

<https://doi.org/10.69639/arandu.v12i4.1801>

## The impact of Debate Activities to Enhance Speaking Skills on B1 learners at La Salle High School

*El impacto de las actividades de debate para mejorar las habilidades orales en los  
alumnos B1 de la Escuela Secundaria La Salle*

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*Artículo recibido: 18 septiembre 2025 -Aceptado para publicación: 28 octubre 2025  
Conflictos de intereses: Ninguno que declarar.*

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the implementation and effects of debate activities focusing on proficiency, confidence and possible anxiety. Employing a qualitative and quantitative approach, drawing insights from case studies and experimental designs, the research observes the development of students speaking skills across various components such as fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and comprehension. Findings from relevant studies consistently indicate that engagement in such activities leads to significant improvements in oral communication, fosters critical thinking, enhances collaborative skills, and notably reduces speaking anxiety. The sustained practice and structured environment of debates empower learners to articulate ideas more effectively and confidently, suggesting that integrating debate is a highly effective pedagogical strategy for B1 EFL learners. This exploration aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these dynamic activities contribute to overall language competence and a positive learning attitude.

*Keywords:* speaking proficiency, debate technique, persuasive speaking, B1 learners, speaking anxiety

## RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo investigar la implementación y los efectos de las actividades de debate, centrándose en la competencia, la confianza y la posible ansiedad. Empleando un enfoque cualitativo y cuantitativo, y extrayendo información de estudios de caso y diseños experimentales, la investigación observa el desarrollo de las habilidades orales de los estudiantes en diversos componentes como la fluidez, la gramática, el vocabulario, la pronunciación y la comprensión. Los hallazgos de estudios relevantes indican de manera consistente que la participación en este tipo de actividades conduce a mejoras significativas en la comunicación oral, fomenta el pensamiento crítico, mejora las habilidades colaborativas y reduce notablemente la ansiedad al hablar. La práctica sostenida y el entorno estructurado de los debates empoderan a los estudiantes para articular ideas de manera más efectiva y segura, lo que sugiere que integrar el debate es una estrategia pedagógica altamente eficaz para estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en nivel B1. Esta exploración busca ofrecer una comprensión integral de cómo estas actividades dinámicas contribuyen a la competencia lingüística general y a una actitud positiva hacia el aprendizaje.

*Palabras clave:* competencia oral, técnica de debate, discurso persuasivo, estudiantes B1, ansiedad al hablar

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## INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language remains one of the most essential competencies for learners navigating increasingly globalized educational and professional environments. Within this context, effective oral communication remains a central objective in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. It encompasses not only fluency but also the confidence to convey ideas meaningfully in social and academic settings. Within the communicative competence framework, speaking is one of the most complex and vital language skills (Gonzalez, 2024). In B1-level learners, speaking ability serves as a significant indicator of language development, as students at this level must be able to handle daily communicative tasks using clear and structured language.

Research consistently emphasizes that active speaking practice especially through interactive strategies like debates as this enhances learner motivation, language processing, and expressive competence (Rica & Indra, 2021). Debate, as a structured and competitive oral activity, offers multiple cognitive, linguistic, and social benefits. It provides opportunities for learners to develop fluency, argumentation, critical thinking, and collaboration (Afri et al., 2021; Ghalib & Mohammed, 2023). Importantly, it also addresses common affective filters such as anxiety, shyness, and fear of making mistakes, which frequently hinder speaking progress in traditional classrooms (Dieu, 2024).

Despite the growing recognition of debate's pedagogical value, many EFL classrooms, especially in Latin America, continue to rely on teacher-centered approaches that restrict student interaction. The Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model dominates, often marginalizing student voice and reducing communicative risk-taking (Sako & Shinozaki, 2023). This issue is particularly critical at the B1 level, where students may possess enough vocabulary and grammar but lack confidence and real-world practice. Therefore, student-centered interventions as in the case of debate is necessary to bridge the gap between passive knowledge and active performance (Iman, 2017).

Previous studies have examined the impact of debate techniques on university students, adult learners, and beginners in EFL contexts. Amiri et al. (2017) reported that structured debate improved ESL learners' fluency, self-awareness of grammar, and interactive strategies. Ghalib and Mohammed (2023), in a study with low-level university students, found measurable gains in fluency, vocabulary use, and confidence. Similarly, Afri et al. (2021) concluded that debate activities significantly enhance student participation and reduce anxiety. However, there is still a limited body of literature focused specifically on high school B1 learners in private institutions within Latin America.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how debate can affect the speaking skills of B1 learners at La Salle High School. It explores how this activity influence not only linguistic

features like fluency, grammar, and pronunciation but also affective dimensions such as confidence and anxiety. The ultimate goal is to provide a context-specific pedagogical model that can improve speaking performance among intermediate-level EFL learners.

