

Using Debate to Teach: A Multi-skilling Pedagogy Often Neglected by University Academic Staff

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Abstract. This paper describes both qualitative and quantitative studies that addressed the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy in a graduate level course at Makerere University (Uganda). The investigation was triggered by persistent complaints from students who had participated in international exchange programmes where they were taught using different pedagogical methods including debate. They wondered why they were hardly taught using debate; yet, its use would equip them with extra skills. Using a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, the study established that: a whole 20 percent of the student participants had never been taught using debate; the academic staff respondents acknowledged their limited use of debate due to hurdles; and all respondents reportedly perceived the use of debate as an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing class participation, oral communication, research, and critical thinking skills. It was concluded that members of academic staff were aware of the benefits of using debate as a pedagogical tool; though they were unable to use it, regularly. The author recommends academic staff in universities to consider using debate since it is perceived not only to encourage active learning, but to equip learners with additional competences.

Keywords: academic staff; debate; graduate students; multi-skilling; pedagogy

Introduction

World over, the call for effective teaching and learning at all levels of education is on the increase. Practically, the concern about ineffective teaching is not only being raised by parents, but virtually all stakeholders in education including school administrators, civil society as well as scholars. In higher education in particular, the apprehension about using poor methods of teaching has equally been raised by students. Yet, effective teaching requires making choices from a repertoire of pedagogical strategies that do not only enhance learning, but also promote the development of additional competences such as communication,

critical thinking as well as interpersonal skills among others. But choosing an appropriate teaching strategy, even for the most accomplished teacher, is no easy feat. The case of academic staff at the College of Education and External Studies (CEES) of Makerere University does not seem to be an exception. In this study, the researcher looked at how often the graduate students at CEES were taught their courses through debate and whether the students perceived the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy to enhance their class participation, oral communication, research, and critical thinking skills. In this section, the author presents the statement of the background, the research objectives, and questions.

Historically, while several scholars seem to agree that the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy occurred many years ago, there appears to be controversy over who developed it and when it was first used. According to Vo and Morris (2006), the use of debate might have been pioneered by Sophists and Aristotle. But Darby (2007) and Hall (2011) believe that it is Protagoras of Abdera who initiated using debate as a pedagogical technique around the 5th century. Nonetheless, there is consensus that the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy emanated from ancient Greece well before it spread to other parts of the world. However, as a pedagogical method, debate flourished during the 19th and early 20th century, before it somehow lost popularity and its use in schools actually diminished (Zare & Othman, 2013). But the curiosity to use debate as a pedagogy across the world again started in the 1980s. According to Darby (2007), this renewed interest was premised on the philosophy that debate helps to promote critical thinking, logic, and oral communication skills. This belief still persists amongst educators up to the present day. As a result, the author hypothesised that the use of debate to teach graduate students in education courses is a worthy pedagogical tool to consider by those who teach (or lecture) such students; thus, the genesis of this study.

Over the years, a number of scholars have investigated the role debate plays in teaching, and how it can be successfully used to teach different disciplines in different contexts. According to Shen (2015), debate has been successfully used as a pedagogical strategy to teach several disciplines. For instance, while Fallahi and Haney (2011), revealed that debate has been successfully used in teaching psychology, Healey (2012) and Combs and Bourne (1994) respectively reported the successful use of debate to teach geography, and marketing. In addition, debate has also been found to be effectively used in teaching sociology (Green & Klug, 1990), and more recently, in on-line teaching (Park, Kier & Jugdey, 2011). However, many of these studies were conducted in the context of developed nations. Moreover, most of these studies focused on investigating the use of debate in teaching undergraduate students. This study, however, was focused on examining the benefits of using debate in teaching graduate students pursuing education-related programmes. Besides, the context of this study is that of a developing nation; therefore, the researcher expected that the study findings would fill this knowledge gap.

According to Vargo (2012), the results of several previous studies have revealed that using debate to teach allows students to take responsibility for their own

learning since it grants the students the opportunity to prepare and present their work to other fellow students. As such, its use as a pedagogical tool is in line with the pedagogic theory which states that individuals learn well when they study together and interact. But Zare and Othman (2013) add that using debate to teach helps the students in many ways - including in how the students can make use of library resources, think, analyse issues, and be able to present their arguments in a logical manner. These imply that the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy can help in developing other additional skills like research, critical thinking and communication skills (Brown, 2015). This study was thus intended to verify these claims in the context of graduate education.

