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DEBATE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY ON ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND CRITICAL THINKING AMONG PALESTINIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: Debate-based pedagogy has gained increasing attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction due to its potential to promote communicative competence and critical thinking skills. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of debate in enhancing English language proficiency and fostering critical thinking skills among Palestinian EFL students. Using a mixed-method design, the researchers collected data from 100 undergraduate English major students and 4 instructors at the English department of Hebron University. They utilized a structured questionnaire and open-ended questions. The results of this study revealed that both students and instructors had high levels of agreement regarding the effectiveness of debate in improving students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, confidence, and critical thinking skills. Qualitative data from the instructors supported these results, highlighting high engagement, enhanced confidence, and critical thinking. The researchers conclude that debate constitutes an effective communicative pedagogy in EFL university contexts, particularly for fostering fluency-oriented skills and critical thinking. Students should practice more in organizing their ideas, managing their time, and speaking confidently during debate to overcome the challenges they face. In general, the result of this study may help instructors know how to deal with challenges that students face during debate. This is going to be reflected in their students' performance.
Keywords: *debate; English language proficiency; critical thinking; mixed method.*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary EFL instruction, critical thinking and communicative competence have gained a lot of attention to achieve educational goals. Most instructors employ traditional teacher-centered methods that emphasize grammar memorization and passive learning. These methods have come under attack as they fail to prepare learners to use language in authentic contexts. Therefore, communicative and learner-centered methods, such as the Communicative Approach, have gained importance, particularly in contexts where opportunities for real-life English interaction is limited. In Palestinian educational institutions, EFL learners face challenges such as lack of exposure to English outside the classroom and sociocultural constraints that me hinder oral participation. These challenges require engaging methods that encourage learners to interact in a conducive environment. That is why there is a need for new and fun ways to learn. One of the methods is using a debate strategy. In this respect, debate offers a structured context in which learners ought to explain positions respond to opposing perspectives, and negotiate meaning. This strategy promotes meaningful communication and collaborative learning. From a discourse perspective, such tasks also require speakers to guide audiences through claims and supporting reasons, a function closely related to metadiscourse and using language communicatively (Krieger, 2005; Hyland, 2005; Hyland 2015; Hyland, & Jiang,

2022; McMonagle & Savitz, 2023; Weisi & Zandi, 2024).

Recent research has steadily confirmed the pedagogical value of debate-based strategy use in the EFL context. Previous studies demonstrated that debate improves speaking fluency, vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension and learner confidence (Alasmari & Ahmed, 2013; El Majidi et al., 2024; Safitri & Suntari, 2024; Putri, 2023) According to Alasmari and Ahmed (2013), using debate in EFL classes helps students practice the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, they said that "debaters need to master pronunciation of words, stress, vocabulary, brainstorming, script writing, logic building, argumentation, and refutation." (p. 148). Therefore, debating in English requires students to develop a wide range of language and thinking skills. Other studies underscored the role of debate in enhancing critical thinking, logical expression, and evaluative judgment (Alén et al., 2015). Yao, 2024; Saputri et al., 2022). Debate is viewed, within communicative frameworks, as a method that prioritized meaning-focused interaction, and spontaneous language production. More recent empirical evidence is provided by El Majidi et al. (2024) whose controlled pre-test/post-test study found progresses in some dimensions of L2 speaking performance, including fluency, accuracy, coherence, and lexical complexity. Other studies on learners' perceptions have also reported evidence of debate for speaking development (Kassem, 2021; Oweis & Karain, 2021; Salvador-Garcia, 2023; Putri, 2023; Saputra, 2024; Safitri, 2024; Haliti, 2025, Ha et al., 2026).

However, despite the growing body of research, the existing literature is mostly skill specific or methodologically limited as it relied heavily on quantitative design or concentrated mostly on learners' perceptions. Few studies in the Arab world have examined how debate affects language development and critical thinking while also addressing challenges from both learner and instructor perspectives. In fact, there is scarcity in the studies that discussed the general benefits of debate in EFL pedagogy and utilized mixed method that triangulate learner perception with instructor insights within the same institutional context. Moreover, previous studies provided limited attention to the challenges that may arise while implementing the debate strategy such as emotional control time management (Sukkaew et al., 2025), and idea organization, alongside its pedagogical benefits.

