

## EFL Student Teachers' Debate Practice: Problems And Solutions

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### **Abstract**

*Debate is considered as one of the best ways and interesting classroom activity of speaking practice. It is also one of the most challenging practices among the others. Furthermore, debate in the foreign language classroom generally helps English learners to develop their communicative abilities. Nevertheless, some English learners' still have problems in doing debate. This study aims to explore the EFL student teachers' problems and strategies to solve those problems in debate practicing in academic speaking class at Universitas Muria Kudus. This study is qualitative research with the questionnaire and interview as the instruments of collecting data. The result of this study shows that there were eleven problems faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practicing in academic speaking class. Meanwhile, the students implement seven strategies to solve those problems. This study suggests that lecturers know the potential problems in debate practicing to anticipate the difficulties when teaching debate as well as to inform the students about the strategies to cope with the problems in debate practicing.*

**Keywords:** *debate practice, EFL student teachers, problems, strategies, academic speaking*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Debate is considered as one of the best ways and interesting classroom activity of speaking practice. According to Snider and Schnurer (2002), debate foster students' active learning by giving them responsibility to understand course content, an approach that completely transform perspective from passive to active. A debate is a speaking situation in which opposite point of view are presented and argued (Dale & Wolf, 2000). Similarly, Littlewood (1981) states that a debate is about the real or simulated issue. The learners' role ensure that they have adequate shared knowledge about the issue and different opinions or interest to defend. At the end of activity, they may have to reach a concrete decision or put the issue to a vote.

Therefore, debate is an activity in which students take a position on issue and defend their position. It is a competitive intellectual activity with the principal objective of communicating ideas. Berdine (1987) has found that debate requires extensive oral communication abilities because students must defend their points of view and directly and quickly respond to the questions that they are asked. These tasks are not mechanical, but practical drilling is useful to debate better and more quickly. Furthermore, Schroeder & Ebert (1983) state that this methodology can bring many benefits to students, including an increase in their motivation to learn and consequently to master course content, along with an improvement in their research skills, empathy, and oral expression and communication skills.

Debate is one of the most challenging practices among the others. In the foreign language classroom, debate generally helps English learners to develop their communicative abilities. Fukuda (2003), in a study conducted with Japanese students, found that before the practice of debate only 30.8 per cent of the students were not afraid of expressing their opinions. After the debate, this figure rose to 56.7 per cent. Fukuda (2003) added that the knowledge and skills

which came from the practice of debate led students to become more accustomed to expressing opinions.

Ali and Sayed (2013) showed that debating can be used to learn English in both formal and informal settings. It is an activity that engages learners in practicing all skills of English language. If the debate practice modules are practiced appropriately, students will learn both English language and presentation skills which will make them confident users of English language in academic, social and professional settings. Farzaneh, Moomala, and Maryam (2017) revealed that the improvement of the participants' speaking skill after five rounds of debate activities. An analysis of the participants' use of communicative strategies and development of speaking skills through debate activities has shown that the group work strategy with peers allowed the student to interact and collaborate.

However, according to Gebhard (2000:186), "EFL learners face the students' won't talk problem". In fact, most of EFL students still have problems in speaking, especially in debate practicing. Debate is a formal activity in interactive and representational arguments. It aims to persuade judges and audience. Debating is a practice that inspires learning to get into discussion, defend their own arguments with evidence to against opponent. Berdine (1987) states that debate requires extensive oral communication abilities because students must defend their points of view and directly and quickly respond to the questions that they are asked. These tasks are not mechanical, but practical drilling is useful to debate better and more quickly. Furthermore, Schroeder & Ebert (1983) note that this methodology can bring many benefits to students and increase their motivation to learn and consequently to master course content, along with an improvement in their research skills, empathy, and oral expression and communication skills. In other words, to improve communication skill in debate, students need to know the basic debating skill.

At the English Education Department (EED) of Universitas Muria Kudus, debate is practised by the EFL student teachers in academic speaking class. The students are required to share their arguments on an issue properly and to keep up with current issues. This study focuses on the problems faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practicing at EED Universitas Muria Kudus and their strategies to solve those problems.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The method of this study is qualitative with case study as the research design. The participants were twenty-six students of EED of Univeritas Muria Kudus enrolling n academic speaking course. To collect the data, the instruments used were questionnaire and interview.

The questionnaire consists of fifteen close ended Likert scale questions with five options of answer: (5) strongly agree (4) agree (3) neutral (2) disagree (1) strongly disagree. The interview was then conducted after the questionnaire given to the EFL student teachers. It was a structured interview to get the information of the students' problems and the strategies to solve the problems. The data collected from the questionnaire and interview were analysed qualitatively.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study revealed that there were eleven problems faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practice in the academic speaking course. Those problems are difficulty to practice speaking in debate practicing, difficulty to define the motion in debate practicing, difficulty to make limitation and be the first speaker in debate practicing, lack of vocabulary in

debate practicing, difficulty to do rebuttal in debate practicing, difficulty to express an argument in debate practicing, difficulty to find the reference to support the argument in debate practicing, difficulty to build up critical thinking and prepare material, difficult in managing manner in debate practicing, difficulty to control eye contact and use note, and anxiety.