In this study, three key concepts were focused on, namely: debate, pedagogy and multi-skilling. Debate, according to Darby (2007, p.1), is "an old teaching-learning strategy that presupposes an established position, either pro or con, on an issue, assertion, proposition, or solution to a problem." But Hall (2011, p.1) defines debate as "an education strategy that fosters clinical reasoning and thinking skills as well as heightens awareness of attitudes, values and beliefs". However, as a pedagogical method, debate enables students to express their opinions over an issue from two different perspectives. This is done in order to contradict one another's argument (Chang & Cho, 2010). In this study, the researcher focused on investigating formal debate organised for the purpose of teaching a topic in a course in a classroom setting. The second major concept of interest in this study was pedagogy. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016), the word pedagogy is used to refer to the method and practice of teaching. It may also be looked at as the art or profession of teaching. In this study, pedagogy was used to refer to the use of debate as a teaching method. Finally, the study also focused on the concept of multi-skilling. The term multi-skilling has different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. According to Macquarie Dictionary (2016), multi-skilling refers to the situation where individual workers are made to possess several skills that make them versatile in a work situation. In that regard, a multi-skilled worker is one who possesses or acquires a wide range of skills and knowledge that he/she can apply to accomplish tasks well beyond the original training. In the context of this study however, the term multi-skilling was used to refer to a range of skills that a student was expected to acquire when taught using debate including class participation, oral communication, research, and critical thinking skills.

In terms of context, the researcher investigated the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy at CEES. This College is one of the nine colleges that was established by the University Council in 2011 when the University adopted the collegiate system of administration and management (Makerere University, 2011). The College is comprised of three schools, namely: the School of Education (SoE), School of Distance and Life-long learning (SoDLL), and the East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development (EASHESD). Each year, the College enrolls approximately 100 students on its different masters and taught-PhD programmes (Makerere University, 2014a). The College employs 119 academic staff of different ranks ranging from teaching assistants to professors (Makerere University, 2014b). Of recent, the College has experienced some cases

of student unrest. One source of student discontent has been over the manner in which they are allegedly taught. Some groups of graduate students of the College who had participated on different international exchange programmes in which they reportedly were taught using diverse teaching methods including debate, wondered why at CEES they were hardly taught using such techniques. Yet, they claimed that debating would make their lessons interesting and could improve on their presentation, public speaking and critical thinking skills. This kind of complaint was amongst the factors that prompted the researcher to conduct this study in order to verify what the rest of the other students and academic staff think about such claims; hence, the genesis of this paper.

Study objectives. Overall, the study investigated the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy in graduate level course in education courses at CEES. However, the study intended to achieve the following specific objectives: (1) to find out how often the graduate students at CEES were taught their courses through debate; and (2), to establish the perception of the graduate students and the academic staff (or faculty) of the benefits of using debate as an effective pedagogical strategy in enhancing: (a) class participation, (b) oral communication, (c) and (d) critical thinking.

Research questions. The study sought for answers to the following research questions: (1) how often are you taught your courses through debate as a pedagogical strategy? (2) What is your perception about the benefits of using debate as an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance your: (a) class participation, (b) oral communication, (c) research, and (d) critical thinking skills?

Literature Review

Theoretical Review. Theoretically, this study was underpinned by the social theory of learning. The theory is attributed to the work of scholars such as Albert Bandura, and the Russian teacher and psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1962). According to the theory, people often learn in a social context (learn from each other); therefore, educators (or teachers) should learn to construct a social environment where active learning can occur (Bandura, 1977). In that regard, the main role of the teacher is to create an active community of learners by enhancing social interactions and engagements. In addition, the theory stipulates that culture is an important factor for knowledge creation because it is through the cultural lens that individuals learn through their interaction with one another (Vygotsky, 1962). In this study, the social theory of learning was preferred because the researcher looked at using debate to teach as an opportune moment for the teacher to create a social environment within which individuals learn from each other through imitations, interactions and engagements. It was therefore hypothesised by the researcher that through using debate, a teacher would create an active learning environment and community which should enhance not only the understanding of the concepts and issues being taught and learnt, but also facilitate the development of additional competences in the learners such as participation, oral communication, research and, critical thinking skills, among others.

