methods to align with Afghan cultural values while fostering critical thinking is essential for maximizing their effectiveness.

## Recent Studies

Recent empirical research underscores the effectiveness of integrating debate techniques into EFL instruction to enhance students' speaking competencies. For instance, Tarigan and Lubis (2024) conducted a qualitative study at an English language learning center in Medan, Indonesia, revealing that debate techniques significantly improved students' confidence, fluency, and ability to construct and defend arguments. Similarly, a study by Alasmari and Ahmed (2013) demonstrated that structured debate modules in EFL classes fostered confident use of English in academic, social, and professional settings. In addition, a systematic review by Johnson (2022) and a study by Smith and Brown (2021) critically evaluated the role of classroom debates in enhancing the English-speaking skills of ESL/EFL learners, highlighting improvements in fluency,

coherence, and critical thinking abilities. These findings suggest that debate serves as a dynamic pedagogical tool, promoting active participation and critical thinking among EFL learners. Therefore, the current study investigated EFL students' perception toward debate techniques and its effects.

## Research Method

This study investigates students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of debate as a pedagogical tool for enhancing speaking skills in EFL contexts. The research employs a mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation. For the quantitative component, the study utilizes a survey research design, which Brown and Rodgers (2002) identify as particularly valuable for language teaching research and curriculum development projects. The survey approach allows for the systematic collection of measurable data from a representative sample of participants. The qualitative component adopts a semi-structured interview design, following Creswell's (2012) recommendation that qualitative methods are most appropriate when researchers seek to develop an in-depth understanding of complex educational phenomena. This approach enables the exploration of participants' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions in greater depth than quantitative methods alone would permit.

### Participants and Sampling

This study employed convenience sampling to select participants, a methodological approach appropriate when researchers select subjects based on their willingness and accessibility (Creswell, 2012). The sampling strategy was particularly suitable for this investigation as it allowed efficient access to participants who were both available and motivated to contribute to the research. The quantitative component of the study involved 50 randomly selected sophomore and junior students from Herat University. Participants were chosen based on their prior exposure to debate techniques in classroom settings, ensuring they possessed relevant experience for the study objectives. The sample maintained gender parity with an equal distribution of male and female participants (50/50 ratio), all falling within the 19-25 age range. For the qualitative phase, four students were randomly selected to participate in in-depth interviews. This subsample was designed to provide richer, more nuanced insights to complement the quantitative data. Table 1 presents interview participants' demographic information.

Table 1

*Participants' Demographic Information*

Participant	Age	Debate experience	Gender
Ahamd	25	2 years	Male
Sara	21	1 year	Female
Maria	22	1 year	Female
Mohammad	24	1 year	Male

## Data Collection

This study utilized a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to ensure comprehensive results. The survey was adapted from Tajik and Noor (2022), consisting of two constituents: demographic information about participants (age, gender, and academic level) and 20 Likert-scale items assessing perceptions of debate technique effectiveness. For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview questions were developed, reviewed by language experts for validity, and then administered to selected participants. Following Bans-Akutey and Tiimub's (2021) recommendation on methodological triangulation, this dual approach helped compensate for the limitations of each individual method while strengthening the study's overall credibility. The questionnaire was distributed to 50 randomly selected students to gather broad quantitative data, while four participants were interviewed to obtain deeper qualitative insights. To ensure accuracy, interview transcripts were shared with participants for verification through member checking. By combining these methods, the research achieved both breadth of perspective through statistical analysis and depth of understanding through personal narratives, providing a more robust examination of how debate techniques influence speaking skills in EFL classrooms.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 25 to generate descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) for preliminary insights. For qualitative analysis, we employed Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis framework - a systematic approach involving identification, organization, and interpretation of meaningful patterns (themes) across datasets. This method facilitated understanding of participants' shared experiences and collective meanings through examination of topic-related commonalities. The analysis process proceeded as follows: First, audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed multiple times for data familiarization. Initial codes were then assigned to capture key concepts, with constant comparative analysis applied to examine relationships between codes. Through iterative refinement, these codes were organized into overarching themes. To ensure reliability, an external qualitative research expert independently analyzed a subset of data, with consensus on final codes and themes reached through collaborative discussion. Finally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation. Four primary themes emerged from this analysis: (1) promoting critical thinking skills, (2) decreasing speaking anxiety, (3) exposure to authentic language materials, and (4) the time-intensive nature of debate preparation.