### **Research context**

Unidad Educativa La Salle is a private Catholic institution located in the city of Riobamba, Chimborazo province, Ecuador. It forms part of the international La Salle educational network, which is renowned for its holistic approach to learning, emphasizing academic excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility. The school serves students from early childhood education to the final year of high school, offering a comprehensive curriculum grounded in Christian values and focused on forming ethical, reflective, and competent individuals.

As a private institution, La Salle Riobamba is distinguished by several characteristics that make it a suitable context for educational research. Firstly, it maintains a bilingual education policy, with English taught as a foreign language throughout all academic levels. By the upper grades (from 10th EGB to 3rd BGU), students are expected to reach an intermediate proficiency level aligned with the B1-B2 descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The school's emphasis on communicative competence is reflected in its curricular design, which encourages the integration of student-centered methodologies.

The school is technologically equipped, offering access to digital resources and platforms that support interactive teaching and learning. It promotes an inclusive environment, with students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Extracurricular activities such as academic contests, cultural events, and public speaking opportunities further enrich the educational experience. In total, the school serves approximately 950 students, with around 400 enrolled in upper secondary education.

Given its commitment to academic innovation and the development of global competencies, La Salle Riobamba provides a fertile ground for exploring the implementation of a debate strategy. This research takes advantage of the school's institutional strengths such as its bilingual program, structured curriculum, and openness to methodological experimentation to examine how dynamic speaking activities can improve English language proficiency among B1 learners.

### **Goal of the study**

The main objective of this study is:

To analyze the impact of debate activities on the speaking proficiency of B1-level English learners at Unidad Educativa La Salle Riobamba.

This objective focuses on examining how these oral communication strategies, when applied in a structured and consistent manner, can enhance both the linguistic and affective dimensions of students' speaking abilities. It encompasses the observation of improvements in

fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension, as well as changes in learners' confidence and levels of anxiety.

Based on this general aim, the study outlines two specific objectives:

The first specific objective is: "To evaluate the effectiveness of debate as a pedagogical tool in improving key aspects of speaking proficiency, such as spontaneous speech production, vocabulary usage, and pronunciation clarity." The goal is to measure tangible progress in students' oral performance through the implementation of debate practices.

The second specific objective is: "To promote the operational impact of participating in debates on students' speaking proficiency by analyzing self-confidence, levels of anxiety and motivation to communicate in English." These objectives are aligned with the instruments that will be applied, including speaking tests and learner perception surveys, to generate both quantitative and qualitative data that support the overall analysis.

### **Research question**

The central research question that guides this study is:

- What measurable improvements in spontaneous speech production, vocabulary usage, and pronunciation clarity can be observed in learners who participate in structured debate sessions?

This question aims to explore the effects of implementing student-centered oral communication strategies on both linguistic competence and affective outcomes within a high school EFL context.

### **Variable definition**

The present study involves two main variables: the independent variable—Debate Activities—and the dependent variable—Speaking Proficiency.

#### **Independent Variable: Debate Activities**

The independent variable refers to the use of structured and competitive oral tasks designed to encourage students to express ideas, evaluate different viewpoints, and defend arguments within a communicative framework. Debate activities promote persuasive speaking, argumentation, and critical thinking while providing a meaningful context for authentic language use. As noted by Iman (2017), debate instruction in EFL classrooms enhances learners' critical thinking and speaking skills by encouraging active participation, collaboration, and linguistic creativity. In this study, debate activities were operationalized through weekly sessions where students engaged in argument mapping, rebuttals, and persuasive speeches based on relevant social and academic topics.

#### **Dependent Variable: Speaking Proficiency**

The dependent variable represents learners' ability to communicate effectively in English through spoken interaction. Speaking proficiency encompasses several linguistic components, including fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, pronunciation, and comprehension.

According to Ceneciro et al. (2023), speaking in a foreign language involves both linguistic competence and affective dimensions such as confidence and reduced anxiety, which are essential for meaningful communication. In this research, speaking proficiency was assessed using CEFR-aligned pre- and post-tests, oral performance rubrics, and classroom observations to evaluate students' development across these linguistic and affective domains.

### **The Importance of Speaking in Language Learning**

Speaking is a fundamental component of effective communication, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It enables individuals to express thoughts, build social relationships, and achieve academic or professional goals (Dieu, 2024). Defined as an interactive process involving verbal and non-verbal communication, speaking requires both the ability to produce language and to interpret messages. Mastery of this skill depends on various linguistic elements, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. For EFL learners, the ability to speak fluently is often viewed as a critical marker of language acquisition and overall proficiency (Ceneciro et al., 2023).