Related Literature. Several scholars have already written about the importance of using debate as a pedagogical strategy. Many of these writings have covered studies on how to use debate to teach in different contexts and disciplines. According to Berdine (1984), for instance, there are different types of debate that a teacher can conduct to enhance learning. Shen (2015) identifies some of these as: “dividing students into opposing groups that present in turn or discuss in a relatively unstructured way, free-flowing form, as well as role-playing or simulations of media and court debates” (p.1). Vargo (2012) meanwhile classifies debate in form of: “four corner, role-play, fishbowl, think-pair-share, and meeting house debates” (p.5). However, much as the format of debate can vary, Shen (2015) contends that:

a classroom debate that serves effective teaching and learning is encouraged to incorporate four conceptual components: (a) *development* of ideas with description, explanation, and demonstration, (b) *clash* of opinions supported by reasons and evidence, (c) *extension* or arguments against criticisms, which again are refuted by the opponent, and (d) *perspective*, the process of weighing ideas and issues to conclude with a logical decision is made, either about the issue or about the presentation of arguments. (p.1)

This implies that when planning and conducting a debate as a pedagogical strategy, the teacher (or faculty or lecturer) must ensure that the exercise would lead to the development of ideas; that there would be differences in opinions supported by evidence; that the arguments raised would be countered, and that the arguments would be weighed against each other. As a result, apart from gaining new knowledge, participants would be able to strengthen their oral communication as well as critical thinking skills.

Regarding the roles that debate plays when used as a pedagogical strategy, several studies have already revealed significant correlations between the use of debate and the benefits that accrue from it. Fallahi and Haney (2011) for instance revealed that the use of debate has been found successful in involving undergraduate students in the teaching-learning process. Berdine (1984) supports that view but adds that the use of debate facilitates verbal participation and better involves students in class. This is because, according to Snider and Schnurer (2002), the use of debate discourages passive learning, and makes the students play an active role in understanding what is being taught. In fact, the benefits of using debate as a pedagogical strategy according to Green and Klug (1990), is not only enjoyed by the debaters, but even members of audience due to the post-debate discussions that often ensue. However, the majority of these studies were focused on undergraduate classroom settings. This particular study instead looked at the use of debate in the context of teaching graduate students.

According to Shen (2015), debate has “also been found to improve learning outcomes” (p.1). For instance, one short-term benefit of debate has been found to enhance knowledge acquisition because as Kennedy (2009) puts it, it enables

students to master what they have already been taught. However in the long-run, debate helps students to gain “better comprehension, application, and critical evaluation skills when a controversial topic” is presented for discussion (Omelicheva & Avdeyeva, 2008, p.607). These same authors also add that debate helps to improve students’ listening and public speaking skills, while Combs and Bourne (1994) contend that it opens up opportunities to develop oral communication skills; and Vo and Morris (2006) say it enhances creativity. All these, and more, were some of the benefits of debate that this study intended to re-affirm in the context of graduate education

Methodology

In this study, the researcher used the descriptive cross-sectional sample survey research design, where both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used. The descriptive design was preferred because the study was aimed at investigating how the use of debate enhances the learning outcomes of graduate students at CEES. The study specifically used the cross-sectional survey design. This was intended to allow the researcher to collect data from a cross-section of the study population at one point in time in order to avoid wasting time returning to the field to collect additional data that would make the process rather time consuming and costly if the design was longitudinal in nature. In addition, using the design would help to generalise the findings obtained from the sampled population to the targeted population of graduate students pursuing masters and doctoral programmes in education as well as the academic staff of CEES. Data were collected from 55 students and four members of academic staff (two female and two male staff) drawn from the College through survey and interview methods. The survey tool was adapted from previous studies (Darby, 2007), and data analysis was conducted using content analysis and descriptive statistical techniques.

Results

This study looked at how often the graduate students at CEES were taught their courses using debate and whether the students perceived the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy to enhance their class participation, oral communication, research, and critical thinking skills. In this section, the results of the study are presented in accordance with the research questions that guided the investigation. But first, a description of the characteristics of the student respondents in terms of their gender, study programme and year of study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by their background characteristics

Background Variable	Attributes	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	22	40
	Male	33	60
	Total	55	100
Program	PhD	19	34.5
	Masters	36	65.5
	Total	55	100

Year of Study	Year 1	21	38.2
	Year 2	25	45.5
	Year 3	5	9.1
	Above 3 years	4	7.3
	Total	55	100

