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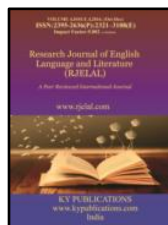
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

## IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILL: IMPLICATIONS FOR USING DEBATABLE TOPICS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSES

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of debates on enhancing speaking skill and attitudes of tertiary level students. Participants of the current study consisted of seventy students in the College of Education- Seiyun- Hadhramout University. Two intact groups were involved in the study. One class was used as a control group and the other as an experimental group. The control group was taught speaking through using the regular method followed in the college and the experimental group was taught speaking through using debates. The data for this study were collected before and after the experiment through using speaking test and a questionnaire. Then the data were interpreted using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-test and effect size. The findings of the study revealed that debates have a positive impact on developing students' speaking skills and attitudes. In light of the findings, the researcher writes recommendations for teachers and prospective researchers.

**Keywords:** debates, speaking skill, attitudes

### Introduction

Developing good competence of speaking in English is significant for most of foreign and second language learners. Consequently, students usually evaluate their improvement in second or foreign language in the way that they can be able to express themselves orally in English. Tsou (2005) stated that students cannot answer their teachers' questions in English. Most of those students have a problem in speaking English. This result shows that speaking skill is still to some extent not given enough attention and new methods should be adopted to improve this skill. The individuals in a discussion require some skills to enable them to convey their messages to other people. If they lack this skill, they cannot convince other people who have different views or ideas. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve students' speaking skills in secondary school as well as in university level.

It has been said that the effects of debates on speaking skills have been emphasized by studies conducted by researchers in L2 learning (Ur, 1996; Krieger, 2005; and Arung, 2016). However, studies on this area with EFL students in Yemen are none, particularly in Hadhramout district. Therefore, investigating the effect of debates on improving Yemeni students' speaking skill and attitudes is necessary for empirical validation. It is the opinion of the researcher that Yemeni tertiary level students can develop their speaking skills if they are taught or trained to become effective and competent speakers. There appears to be a need for debates to enhance Yemeni college students' speaking skill and attitudes.

### Literature Review

This section sheds light on the theoretical background of the study particularly the concepts of speaking and debates as well as the studies

conducted on teaching speaking through using debates.

### **Debates**

Debating is an effective way to express and discuss certain topics in different fields. In teaching English, debates are used to improve students' speaking skills and thinking. Also, teachers of English use classroom debates to enable students to work in groups. It also helps them to increase their vocabulary and to find out concepts in order to support their arguments and opinions. During preparation for debates, students do some readings by identifying the main idea, deleting less important information, and labeling information. These skills are very important for students to become competent readers and good debaters as well (Pamela and Pearson, 2004). Improving oral skills in students demand activities that will enable them to exchange ideas with their classmates and run successful discussion or debates. As suggested by Ur (1996), debates and use of discussion through using group work will motivate students to speak the target language. Likewise, Krieger (2005) states that the use of debates inside the classroom is effective for developing skills of argumentation. Similarly, Alasmari & Ahmed (2013) confirm that the use of debates inside the classroom improves students' fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary of English.

### **Speaking Skill**

Speaking in English goes through different stages in which speakers build and share meaning with others. These stages involve the use of oral speech and body languages determined by various contexts (Chaney, 1998). Speaking, according to Huebner (1960), is a skill which can be used in classrooms or outside. Learners can acquire this skill by much practice and repetitions. It is also a skill that human beings need for interacting and surviving with others. For this purpose, speaking should be given much attention in the teaching and learning process (Rohmawati, 2009). Now many linguists and teachers of English agree that interaction is an effective way to enable students to learn to speak English. Therefore, debating is effective for achieving this aim.

### **Previous Studies**

Bellon (2000) investigated the effectiveness of debates on improving speaking skill. College students at Georgia were involved in this study. Oral test was given to the students to collect data. The experiment involved two groups of forty-five students. Results showed that debate training develops speaking skills. These results indicate that these benefits will add ice to the cake if debate training is adopted across the curriculum. The findings also showed that there was high number of participants who claimed that they had been improved in their speaking skills by the end of the treatment.