This study aims to: explore the role of debate in enhancing English language proficiency and fostering critical thinking skills among university students, know the challenges that students face when participating in debates, obtain instructors' opinions who have used debate in their classrooms, gather instructors' and students' opinions on the importance of implementing debate in classrooms.

This study aims to address the following questions: (1) What is the role of debate in enhancing English language proficiency and fostering critical thinking skills among university students? (2) What are the challenges that face students when participating in debates? (3) What are the views of instructors who have used debate in their teaching? (4) Why is implementing debate in classrooms essential in the views of instructors and students?

This study offers five distinctive contributions to literature on debate-based pedagogy. Firstly, methodologically, it employs a convergent mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative data (n=100) with qualitative open-ended responses and instructor interviews (n=4), addressing the over-reliance on single-method designs in existing debate research. Secondly, contextually, it offers the first mixed-methods exploration of debate pedagogy in Palestinian higher education by addressing a real research gap by providing empirical evidence on how Palestinian students actually use perceive debate-strategy. Thirdly, theoretically, it contributes to Constructivist Theory, Communicative Language Learning and Symbolic Interactionist Theory. So it is going to contribute to the growing body of research in these areas. Fourth, practically and on the pedagogical level, it helps instructors understand the benefits students gain from using this strategy and the challenges that may encounter them. Moreover, it offers evidence-based insights to inform curriculum design, teaching strategies and assessment practices in university-level EFL program. Finally, analytically, this study moves beyond skill-

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specific outcomes to examine the dual dimensions of debate-both its benefits for language and critical thinking development and the challenges students encounter- thus providing a better balanced account of debate-based strategy.

There are some limitations to this study in terms of where the students who will respond to the questionnaire study and their field of study. All students in this study are Hebron University students and are studying the English language in the academic year 2024-2025. This limits the generalizability of the results to other age groups.

This section talks first about the theoretical conceptual framework, and then it is followed by the practical studies that explain how using debate can help students improve their language skills and promote critical thinking. These ideas together help us understand why debate is useful in language learning.

This study is based on three theoretical foundations, such as Constructivist Learning Theory and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Symbolic Interactionist Theory. These perspectives help explain the linguistic, cognitive, and social processes that maybe involved when learners take part in debate. Recent discussions of social constructivism, communicative competence, and classroom interaction offer additional context for these overlapping perspectives (Zhang, 2021; Hattani, 2021).

First, Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1954). This theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge by interacting, talking, and working together. Debate as a way of arguing encourages students to think critically about information (Arar, 2022; Nguyen & Le 2024). It allows them to look at different viewpoints and make strong arguments. This process creates an active learning environment. It encourages students to think deeply and use higher-level thinking skills like analyzing, combining ideas, and making decisions (Mumtaz & Latif, 2017).

Second, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) suggests using debate in learning. This approach focuses on using language in real situations. Debate has a significant role in improving students' language skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It gives them the opportunity to use the language in real conversation. While preparing their arguments and responses, they expand their vocabulary and improve their sentence structure. In addition, they practice using academic and persuasive language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Debate can therefore provide chances for both interaction and pushed output, while vocabulary knowledge remains important in expressing arguments precisely.

According to Symbolic Interactionist Theory, debates are social interactions. People use language to share meaning. They adjust their views, or self-perception, based on others' responses (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). Moreover, debate serves as both a cognitive and communicative activity. It enhances the development of critical thinking and language skills (Mokhtar et al., 2020). When students are in debate, they are required to conduct research and organize their ideas logically. They express their ideas in a clear way and listen to others at the same time. They also respond to different viewpoints with good reasoning. These steps enhance their critical thinking and language skills (Carter, 2023). Related work highlights the importance of peer interaction, learners' confidence, and affective factors in oral participation (Aulia, & Apoko, (2022).