The results in Table 1 indicate that of the 55 graduate students who participated in the study, 60 percent (33) were males. The remaining 40 percent (22) were females. This finding was in agreement with the enrolment records in the Department of the Academic Registrar which showed that there were more male students enrolled on the masters and PhD programmes at CEES than their female counter-parts (Department of the Academic Registrar, Makerere University, 2016). In terms of programme of study, master's students dominated in the study (65.5% or 36). There were only 19 (34.5%) PhD students who participated in the study. This was also in consonant with the enrolment data in the Department of the Academic Registrar which revealed that there were more masters students enrolled in the College than their PhD counter-parts. Finally, in terms of year of study, the majority of the respondents were second year students (25 or 45.5%). These were followed by students of first (21 or 38.2%), third (5 or 9.1%) and more than 3 years (4 or 7.3%). The dominance of the second and first year students respectively in the study was the result of their presence on campus during the time of data collection. The third years and those on their study programmes beyond three years were students who were engaged in producing their dissertations and they were rarely on campus during such times. Overall, the data for this study were collected from students pursuing masters and taught-PhD programmes. Therefore, they were in position to provide valid information regarding whether their teachers (or lecturers) use debate to teach the different courses, and whether they perceived the use of debate to enhance their class participation, oral communication, research, and critical thinking skills.

Research Question One

This study intended to establish how often the graduate students at CEES were taught their courses using debate as a pedagogical strategy. The question which guided the achievement of this objective was stated as, "How often are you taught your courses through debate as a pedagogical strategy?" Under this question, the respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which they were taught through debate on a scale of: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Seldom, 4=Often, and 5=Always on three different questionnaire items. The results of their ratings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Distribution of student respondents by their ratings on how frequently they are taught through debate

Questionnaire Item	1 N	2 R	3 S	4 O	5 A	Mean	S.D
I am taught using debate	8 (14.5%)	27 (49.1%)	13 (23.6%)	5 (9.1%)	2 (3.6%)	2.38	0.97
Our courses are structured in the format of debate	12 (21.8%)	20 (36.4%)	16 (29.1%)	7 (12.7%)	0 (0%)	2.33	0.96
Our courses are delivered through debate	12 (21.8%)	21 (38.2%)	14 (25.5%)	6 (10.9%)	2 (3.6%)	2.36	1.06
Overall Total	32 (18.29%)	78 (44.57%)	43 (24.57%)	18 (10.28%)	4 (2.29%)	2.36	0.99

The results in Table 2 indicate that the majority of the respondents (Never=14.5% and Rarely=49.1%) reported that they were hardly taught using debate as a pedagogical strategy with a mean response rate of 2.38, and a standard deviation of 0.97 - implying that there was high level of agreement over the issue among the respondents. On whether their courses were structured in the format that allows the use of debate, the majority of the respondents (Never=21.8% and rarely=36.4%) again rated that their courses were hardly structured to allow the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy with a mean response rate of 2.33, and a standard deviation of 0.96. Overall, the results in Table 2 show that the students who participated in this study were in agreement with the fact that they were rarely taught their courses using debate with an overall mean response rate of 2.36, and a standard deviation of 1.06. The finding that the graduate students at CEES are hardly taught using debate as a pedagogical strategy was corroborated by interviewing some members of the academic staff of the College.

During interviews, one senior lecturer acknowledged that he hardly uses debate as a method of teaching. According to him, "debating is time consuming, and most times, it is difficult to ensure proper class control during debate". He also reiterated that with debate, "it needs a lot of prior planning on the part of both the teacher and the students". He claimed that he "has no such time to think of and to plan for debating" in his classes. Another lecturer, who said that she uses debate to teach her students once in a while, said she does so because "many of these students are lazy. When you give them work to research on, they hardly do a good job". According to her, "this discourages me from frequently employing debate to teach my classes". Another lecturer who teaches research methodology also acknowledged limited use of debate to teach his course unit. He attributed this to "lack of sufficient time to enable me complete the course

syllabi in time". These qualitative findings therefore validated the quantitative ones that were obtained from the students.

Research Question 2(a)

The second question that guided this study was stated as, "What is your perception about the benefits of using debate as an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance your class participation skills?" The researcher asked the respondents to rate their responses on a scale of: 1=Not at all true (NAT), 2=Slightly true (ST), 3=True about half the time (THT), 4=Mostly true (MT), and 5=Completely true (CT) on seven questionnaire items. The results of the ratings of the student respondents on the issue of class participation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' by their ratings on how true using debate enhances their class participation