### **Challenges in Developing Speaking Proficiency**

Despite its importance, EFL learners frequently struggle with speaking due to a combination of internal and external barriers. Internally, students may experience anxiety, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and shyness. These emotional challenges can occur across proficiency levels and hinder learners' willingness to speak. Research made by Setiawan et. al. (2024) show that linguistic limitations appear such as difficulty accessing vocabulary or forming coherent sentences, also restrict fluency.

Externally, classroom dynamics often exacerbate these challenges. Traditional teacher-centered instruction, characterized by the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model, limits authentic interaction and promotes passive learning. Moreover, Laoli (2021) says that EFL learners frequently lack real-world opportunities to practice English beyond the classroom, which slows language development.

### **Debate as a Pedagogical Tool**

To overcome these barriers, educators increasingly turn to student-centered approaches, with debate emerging as a particularly effective strategy. Debate encourages learners to express ideas, evaluate opposing viewpoints, and defend arguments using evidence, all within a structured, interactive setting (Iman, 2017). Unlike traditional practices, debate shifts the focus from teacher to student, fostering more meaningful communication and encouraging active participation.

Debate has also been recognized for its cognitive and linguistic benefits. It engages students in higher-order thinking, such as analysis and synthesis, while simultaneously promoting the use of complex language structures. It provides an authentic context for language use, motivating learners to speak and helping them overcome psychological barriers as stated by Gonzalez (2024).

### **Benefits of Debate in EFL Instruction**

The pedagogical value of debate is well documented as shown by Usman et.al. (2020) and Saputra & Fran (2024). Among the most frequently cited benefits is increased learner confidence and reduced speaking anxiety. Participation in debates empowers students to express their ideas more fluently and with greater conviction. Some learners report feeling less anxious due to the structured and collaborative nature of debate, which allows for preparation rather than a spontaneous interaction.

Debate also improves critical thinking, requiring learners to construct logical arguments, identify assumptions, and respond to counterpoints. Baziganya et al. (2024) demonstrates that these analytical skills enhance both speaking and academic writing abilities. Vocabulary expansion and fluency are additional gains, as students are exposed to a broader lexical range and must speak spontaneously.

Moreover, debate supports collaborative learning by fostering peer interaction and teamwork. Through group preparation and discussion, learners share perspectives and co-construct arguments, which strengthens social bonds and communication skills. Structured discourse in debates also reinforces grammatical accuracy and improves sentence construction under time constraints (Werdiningsih, 2018).

### **Empirical Evidence Supporting Debate**

Research provides robust support for the effectiveness of debate in enhancing speaking performance. For example, a case study in Malaysia found that five rounds of debate significantly improved a student's collaboration, language accuracy, and use of compensatory strategies (Tajik & Noor, 2022). Another study with 12 trained debaters reported improved sentence formation and reduced fear of public speaking (Ceneciro et al., 2023).

A quasi-experimental study by Iman (2017) found that debate instruction contributed to 96.1% of the improvement in speaking skills and 82.1% in critical thinking. Fluency showed the most significant gain (67.4%), followed by grammar and pronunciation.

### **Challenges in Implementation**

Despite its advantages, implementing debate in EFL classrooms is not without obstacles. Students with limited language proficiency may find it difficult to follow complex arguments or respond spontaneously, leading to disengagement. Cultural norms can also inhibit participation, especially in contexts where challenging authority or expressing dissent is discouraged.

Teacher-related challenges include a lack of training in structuring debates and providing feedback. Without adequate resources or time, instructors may struggle to integrate debate into the curriculum effectively. Students, too, may need support in research and argument organization says Baziganya et al. (2024).



## **Strategies for Effective Implementation**

To maximize the benefits of debate, researchers recommend several strategies. First, consistent practice and constructive feedback are essential for building speaking confidence and accuracy. Teachers should avoid overcorrecting during debates to reduce pressure and instead focus feedback on broader areas after the activity is what Amiri et al. (2017) mentions in their study.

Second, explicit training in critical thinking and argumentation prepares students for meaningful debate participation supports Lubis & Kurniawan (2021). Visual aids and structured outlines can also assist learners in organizing their thoughts, particularly those with lower proficiency.

Furthermore, integrating debate into the English curriculum with clear objectives and assessment criteria ensures alignment with learning goals. Establishing debate clubs and offering professional development for teachers can further institutionalize this practice. Selecting engaging and relevant topics helps maintain student interest and encourages real-world application of language skills.

Finally, fostering a supportive classroom environment one that encourages experimentation and accepts errors can significantly reduce anxiety and enhance learner engagement (Sako & Shinozaki, 2023).