## Results

This section presents the findings from questionnaires administered to 50 sophomore and junior students at a public university in Afghanistan, examining their perceptions of debate's effectiveness in developing speaking skills.

The data in this table indicate that students recognize how using the debate technique improves their speaking skills and enhances their English language learning. The mean scores for key items—"Debate as a joyful and exciting technique" (4.26), "Increased motivation" (4.20), "Asking more questions" (4.06), "Increased self-confidence" (4.04), "Vocabulary

learning" (4.28), and "Expressing ideas freely" (4.02)—represent the highest values, demonstrating that students find debate particularly effective for developing speaking skills. Participants in this research expressed strong agreement that debates help them acquire more vocabulary and apply it in speaking. They also reported that debates improve their argumentation skills, enabling them to research topics and support their positions with evidence. Additionally, students described how in-class debates foster open-mindedness and encourage them to consider different perspectives. Learners further noted that debates enhance their oral communication and critical thinking skills, helping them analyze discussion topics more deeply.

The findings also reveal that debates boost students' self-confidence and motivation while reducing stress and anxiety. Participants also highlighted how debates promote collaborative learning and provide opportunities to practice authentic language use. However, students expressed uncertainty about whether this technique effectively teaches new phrases or improves pronunciation. Table 2 presents more descriptive information about items.

Table 2

*Individual Items' Descriptive Statistics*

No	Items	N Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
1	Debate as new method of learning speaking skills	50	0	3.98	4.00	.869
2	Debate as joyful and exciting technique	50	0	4.26	4.00	.85261
3	Debate promotes critical thinking skills	50	0	3.98	4.00	.892
4	Decreasing speaking anxiety	50	0	3.56	4.00	1.327
5	Increasing motivation	50	0	4.20	4.00	.948
6	Debate; collaborative learning skills	50	0	3.74	4.00	.828
7	Debate; Open minded	50	0	4.00	4.00	.756
8	Debate; asking more question	50	0	4.06	4.00	.935
9	Increasing students' self-confidence	50	0	4.04	4.00	1.068
10	Improving oral communication s	50	0	3.96	4.00	.832
11	Debate; waste of time	50	0	2.66	2.00	1.319
12	Promoting level of understanding	50	0	3.64	4.00	.875
13	Learning more vocabulary	50	0	4.28	4.00	.757
14	Improving pronunciation	50	0	4.00	4.00	.904
15	Promoting course content	50	0	3.54	3.50	.838
16	Enhancing learning better	50	0	3.96	4.00	1.009
17	Debate; expressing ideas freely	50	0	4.02	4.00	1.040
18	Increasing students' argument skills.	50	0	3.90	4.00	1.111
19	Debate; find reason and solution	50	0	3.82	4.00	.873
20	Practicing the authentic language	50	0	3.76	4.00	.822

**Qualitative Results**

The interview data analysis indicates that debate serves as a valuable pedagogical tool for fostering critical thinking skills among students while also helping them manage speaking-related anxiety. Additionally, it provides learners with exposure to authentic materials, enhancing real-world language application. However, the findings also

highlight that debate requires significant time investment in both planning and implementation, posing a challenge for educators and students alike. A detailed breakdown of emerging codes and themes is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Themes and codes*

No	Themes	Codes
1	Promoting Students' Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being cognizant about other subject matters</li> <li>• Growing a mindset to search for responses</li> <li>• Considering different perspectives</li> </ul>
2	Decreasing Students' Speaking Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivating to speak more in public speeches</li> <li>• Increasing the level of self-confidence</li> </ul>
3	Exposure to Authentic Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacting more with native speakers</li> <li>• Learning new things</li> </ul>
4	The Time-intensive Nature of Debate Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking more time for preparation</li> </ul>

