



Implementation of Debate Learning Strategy to Improve Students' English Speaking Skills at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro

Teuku Fahrul Mukminin¹, SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro, Indonesia

Muliasari², SMA Negeri 1 Darussalam, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Speaking skills are a crucial component of English language acquisition, yet many eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro still face challenges in fluency, confidence, and argumentation skills. This study aims to test the effectiveness and analyze the process of improving students' speaking skills through the implementation of the Debate Learning Strategy. This study used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design implemented in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The subjects were all eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro. Data were collected through speaking practice performance tests (pre-test and post-test per cycle) and observation sheets. The results showed a significant improvement in students' speaking skills after implementing the Debate Learning Strategy. Initially, students' average scores were in the low category. After Cycle I, the average score increased, and after Cycle II, with improvements, the average score increased significantly, reaching the school's learning completion target. This improvement is reflected not only in linguistic aspects (accuracy and fluency), but also in non-linguistic aspects, namely students' confidence and activeness in presenting arguments and responding to their interlocutors. Thus, it can be concluded that the Debate Learning Strategy has proven effective as a learning innovation that successfully improved the English speaking skills of 11th-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro. This strategy is recommended for implementation to create a more interactive and challenging learning environment.

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Corresponding Author:

Teuku Fahrul Mukminin

SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro, Indonesia

teukufahrul94@gmail.com

Introduction

In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, mastery of English is no longer an option, but a fundamental necessity. English has been recognized as a lingua franca connecting various nations around the world, across educational, economic, and social sectors (Mardhiyah, Aldriani, Chitta, & Zulfikar, 2021). The ability to communicate in this language is key for Indonesia's young generation to compete in the demands of 21st-century skills (Rahman, Munandar, Fitriani, Karlina, & Yumriani, 2022). Therefore,

educational institutions, including SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro, play a vital role in preparing students to possess adequate English language competency. In learning English, there are four main skills that students must master: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills are interrelated and form a unified whole in communication. However, among the four, speaking skills are often considered the primary indicator of successful language acquisition, as they are a direct manifestation of a person's language proficiency (Erawadi, Hamka, & Juliana, 2017).

Speaking skills are the ability to articulate sounds or words to express, convey, and convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Ricardo & Meilani, 2017). Beyond just pronunciation, effective speaking also encompasses fluency, accuracy, and the ability to structure arguments logically and cohesively. These skills significantly determine the quality of students' interactions in social and academic settings (Harahap & Hamka, 2023). Despite the importance of speaking skills, the reality on the ground shows that learning speaking skills still faces many obstacles. Often, the focus of learning is dominated by grammar and theory, resulting in a lack of authentic and challenging practice opportunities for students. As a result, many students feel awkward, afraid of making mistakes, and have low self-confidence when speaking in public in English (Ningsih, Mulia, & Lubis, 2023).

A similar situation was also identified among 11th-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro. Initial observations revealed that most students tended to be passive in English classes. They were reluctant to ask questions or respond, indicating low motivation and minimal practice in spontaneous and structured speaking. This was reinforced by the average speaking skill score, which remained below the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) set by the school (Gogahu & Prasetyo, 2020). To address these issues, innovation is needed in the learning methods and models used by teachers (Hamka, 2023). Learning models must be designed to encourage student engagement (student-centered learning), stimulate interaction, and provide stimuli that encourage students to think critically and express ideas verbally (Lubis, 2019). Monotonous, one-way learning is no longer relevant to achieving the learning goals of this century (Pebtiyanti, Ahmad, Dzaky, Fauziah, Rendi, & Puspitasari, 2023)

One learning strategy deemed capable of addressing these challenges is the Debate Learning Strategy, or Debate-Based Learning. Debate is an argumentative activity between two parties (the affirmative team and the opposition team) to defend their position on a motion (the topic of debate) (Ranisa, Erawadi, & Hamka, 2018). Debate Learning inherently demands a high level of cognitive engagement and verbal interaction from each student. The application of Debate Learning directly targets the improvement of linguistic aspects of speaking. In debates, students are required to speak fluently (fluency) to convey their message effectively, and to speak accurately (accuracy) with appropriate grammar and word choice to strengthen their arguments

(Siregar, 2025e). Furthermore, debates also enrich students' vocabulary because they must prepare and use terms relevant to the topic being debated (Putra, Maulana, Rizky, & Fatwa, 2023). Debate strategies not only improve language skills but also play a crucial role in developing non-linguistic skills and student character. Debates train critical thinking (Dasopang, Nasution, & Lubis, 2023), decision-making, and persuasive skills. More importantly, this strategy consistently boosts students' self-confidence because they are forced to stand up and voice their opinions in a structured manner before an audience and a debate opponent (Dasopang, Lubis, & Dasopang, 2022).