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the effects of debate activities on the speaking proficiency of B1 learners at La Salle High School. A quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design was implemented, supported by qualitative tools such as classroom observations and perception surveys. This methodological triangulation helped ensure the credibility of the data by integrating objective performance metrics and learners' reflective insights.

The rationale for using a mixed-methods design stems from the multifaceted nature of speaking proficiency, which encompasses not only linguistic accuracy but also fluency, confidence, and affective variables (Ina et. al., 2023). Debate as an instructional strategy has been shown to influence these dimensions holistically, thereby justifying a research design that could capture both measurable performance gains and student attitudes.

### **Research Design**

The research followed a quasi-experimental model with a single group, where participants served as their own control. A pre-test was administered before the intervention, followed by four weeks of debate-based instruction, and a post-test at the end. This model was selected due to logistical constraints and the ethical responsibility of not denying any students access to the proposed pedagogical innovation.



Quantitative data from the speaking tests allowed for a comparative analysis of students' oral proficiency before and after the intervention. Meanwhile, qualitative data from surveys and observations offered insights into the psychological and motivational shifts resulting from their participation in structured debates. As emphasized by Baziganya et al. (2024), integrating both types of data strengthens the validity of findings, particularly when assessing complex skills like oral communication.

### **Participants**

To establish the criteria for participant selection, it is necessary to first describe the broader student population at Unidad Educativa La Salle Riobamba. The institution serves approximately 950 students, ranging from early childhood education (ages 3 to 4) to the final year of secondary education (3rd year of Bachillerato General Unificado). Throughout their academic journey, students receive continuous English instruction as part of the school's bilingual education program. A diagnostic assessment was conducted by the institution prior to the study, which revealed that the majority of students enrolled in the second year of Bachillerato (2nd BGU) demonstrated B1-level proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

From this larger population, a sample of 33 B1-level students from 2nd BGU was selected to participate in the study. These students were enrolled in the researcher's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class and had previously been assessed through institutional evaluations aligned with CEFR standards. The sampling technique applied was non-probabilistic convenience sampling, determined by the availability of students and their direct instructional relationship with the researcher. As Gonzalez (2024) suggested, implementing debate strategies with intermediate-level learners is particularly effective when students possess a foundational command of grammar and vocabulary, which enables them to maximize the benefits of structured speaking activities such as debate.

### **Instruments**

#### **Pre-Test and Post-Test**

To measure oral proficiency, students completed two performance-based speaking assessments: one before and one after the debate intervention (Annex B). Each test included:

- A personal interview with general questions (e.g., habits, experiences).
- An opinion-based monologue or guided discussion (e.g., "Do you think technology improves communication?").

The format and conditions of both assessments were kept consistent to ensure reliability. The tasks were aligned with CEFR B1 descriptors and assessed using a performance rubric based on fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension (Ghalib & Mohammed, 2023). Tests were recorded and scored independently by two raters to ensure inter-rater reliability.

Dieu (2024) mentions that debate provides a meaningful and interactive platform to measure progress in speaking skills, especially when linked to real-life situations and spontaneous production. Therefore, both pre- and post-tests emphasized spontaneous speech production rather than memorized content.

### **Observation Checklists**

Each debate session was monitored using a structured checklist to record levels of student participation, engagement in argumentation, clarity of ideas, and interaction with peers. This instrument helped document behavioral and communicative progress during the intervention (Annex C). Observation is a key tool in capturing non-verbal cues, confidence levels, and shifts in engagement especially important in research involving affective variables such as anxiety (Ali & Souisa, 2019).

### **Oral Performance Rubric**

In order to get a correct data collection, the same rubric was used for both speaking tests and in-class debate assessments (Annex D). It included the following components: fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, comprehension, and argumentation skills. This instrument was adapted from rubrics proposed in Iman (2017) and Afri et al. (2021), and aligned with CEFR descriptors for speaking at the B1 level.

### **Student Perception Survey**

At the end of the intervention, students completed a Likert-scale questionnaire aimed at capturing changes in self-confidence, perceived fluency, anxiety levels, and attitudes toward speaking in English (Annex E). The survey was adapted from Ceneciro et al. (2023), who found that students engaged in debate often reported “a decrease in speaking-related anxiety and an increase in willingness to participate”.

### **Procedure**

The study was conducted over six weeks, following this sequence:

- *Week 1 – Pre-Test and Survey:* Students completed an oral test and answered a baseline perception survey regarding their speaking confidence and anxiety. They were then introduced to the purpose and format of debate activities.
- *Weeks 2 to 5 – Debate Sessions:* Each week, students participated in a structured debate on relevant social or academic topics. Preparation included vocabulary brainstorming, argument mapping, and role assignments (e.g., opening speaker, rebuttal speaker). Debate formats included modified British Parliamentary and Four Corners, alternating between individual and team formats to provide varied practice.