The three theatrical perspectives operate collectively to explains debates' pedagogical value. Firstly, constructivism demonstrates the cognitive dimensions and how through debate students engaged in an active process to construct knowledge, evaluate evidence and synthesizing information. Secondly, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) explains the linguistic dimension as debate offers meaningful real-life interaction. Finally, interactionism explains the social and affective dimensions. Learners negotiate meaning through debate, moreover, they get prompt feedback and reconstruct their self-perceptions as confident language users. Therefore, collectively, suggest that debate-based pedagogy simultaneously engages cognitive, linguistic, and social processes, making it a uniquely powerful tool for holistic language development.

This section reviews previous studies on the use of debate in EFL contexts. The first section discusses debate as a pedagogical tool in EFL context. This is followed by studies examining the relationship between debate and English language proficiency as well as the

role of debate in the development of critical thinking skills. Finally, the section addresses the use of debate in EFL university contexts and identifies gaps in existing literature.

Using debate as a pedagogical tool in EFL and ESL classrooms has received a lot of attention because of its value in improving both language competence and critical thinking skills (AlRubaie et al. 2024; Pham, 2024; Khatimah et al., 2025). A number of studies explored debate-based pedagogy from different methodological perspectives, demonstrating its value as an effective instructional method. Previous studies reflect a growing interest in understanding how structured argumentative interaction may enhance meaningful language use and learner engagement (Safie & Baharudin, 2025). Aclan and Aziz (2015), for example, investigated how structured debate can enhance English communication skills among students in EFL/ESL classrooms. The study underscored the importance of incorporating parliamentary debate into EFL/ESL curricula, the importance of incorporating debate into ESL/EFL curricula, which will be an ideal pedagogical tool to promote communication and English language skills. Likewise, Islamiah and Fadila (2024) conducted a study to identify the students' attitudes toward using debate strategy to promote English language skills literacy. This study reported that all participants agreed that the debate strategy positively affected their literacy skills. They recommend using debate as a tool to promote learning language skills. These results reveal that debate can promote active participation in the learning process.

Several studies have highlighted the positive influence of debate on learners' speaking skills, including, confidence, accuracy, fluency, and communicative effectiveness (Haliti, 2025). For example, El Majidi, De Graaf, and Janssen (2024) investigated the effect of debate as a pedagogical tool for enhancing speaking competence in second language education. They demonstrated through a pre-test and post-test control group design that debate pedagogy is an effective tool for improving students' speaking skills in second language education. "Debate pedagogy seems to trigger deeper and more elaborate processing of the content and form, which helped the students to achieve greater proficiency and automaticity over time" (p. 2448). Similarly, Fatima, Zahid, and Ullah (2023) examined the impact of the discussion teaching technique on the speaking skills of ESL learners. The researchers used a qualitative research design. They found that discussion-based strategies, including debate, notably improved ESL students' speaking skills, confidence, and fluency. Likewise, Putri (2023) investigated EFL students' perception of the use of debate as a strategy for learning to speak. The researcher revealed that debate is perceived as an effective strategy in enhancing speaking skills, critical thinking, accuracy, and fluency. Finally, Safitri and Suntari (2024) investigated the effectiveness of English debate on the speaking skills of eleventh-grade students. Through quantitative evidence, they emphasized the role of debate in fostering speaking performance. Together, these studies suggest that debate is as a significant pedagogical tool for fostering oral proficiency in EFL context (Tang, 2024).

In addition to linguistic benefits, debate has been widely acknowledged as a means of enhancing critical thinking skills. Learners are given opportunities to engage in complex cognitive processes through rebuttal, evidence evaluation and argument construction (Tessier, 2009; Iman, 2017; Othman & Zare, 2015; Tao & Griffith, 2020; Chen et al., 2024). Hattani (2021) investigated how communicative language teaching can promote critical thinking through debate in class. In her study, data was collected through observation and focus group interviews. The study highlighted the important role of using the debate to promote linguistic competence for the learners, their confidence, and their ability to think critically. The researcher recommended using interactive activities like debates to enhance active learning and self-directed learning among students. Similarly, Yao (2024) investigated the impact of English debate participation on students' critical thinking and logical expression using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings indicated that participation in English debate is a powerful method for enhancing students' critical thinking and logical reasoning skills. Gulnaz (2020) explored the role of debate in class to develop learners' critical thinking and communication skills. The researcher found that debate effectively promotes learners' critical thinking skills and helps them master their course content because