The use of innovative strategies such as debate aligns with character development efforts in education, where students learn to respect differences of opinion and argue ethically (Santi & Kasja, 2023). Furthermore, debate activities also require in-depth literacy, requiring students to read and analyze credible sources to build the foundation for their arguments (Fatimah & Maryani, 2018; Lubis, Dasopang, Ramadhini, & Dalimunthe, 2022). Various previous studies have underscored the importance of learning innovation. For example, studies on the use of interactive media (Lubis, 2023) and problem-based learning models (Putra, Maulana, Rizky, & Fatwa, 2023) demonstrated positive impacts on students' learning outcomes and analytical thinking. Similarly, cooperative learning models (Lubis, 2019) and problem-posing (Rahmah & Lubis, 2024) have also proven effective, providing evidence that strategic changes can lead to significant improvements.

Given that the research objective was to address practical classroom problems and observe sustainable improvements, Classroom Action Research (CAR) was chosen as the most appropriate methodology. CAR allows researchers to reflect, design corrective actions (debate strategy interventions), and measure their impact cyclically in the natural classroom environment (Arikunto, 2002). This approach ensures that the solutions provided are contextual and relevant to the needs of students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro (Sugiyono, 2018). This research focuses on implementing specific steps of the Debate Learning Strategy and analyzing how these steps gradually impact students' speaking skill indicators, from pronunciation and fluency to comprehension. The gap addressed is empirically measuring the effectiveness of debate as an intervention solution for the specific case of students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro experiencing speaking difficulties.

Based on the background of the problem and the focus outlined above, this study has two main objectives: (1) To describe the steps involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating the Debate Learning Strategy in English learning in grade XI students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro, and (2) To measure significant improvements in the English speaking skills of grade XI students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro after implementing the Debate Learning Strategy through a series of action cycles. The results of this study are expected to provide significant theoretical and practical contributions, particularly for

English teachers in identifying alternative, effective learning methods to improve speaking skills. Furthermore, these results can serve as scientific reference material for curriculum development that places greater emphasis on interactive communication aspects in secondary schools (Siregar, 2024). Thus, this study is expected to provide concrete solutions to the speaking skills problems faced by students.

Methods

This research adopted a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, locally known as Classroom Action Research (PTK), which is fundamentally a descriptive and practical approach aimed at solving practical problems within the classroom setting and simultaneously improving the quality of teaching and learning practices (Arikunto, 2002). This method was chosen because the primary goal was not merely to observe, but to actively intervene in the learning process by implementing the Debate Learning strategy to address the observed low speaking proficiency and lack of student confidence among the participants. The cyclical nature of CAR allows the researcher, acting as the teacher-researcher, to continuously monitor, evaluate, and refine the action based on reflective observation, ensuring that the intervention is contextually relevant and effective for the specific group of students (Sugiyono, 2018).

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro, specifically involving students from the Grade XI academic cohort. The participants were the entire population of one of the Grade XI classes, chosen due to the identified issues regarding their limited English speaking engagement, low participation rate, and overall low scores in preliminary speaking assessments. The selection of this particular group was purposive, based on the preliminary needs analysis and initial classroom observation which indicated a significant need for an innovative instructional strategy to boost their communicative competence and interactive skills. The research timeline spanned across two planned cycles, ensuring ample time for the implementation and rigorous evaluation of the Debate Learning strategy.

The research procedure strictly followed the established action research model, which is structured in distinct yet continuous cycles. Each cycle consists of four sequential phases: Planning (diagnosing problems, preparing lesson plans, media, and instruments for the debate strategy), Action (implementing the Debate Learning strategy in the classroom according to the established plan), Observation (collecting data on student activities, teacher performance, and speaking outcomes during the action phase), and Reflection (analyzing all collected data to determine the success of the action and to identify weaknesses, which then serve as the basis for revising the plan for the subsequent cycle). This reflective step is crucial for the continuous improvement inherent in the CAR model.