The structure of each session included:

- Topic introduction and preparation time (30 mins)
- Debate performance (10–15 mins per group)
- Teacher-guided reflection and feedback (10 mins)

This structure follows suggestions by Amiri et al. (2017), who emphasized the importance of preparation and feedback to maximize student confidence and language accuracy.

*Week 6 – Post-Test and Final Survey:* Students completed the same oral assessment as in Week 1 (with a different but equivalent topic), and the final perception survey.

### **Research Scope**

This study focuses on analyzing the effects of structured debate and persuasive speaking activities on the speaking proficiency of B1-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at Unidad Educativa La Salle Riobamba. It examines both linguistic dimensions—such as fluency, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and oral comprehension—and affective components, including students' levels of confidence, speaking-related anxiety, and classroom motivation. These two categories are essential for understanding not only how students perform linguistically, but also how they perceive and emotionally respond to oral tasks in a second language (Ceneciro et. al., 2023). The research is delimited to students in the second year of Bachillerato General Unificado (2nd BGU), equivalent to the fifth year of high school, and is situated in a private bilingual educational institution in Ecuador that follows CEFR-aligned instruction. The educational context offers continuous English language instruction, creating a consistent foundation for longitudinal interventions focused on oral production.

### **Type of Research**

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to obtain a comprehensive perspective on students' development. Quantitative data were derived from pre- and post-test speaking assessments, as well as Likert-scale surveys, while qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, teacher field notes, and students' open-ended survey responses. The design is quasi-experimental, structured as a single-group pre-test/post-test model, which allows for within-subject comparison over the intervention period. Although the study does not include a control group, the use of multiple data sources enhances its internal validity (Wariyati et. al., 2024). As a piece of applied research, its primary aim is to identify practical pedagogical strategies that can be implemented to improve EFL oral communication in similar school contexts.

### **Data Collection and Compilation**

Data were collected over a six-week intervention period conducted during the second academic term. In the first week, students completed a diagnostic speaking test and a baseline survey measuring self-reported confidence and anxiety. Debate activities began in Week 2 and continued through Week 5, with structured tasks assigned and monitored by the instructor. During these sessions, learners prepared arguments, participated in oral exchanges, and received real-time feedback. Observations were conducted simultaneously to capture behavioral and affective patterns (Dieu, 2024). The final week included the administration of a post-test and a follow-up

survey. All data were compiled manually, reviewed by the researcher for completeness, and stored in a secure digital database for further processing.

### **Data Entry and Coding**

Quantitative results, including rubric-based speaking scores and Likert-scale survey responses, were entered into Excel spreadsheets for statistical analysis. Survey responses were numerically coded using a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), enabling the identification of trends across individual items and composite variables. Qualitative data from classroom observations and open-ended survey items were transcribed and categorized according to recurring themes such as participation, turn-taking, error correction, and spontaneous speaking (Ghalib & Mohammed, 2023). This thematic coding supported a deeper understanding of how learners engaged with the speaking tasks and how their affective responses evolved over time.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and variability (standard deviation), were calculated to evaluate the distribution of students' performance before and after the intervention. These indicators helped to quantify gains in speaking fluency, vocabulary use, and confidence levels, and allowed for the detection of any outliers in student performance. Visual tools such as bar charts and frequency tables were also generated to illustrate changes in students' scores and perceptions. This stage of analysis was crucial for providing an objective representation of the overall effectiveness of the intervention (Burak & Saricoban, 2023).

### **Comparative Analysis**

To examine differences between students' initial and final performance, pre- and post-test results were compared using rubric-based scoring systems aligned with CEFR B1 descriptors. Changes in individual components—such as coherence, vocabulary control, and pronunciation—were analyzed both at the group level and individually to identify patterns of progress. Parallel analysis was conducted on survey data to compare students' self-perceptions before and after the intervention, particularly focusing on speaking confidence and anxiety. Previous research has shown that such pre/post comparisons are effective in evaluating the impact of communicative strategies like debate (Afri et. al., 2021), as they often yield measurable shifts in learners' linguistic and emotional engagement.