it allows them to speak, listen, read, and write. He highly recommended using debate strategy in universities and schools. Each learner should be assigned to defend his point of view in the debate and to have a written assignment, and the teacher should grade their performance. Moreover, through a quantitative method, Saputri, Indah, and Rasyid (2022) investigated both the direct and indirect effects of debate, critical thinking disposition, and self-confidence on enhancing students' speaking skills. The findings showed that debate significantly had direct and indirect impacts on students' critical thinking, self-confidence, and speaking proficiency, underscoring the interrelated nature of cognitive and linguistic development.

While previous research has extensively explored the impact of debate on language skills such as speaking flency (El Majidi et al., 2024; Putri, 2023; Ha et al., 2026).) and critical thinking (Yao, 2024; Saputri et al., 2022), three significant gaps remain. Firstly, most previous research utilized single-method designs. This limited their ability to capture both measurable outcomes and the lived experiences of the participants. Secondly, there is a scarcity of research in Arab and particularly Palestinian EFL contexts, despite unique sociocultural constraints that shape classroom interaction and oral participation. Thirdly, the existing research has mainly explored learner outcomes, with limited attention given to instructors' perspectives or the practical challenges associated with implementing debate in classroom settings. There are missing opportunities to understand how pedagogical intentions align with student experiences. This study addresses these gaps by employing a convergent mixed-method design that triangulates survey data from 100 students with in-depth interviews from four instructors. Exploring both learners' and instructors' can provide deeper insights into how debate support speaking development, critical thinking, and decision-making skills, as well as challenges learners face while having debate activities. Engaging with these gaps provides insights on the role of debate in promoting critical thinking skills and language learning in real-life under-researched Palestinian higher education educational context.

METHOD

This section describes the methods of the study. The techniques used to collect and analyze data are discussed in this section. The research population, the sample selected, and the research equipment used to collect the necessary data are then described. It presents information about participants, instrumentation, and the procedure of the study.

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of debate-based instruction in EFL classrooms.

The study was conducted in the spring semester of 2025 at the English department at Hebron University. The sample included four instructors and 100 students; the participants were selected using stratified random sampling based on academic level to ensure representation across freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. However, the resulting sample over-represents seniors (67%) and females (97%) reflecting the actual demographics of the English department at Hebron University. This gender imbalance, while limiting generalizability to male students, is characteristic of humanities programs in Palestinian higher education. Future studies may deliberately recruit more male participants to observe probable gender differences in debate experiences. Table 1 presents the demographic data.

Table 1. *The results of the demographic data*

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	97	97.0
	Male	3	3.0
	Total	100	100.0
Level	Freshman	3	3.0
	Sophomore	10	10.0
	Junior	20	20.0
	Senior	67	67.0

	Total	100	100.0
Major	English Literature	9	9.0
	English-French	26	26.0
	English teaching methods	21	21.0
	English Literature Translation Track	28	28.0
	Translation & Interpretation	16	16.0
	Total	100	100.0

As Table 1 reveals, the majority of the students were females (97%), and 3% were males. Regarding their academic level, 67% were seniors, 20% were juniors, 10% were sophomores, and 3% were freshmen, and this is normal because the majority of students in the groups that the researchers distributed were seniors. 28% were majoring in English Literature, 26% were English-French, 21% were English teaching methods, 16% were Translation & Interpretation, and the lowest percentage was from English Literature, and they were 9%. The diversity of the respondents was suitable for this investigation.

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study. The researchers used a questionnaire to explore the role of debate in enhancing English language proficiency and fostering critical thinking skills. The first section of the questionnaire covered the demographic information. The second section contained an attitude scale with 19 items. The answers are arranged on a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). The last section included five open-ended questions. Also, they conducted interviews, which consisted of five questions, with four instructors at Hebron University who teach oral courses to investigate their attitudes toward using debate in their classrooms.