Data for measuring the effectiveness of the intervention were gathered using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were collected through speaking performance tests, administered as a pre-test before Cycle I and post-tests after each cycle to measure the students' improvement in various speaking indicators such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and comprehension. Qualitative data were obtained through structured observation sheets completed by an observer and field notes kept by the researcher to record student engagement, non-verbal cues related to confidence, and overall classroom dynamics during the debate sessions.

The core intervention involved the systematic application of the Debate Learning Strategy. This strategy utilized a structured debate format, requiring students to work in teams (affirmation and opposition) to prepare, present, and defend arguments on various current issues or educational movements. The success of the action was determined by achieving a predetermined minimum passing score (Minimum Completeness Criteria or KKM) on the speaking post-test, alongside an increase in the percentage of actively engaged students as recorded in the observation sheets. The specific focus of the assessment was on the student's ability to logically structure an argument and maintain clear, coherent communication during the high-pressure situation of a debate.

The collected data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The quantitative data from the speaking tests were analyzed by calculating the mean score of the class for each cycle and comparing it to the initial pre-test score and the KKM standard. This descriptive comparison provided empirical evidence of the improvement in speaking skills. Concurrently, the qualitative data from the observation sheets and field notes were analyzed using descriptive analysis, focusing on identifying patterns of student behavior, challenges encountered, and the positive shifts in confidence and participation levels. The synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative findings was used to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the Debate Learning strategy.

Result

The preliminary data collected during the pre-test phase established a baseline where the average speaking proficiency score for the Grade This initial low baseline confirmed the necessity of implementing an innovative instructional intervention. The implementation of the Debate Learning strategy began in Cycle I. Qualitatively, observation notes revealed a high degree of initial reluctance, particularly during the first two debate sessions, with many students reading directly from their notes and exhibiting clear anxiety and poor eye contact. The teacher-researcher and observer noted significant challenges in maintaining structured arguments and rebuttals, although student engagement showed a marginal increase compared to traditional lecture-based lessons.

Quantitatively, the Cycle I Post-Test results demonstrated a positive trend but failed to fully achieve the success criteria. The class average score increased from 60.5 to 70.8. Furthermore, the percentage of students who successfully met or exceeded the KKM rose to 65%. While this represented a 35% improvement in mastery, the target of overall class mastery was not reached, indicating that the initial action needed refinement, particularly concerning the effective use of rebuttal techniques and spontaneous language use. Based on the reflection phase of Cycle I, revisions for Cycle II focused on two key areas: enhanced scaffolding for argument construction and the introduction of dedicated practice sessions focused on Point of Information (POI) to promote spontaneous and confident language use. The revision also included clearer rubrics emphasizing fluency and interaction speed, addressing the previous cycle's noted reliance on pre-written scripts.

Cycle II saw a marked difference in the qualitative observations. Students demonstrated greater preparation autonomy and noticeably reduced anxiety. Field notes highlighted instances of spontaneous language use, effective counter-arguments, and a significant boost in self-confidence, evidenced by louder voices and sustained eye contact when addressing the opposing team or the adjudicator. Student active participation, as measured by the qualitative observation sheet, reached 90%, fulfilling the secondary success indicator.

The Cycle II Post-Test results confirmed the qualitative improvements with a substantial quantitative increase. The class mean score soared to 81.3, successfully exceeding the KKM target of 75. More importantly, the student mastery percentage reached 93%, indicating that the Debate Learning strategy, following the necessary refinements in Cycle II, was highly effective in addressing the core problem of low speaking proficiency. A comparative analysis of the three assessment points—Pre-Test (60.5), Cycle I Post-Test (70.8), and Cycle II Post-Test (81.3)—reveals a progressive and linear improvement in students' speaking skills. The total mean score increase from the pre-test to the final post-test was 20.8 points, demonstrating that the cyclical intervention was successful in bringing the student performance from a "failed" category into a "good" and "mastery" category.