Questionnaire Item	1 NAT	2 ST	3 THT	4 MT	5 CT	Mean	S.D
Debate increases my ...							
Class participation	0 (0.0%)	3 (5.5%)	13 (23.6%)	25 (45.5%)	14 (25.5%)	3.90	0.84
Interaction with course mates	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.6%)	15 (27.3%)	24 (43.6%)	14 (25.5%)	3.91	0.82
Interaction with teachers	1 (1.8%)	2 (3.6%)	16 (29.1%)	19 (34.5%)	17 (30.9%)	3.89	0.96
Class attendance	2 (3.6%)	8 (14.5%)	7 (12.7%)	28 (50.9%)	10 (18.2%)	3.65	1.06
Engagement with study materials	0 (0.0%)	3 (5.5%)	19 (34.5%)	21 (38.2%)	12 (21.8%)	3.76	0.86
Ability to get more subject content	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.8%)	12 (21.8%)	30 (54.5%)	11 (20.0%)	3.89	0.81
Attention during lessons	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.8%)	13 (23.6%)	21 (38.2%)	20 (36.4%)	4.09	0.82
Overall Total	4 (1.04%)	20 (5.19%)	95 (24.68%)	168 (43.64%)	98 (25.45%)	3.87	0.88

The results in Table 3 indicate that on the item "debate increases my class participation," the majority of the student respondents (Mostly true=45.5% and completely true=25.5%) agreed that use of debate enhances their participation in class with a mean response rate of 3.90, and a standard deviation of 0.84. But on the issue of whether "debate increases my interaction with course mates", the majority were also in agreement with 43.6 percent rating themselves as mostly true, and 25.5 percent as completely true with a mean response rate of 3.91, and

a standard deviation of 0.82. On the issue of whether “debate increases my interaction with my teachers”, again the majority of the respondents rated themselves as mostly true (19 or 34.5%), and completely true (17 or 30.9%) with a mean response rate of 3.89, and a standard deviation of 0.96. On the issue of “debate increases my class attendance”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (20 or 50.9%), and completely true (10 and 18.2%) that debate increases their class attendance with a mean response rate of 3.65, and a standard deviation of 1.06. On the statement on whether use of debate “increases my engagement with study materials”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (21 or 38.2%), and completely true (12 or 21.8%) that the use of debate increases their engagement with study materials with a mean response rate of 3.76, and a standard deviation of 0.86. On the statement on whether the use of debate “enables me to get more subject content”, the majority of the respondents indicated that this is mostly true (30 or 54.5%), and completely true (11 or 20.0%) with a mean response rate of 3.89, and a standard deviation of 0.81. Finally, on the issue of whether the use of debate “makes my lessons interesting and I pay more attention”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (21 or 38.2%), and completely true (20 or 36.4%) with a mean response rate of 4.09, and a standard deviation of 0.82. Overall, the majority of respondents rated that it is mostly true (43.64%), and completely true (25.45%) that the use of debate increases their class participation with a mean response rate of 3.87, and a standard deviation of 0.88. This implies that the students perceived the appropriate use of debate to enhance their class participation skills, other factors held constant. These findings were triangulated by interviewing some members of the academic staff who expressed similar views about the role of debate in enhancing class participation skills.

During the interview with members of academic staff, a respondent who is at the rank of senior lecturer pointed out that the use of debate compels some students to engage in the teaching-learning process. He said this happens “when the usually quiet students are assigned active roles in debating”. Moreover, the senior lecturer added that “debating would force such quiet students to bring out what they have researched on thereby making them active in class.” However, one lecturer observed that “for a debate to enhance class participation, the teacher must take care of the roles that are assigned to the different students, otherwise some students may dodge to participate in the debating activity”. All in all, there was consensus between the students and their teachers on the role debate plays in enhancing active learning in the classroom environment.

Research Question 2(b)

The third question that guided the study was stated as, “What is your perception about the benefits of using debate as an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance your oral communication skills?” The researcher asked the respondents to rate their responses on a scale of: 1=Not at all true (NAT), 2=Slightly true (ST), 3=True about half the time (THT), 4=Mostly true (MT), and 5=Completely true (CT) on five questionnaire items. The results of the ratings of the student respondents on the issue of oral communication are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of student respondents' by their ratings on how true using debate enhances their oral communication skills

Questionnaire Item	1 NAT	2 ST	3 THT	4 MT	5 CT	Me an	S.D
Debate... Develops my public speaking skills	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.8%)	9 (16.4%)	23 (41.8%)	22 (40.0%)	4.20	0.78
Builds my confidence to speak in public	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.6%)	9 (16.4%)	26 (47.3%)	18 (32.7%)	4.09	0.80
Helps me communicate fluently with others	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (16.4%)	23 (41.8%)	23 (41.8%)	4.25	0.73
Enables me to persuade others	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.6%)	13 (23.6%)	20 (36.4%)	20 (36.4%)	4.05	0.87
Enables me to logically arrange my arguments	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (10.9%)	31 (56.4%)	18 (32.7%)	4.22	0.63
Overall Total	0 (0.0%)	5 (1.8%)	46 (16.7%)	123 (44.7%)	101 (36.7%)	4.16	0.76