Content and face validity were ensured through expert review and pilot testing. The questionnaire's reliability coefficient was calculated. The final result indicates that the questionnaire's total Cronbach Alpha Coefficient is very high (r = 0.80), presenting a highly reliable instrument.

The researchers prepared the questionnaire, and then they designed it by using Google Forms. They sent the questionnaire to English major students at Hebron University in the spring semester of the year 2025 via WhatsApp groups for this semester's courses. After students filled it out, quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, with descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) calculated for each item. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and instructor interviews (with four instructors at Hebron University) were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six phase thematic analysis: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and writing. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results collected from the questionnaire after being analyzed using SPSS. First, the researchers are going to answer the first research question, "What is the role of debate in enhancing English language proficiency and fostering critical thinking skills among university students?"

Table 2. *Debate's effect on English language proficiency*

	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	Debate helped me to understand the importance of listening to different points of view	3.41	.588
7	Debate enhanced my critical listening skill	3.33	.587
4	Debate helps me expand my English vocabulary	3.32	.649
2	Debate helped me pronounce English properly	3.26	.562
1	Debate helped me to become more fluent in English.	3.23	.664
3	Debate improved my accent in English.	3.22	.660
5	Debate improves my English grammar.	2.96	.764

Table 2 shows the items as they are arranged in an ascending order based on the means. As the table demonstrates, most of the items received high degrees of agreement, with item 6 getting the highest mean score (3.41), and it shows that students strongly agree with the idea that "Debate helped me to understand the importance of listening to different points of view." Additionally, students strongly agree with item 7, "Debate enhanced their critical listening skill." (Mean = 3.33). A similar result is achieved by item 4, which recorded a mean score of 3.32. This means that students agree that "debate helps them expand their English vocabulary."

Item number 2: "Debate helped me pronounce English properly." (Mean = 3.26) illustrates that students agreed that debate helped them improve their English pronunciation. This finding shows how practicing speaking during debate helped them say English words more clearly and accurately. Moreover, the mean score of item number 1 (3.23) is close to item number 3, which means that they believe that debate helped them to become more fluent in English, and it improved their English accent. Finally, item number 5, "Debate improves my English grammar, gets the lowest score with a mean score of 2; this result was not surprising. Since debate focuses more on speaking skills, students don't have enough time to pay attention to the grammar. The following table presents learners' perceptions of the debate technique.

Table 3. *Perception of debate technique among learners*

	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
10	Debate is an effective method to raise confidence to answer questions in front of a group of people.	3.36	.628
9	Debate is a good way to enhance body language, which influences a person's perception and decision-making.	3.18	.672
11	Debate serves as an effective motivational strategy for acquiring English language skills.	3.16	.677
8	Debate is a helpful tool for researching and studying issues.	3.12	.729

As we notice, item 10 achieved a mean score of 3.36, stating that "debate is an effective method to raise confidence to answer questions in front of a group of people." Moreover, item number 9, "Debate is a good way to enhance body language, which influences a person's perception and decision-making," indicates that most students agreed that debate contributes to developing body language, which in turn affects how others see them and influences their ability to make decisions.

The mean (3.16) of item number 11, "Debate serves as an effective motivational strategy for acquiring English language skills," reveals that the students agreed that debate helped motivate them to learn English. The interactive and competitive nature of debate encourages them to improve their English language skills. And item number 8 (3.12) shows that the students agreed with the idea that "debate is a helpful tool for researching and studying issues." Getting ready for a debate made them search for information and think carefully about different sources. This helped them get better at finding information and understanding it. Table 4 presents the effect of debate on critical thinking skills.

Table 4. *The effect of debate on critical thinking skills*

	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
12	Debate made me think more deeply.	3.30	.628
13	Debate has provided me with a more objective perspective on various opinions.	3.21	.640
14	Debate helped me to think and make decisions more quickly.	3.10	.674

For item 12, which states that "Debate made them think more deeply." Mean =3.30 illustrates that the students agreed with the effectiveness of using debate in enhancing critical thinking, as debate made them think more deeply. Regarding item number 13,

which states that "Debate has provided me with a more objective perspective on various opinions." (Mean =3.21) students agree that debate helps them develop a more objective way of looking at different perspectives. By listening to different opinions, students learned to be more objective and fair. And item 14 (3.14), most of the students agreed that "Debate helped to think and make decisions more quickly." The quick nature of debate trained them to think faster and to answer quickly. Now we are going to answer the second question, which is "What are the challenges that face students when participating in debates?"