### **Triangulation and Integration**

The reliability of the findings was reinforced through data triangulation, in which results from test scores, survey responses, and observation records were cross-referenced to validate consistency. This methodological integration enabled the study to verify whether linguistic improvements coincided with positive shifts in students' attitudes and behaviors. For instance, a student showing increased fluency in the post-test was also observed to participate more

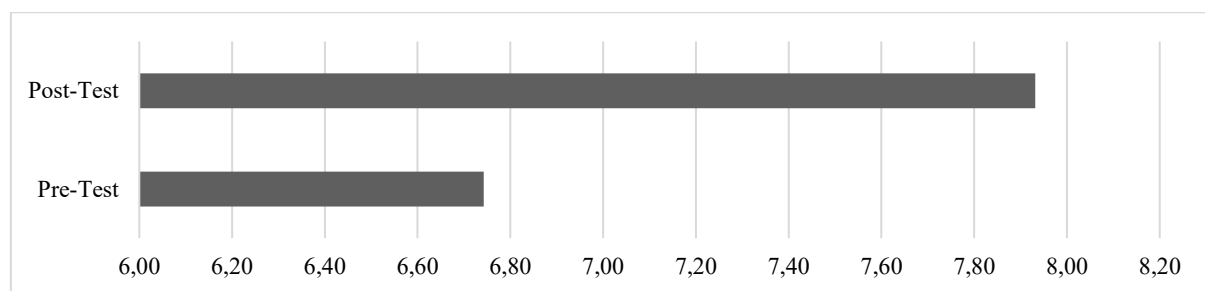
frequently during debate sessions and reported greater confidence on the final survey. According to Laoli (2021), triangulation enhances the interpretative depth of classroom-based research and supports the practical applicability of its outcomes.

### **Description and Analysis of the Pre and Post Test.**

The speaking pre- and post-tests were administered using a rubric aligned with the CEFR B1 descriptors, assessing fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. Students completed an individual oral task before and after the intervention. The rubric provided a score from 0 to 2 for each criterion, with a maximum total score of 10 points. Results are expected to show a measurable increase in speaking proficiency after the debate sessions. Preliminary data indicate that the average pre-test score was approximately 6.74, while the post-test average increased to 7.93, reflecting gains in fluency and vocabulary use. These improvements suggest that structured debate activities enhanced learners' spontaneous speaking abilities and accuracy in communication.

**Figure 1**

*Average scores obtained in pre- and post-test*



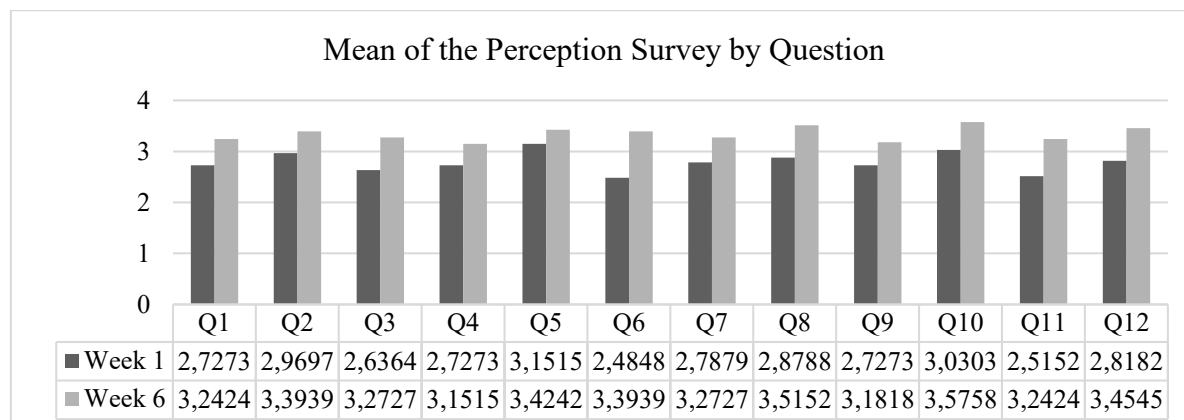
*Note.* Figure created by the author

### **Student Survey on Confidence and Anxiety**

A Likert-scale survey was conducted at the beginning and end of the intervention to measure students' self-perceived confidence and anxiety when speaking English. The survey included items such as "I feel confident speaking in front of others" and "I get nervous when I speak in English." Responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Initial results revealed high anxiety levels and low confidence, with an average score of 8.33 in Week 1. By Week 6, the average confidence score increased a 18.91%, while anxiety scores declined 19.2%, indicating that students became more comfortable and willing to speak in public. These outcomes suggest that debate activities contributed positively to learners' emotional responses toward English communication.