The results in Table 4 indicate that on the item debate “helps to develop my public speaking skills,” the majority of the student respondents (Mostly true=41.8% and Completely true=40.0%) agreed that debate develops their public speaking skills with a mean response rate of 4.20, and a standard deviation of 0.78. On the issue of whether the use of debate “helps to build my confidence to speak in public”, the majority of the respondents were also in agreement that using debate helps them build confidence in public speaking with 47.3 percent rating their feelings as mostly true and 32.7 percent rating as completely true with a mean response rate of 4.09, and a standard deviation of 0.80. On the issue of whether using debate “enables me to communicate fluently with others”, again the majority of the respondents rated that it is mostly true (23 or 41.8%), and completely true (23 or 41.8%) that debate enhances them to communicate fluently with other people with a mean response rate of 4.25, and a standard deviation of 0.73. On the issue of whether the use of debate “enables me to persuade others to support my argument”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (20 or 36.4%), and completely true (20 or 36.4%) that debate helps them to persuade others with a mean response rate of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 0.87. On the question of whether the use of debate “enables me to logically arrange my arguments”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (31 or 56.4%), and completely true (18 or 32.7%) that debate helps them to arrange their arguments with a mean response rate of 4.22, and a standard deviation of 0.63. Overall, the majority of respondents rated that it is mostly true (36.72%), and completely true (44.7%) that debate enhances their oral communication skills with a mean response rate

of 4.16, and a standard deviation 0.76. This implies that appropriate use of debate would make learners acquire better oral communication skills, other factors notwithstanding.

During interviews with the academic staff, a respondent who is at the rank of senior lecturer pointed out that “the use of debate practically engages students in the teaching-learning process and since debating involves talking, it must induce students to learn how to speak in public”. “Frequent participation in debate therefore can enable individuals learn how to speak in public”, the interviewee added. Another lecturer who was also interviewed observed that “since debate makes students discuss issues from different perspectives, it helps them learn how to persuade others to look at an issue from their perspectives”. This, the interviewee added, “can be helpful in developing persuasion and negotiation skills”. Moreover, the interviewee also said, “frequent use of debate should help to reduce fears and anxiety that many individuals face when they are made to speak in public especially to a large audience”. In that regard, use of debate as a pedagogical strategy makes students gain confidence in themselves and in their ability to convince others.

Research Question 2(c)

The fourth question that guided the study was stated as “What is your perception about the benefits of using debate as an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance your research skills?” The researcher asked the respondents to rate their responses on a scale of: 1=Not at all true (NAT), 2=Slightly true (ST), 3=True about half the time (THT), 4=Mostly true (MT), and 5=Completely true (CT) on six questionnaire items. The results of the ratings of the student respondents on the issue of research skills are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents’ by their ratings on how true using debate enhances their research skills

Questionnaire Item	1 NAT	2 ST	3 THT	4 MT	5 CT	Mean	S.D
Debate enhances my...							
Literature search skills	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.6%)	14 (25.5%)	24 (43.6%)	15 (27.3%)	3.94	0.83
Organization skills	0 (0.0%)	4 (7.3%)	21 (38.2%)	22 (40.0%)	8 (14.5%)	3.62	0.83
Data collection skills	0 (0.0%)	7 (12.7%)	14 (25.5%)	27 (49.1%)	7 (12.7%)	3.62	0.87
Analytical skills	0 (0.0%)	3 (5.5%)	18 (32.7%)	24 (43.6%)	10 (18.2%)	3.75	0.82
Discovery skills	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.8%)	17 (30.9%)	24 (43.6%)	13 (23.6%)	3.89	0.79
Discussion skills	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.8%)	9 (16.4%)	24 (43.6%)	21 (38.2%)	4.18	0.78
Overall Total	0 (0.0%)	18 (5.45%)	93 (28.18%)	145 (43.94%)	74 (22.43%)	3.83	0.82