Table 5. *Students' challenges during debate*

	Item	Mean	S.td Deviation
19	Speaking in front of a crowd during debates makes me nervous.	2.76	.830
16	I find it challenging to organize my ideas during debate.	2.73	.802
18	I find it difficult to manage my time during debate.	2.51	.870
15	I find it challenging to understand the opposing team's argument.	2.46	.731
17	I lose my emotional control during debate.	2.33	.853

Items 19, 16, 18, 15, and 17 show the challenges that face students, like, "Speaking in front of a crowd during debates makes them nervous." Mean = 2.76. This means that they may need to work on building more confidence. Students also believe that "they find it challenging to organize their ideas during debate" (2.73); they find it difficult to manage their time during debate (mean: 2.51). This may be due to a lack of practice. Finally, they find it challenging to understand the opposing team's argument, and they lose their emotional control during the debate. And this affects their ability to think clearly and respond calmly.

Results of open ended questions

At the end of the questionnaire, students were asked many questions about using debate and the challenges they face during debate. According to participants' responses to the question "What do you think are the most important language and thinking skills that can be acquired through debate?" Many language skills can be acquired through debate, such as speaking, because they need it to argue their points and engage with the audience. Another important skill to acquire is listening, because it helps them to understand opposing points of view and respond to them effectively. Critical thinking is important to acquire because they need to analyze ideas and present them clearly and quickly.

Looking at the responses to the question "What strategies do you think could be used to make debates more effective in improving English language skills?" It turns out that there are several key aspects to making the debate more effective. Feedback helps participants to understand what they have done and what they need to improve, and it builds confidence by showing progress, not just mistakes. Building vocabulary is also important. The more words the speaker knows, the easier it is to express ideas clearly. Listening skills are important in debate. It helps you to understand arguments and to respond effectively. Choosing a good topic is essential to make the debate effective by keeping participants motivated. Finally, practice helps to improve debating skills by helping participants to become more confident and fluent.

To the third question, "What challenges do you face when using English in debates? How do you deal with them?

Participants replied that they face some challenges during the debate, such as limited vocabulary, struggling to find the right words quickly, feeling nervous, and having difficulty understanding speakers when they speak fast. One student clarified: ‘When the other team speaks fast, I cannot catch their points. My mind goes blank and I forget all the words I prepared. Another added: “I know the words in my mind, but when I start speaking, they disappear. I experience anxiety and my English words just disappear.” To deal with

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these challenges, they try to expand their vocabulary through listening or speaking, practicing, and using prepared phrases for the debate. Finally, they try to improve their listening skills to understand the other team's point of view, which builds confidence and relieves the pressure they had during the debate.

Participants' answers to the question "How do debates help to build confidence and fluency in speaking English?" They felt that debates help to build confidence and fluency in speaking English because debates give them an opportunity to speak in front of others, which reduces the pressure; they also encourage quick thinking and clear expression and improve vocabulary and pronunciation; over time, they feel comfortable in debates as they express their ideas and respond quickly.

To the last question, "In your experience, how does taking part in debates affect critical thinking and argumentation skills in English?" The participant replied that debate helps improve critical thinking and argumentation skills by making them analyze different opinions, evaluate evidence, and build logical arguments. It teaches them how to think deeply and organize their ideas clearly. Debate makes them see things from different perspectives by seeing how people think differently. Debate also helps them build confidence in speaking and makes them better at communicating in English.