### Promoting Students' Critical Thinking

Most participants agreed that debate enhances their critical thinking skills, as it requires thorough preparation and argumentation on relevant topics. One participant emphasized that debate fosters active engagement not only in language learning but also in other academic subjects. They explained that debate, as a classroom activity, encourages independent research in English, thereby improving their overall language proficiency. As Maria noted: "For the debate project, I had to search through numerous websites. Initially, it was challenging, but I gradually became accustomed to it. Now, I can easily research any topic." Similarly, another participant, Sara, highlighted: "Debate is a valuable technique because it requires examining multiple perspectives on a single issue." Therefore, when implemented effectively, debate can increase student engagement and strengthen English language skills. Given these benefits, educators should consider incorporating debate into subjects where it is thematically applicable.

### Decreasing Students' Speaking Anxiety

Another key finding from the interviews was debate's role in reducing student anxiety while increasing motivation and self-confidence in speaking. Participants reported that engaging in debate activities made them more willing to participate in class discussions, with noticeable improvements in their confidence levels. As Sara explained, "I feel much more eager to speak during debates because I come prepared on the assigned topics." Other participants similarly emphasized debate's effectiveness in promoting oral participation. Mohammad noted, "Debate encourages me to speak more in class." These responses demonstrate that structured preparation for debate tasks enhances student performance. When topics are assigned in advance, students invest more effort in preparation, leading to increased motivation and reduced anxiety. This

evidence underscores debate's pedagogical value in fostering a more confident and engaged learning environment.

### **Exposure to Authentic Materials**

The interviews further revealed that debate activities enhance students' exposure to authentic materials, providing them with greater access to native-like texts and speech patterns as they research topics for debate preparation. Participants reported that this increased engagement with authentic resources improved their ability to contribute meaningfully to class discussions. As Maria observed, "Through researching debate topics, I discovered many new concepts and perspectives." Additionally, students noted that debate facilitates exposure to contemporary, real-world language usage. The web-based materials they encountered during research represented authentic linguistic forms employed by native speakers. This finding suggests that debate serves as an effective pedagogical tool for bridging the gap between classroom instruction and genuine language use.

### **The Time-intensive Nature of Debate Preparation**

The sole drawback identified during the interviews concerned the time-intensive nature of debate activities. Participants reported that thorough debate preparation demanded significant time investment, often at the expense of other academic subjects. This temporal challenge represents a critical consideration for implementing debate-based pedagogy. Both students and instructors face substantial time commitments, requiring careful lesson planning and classroom management. As Ahmad noted, "The only disadvantage of debate is the time requirement." Maria similarly commented, "I struggled to allocate sufficient preparation time for the debates." These findings highlight the importance of addressing time management when incorporating debates into instruction. While the pedagogical benefits - including increased student engagement and reduced anxiety - remain clear, educators must balance these advantages against the considerable preparation time needed for effective implementation. Strategic planning and time allocation are therefore essential when designing debate-based learning activities.

## **Discussion**

This study examined students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of debate in enhancing speaking skills at a public university in Afghanistan. The findings from both questionnaire and interview data reveal several significant insights that align with and extend existing literature on debate pedagogy in EFL contexts. The results demonstrate strong student endorsement of debate activities, with over 80% of participants agreeing that debates improved their critical thinking abilities. This finding corroborates the work of Roy and Macchiette (2005) who established that debate fosters critical thinking by requiring students to articulate and defend positions on complex issues. The structured nature of debate appears to provide an effective framework for developing analytical skills while engaging with diverse perspectives.