**Figure 2**

*Average of the perception survey by question*



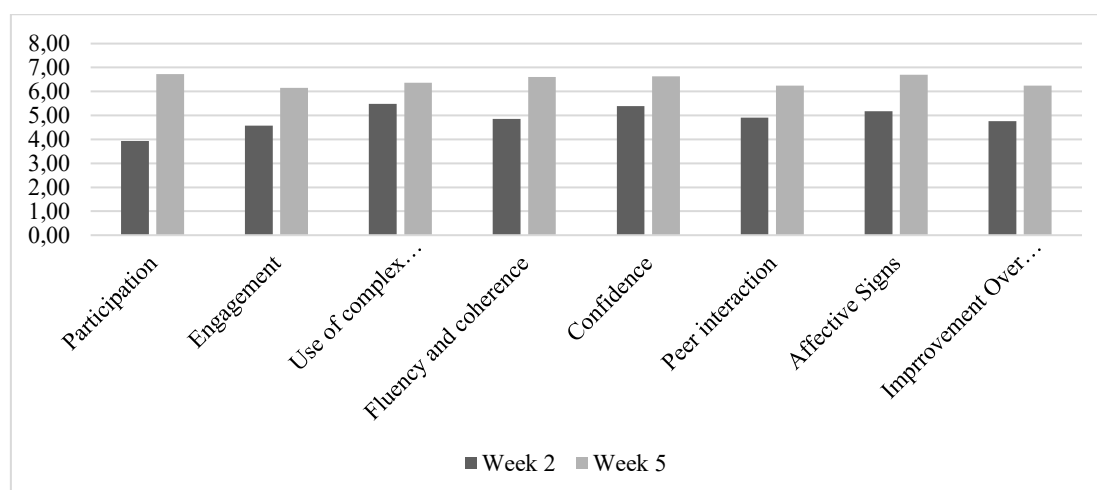
*Note.* Figure created by the author

### **Classroom Observation Checklist**

Throughout the intervention, a classroom observation checklist was used to monitor student participation, turn-taking, use of target vocabulary, and non-verbal indicators of engagement. The checklist included both quantitative marks and qualitative notes. Observations suggest a steady increase in active participation and the use of academic language structures, with the number of students initiating speech acts rising from 39.39% in Week 2 to 67.27% in Week 5. The observer also noted improvements in students' posture, eye contact, and willingness to volunteer during debates. These findings support the conclusion that students were increasingly engaged and took ownership of their speaking development over time.

**Figure 3**

*Average of the answers obtained in the classroom observation checklist*



*Note.* Figure created by the author

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSION**

The results of the study revealed measurable progress in students' speaking proficiency after participating in four weeks of structured debate sessions. Comparative analysis between the

pre-test and post-test demonstrated overall improvement across all evaluated components—fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. Students exhibited greater spontaneity in oral production, reduced hesitation, and a more coherent organization of ideas. The increase in mean scores between the pre- and post-test indicates that the debate-based instruction had a positive impact on learners' communicative performance.

Qualitative observations supported these findings. Throughout the intervention, students showed higher levels of engagement and participation during debate activities. Observation checklists documented noticeable growth in confidence, peer interaction, and the use of persuasive and academic language. Learners who were initially reluctant to speak became more active and expressive by the end of the sessions, demonstrating improved argumentation skills and willingness to take part in discussions.

Results from the post-intervention perception survey further confirmed the positive effect of debate activities on affective variables. Most participants reported increased confidence and motivation to speak English, as well as a decline in speaking-related anxiety. The majority agreed that debates provided an enjoyable and meaningful context to practice speaking, helping them overcome fear of making mistakes. These outcomes align with previous research (Iman, 2017; Ceneciro et al., 2023; Ghalib & Mohammed, 2023), which also highlights the role of debate in fostering both linguistic and psychological growth in EFL learners.

Overall, the data triangulation of test results, surveys, and classroom observations validates the effectiveness of debate as a pedagogical tool for enhancing speaking skills. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthens the interpretation that structured debate fosters a communicative and supportive classroom atmosphere conducive to oral proficiency development.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the study suggest that structured debate activities had a notable positive impact on B1-level learners' speaking proficiency and affective development. Students not only demonstrated measurable improvements in fluency, lexical diversity, and pronunciation accuracy, but also reported higher levels of motivation and reduced speaking anxiety. These findings are consistent with earlier research showing that debate-based instruction promotes spontaneous communication and enhances learner confidence in oral tasks (Iman, 2017). Based on this evidence, the integration of structured debates into EFL classroom routines can be recommended as an effective strategy to foster communicative competence and a more engaging language learning environment.



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## ANNEX A.- OPERATIONALIZATION MATRIX

Variable Category	Variable	Definition	Indicators	Measurement Instruments
Independent Variable	Debate Activities	Structured and competitive oral activities that encourage learners to express ideas, evaluate viewpoints, and defend arguments. Dimension Persuasive speaking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participation in debate rounds</li> <li>- Engagement in argumentation and critical thinking during debates</li> <li>- Use of complex language structures during debates</li> <li>- Delivery of persuasive speeches</li> <li>- Application of persuasive techniques</li> </ul>	Observation checklists of debate performance, potentially rubrics for judging debate rounds.
Dependent Variable	Speaking Proficiency	The ability to communicate effectively in English, encompassing fluency, confidence, and the ability to convey ideas meaningfully in social and academic settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fluency: Spontaneous speech production, rate of speech, smoothness of delivery</li> <li>- Accuracy (Grammar): Correct use of grammatical structures, sentence formation</li> <li>- Vocabulary: Range and appropriate use of lexical items</li> <li>- Pronunciation: Clarity and comprehensibility of spoken English</li> <li>- Comprehension: Understanding and responding to input during interaction</li> </ul>	Speaking tests (pre and post-intervention), rubrics for evaluating speaking performance.