Tsou (2005) evaluated the effectiveness of instruction in oral classroom participation on improving speaking skill. Tertiary students were selected from the freshman English class. Seventy students participated in this study. They were divided into two groups. Each group has 35 students. Students attended two hours each week with their EFL instructor. Debates were included as a treatment to encourage more oral participation. Preliminary tests and an oral test were used to collect data. The findings revealed that not only students speaking proficiency improved but also their attitudes towards class became more positive.

Shan (2005) investigated the effect of debate on oral communication skills and the relationship between students' personalities and their language learning. Participants were chosen randomly and divided into two groups. One group was appointed as a control group for the first six weeks, which was taught by a university professor using a discussion format to teach speech, whereas the experimental group was taught by the researcher using a debate format to teach students' public speaking skills. After six weeks, the two groups switched instruction to receive the other treatment. The whole study was conducted for 12 weeks. Before the treatment, students took the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to identify their personality preferences, and the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency to identify their language ability proficiency levels. The data analyzed in this study consisted of three impromptu speeches, student journal, semi-structured oral interviews and five questionnaires. The results

showed that both groups did not make much progress between the pre-test and the midterm test at the end of the first treatment, but both groups made much progress between the pretest and the post-test by the end of the second treatment. Moreover, from the students' viewpoints, frequent debate in class increased not only their public speaking skills, but also other skills, such as critical thinking skills, organization skills, communication skills and note-taking skills as well as learners' preferences and attitudes towards different oral task-based activities.

Junaidi's (2011) study examined whether or not critical debate technique can develop the speaking ability of the second year students. The sample of the study consisted the second year of SMAN 1 Sakra, academic year 2010/2011. Thirty one students were involved in the study. Twenty one were females and ten male students. Quantitative and qualitative data were obtained from respondents. The quantitative data were collected by using test and document analysis, while the qualitative data were collected by using observation, interview, questionnaire, and document analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed by using descriptive statistic, while the qualitative data were analyzed by using constant comparative method suggested by Hopkins (1993:149). The finding of the study showed a positive effect of Critical Debate Technique on students' speaking skill. Also this study confirms that Critical Debate Technique can raise the motivation and interest in students and also can promote students' critical thinking.

Hasanah (2012) investigated the effect of debate technique on improving students' speaking skill. The methodology used in the study reflected the characteristics of the collaborative classroom action research. The data used in the study were tests – pre and post-tests. She used four cycles, each cycle comprises of one meeting of 80 minutes. Each meeting comprises planning, implementation of the action, and reflection. The study shows that the students are confident to speak in English than before. Based on field note in each meeting, it can be found that debate technique has benefit to improve students' speaking competence in class. The results of this action research indicate that the

majority of mean scores of pre-test and post-test is 36.6 to 45.2 in cycle 1. And the mean score of post-test is 50.4 in cycle 2. The mean scores of post-test is 56.6 in cycle, the mean scores of pre-test in cycle 4 is 73, and the mean scores of post-test in cycle 4 is 81.

Khoironiyah (2012) investigated the effect of debates on improving speaking skill among students. Forty four students were involved in the study. The data of the study were collected through using speaking test, observation check list and a questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed a positive effect of debates on improving speaking skill and the study suggested that the method of debates can be adopted and used as an alternative and effective method in teaching speaking skill.

The purpose of the study of Zare & Othman (2015) was to explore students' perceptions on using classroom debate to improve critical thinking and oral communicative competence. Sixteen university students participated in the study. They were randomly assigned to a group. They were involved in debates for nine sessions in one semester. Data were collected by using a survey questionnaire and open-ended questions to be answered by the students about their perceptions of the classroom debate. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a number of volunteered participants. The results of the study showed that the debates helped improve students' critical thinking skills and oral communication ability. In addition, as the students claimed, other benefits of the debates included mastering the course content, boosting confidence, overcoming the stage fright, and improving team work skills.

The study of Yonsisno (2015) aims to find out if there is any influence of debate technique on students' speaking skill at grade 11 in secondary school.

The design of the study is experimental. The population of the study was 110 students distributed among three classes. The sample of the study was divided into two groups, namely the experimental group and the control group. The number of students in each group is 18. Based on the t-test calculation is 2,223 higher than the T-Table 1.69, then H1 accepted. The results of the

study indicate that there is a significant influence of debate technique on speaking skill of grade 11 students.