Results of interview questions

The researchers conducted interviews with four instructors at Hebron University to answer the third research question, "What are the views of instructors who have used debate in their teaching?" and in order to answer this question, they were asked the following questions:

Question number one was, "How do you include debates in your ELT lesson plans, and what learning goals do you pursue through them?" They answered that they incorporate debates into ELT lessons to encourage students to participate. One of them, for example, said, "I use debate by assigning debatable topics and dividing students into groups." Another instructor noted that "I use debates in speaking lessons to encourage discussion and argumentation. I plan topics related to students' interests or course themes. My goals include improving fluency, confidence, and the ability to express opinions clearly. To help students engage, I sometimes use IELTS Speaking Part 3 question samples, which encourage deeper discussion and critical thinking."

Looking at the responses to the second question, "What language skills do you think debates develop in students (e.g., speaking, listening, and critical thinking)? And how?" Instructors agreed that debates improve several essential language skills. These include speaking, by encouraging clear expression of ideas; listening, through active comprehension (Tous et al., 2025). and engagement with opposing arguments; and critical thinking, by requiring logical analysis and thoughtful responses. Debates also enhance vocabulary, pronunciation, and the use of persuasive language. As one teacher put it, "Debating also develops vocabulary and argument structure because students need to use precise language to defend their ideas. Another instructor noted that all of these can be considered sub-skills involved in debate: students learn to speak fluently, respond appropriately, listen attentively, and think critically, all while defending their stance on a controversial topic. Ultimately, incorporating debate in the classroom integrates multiple language skills in a dynamic, interactive way that fosters both linguistic competence and confidence.

According to the instructors' responses to the question, "What challenges do you face when using debates in the classroom, and how do you deal with them?" They mentioned some challenges include students' lack of confidence, limited knowledge, and shallow thinking. These can be addressed by motivating students, assigning roles, and setting clear time limits. For shy students, starting with smaller roles can help build their confidence. The lack of depth in students' insights can hinder their debating skills, but with structured guidance, these issues can be overcome.

To the fourth question, "How do you measure the impact of debates on students' English language and critical thinking skills?" One of them said that "I assess the impact of debate by observing how well students use the language and apply critical thinking during discussions." They focus on students' fluency, coherence, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation; progress is usually measured

through instructor feedback and students' own reflection on their performance. By engaging in debates, students develop their ability to negotiate meaning, which strengthens their overall proficiency in the second language.

To the last question, "What do you think about the effectiveness of debates compared to traditional teaching methods in improving students' English language skills?" They said that compared to traditional methods like lectures or textbooks, exercises and debates make learning more interactive. For example, instead of just memorizing vocabulary, students use words in real discussions. Rather than practicing isolated grammar exercises, they apply structure naturally while arguing their points. Debates also push students to think quickly, unlike reading comprehension tasks where they have more time to process information. By incorporating IELTS-style speaking cards, students get real-world practice for structured discussions, which helps them improve both academic and everyday communication skills.

The current study was carried out on English language students at Hebron University to explore the role of debate in enhancing English language proficiency and fostering critical thinking skills. To gather the needed data, both a questionnaire and interviews were used. The questionnaire helped collect general opinions from a larger group of students, while the interviews provided more detailed insights and personal experiences. Combining these two methods strengthened the reliability of the findings and addressed all the research questions.

According to the results, it is believed that the students strongly agree that debate has a positive role in fostering their language and critical thinking skills. The results reveal that debate based pedagogy. Plays a significant role in promoting FL Learners' communicative competence and critical thinking. For example, most of them strongly agreed on the idea that debate helped them to understand the importance of listening to different points of view. This is to some extent an agreement with the study of Alasmari and Ahmed (2013) that debate enhanced all language skills. These findings align with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, which emphasize meaning-focused interaction over formal accuracy. The study found that debate is an effective method to raise confidence to answer questions in front of a group of people. Most of the students strongly agreed that debate is an effective method to raise confidence to answer questions in front of a group of people. There is a similarity between this result and the results of Saputri, Indah, and Rasyid (2022), which show that debate had a positive impact on raising students' self-confidence. Also, the results of Fatima, Zahid, and Ullah (2023) show that debate notably improved students' self-confidence. According to the constructivist theory, debate-based activities improve knowledge construction through peer negotiation, collaborative meaning-making, and social interaction. Likewise, Symbolic interactionism explains the gains in confidence as learners reconstruct their self-perception through role-taking, feedback, and audience response during debate-based activities.