According to Alonso and Junio (2012), the more practice students do, the better result they will obtain. However, difficulty in practicing speaking in debate practicing became one of the problems faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practicing in academic speaking class. The students mostly spoke Indonesian even when they were in the classroom. Hence, it was in line with Alonso and Junio (2012) who stated that the students are difficult to practice speaking English because the students do not live in English speaking country.

In debate, there are rules to follow, one of which is the affirmative team has the right to define the motion and makes any reasonable definition of each of the terms of the proposition. If the negative challenges the reasonableness of a definition by the affirmative, the judge must accept the definition of the team that shows better grounds for its interpretation of term. However, difficulty to define the motion becomes one of the problems faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practicing in academic speaking class. One student claimed that “my problem is actually nervous and defining the motion” and another student noted “the difficult thing in debate is the motion”. Thus, it indicates that most of the students were difficult to define the motion in debate practicing and they were sometimes unfamiliar with some terms of the motion itself.

The next problem in debate practicing was difficulty to make limitation and be the first speaker. One student stated that she found it difficult to make limitation and could not be the first speaker. She said, “It is about they're totally difficult about the limitation itself, how to make limitation”, “I am never being a first speaker, so when I become the first speaker, it makes me blank”. Swanwick, Erskine, & D'Cruz (2003) defines that the duty of the first speaker of affirmative and negative team is to present team structure – team line – team split. It means that the first speaker with the duty to make limitation is considered as one of the problems faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practicing.

Another student spoke English less because he had limited vocabulary. He claimed, “I feel difficult to express it because my speaking English is not good enough and still try to find some new vocabularies to speak up in arguing in debate”. It can be concluded that vocabulary is the problem in speaking especially in debate practicing in academic speaking class. Liu and Jackson (2008) mention that EFL students have poor vocabulary as their problem in speaking English.

Swanwick, Erskine, & D'Cruz (2003) define that duty of each speaker has to defend own case against rebuttal by previous speaker. It means that the rebuttal must be done by the first speaker of negative, second and third speaker of each group to define their group's argument. Contrary to that statement, it was found that most of the students were difficult to rebut opponent's argument. One student explained his difficulty, “In speaking of course, when I have to rebut”.

The sixth problem in debate practicing is the difficulty to express an argument. One student stated, “For me, the most difficult is how to express about my opinion when I want to argue something”. According to Kidd (2002) there are six basic debating skills in which one of those skills is clarity. The ability to concisely and clearly express complex issues is what debating is all about. However, difficulty to express an argument becomes one of the problems faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practicing in academic class.

Another student said that the difficulty in debate practicing is “find the data and make sure the data”. She indicated that most of students deliver their argument as their assumption without any supporting references. In other words, finding the reference to support the argument is one of the problems revealed in debate practicing in academic speaking class.

Debate is an activity that make people to be critical thinking and these sorts of activities will foster creative and critical thinking and quick decision making in problem solving matters (Dundes, 2002). However, the EFL student teachers found out that it was difficult to build up critical thinking and preparing material in debate practicing. One student stated, “My mind maybe, because in debate we have to think critically like that and nervous, and less prepare the material”. He realized that he was less critical in thinking argument and so he did not prepare material in debate practicing in academic speaking class well. This is because the student did not know exactly about the issues surrounding to be discussed in the motion of the debate practice.

Kidd (2002) explains that style is the manner in which we communicate our arguments. However, difficulty in managing manner in debate practicing is faced by the EFL student teachers in debate practicing because they have problem when they have to deliver their argument while stand up. A student stated, “When I do the debate, actually it's hard thing that I must stand up, in debate when I share my argument”. From that statement it can be indicated that difficult in managing manner is the problem in debate practicing in academic speaking class.

A student said that she could not control eye contact with the audience and the judges while she delivered arguments and she had blank when she did not read a note. She claimed, “I got difficulty to say my argument and then I lost my eye contact to the audience and the judge. I usually got blank if there is no note in my hand, so I just lost some argument”. Kidd (2002) explains that one of the basic debating skills is the use of note and eye contact. Notes are not essential, but they must be brief and well organized to be effective. There is absolutely no point in trying to speak without notes. Of course, note should never become obtrusive and damage eye contact with the audience, nor should they ever be read for verbatim. Eye contact is important, but keep shifting the gaze is also necessary.

The last problem revealed from this research is anxiety. It is related to psychological aspect. The EFL student teachers' anxiety can be seen when they delivered arguments in front of people. Furthermore, difficulty to practise before debate practice and lack of vocabulary are also contributing factors that cause students to feel anxious. Juhana (2010) notes that anxiety is the feeling of nervous correlated to the specific situation. When the students are dominated by this situation during practicing English, it must obstruct students from speaking fluently.

This study also reveals the strategies used by the EFL student teachers to solve their problems in debate practicing in academic speaking class. They are doing rehearsal before debate practice, pausing argument in few minutes to mediate some word to be produced, repeating some word, using non-linguistic signals when delivering argument, having discussion with group before debate practice, making some notes, reading to get knowledge from any sources.