Fauzan (2016) implemented debate technique and peer assessment to improve students' speaking ability. The design of the study is action research and it was done in two cycles. There were four meetings in each cycle; three meetings was for the implementation of debate in the teaching of speaking and one meeting was for conducting the speaking test. The data were collected through using observation checklist, field-note, score sheet and a questionnaire. The findings of the study showed that students had made some progress in the result of speaking test in comparing the results of pre-test and post-test in the two cycles. These scores indicated that there is an increasing ability from being 'fair' to being 'good'. The classroom atmospheres were also increasing positively. The result shows that the students gradually could express their thought and opinions in debate practice. By practicing speaking in the debate practice, they improved their fluency as well as their confidence.

Finally, there is a great role of using debate on developing students' speaking skill. As teachers focus on using them in the classrooms, the better improvement can be achieved in speaking skills among students.

### **Significance of the Study**

The current study investigates the effect of debates on developing students' speaking skill and attitudes. Though a number of studies had been carried out, none of them investigated the effect of debates on developing students speaking skill in Hadhramout district and few of them focused on the relationship between speaking and other skills. On this particular basis, the current study is considered significant since it has a priority in this certain area.

### **Research Questions**

The current study has the following research questions:

- 1- To what extent do debates develop speaking skill?
- 2- To what extent does the use of debates affect Yemeni secondary school students' attitudes?

### **Research Methodology**

The current section describes the methodology of the study. It deals with the design of the study. It discusses the participants who were involved in this study. It also touches upon the research instruments and the statistical methods used in analyzing the data of the study.

### **Design of the Study**

Quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-tests is adopted in this study. It includes one independent variable and two dependent variables. The design of the study has one independent variable which is the debates proposed for this study. The dependent variables are speaking competence, and attitudes of students toward speaking measuring through a speaking test and a questionnaire.

### **Participants of the Study**

Seventy students were involved in the study. They constituted the available population at two colleges of education. One college is for boys and the other for women. Two intact classes of seventy native speakers of Arabic were selected to be involved in the present study. They had been studying English for three years as their major. One class was used as a control group and the other one was used as an experimental group. Students within this district (Hadhramout) generally come from families who range from middle to upper middle class with regard to socioeconomic status. They were of a similar age, ranging from 20-23 years. They were also homogenous with regard nationality, mother tongue (Arabic), exposure to English, and cultural and educational background.

### **Research Instruments**

Two research instruments were used in this study to collect the main data of the study. The first research instrument is a speaking test. This test uses three kinds of speaking activities (a communication game, a reading passage, and presentation - a topic to discuss). The speaking test is administered in three steps. In the first step two pictures are given to pair examinees, and they are asked to describe the picture and find difference in the two pictures. The second step requires the examinee to read a passage for a few minutes then the examiner will give some questions. In the third step, two

examinees are assigned to discuss a topic so that they can interact with each other. There are five components to be assessed in this test: pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, and interactive communication.

The second research instrument is an attitudinal questionnaire. This instrument was based on the work of Zare and Othman (2015). The questionnaire was intended to measure students' attitudes toward debates before and after the experiment. Therefore, students' attitudes toward debates were measured with 21 items questions/items. The students responded to the statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (5 = strongly agree) to 1 (1 = strongly disagree). The students were asked to read each statement and circle the number that applied to them to indicate to what extent the attitude described in the statement corresponded with their own attitudes. This questionnaire was given to the students in the experimental group and the control group before and after they had been exposed to the experimental treatment and had completed the oral speaking post-test. The aim of this questionnaire was to find out the attitudes of students in the experimental and control groups toward debates. It attempted to discover the activities of debates instruction that the participants found useful in developing their speaking abilities and attitudes. This was expected to provide the researcher with an idea about how far the different types of activities of debating instruction could be adopted in the tertiary levels in EFL speaking classes in Yemen.

#### Statistical Methods

Descriptive statistics such as mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyze the main data of the study. Further analysis will be performed by using paired sample t-test, and effect size to find out the extent of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variables of the current study.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study limits itself to tertiary students, level three, Hadhramout, Yemen. The study is also limited to the investigation of the impact of debates on enhancing speaking and attitudes of students. Another limitation of this study is that it is restricted

to only two colleges of education located at the same building in Hadhramout- Yemen.