*Note.* Matrix created by the author.

## **ANNEX B.- Pre-Test and Post-Test Design**

Objective: Evaluate the development of speaking proficiency (fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension) before and after the debate intervention for B1-level.

Test Format (3 minutes per student):

### **Part 1 – Warm-Up Interview (1 minute)**

Purpose: assess spontaneous interaction and general fluency

- Tell me about your daily routine.
- What do you usually do on weekends?
- Can you describe your favorite memory at school?

### **Part 2 – Guided Monologue (1 minute)**

Purpose: assess extended speaking and organization

Pre-Test Topic: "Describe your favorite place and explain why it is important to you."

Post-Test Topic: "Talk about a problem in society and share your opinion about how to solve it."

### **Part 3 – Follow-Up Questions (1 minute)**

Purpose: assess comprehension, elaboration, and interaction

- Do you think your ideas are easy to understand?
- How do you feel when giving your opinion in English?

### ANNEX C.- Classroom Observation Checklist

Objective: Monitor participation, engagement, language use, and affective responses during debate activities in B1 level

Category	Indicators	Observed (0-10)	Notes
Participation	Volunteers to speak, takes roles in debates		
Engagement	Shows interest in the topic, listens to others attentively		
Use of Complex Language	Uses connectors, persuasive phrases, and arguments		
Fluency and Coherence	Maintains flow of ideas without long pauses or breakdowns		
Confidence	Makes eye contact, speaks without fear, responds without prompting		
Peer Interaction	Rebuttals, questions, support or challenge of classmates' arguments		
Affective Signs	Appears relaxed, smiles, or seems more comfortable over time		
Improvements Over Time	Demonstrates visible progress in speech quality or reduced hesitation		

*Note.* Observation checklist created by the author.

## ANNEX D.- Oral Performance Rubric

Objective: Assess B1-level EFL students' ability to communicate effectively in spoken English, focusing on fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and interaction. The rubric evaluates performance in familiar contexts using appropriate vocabulary and coherent speech.

Criteria	5 – Excellent	4 – Good	3 – Fair	2 – Needs Improvement	1 – Limited
<b>Fluency</b>	Speaks smoothly with little hesitation	Some hesitation but generally fluent	Frequent pauses and self-correction	Disrupted flow; relies on short phrases	Speech is slow, fragmented, hard to follow
<b>Grammar</b>	Accurate and varied use of grammar	Minor mistakes, meaning is clear	Some consistent errors	Frequent errors, affecting clarity	Errors dominate and prevent understanding
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Rich and precise vocabulary	Adequate range; few repetitions	Limited range and repetitions	Frequent errors and gaps	Very basic or incorrect vocabulary
<b>Pronunciation</b>	Clear and natural; easily understood	Generally clear; few mispronunciations	Understandable with some effort	Difficult to understand at times	Mostly unintelligible
<b>Comprehension &amp; Interaction</b>	Responds accurately and elaborates ideas	Responds with detail; minor lapses	Answers are short; needs support	Limited comprehension; off-topic	Unable to understand/respond effectively
<b>Argumentation (for debates)</b>	Presents structured, convincing arguments	Gives reasons with some structure	Simple ideas; few connections	Weak arguments or off-topic	No logical structure or clarity

*Note.* Oral performance rubric created by the author.

## **ANNEX E.- Student Perception Survey**

**Objective:** Assess students' perception of their speaking ability, confidence, anxiety, and engagement after the intervention.

**Format:** 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

### **Part A – Confidence & Motivation**

1. I feel more confident speaking English after participating in debates.
2. I am more motivated to improve my speaking skills.
3. I am more comfortable speaking in front of the class.

### **Part B – Anxiety Reduction**

4. I feel less nervous when I speak English now.
5. I no longer worry much about making mistakes in English.
6. Debate helped me reduce my fear of public speaking.

### **Part C – Perceived Progress**

7. My vocabulary has improved because of debates.
8. I can now speak more fluently than before.
9. I can organize my ideas more clearly when I speak.

### **Part D – Engagement with Debate**

10. I enjoyed participating in the debates.
11. I would like to continue using debates in English class.
12. Debates helped me learn from my classmates.