According to Alonso and Junio (2012), the more practice students do, the better result they will obtain. This study indicates that doing rehearsal before debate practice is one of the strategies used by the EFL student teachers to solve their problems. Some students state, “I try to speak by standing up that's actually I do it a lot thing, I prepare some stuff, and I prepare the camera in my room at my home. I prepare for table and then I try to stand up and I try to record myself and then I try to review and try again”, “I practice with my group and discuss the

motion”, and “Practice in group and prepare the motion”. By doing rehearsal, the students try solve the problems in debate practicing, especially for overcoming the difficulties in managing manner when delivering arguments, expressing an argument in debate practicing and coping with their anxiety when speaking in front of people.

The other strategy used by the EFL student teachers is using pausing argument in few minutes to mediate some word to be produced. The average of students agree that the students used pause argument in few minutes to mediate some word to be produced. Thus, it becomes a strategy used by the students to solve their problem in debate practicing in academic speaking class while delivering argument. Similarly, Linblad (2011) states that students can pause in few times to find some words to be produced in speaking English and to solve their problem.

Repeating some words is the other strategy taken by the EFL student teachers. Most of the students say that they repeat some words. This strategy makes speaking going on and other people understand to deal with the speaking problem. It is in line with Linblad (2011) who notes that students repeat some words in order to produce what they intend to say.

The EFL student teachers also use non-linguistic signals as a strategy while delivering argument. Most of the students agree that they add mimes, gesture, and facial expression while delivering argument. By having that strategy, the students can solve the problem in debate practicing in academic speaking class related to the difficulty to express an argument, control eye contact and anxiety in debate practicing. Ya-ni (2007) states that students add mimes, gestures, and facial expression while speaking occur to declare something in English.

Most of the EFL student teachers have discussion in group before debate practice. One student stated, “We have discussion, a big discussion with the some of different groups and we just talk about the motion and what is the limitation and anything else” while another student said, “I practice with my group and discuss about the motion”. It can be inferred that having discussion with group before debate practice is a good strategy in solving the students’ problems in debate practicing in academic speaking class related to less in preparing material and anxious feeling. It also drills the students to practise more. Byrne (1986) mentions that by discussion is meant by any exchange of ideas and opinion. Thus, it is one of effective strategies to solve the problems in debate practice.

Making note is another strategy to solve the EFL student teachers' problems in debate practicing in academic speaking class. A student claimed, “We take a note”. Another student stated, “I try to write what I want to say in a paper first”. Through this strategy, students can easily remember what words they intend to say by making some notes in debate practicing. As a result, students could deliver argument in front of people well. Making some notes is then a good strategy to solve the problems related to difficulty in expressing argument and to do rebuttal in debate practicing. As Kidd (2002) explains, notes are essential, but they must be brief and well organized to be effective. There is absolutely no point in trying to speak without notes. Note should never become obtrusive and damage the contact with the audience, nor should they ever read from verbatim. Most people sketch out the meaning headings of their speech, with brief note under each. When writing notes for rebuttal during the debate, it is usually better to use separate sheet of paper to take down the details of what the other speaker has said and then transfer a rough outline onto the notes used.

The last strategy used by the EFL student teachers to solve the problems in debate practicing is reading to get knowledge from any sources. One student claimed, “My strategies is before I do debate, I read a lot of sources to build my vocabularies and before I argue something I read a lot of books to support my argument”, while another student said, “Search

the data from the internet". Reading to get knowledge from many sources such as book, newspaper or internet is useful for students to solve their problems related to anxiety, to enrich their vocabulary, to solve difficulty in expressing an argument in debate practicing in academic speaking class. It was in line with Pikulski and Templeton (2004) who state that through reading, students can build their vocabularies knowledge. Moreover, Rajasekaran (2010) notes that students can involve to group of reading in order to solve and decrease their anxiety.

## CONCLUSION

Debate enables English learners to develop their communicative abilities through the challenging practices in the foreign language classroom. However, during the debate practice some problems might arise as it occurred to the EFL students of the English Education Department of Universitas Muria Kudus. Those problems include ten difficulty aspects and one psychological aspect. The difficulties aspects consist of difficulty to practice speaking, difficulty to define the motion, difficulty to make limitation and be the first speaker in debate practicing, lack of vocabulary, difficulty to rebuttal, difficulty to express an argument, difficulty to find the data to support an argument, difficulty to build up critical thinking, difficulty in managing manner, difficulty to control eye contact and use note in debate practicing. Meanwhile, the psychological aspect is anxiety.

To solve those problems, the EFL student teachers implement some strategies. They are doing rehearsal before debate practice, pausing argument in few minutes to mediate some words to be produced, repeating some words, using non-linguistic signals when delivered argument, having discussion with group before debate practice, making some notes, and reading to get knowledge from any sources.

It is suggested that the lecturers know the potential problems in debate practicing and so can anticipate the difficulties when teaching debate. Furthermore, they can inform the students about the strategies to cope with the problems faced in debate practicing.

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