

PARLIAMENTARY ENGLISH DEBATE WITHIN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXT: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Erwin Suhendra

Universitas Bumigora, erwin@universitasbumigora.ac.id

Abstract

This paper discusses further contributions of English debate within the Communicative Language Teaching framework (therefore CLT). In the English as a Foreign Language classrooms (henceforth EFL), presentation remains the prominent instructional strategy, which does not accommodate learners' English skills and critical thinking skills development in a more engaging, interactive and critical way. Parliamentary English debate as an interactive instructional strategy has been found to mediate the aforementioned skills and the macro skills being learnt such as reading, speaking, listening and writing. However, there has been a dearth of scholarly discussion on the English debate's contributions framed under the CLT. For this reason, this paper tries to shed lights on how the parliamentary English debate and its contributions to EFL learners in the CLT sphere. Debating as a teaching strategy does not only serve purposes for the students' language skills development but also promote their critical thinking skills and self-confidence.

Keywords: *Parliamentary Debate, CLT, EFL.*

INTRODUCTION

Communicative language teaching derives from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes, at least, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research. The focus has been the elaboration and implementation of programs and methodologies that promote the development of functional language ability through learners' participation in communicative events.

“Central to CLT is the understanding of language learning as both an educational and a political issue” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 120).

The traditional teaching approaches to teaching grammar have been widely adopted in the Indonesian English language classrooms in spite of the many curriculum overhauls. This practice of English language teaching is not without criticism. For several years, English has been taught in the sense of communication to help students gain their competencies more straightforwardly in learning language. Cooperative learning is believed to help students find it easier to comprehend learning, because it provides them communicative and interactive learning environment. The essence of language is for communicative purposes; therefore, students should acquire the language use, not only knowing language forms, but also understanding what interlocutors are spoken and knowing how to respond to their communicative production properly.

Critical language educators in Indonesia such as Alwasilah (2001) and Dardjowidjojo (2003) opine that the grammar based teaching strategies undermine students' communicative competence and critical thinking skills. Many students face these problems even they have learnt English for years. In the learning activity, students may not be able suitable with the teaching method that are used by the teacher or in some other case the students were too passive and or they enjoy learning individually. Some of these problems might appear in language learning. The awareness of teachers are demanded in this case, on how teacher give a right role to each students; how students enjoy the learning, how students able to communicate with their partners and how students demand to work cooperatively to develop their leadership too.

Therefore, debate offers the activity which covers those necessities of the teaching foreign languages for communicative purposes especially the teaching speaking in Indonesian EFL context. Krieger (2005) states engaging in actual debate also has the potential to enhance critical thinking skills including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, as these are essential components in the formulation of refutations. It is assumed that debate arms the students with analytical skills defined as the ability to critically analyze a problem and propose workable solutions. Research skills would be an invaluable skill that

student will gain in debate. This covers traditional library research to the Internet- based research.

Current Communicative Language Teaching is quite satisfied enough to see the progress of the students in learning. Because of the monotone of the topic given to the students, and present it even if there are some discussion which seems that is not enough to dig students' competence. Only a few of the students were involved in discussion session. Therefore, few of the students comprehend the learning. On the other hand, debate offers more skills in students learning language such as speaking, listening and writing. Students will read several issues before write their argument and in arguing their ideas students also will learn listening in listening to their opponents arguments. Moreover, they gain critical ideas more than they get in the students' presentation or discussion.

The diversity of teaching techniques might be derived from the necessity and teachers belief toward learning language. Cooperative Learning is an instructional strategy where small teams of students work together to maximize their individual and collective learning. After team members are organized into these small groups and receive instruction from their teacher, students within the team cooperate with one another and work through the assignment until each team member successfully understands and completes it. Ultimately the shared goals are accomplished individually by each team member, and collectively by the group as a whole. In cooperative learning for instance we have jigsaw, Number Head Together (NHT), Think Pair Share (TPS), stay-stray and Round Robin. These teaching strategy were actually has the same purposes to teach students communicatively. Different strategy has each advantages and weaknesses, these strategies might be different to be implemented depend on the appropriate subject that will be taught.

In most undergraduate study programs, students learn through presentation in order to see their comprehension on learning the subject. This strategy implemented not merely in English language learning but in most other subject too. In language learning for instance, students were distributed several topics related to the issues etc. then the topic that had been distributed then discussed in the next meeting. Within discussion session students were expected

to have a strong critical analysis relate to students' presentation. However, some students who fail to present their topic or paper will be blame because of the unexpected materials, topics, or issues which he provide was not relevant to the topic that should be discussed.