#### Results

This section provides the results of the collected data based on the two questions of the study. The first part demonstrates the effects of debates on the students' speaking skill. The second part illustrates the impact of debates on students' attitudes.

#### Effects of debatable topics on improving students' speaking skill

To answer the first question, to what extent do debates develop speaking skill?, the results of the pre- and the post- questionnaire of the experimental and control groups in this section are presented and analysed. It begins with a description of the pre- and the post- questionnaire overall scores of the experimental group and then the pre- and post- questionnaire overall scores of the control group. Inferential results of the speaking test for both the experimental and control groups are also provided. To find out the effect size of the independent variable (debates) on the dependent variable (speaking skill), an effect size 'Cohen's d' (Cohen, 1992) is reported for the experimental and control groups' post-test mean scores difference.

#### Experimental and Control Groups' Descriptive Statistics Findings

In this section, Table 1 and 2 depicted the results of the pre-test and post-test for both the experimental and control groups. The means and standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test speaking test scores for the control and the experimental groups are presented.

**Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Experimental and Control Groups in the Pre-speaking test**

Group	n	Mean	SD
Experiment	35	63.23	9.8844
Control	35	64.5	9.2912

In the post-test, the mean score of the speaking test in the control group was 63.63 and the mean score of the experimental groups was 76.60. This finding showed that the participants who were received instruction on debates did significantly better in speaking test than those who did not receive instruction.

**Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Experimental and Control Groups in the Post-speaking test**

Group	n	Mean	SD
Experiment	35	76.6	7.2995
Control	35	63.63	9.8312

**Inferential Analyses of the Experimental and Control Groups' Results**

As depicted in Table3, the results of paired sample t-test showed that there was no significant difference

between the control and experimental groups in the pre-test. The mean score of speaking test was 64.50 in the control group and it was 63.23 in the experimental group. The difference between the two groups in speaking test ( $p = .029, p < .05$ ) was not significant. This means that the students in both the control and the experimental groups are having the same proficiency level of speaking skill before the debating instruction.

**Table3: Paired Sample t-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups in the post-test**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PretestExp– PretestCntr	-1.27E+00	3.01643	0.55072	-2.39302-	-.14031-	-2.300-	29	0.029

In the post-test, the finding showed that the participants who were received instruction on debates did significantly better in speaking test than those who did not receive instruction. This

difference is proved by having a statistically significant results examined by paired sample t-test ( $p = .000, p < .05$ ).

**Table 4, Paired Sample T-Test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups in the post-test**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Post-test EXp Post-test Ctrl	1.30E+01	12.04727	2.19952	8.46814	17.46519	5.895	29	0

**Effect Size**

According to Cohen (1992), when testing the difference between independent means, an effect size of 0.20 is considered small, an effect size of 0.50 is defined as medium, and an effect size of 0.80 is defined as large. For this study, the effect size of the debates on speaking skill was also calculated as the control group's post speaking test mean score minus the experimental group's post speaking test mean score divided by the pooled standard deviations. The results indicate that the effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ) of 1.52 was found when comparing the overall speaking mean scores difference of all students in the experimental and

control groups. This is interpreted as a large effect size according to Cohen (1992).

**Effects of Debates on Improving Students' Attitudes**

To answer the second question, *to what extent does the use of debates change Yemeni tertiary students' attitudes?*, the results of the pre- and the post- questionnaire of the experimental and control groups in this sub-section are presented and analysed. It begins with a description of the pre- and the post- questionnaire overall scores of the experimental group and then the pre- and post-questionnaire overall scores of the control group. Inferential results of attitude questionnaire for both



the experimental and control groups are also provided. To find out the effect size of the independent variable (debates) on the dependent variable (attitudes), an effect size 'Cohen's d' (Cohen, 1992) is reported for the experimental and control groups' post-test mean scores difference.

#### Experimental Group's Descriptive Statistics Findings

The students' responses in the experimental group in terms of the overall items of the attitudes questionnaire were examined. As shown in Table 5, the overall mean score of the attitudinal questionnaire in the pre-test for the experimental group was 42.34, indicating low overall attitudes toward speaking.