Additionally, it is believed that the students agreed that debate can improve their listening skills. They strongly agreed that debate enhanced their critical listening skills, which aligns with the study of Gulnaz (2020), which revealed that using debate improved English language skills, including listening skills. Most of the students agreed that debate helps them expand their English vocabulary; also, they strongly agreed that debate made them think more deeply, which is in agreement with the study of Gulnaz (2020), which said that debate helps students to think critically. Moreover, students believe that debate helped them pronounce English properly. There is a similarity between this result and the result of El Majidi, De Graaf, and Janssen (2021). They found that debate is an effective tool for improving students' speaking skills in second language education.

The study found that debate helped students to become more fluent in English and that debate improved their accent in English. There is an agreement between this result and the result of Putri (2023). Her result showed the effectiveness of using debate in enhancing speaking skills, accuracy, and fluency. The relatively lower grammar scores reflect a well-documented fluency-accuracy trade-off in communication tasks. And students believed that debate has provided them with a more objective perspective on various opinions. This is in agreement with the study of Aclan and Aziz (2015) that suggests the importance

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of using debate to promote communication and English language skills.

Students agree that debate is a good way to enhance body language, which influences a person's perception and makes decisions quickly. This is to some extent an agreement with the study of Yao (2024), which stated that participation in English debate is a powerful method for enhancing students' logical expression skills. Furthermore, this study found that debate serves as an effective motivational strategy for acquiring English language skills. This is in agreement with the study of Hattani (2021). The researcher recommended using interactive activities like debates to enhance active learning and self-directed learning among students. On the other hand, students feel that debate didn't help them to improve their English grammar. And this is normal because they speak quickly during debate, and they don't pay attention to the grammar. This challenge can be ascribed to the unstructured and time-pressured nature of debate, where learners set priorities for meaning over grammatical accuracy.

As we notice that most of the students and instructors support implementing debate in the classrooms. This indicates to some extent an agreement with Putri's study (2023), where the students admitted the positive role of using debate in EFL classes. After conducting interviews, the finding reveals that teachers support using debates in classrooms. This is in agreement with the study of Aclan and Aziz (2015). They showed the importance of incorporating parliamentary debate into ESL/EFL curricula as an ideal pedagogical tool to promote communication and English language skills. Moreover, this result was echoed by Safitri and Suntari (2024). They recommend putting debates into the curricula of learning a language. However, qualitative findings indicated that affective challenges such as anxiety (Sukkaew et al., 2025) and emotional control remain significant, highlighting the need for instructional scaffolding, clearly defined roles, and systemic explicit training in debate strategies. Instructors' perspectives further reinforced the value of debate as an alternative to traditional teaching methods, particularly for promoting engagement and authentic language use.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on exploring the role of debate in enhancing English language proficiency and fostering critical thinking skills. The research questions were answered by using a questionnaire and interviews conducted with students and instructors of the English department at Hebron University. The results showed that both students and instructors had a highly positive view of using debate in the classroom. They strongly agreed that it helped improve students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and critical listening skills (mean=3.33). Additionally, they noted that debate increased students' confidence (mean=3.36), improved their body language, and enhanced their ability to think quickly and objectively. However, some students faced challenges during the debate, such as difficulty in understanding the opposite team's argument, organizing their ideas, managing their time, controlling their emotions, and feeling nervous when speaking in front of a crowd. Both students and instructors emphasized that debate strategy should be used more often in English classrooms because debate has a positive impact on students' learning and communication skills. Future research could explore how different debate styles affect students' critical thinking and communication skills. This could offer valuable insights into creating teaching strategies that enhance students' academic and personal development.

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommended the following: (1) Debate should be used more in English classes because it helps students speak better, learn new words, and think faster and more critically. (2) Students should receive more support and practice in organizing their ideas, managing their time, and speaking confidently during debate to overcome the challenges they face. (3) Different debate styles should be explored and applied to find the most effective method for improving students' language and communication skills. (4) It is suggested to conduct further studies on debate strategy in other universities with a larger group of students to compare the results and get a clearer understanding.

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