In relation to the teaching language teacher are responsible to develop knowledge/ability necessary to manipulate the linguistic system and use it spontaneously and flexibly in order to express their intended message; understand the distinction and the connection between the linguistic forms they have mastered and the communicative functions they need to perform; develop styles and strategies required to communicate meanings as effectively as possible in concrete situations; and become aware of the sociocultural norms governing the use of language appropriate to different social circumstances. Therefore, teacher must foster meaningful communication in the classroom by developing activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Greenstreet (1993) has a strong reason why a debate is very effective for the students to have strong reasoning ability. Debate should be very significant to be unique and distinct in form of intellectual clash, thus it demands the students to provide a strong argument, students are required to research issues (which requires knowledge of how to use libraries and data banks) organizing the data, analyzing the data, synthesizing different kinds of data and evaluate information with respect to the quality of conclusions. This strong argument should be supported with the strong reason. The key of whether the argument is strong lies on the critical analysis of the argument. Thus, students should be able to use effective method in delivering reasoning, such inductive and deductive reasoning (Sueb, 2014). Further, Kennedy (2007) emphasizes that in-class debates as an instructional strategy benefits to mastery of the content and the development of critical thinking skills, empathy, and oral communication skills.

METHOD

This paper is aimed to see further contribution of English debate within communicative language teaching context. Further teaching and learning within English as a Foreign Language

classroom is demanding the students to be active, interactive within the learning. Like it or not, most of the students are afraid to use their language. Therefore the target language environment should be created within EFL classroom. This research reveals the current teaching of English within the EFL classroom and the parliamentary debate as the effective approach to improve students' speaking skills. Further, students developed their confidences and their critical thinking skills.

This research is observed throughout the English as Foreign Language learning and combined with the Parliamentary Debate experiences of the researcher to seek its effectiveness and benefits towards the learning. Several references by the experts who did the research at the same fields are also considered as the strong points to support the researcher's ideas. The references is objected and become the data and evidences towards the research. Therefore, this research used qualitative approach within its method.

English Debate and EFL Class

Debate in EFL has a heavy image. Partly it is the result of formal debating Debate is exclusive, sophisticated, and it is only to people who are had a good in English or so called "advanced level". To my surprise, debate was adopting the communicative language teaching where the students are forced to use their English instead of memorize the whole words that I had been memorized for several years. Oller and Richard-Amato define a debate as an activity for getting learners to talk which, if it is properly gauged to the level of students, generates high levels of interaction and communication. It can also help to lower the level of self-consciousness as students abandon themselves to the heat and humor of either real or feigned argumentation (1983).

Debate is the methodology which demands the students to use their English language which is actually the same with the Communicative Language Teaching which provide the students an activity in where they can show, use and empower their ideas, English and their communication. Yet debate is more challenging and fun compare to speech. Debate is also as the game for the student which not only emphasis on which teams are loose or win the game, but it tends to help them think critically and learn to conveying people

by providing a strong argument and develop their communication among others. Lybert (1985) in the article by Nola Kortner Aies in his *Debate and Communication Skill*, debates has three goals, which are; increasing the critical thinking and conveying the argumentation, developing the academic skills and the development in communication.

Competency in critical thinking is rightly viewed as a requisite intellectual skill for self-realization as an effective participant in human affairs, for the pursuit of higher education, and for successful participation in the highly competitive world of business and the professions. Debate is today, as it has been since classical times, one of the best methods of learning and applying the principles of critical thinking (Freely, 1990). I then started to realize every debater learn much more about critical thinking than the old adage "there are two sides to every coin." They learn how to spot errors in reasoning and proof. They gain a greater respect for the complexity of ideas and they learn how to criticize in a productive way based on facts and logic.

Debater is debating based on facts and logic while to provide facts on logic the students' needs to observe the case to support the ideas and analyze the source than the students comes to have several point within the argument. This process also taught students in doing research where they have the hypothesis to analyze. After analyzing the hypothesis then the student have synthesize to be synthesized and the final process is than they have a thesis which is the same that they taught by their teacher in the class. Yet, debaters are often using this studying process and these things ease them and support their academic carrier in the class.

Debaters must analyze, synthesize and evaluate the knowledge they have acquired in order to propose, oppose and make competing choices. Semlak (1977) concluded that "students with debate experience were significantly better at employing the three communication skills (analysis, delivery, and organization) utilized in this study than students without experience". The experts, other debaters and I as well has proven the benefits of debate to empower students' affective skill and improve their English which cover Speaking, Reading, Listening and Writing which the most important of all is that the students have a chance to increase their communication skills.

Debate is also a successful method of teaching because of its inherently interactive format. This methodology describes competitive debate, both in terms of how debates are formatted and in its reliance on "coaching" as a method of instruction. Research has demonstrated that interactive formats are the preferred method for achieving critical thinking, problem solving ability, higher level cognitive learning, attitude change, moral development, and communication skill development.

Some educators feel that debate should become more audience centered and focused on community issues rather than on tournaments (Scott, 2006). Many college students who are involved in debate feel that the emphasis on tournament debating makes them too argumentative in everyday life. For younger children, a focus on developing communication skills rather than on competition in debate fosters attitudes of open-mindedness, fairness, and tolerance for the viewpoints of others. (Atwater, 1984)

According to Cahyono (2011) Debate is considered as another variation of speaking concept to enrich the students' experience. In the classroom, debate might be applied as the followings:

- The students are divided into two groups.
- One group is the pro side, and the other is in the contra side to the topic (motion).
- Each group discusses their own part.
- Then, the teacher asks each group in turns to deliver their ideas.
- The teacher may write all the ideas on the board.
- When they have finished debating, the teacher and the students make a conclusion.