**Table5: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Experimental Group before the Experiment**

Group	n	Mean	SD
Experiment	35	42.34	3.6857

At the end of the experiment, the students' responses in terms of the overall items of the attitudinal questionnaire were again examined. As shown in Table 6, the overall mean score in the post-test was 88.60, indicating high overall attitudes toward speaking. The results indicate that students in the experimental group had obtained higher overall mean scores in the post-test than the overall mean scores obtained in the pre-test.

**Table 6: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Experimental Group after the Experiment**

Group	n	Mean	SD
Experiment	35	88.6	3.0312

#### 4.3.3(b) Control Group's Descriptive Statistics Findings

The results of the control group are presented in Tables 7 and 8. The students' responses in the

control group in terms of the overall were examined. As shown in Table 7, the overall mean of the attitudinal questionnaire in the pre-test for the control group was 43.08, indicating low overall attitudes.

**Table7: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Control before the Experiment**

Group	n	Mean	SD
control	35	43.08	4.5389

At the end of the experiment, the students' responses in terms of the overall items of attitudinal questionnaire were again examined. As shown in Table 8, the overall mean score of the post-test was 40.28, indicating low overall attitudes.

**Table 8: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Control Group in ASRA Sub-scales after the Experiment**

Group	n	Mean	SD
Control	30	40.28	4.1057

#### Inferential Analyses of the Experimental and Control Groups' Results

The total raw scores for each of the students in each group were used in the paired sample t-test to determine differences among the experimental and control groups. Table 9 displays the results of paired sample t-test on scores of students' attitudes toward speaking. Based on the paired sample t-test results, p-values <0.05 were reported for the students' attitudes. As shown in Table 9, a statistically significant difference does exist between the two groups in favour of the experimental group. The results revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in favour of the experimental group with t (50.915) p-value = .000 < 0.05.

**Table 9: Results of the experimental and control groups- paired sample t-test on post-test scores of the attitudinal questionnaire**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	ovallexpost - overalpostctrl	4.83E+01	5.61391	0.94892	46.38584	50.24273	50.915	34	0

**Effect Size**

Cohen's '*d*' (1992) measure was used to examine the effect of debates on students' attitudes toward speaking skill. An effect size of (13.59) was found when comparing the overall items of the attitudes indicating a positive effect of debates on developing students' attitudes in the experimental group.

In short, the findings for the second research question, elicited by attitudinal questionnaire, indicated that there were significant differences between the pre- and post-scores for the experimental group with a mean difference of 46.62. It was found that the mean score of the post-test was higher than the mean score of the pre-test for the experimental group. This clearly indicated that the students' mean score of their post-test was higher than their pre-test mean score and thus there was a significant difference between the pre-test mean score and the post-test mean score in favour of the experimental group. However, it was found that the mean score of the post-test is closer to the mean score of the pre-test for the control group. This entails that there was no significant difference between the pre-test mean score and the post-test mean score of the control group.

**Discussion**

On the basis of the results of the pre- and post-tests of the research instruments for the two groups, the research questions were answered. For ease of reference, the results of each of the two questions of the study are discussed separately below.

**The Effect of debates on Students' speaking skill**

The first question of the study was to examine the effect of debates on developing speaking skill in university students by comparing the findings of the experimental and control groups.

With reference to previous research, the current study documented statistically significant improvement on speaking skill achievement. The investigation of the overall mean of speaking test revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. As presented in Table 2, the experimental and control groups had a post-test mean score of 76.60 and of 63.63, respectively. This difference produces statistically

significant mean differences between the two groups on the speaking test measure, *t*-value(5.895) *p*. = .000, <0.05, with a large effect size '*d*'= 1.52, indicating that debates had a positive impact on the experimental group's speaking skills. Such a difference was statistically significant in favour of the experimental group's mean scores as compared with that of the control group's. This significant difference could be attributed to the positive effect of the proposed method, debates, over the regular speaking instruction.

Since the two groups were generally equal at the beginning of the treatment period, the significant results obtained by the experimental group might be attributed to the effectiveness of the debates. On the other hand, the difference between the pre-test and the post-test scores of the control group is not statistically significant, which might indicate the ineffectiveness of the regular way of teaching on developing students' speaking skill.