The results in Table 5 indicate that on the item “debate enhances my literature search skills,” the majority of the student respondents (Mostly true=43.6% and completely true=27.3%) agreed that debate enhances their literature search skills with a mean response rate of 3.94, and a standard deviation of 0.83. But on the issue of whether the use of debate “enhances my organization skills”, the majority were also in agreement with 40.0 percent rating as mostly true and 14.5 percent rating their feelings as completely true with a mean response rate of 3.62, and a standard deviation of 0.83. On the issue of whether the use of debate “enhances my data collection skills”, again the majority of the respondents rated that it is mostly true (27 or 49.1%), and completely true (7 or 12.7%) with a mean response rate of 3.62, and a standard deviation of 0.87. On the issue of whether the use of debate “enhances my analytical skills”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (24 or 43.6%), and completely true (10 or 18.2%) with a mean response rate of 3.75, and a standard deviation of 0.82. On the question of whether the use of debate “enhances my discovery skills”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (24 or 43.6%), and completely true (13 or 23.6%) with a mean response of 3.89, and a standard deviation of 0.79. On the question of whether the use of debate “increases my skills for discussion”, the majority of the respondents indicated that this is mostly true (24 or 43.6%), and completely true (21 or 38.2%) that the use of debate enhances their discussion skills with a mean response of 4.18, and a standard deviation of 0.78. Overall, the majority of the respondents rated that it is mostly true (43.94%), and completely true (22.43%) that the use of debate enhances their research skills with a mean response rate of 3.83, and a standard deviation 0.82. This implies that an appropriate use of debate should make students acquire different research skills including the skills to review literature, collect and analyse data and make concrete discussions.

During interview with members of academic staff, a respondent who is at the rank of senior lecturer pointed out that “the use of debate compels some students to do research on the topic being debated and this helps them to master the skills not only of reviewing literature, but also to be critical and analytical in their reviews.” Such skills, the senior lecturer said “can be very helpful to a student during the time of writing his or her dissertation”. However, one lecturer observed that “for debate to enhance the student’s research skills, the teacher must take care of the roles that are assigned to the different students otherwise some students may dodge to participate in the debate”. All in all, there was consensus between the students and their teachers on the role debate plays in enhancing the learner’s research skills.

Research Question 2(d)

The fifth question that guided this study was stated as, “What is your perception about the benefits of using debate as an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance your critical thinking skills?” The researcher asked the respondents to rate their responses on a scale of: 1=Not at all true (NAT), 2=Slightly true (ST), 3=True about half the time (THT), 4=Mostly true (MT), and 5= Completely true (CT) on five questionnaire items. The results of the ratings of the student respondents on the issue of critical thinking are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Distribution of student respondents' by their ratings on how true using debate enhances their critical thinking skills

Questionnaire Item		1 NAT	2 ST	3 THT	4 MT	5 CT	Me an	S.D
Debate... Develops my critical thinking skills		0 (0.0%)	5 (9.1%)	7 (12.7%)	26 (47.3%)	17 (30.9%)	4.00	0.90
Helps in organizing my thoughts		0 (0.0%)	1 (1.8%)	14 (25.5%)	25 (45.5%)	15 (27.3%)	3.98	0.78
Helps me to prioritize information		0 (0.0%)	3 (5.5%)	15 (27.3%)	28 (50.9%)	9 (16.4%)	3.78	0.79
Helps me to form my opinions		0 (0.0%)	3 (5.5%)	11 (20.0%)	26 (47.3%)	15 (27.3%)	3.96	0.84
Enhances me to deconstruct others' opinions		0 (0.0%)	7 (12.7%)	8 (14.5%)	25 (45.5%)	15 (27.3%)	3.87	0.96
Overall Total		0 (0.0%)	19 (6.91%)	55 (20.0%)	130 (47.27%)	71 (25.82%)	3.92	0.85

The results in Table 6 indicate that on the item, debate “develops my critical thinking skills,” the majority of the student respondents (Mostly true=47.3% and completely true=30.9%) agreed that debate develops their critical thinking skills with a mean response rate of 4.00, and a standard deviation of 0.90. But on the issue of whether the use of debate “helps in organizing my thoughts”, the majority were also in agreement with 45.5 percent rating mostly true, and 27.3 percent rating completely true that debate helps to organize their thoughts with a mean response rate of 3.98, and a standard deviation of 0.78. On the issue of whether the use of debate “helps me to prioritize information”, again the majority of the respondents rated that it is mostly true (28 or 50.9%), and completely true (9 or 16.4%) that debate helps them to prioritize their information with a mean response rate of 3.78, and a standard deviation of 0.79. On the issue of whether the use of debate “helps me to form my opinions”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (15 or 27.3%), and completely true (26 or 47.3%) that debate helps them to form their opinions with a mean response rate of 3.96, and a standard deviation of 0.84. On the question of whether the use of debate “enhances me to deconstruct the opinion of others”, the majority of the respondents agreed that it is mostly true (25 or 45.5%), and completely true (15 or 27.3%) that using debate helps them to deconstruct others' opinions with a mean response rate of 3.87, and a standard deviation of 0.96. Overall, the majority of respondents rated that it is mostly true (47.27%), and completely true (25.82%) that debate enhances their critical thinking skills with a mean response rate of 3.92, and a standard deviation 0.85. This implies that an appropriate use of debate would make students think critically.