Although the parliamentary debate has strength, but parliamentary debate also has weaknesses, some of the weaknesses are follows:

- a. Debate is only used for certain subject. Debate technique only can be used for specific subject, such as subject that related with agreeing and disagreeing and giving argument.
- b. Debate needs long times and preparations. Many preparations need in debating in order to make debate runs well. Students should

prepare their arguments before debate to make them easier to attack the opponent's opinion.

c. Make the students' emotional in defending their argument. Many students can't manage their emotion when they defend their argument.

To teach English through parliamentary debate, there are several procedure to establish in order to make the learning effective and understand by the students. First, the lecturer introduced debate from the video played and further told the students the component of debate, such as; moderator, time keeper, etc. and to ease the students' understanding, the students also given handout on the parliamentary debate format. After distributing the handout, the students were given time to have further questions related to debate.

Second, the lecturer came-up with issues in daily life and asked the students' opinion prior to demonstrate the students of the debate systems used during the study by involving some of the volunteers from the students. It aimed to give more understanding and stages during the debate. Third, each team or group was given time to discuss their ideas and construct their argument. Fourth, students take turn to deliver their argumentation or ideas. Fifth, students who acted as the adjudicator gave comments and responses towards the debate and the last was, the lecturer gave feedback and along with the students lecturer made a conclusion.

Teaching debate is teaching thinking. In debating, we verbalize ideas, explain them, and assess them. To debate, you must have ideas about something. You must explain your ideas in a persuasive manner. And you must find and offer support for your ideas. You do this by building up your ideas (making them more persuasive and providing more powerful support), while looking for possible weaknesses in other arguments or ideas. The key words, from Bloom's taxonomy, are understanding, analyzing, and Evaluating. In doing debate, you train yourself in these critical skills. This can help you in thinking, writing, giving presentations, and making decisions. That's a lot of benefit from one activity! In learning how to debate, these skills are made visible. The process is visible. It can be taught. It can be seen, discussed, and evaluated in a social setting.

CONCLUSION

Students will get more experience to use their language communicatively and express their ideas argumentatively. From the beginning of the debate, students learn to criticize some issue launched or proposed teachers. Next, students begin to share with their ideas with their partner and proofing whether their argument is logic and accepted with others through debating. The rest of the students also will not only watch their friend's performance but they take part on debating by giving some evaluation and comment related to their friends' performance.

For what I have been observed in my undergraduate program I found several and many of the teachers and even lecturer who is teaching English taught their students in conventional method. They came into the class, spoken English to their students without knowing their students understand or not then giving some explanation, elaboration and speech dealing with their material till then giving assignment if it is necessary. Even we now have a better curriculum but the case is still happening. These cause difficulties to the students to improve their English. On the other hand, the students also has less chance to practice their English while they got the theory in their class of course they only will memorize the words without use the words since they do not have an environment in where they can express, use the English which they had got in the class.

So there are good reasons for doing debate. But can it be enjoyable? Many people would say yes. If we believe what game designer Raph Koster says, "Fun is just another word for learning," there is no reason why it shouldn't be. I believe debate will helps students in their academic carrier and helps them to gain better English. However, this paper as from the personal reflection further elaboration and evidences are offing.

REFERENCES

- Aiex, Nola Kortner. (1990). Eric digest research articles. *Debate and Communication Skills*. Retrieved from on 4 November 2013.
- Alwasilah, C. A. (2001). *Language, culture and education*. Bandung: Andira.

- Atwater, F. D. (1984). Improving Communication at Work. *The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication*, vol 51, 4: pp 2-7.
- Cahyono, Y. B. (2011). The Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia. State University of Malang Press. Malang
- Dardjowidjojo, S. (2003). English teaching: Where and how we begin?. In K. A. Sukanto (Ed.), *Rampai Bahasa, Pendidikan dan Budaya: Kumpulan Esai Soenjono Dardjowidjojo*, Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia. Pp: 29-40.
- Freely, A. J. (1986). *Argumentation and debate: Critical thinking for reasoned decision making*. Belmont, NY: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Greenstreet, R. (1993). Academic debate and critical thinking: A look at the evidence. *National Forensic Journal*, 11, 33-28.
- Kennedy, Ruth. (2007). In-class debates: Fertile ground for active learning and the cultivation of critical thinking and oral communication skills. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 19(2), 183-190.
- Krieger, D. (2005). Teaching debate to ESL students: A six-class unit. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 11(2). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Krieger-Debate.html>
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). New Jersey, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Oller, W. J. (1983). *Methods that Work: A Smorgasbord of Ideas for Language Teachers*. New York. Newbury House Publisher
- Scott, S. (2006). Perceptions of students' learning critical thinking through debate in a technology classroom: A case study. *The Journal of Technology Studies*, 39-44.
- Semlak, W. D. (1977). The Effect of Debate Training on Students Participating in the Bicentennial Youth Debates. *The Journal of the American Forensic Association*, Vol. 13 (4).
- Sueb. (2014). Critical Thinking Reflected in Academic Practices for English Language Classroom. Unpublished Thesis. Malang. Graduate Program State University of Malang.