Debate has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' linguistic and cognitive abilities. Research demonstrates that debate improves critical thinking, speaking proficiency, and learners' confidence in using English. For example, Halvorsen (2005) highlights that structured debate helps students develop argumentation skills, logical reasoning, and the ability to articulate ideas clearly. Similarly, Darby (2007) found that debate enhances EFL students' speaking fluency and reduces communication anxiety by providing a dynamic, interactive learning environment. Further supporting this, Nisbett (2003) emphasizes that debate encourages active engagement with language, fostering both receptive and productive skills. However, Hung (2015) points out that some learners may experience heightened anxiety during competitive debate settings, suggesting the need for scaffolding techniques to support less confident students. Despite these challenges, studies such as Zare & Othman (2013) confirm that debate significantly improves learners' ability to construct coherent arguments while boosting their motivation and self-efficacy. Overall, the benefits of debate—ranging from enhanced linguistic competence to sharper critical thinking—make it a valuable strategy in EFL instruction. Future research could explore the long-term retention of skills gained through debate and its applicability in digital learning environments.

A particularly noteworthy finding concerns debate's role in mitigating speaking anxiety. Participants reported that the collaborative format of debate helped reduce their fear of public speaking, enabling more confident participation in class discussions. This aligns with previous research demonstrating how structured speaking activities can lower affective filters (Krashen, 1982) and build communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). The team-based aspect of debate appears particularly valuable in this regard, as noted by participants who emphasized how working with peers created a supportive environment for language practice.

The study also revealed debate's effectiveness in developing argumentation skills. Students reported improved ability to evaluate and respond to opposing viewpoints - a finding consistent with Freeley and Steinberg's (2013) conceptualization of debate as a dynamic exchange of competing perspectives. This intellectual engagement not only enhances speaking proficiency but also cultivates important academic skills such as evidence-based reasoning and logical organization of ideas.

Regarding pedagogical implications, the results strongly support incorporating debate into EFL curricula. Multiple participants emphasized how debate increased their motivation to use the target language, confirming previous findings by Musfirah (2017), Tajik and Noor (2022), and Bar (2019). The collaborative nature of debate appears particularly effective in promoting communicative competence while addressing common challenges like student reticence. While the study identified time management as a potential implementation challenge, this appears resolvable through careful lesson planning. The overwhelmingly positive student responses suggest that the benefits of debate - including enhanced speaking skills, reduced anxiety, and improved critical thinking - far outweigh this logistical consideration.

## Conclusion

This study examined students' perceptions of debate techniques in speaking classes, while assessing its impact on key speaking competencies including accuracy, fluency,

pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehensibility. The findings revealed overwhelmingly positive student attitudes toward debate-based instruction, with particular benefits noted for developing oral communication skills and reducing speaking anxiety. The results demonstrate that debate techniques significantly enhance multiple aspects of language learning. Participants reported marked improvements in their argumentation skills, critical thinking abilities, and overall confidence when speaking English. Notably, the collaborative nature of debate activities helped mitigate the common challenge of speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms. These outcomes align with established principles of communicative language teaching and confirm debate's effectiveness as a student-centered pedagogical approach. However, the study's exclusive focus on student perspectives represents a limitation, suggesting the need for complementary research into instructor viewpoints.

For EFL educators, these findings strongly support incorporating structured debate activities into speaking courses. The technique proves particularly valuable for: (1) creating dynamic, interactive learning environments; (2) addressing multiple language competencies simultaneously; and (3) increasing student engagement in large classroom settings. Curriculum developers should consider integrating debate modules into official syllabi and providing specialized teacher training for effective implementation. At the policy level, these results advocate for greater institutional support of active learning methodologies through resource allocation and assessment framework development.

Building on these findings, subsequent studies could: (1) employ longitudinal designs with larger participant cohorts; (2) examine teacher perspectives on debate implementation; (3) explore hybrid models combining debate with digital tools like podcasts or video analysis; (4) assess technique effectiveness across different proficiency levels; and (5) develop standardized rubrics for evaluating debate performance. Such research would further optimize debate's application in EFL contexts and strengthen evidence-based language teaching practices.

Several constraints affected this study's scope, including a modest sample size (50 survey respondents and 4 interview participants), limited three-month duration, and resource restrictions that impacted access to supplementary materials. These limitations primarily relate to the challenging research context in Afghanistan and highlight opportunities for more extensive future investigations.

## **Funding**

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

## **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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