During interviews with the academic staff, a respondent who is at the rank of senior lecturer pointed out that “the use of debate enables students to organize their thoughts and set out what information to give out first or later”. This, he said, “is helpful in strengthening their thinking abilities”. Besides, the interviewee observed that “during debate, participants on either side listen carefully to the arguments of their opponents which they often try to counter”. This shows that “debate equips the participants with the ability to deconstruct the opinions of others”, the interviewee said. Such critical thinking abilities are generally helpful to the individuals not only during debating, but even in different life-settings.

Discussion

In this study, five key findings were made. First, that members of academic staff (or lecturers) at CEES hardly employ debate to teach graduate students. This finding is not strange. According to Darby (2007), the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy started to decline across the world at the beginning of the 19th century and it was until the 1980’s that the move to revive debating began, again. Since then, the use of debate as a pedagogical tool has remained intermittent in many classroom settings. But bearing in mind the numerous benefits of debate, university teachers (or academic staff) need to think about the need to effectively employ debate as a possible means of enhancing effective learning where students would not ordinarily learn, but acquire other additional salient skills including communication, critical thinking and research skills.

Second, the study established that the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy is perceived to generally enhance student’s class participation. This is in agreement with the findings of many other scholars. For example, as Vargo (2012 points out, debate engages the students in active learning because it provides them with the “opportunities to talk, listen, read, write and reflect as they approach the course content” (p. 3). In addition, earlier research has also shown that the use of debate encourages class participation among those students that typically do not talk in class (Darby, 2007). However, this can only happen if the teacher (or academic staff) carefully assigns the roles different students play in debate.

Third, the study found out that using debate is perceived to help students develop critical thinking skills. This is also in agreement with the findings of many other earlier researchers. Darby (2007) for instance found out that debate enhances active learning of students because according to him, debate encourages talking, listening, and reflecting on what others say. According to Omelicheva and Avdeyeva (2008), using debate to teach does not only enhance the acquisition of basic knowledge on the subject content being discussed, but it can enable students think harder and develop more critical thinking skills that will not be used only for understanding the current subject matter, but for solving other life-problems as well. This is because, debaters must critically analyse the issues at hand if they are to ably oppose the other debating side. This process of analysing issues helps to develop individuals’ oral communication skills, and as Combs and Bourne (1994) put it, debating refines the listening

skills of the students who engage in it so that they are able to make effective rebuttals. As a result, the use of debate enhances the development of critical thinking skills in the participants. This, Combs and Bourne (1994) said, is true not only for those that actively engage in debating, but even for those in the audience. And this view is not far from that of this author.

Fourth, the study furthermore established that using debate is also perceived to enhance students' research skills. This is also in agreement with Vargo's (2012) findings where he argues that the use of debate makes participants search for new materials (or points) from literature and other sources, and assemble them for presentation to their opponents in a persuasive manner (Omelicheva & Avdeyeva, 2008). As a result, debaters often acquire literature review, organization, gathering information and discussion skills. All these skills are very helpful to the learner when he or she later gets engaged in research work.

Finally, the study confirmed that the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy is perceived by both students and staff to enhance the development of student's oral communication skills. This is also in consonant with the findings of earlier researchers who pointed out that debating engages students in talking, defending and persuading others over the issues that are debated upon (Combs & Bourne, 1994). Besides, debating helps participants deconstruct the opinions of others as well as form their own opinions. These competences are helpful to the debaters for gaining self-confidence and for making effective oral communication. The findings of this study, however, are generally in consonant with that of several other scholars; although, this study explored the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy in the milieu of graduate education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

On the basis of the study findings, the researcher concluded that the students at CEES were not regularly being taught their courses using debate; yet they would prefer it that way. Secondly, the members of academic staff at CEES were aware of the benefits of using debate as a pedagogical tool; though they were unable to use it regularly for diverse reasons. Finally, it was also concluded that both graduate students and academic staff have a positive perception on the use of debate as a teaching-learning strategy. Therefore, the author recommends that academic staff at CEES and elsewhere should embrace the frequent and planned use of debate as a pedagogical strategy since it is perceived not only to encourage active learning, but also enable the acquisitions of extra competences by learners.

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