The results of the speaking test, however, do not necessarily indicate that the participants in the control group were all unskilled or poor speakers of English. From an investigation of scores of students' pre and post-tests in both groups, it appears that the students in the control group could also have learned through debates and improved their speaking performance.

It is possible then to say that the sixteen weeks of training given to the students in the experimental group learning and practicing speaking skills with more focus on debates, enable them to outperform their counterparts in the control group. Thus, the difference in the two types of instruction used in the two groups with respect to emphasis on the use of debates for the experimental group could well account for the better scores obtained in the post-test by the experimental group. The 16 weeks of speaking instruction provided evidence of significant speaking competence scores over a fixed period of time for students in the experimental group who had been taught by the debates.

Additionally, the debates showed a significant effect size of 1.52 on speaking skill achievement. This effect was not found in the control group, suggesting that debates are more suitable for developing speaking skills. According to Cohen's '*d*'



(1992), the effect size of 1.52 could be depicted as a large effect of debates on the experimental group's speaking competence.

The significant results obtained by the experimental group further supported the efficacy of the debates because these results demonstrated greater improvements for students in the experimental group with larger post-test performance that were not the case for the control group. The practical significance of the debates lies in the use of the techniques used in discussion, argumentation strategies given to students with low level of speaking ability before carrying out the experiment and the confirmation that these strategies of debates are effective for enhancing speaking skills of these students within regular classroom instruction. These results obtained by the experimental group do not count for the students in the control group. One may speculate, however, that if the debates had not been implemented, the experimental group might have exhibited the same scores such as those exhibited by the control group in the post-test.

Also the results of this study are consistent with findings from several empirical studies (Bellon, 2000; Tsou, 2005; Shan, 2005; Junaidi, 2011; Hasanah, 2012; Koironiyah, 2012; Zare & Othman, 2015; Yonsisno, 2015 and Fauzan, 2016). These studies showed the effectiveness of debates on speaking skills. Therefore, the results of this study seem to imply or suggest that the debates are effective in enhancing speaking competence.

To sum up the above discussion, the non-significant difference existing between the experimental and control groups' language proficiency scores and the speaking competence in the pre-test and the significant difference existing between the groups in the post-test imply that the debates are proved to be effective in enhancing students' speaking competence. It is evident that what the students in the experimental group have gained is quite reasonable in view of their pre-achievement. Given the lack of pre-language and speaking proficiency differences between the experimental and control groups, the careful research design and appropriate statistical analyses, post-test performance differences favouring the

experimental group could be attributed to differences between the speaking instructions of the experimental and control groups. It could be therefore, concluded that the debates are effective and worth-trying in developing Yemeni tertiary students' speaking competence.

#### **The Effect of debates on Students' Attitudes toward speaking**

With regard to the effect of debates on students' attitudes toward speaking, this section provides affirmative evidence of a significant speaking attitude gain, over a fixed period of time, for the experimental group students. The mean score of attitudes for the experimental group in the post-test is 88.60, which indicate that students in the experimental group have enjoyed debates and activities of speaking skill. This level of speaking ability enables them to be motivated and have positive attitudes towards debates. On the other hand, the mean score of attitudes for the control group in the post-test is 40.28 which might indicate that students in the control group face difficulties in speaking and therefore, they have negative attitudes towards speaking. The difference between the mean scores of the two groups might indicate that the students in the experimental group had less problems and confusion with speaking while the results of the control group might indicate that students in the control group experienced problems and confusion with speaking. This mean score difference produced a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the speaking attitude measure in favour of the experimental group [ $t(50.915)$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ , with a large effect size = 13.59, indicating that debates have a positive impact on the experimental groups' attitudes toward speaking. This effect is possibly attributed to the debates activity. Also, this result is consistent with findings from the previous empirical studies conducted by Tsou (2005), Shan (2005); Zare & Othman (2015); El Majidi, Graaffand Daniel (2015) and Mcmath (2016).

It is possible to say that providing a fixed period of time for developing students' speaking competence is a valuable speaking activity in facilitating students' attitude toward speaking. A possible explanation for the effect of debates on

speaking attitude is not direct. A positive speaking attitude may be enhanced through the way students get their confidence in speaking which in turn plays a crucial role in enhancing their competence in speaking. Attitude always contributes to speaking competence through mediation of willingness to communicate. That is, attitude toward speaking influences willingness to communicate, which increases exposure to speaking materials, which in turn improves speaking skills. However, a positive attitude toward speaking may not always increase a student's speaking behaviour. In this study, the results from the questionnaire showed that positive attitudes toward speaking of the participants in the experimental group increased. This finding indicates that gains in speaking attitude might contribute to their exposure to debates. In turn, a significant change in speaking competence has happened. This would be one of the most tenable interpretations that debates activity has a positive influence on students' attitudes towards speaking in this study.

#### **Implications for Classroom Instruction**

The findings of the current study in terms of speaking, debates and attitudes lead to a number of instructional implications for teaching and learning speaking. These implications are presented with a brief explanation.

**The first** implication from this study concerns the possibility of using debates in teaching speaking skill. The value of incorporating debates as instructional techniques in teaching speaking is effective in enhancing students' speaking competence. As evident from this study, teaching speaking within the academic materials helps in focusing students' attention on speaking, and thus improving their performance. In addition, debates technique were found to be an effective supplement to speaking in promoting higher achievement outcomes, which calls for future instructional practices by teachers to incorporate this technique into their current repertoire of instructional speaking techniques.

**Second**, the results of this study have demonstrated that when students' attitudes toward speaking are high, they might use different activities to achieve their goals than when attitudes are low. Teachers should seek to make their instruction more

appealing and interesting to students. This might be accomplished by having debatable topics, using examples and practice activities that are relevant to the culture of the students. Such instruction will add to the confidence of students when they practice these topics on their own.

**Third**, tertiary and secondary school teachers might also use the results of this study to better assist students in their speaking process. Specifically, the results might inform them about the ways of developing secondary and tertiary students' speaking competence and improving their speaking ability and performance.

#### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Based on the implication of this study, several suggestions can be made concerning debates and research in the future as follows:

- I. In order to smoothly implement debates, teachers should be trained in using debates in the speaking classes.
- II. Further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of debates on young learners, elementary and secondary grades, of English in Yemen.
- III. In teacher-training courses, teachers and supervisors of English should be made aware of the topics of the debates and the possibility of using these topics to EFL learners.
- IV. The development of attitudes toward speaking takes time and evolves slowly. To determine the long-term effect of debates on them, thus, more longitudinal studies (e.g. entire school year or several school years) are needed.
- V. Due to the limitation of a pre-post-test research design, this study could not determine if speaking competence available through debates continue after the intervention. Thus, further research is needed into the delayed effects of debates on speaking attitude and speaking competence.
- VI. To investigate the process of a change in participants' attitude toward speaking and speaking performance during and after the intervention, qualitative measures such as

observations and interviews should be used.

VII. In conducting the research of this nature with the same or identical sets of students, the prospective researcher(s) may design his/her study on other correlates, such as socio-economic status and gender as determinants of speaking proficiency or deficiency as well as their impact on the speaking competence and attitudes.

VIII. Finally, the researcher recommends that the debates can be adopted and implemented at the secondary level for effective and better teaching and learning of speaking. The researcher hopes that this recommendation will be accepted and taken into consideration by the Yemeni educators for teaching EFL speaking in the Yemeni secondary schools and universities. Presumably Arab countries and similar teaching-learning contexts may get benefit from the findings and suggestions of the present study.

### Conclusion

Within the context of research literature, the current study has provided some clear directions for effective classroom instructional practices. The results of the debates are supported by past and recent theoretical evidence about the development of speaking, and its underpinning skills, and by a dramatically rapid accretion of empirical evidence as a primary focus for intervention efforts. With this possibility, teachers can promote their instruction by employing debates to enable students to receive speaking instruction that is explicit and developmental in nature in order to maximise speaking potential for all students learning to speak as well as for others trying to improve their debatable skills. The skills and knowledge gained from speaking practices should help prepare students for success in lifelong learning and while it is possible to have a chance to teach "tomorrow's leaders", teachers and educators in Yemen need to seize the moment to meet the needs of learners in the context of Yemen's needs at present and in future.

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