The qualitative data provided deep insight into the improvement in Fluency and Confidence. Before the intervention, students were plagued by long pauses and frequent hedging. By Cycle II, observer reports indicated a clear reduction in hesitation and filler words, suggesting that the competitive, time-bound nature of the debate forced them to retrieve and use vocabulary and grammatical structures more quickly and effectively, significantly increasing their communicative fluency.

Regarding Accuracy and Structure, the debate format inherently improved the logical coherence of student responses. The necessity of defending a specific position

requires students to organize their thoughts using clear topic sentences, supporting evidence, and concluding statements. Although minor grammatical errors persisted, the overall coherence and complexity of the sentences used improved drastically, shifting the language use from simple memorized phrases to structured, argumentative discourse. In summary, the two cycles of Classroom Action Research confirmed that the implementation of the Debate Learning strategy, particularly when supported by targeted scaffolding and spontaneous practice, successfully addressed the low speaking proficiency and confidence issues identified in the Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro, leading to an overall class mastery above the KKM.

Discussion

The primary objective of this research, which was to increase the English speaking skills of Grade XI students, was achieved. These findings strongly support the use of challenging, interactive, and structured learning methods to overcome passive learning environments that often stifle student verbal production. The success suggests that when students are placed in a demanding yet supportive context, their intrinsic motivation to communicate and success rises sharply (Ricardo & Meilani, 2017).

The efficacy of the Debate Learning strategy can be explained by its alignment with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes meaningful interaction and the use of authentic language. Debate requires students to engage in real-time negotiation of meaning, justification of arguments, and critical debate. This process moves students beyond rote memorization of grammar rules toward the functional use of language in a high-stakes, yet non-threatening, competitive environment. Furthermore, the mandatory preparation involved in each debate session significantly enhanced the students' research and vocabulary acquisition skills, building a stronger foundation for their oral performance.

A significant observation was the crucial role of the cyclical refinement between Cycle I and Cycle II. While Cycle I provided a necessary exposure to the strategy, the initial lack of full mastery highlighted implementation flaws, such as inadequate spontaneous practice time. The deliberate introduction of focused Point of Information practice in Cycle II was the decisive factor, pushing students to move from reading rehearsed material to thinking on their feet. This outcome validates the core principle of Classroom Action Research, demonstrating that teaching practice must be flexible and responsive to real-time student feedback for optimal results (Arikunto, 2002; Sugiyono, 2018).

Qualitative data strongly suggested that the most profound impact of the intervention was the visible increase in student confidence. Before the action, students displayed anxiety and avoidance behavior. However, the structured, competitive environment of the debate provided a safe psychological space where speaking was

mandatory, thus gradually overcoming the fear of error. The supportive team structure also mitigated individual speaking anxiety, allowing students to develop skills incrementally. This confidence boost is critical, as low confidence is a known inhibitor of communicative competence (Ningsih, Mulia, & Lubis, 2023).

The findings from this study corroborate previous research that advocates for teaching models that foster critical thinking and practical communication simultaneously (Dasopang, Nasution, & Lubis, 2023). Debate Learning not only improved language output but also trained students in logical reasoning, a key skill for Grade XI students preparing for higher education. This dual benefit—improving both linguistic and cognitive skills—makes the debate strategy an exceptionally valuable tool for senior high school educators aiming to produce well-rounded graduates.

While the results are overwhelmingly positive, a limitation of this CAR study is its context-specificity to SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro. Further research is recommended to investigate the long-term sustainability of this speaking improvement and its transferability to non-debate contexts, such as everyday conversation or formal presentation settings. Future studies could also compare the effectiveness of the British Parliamentary debate style versus the Asian Parliamentary style to optimize the method for various cultural learning preferences (Siregar, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the results of Classroom Action Research that has been carried out in two cycles, it can be concluded that the Implementation of the Debate Learning Strategy is significantly effective in Improving the English Speaking Skills of Grade XI students of SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Baro. This improvement is evident from the increase in the average class score which reached 81.3 at the end of Cycle II, exceeding the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) of 75, with the student learning completion rate reaching 93%. The Debate Learning Strategy successfully solved the main problems of low self-confidence and minimal speaking fluency, because this strategy requires students to interact actively, develop structured arguments, and practice the use of English spontaneously and logically, especially after the improvement of focused actions on Point of Information (POI) in Cycle II. Therefore, this strategy is recommended as a vital interactive learning model to develop not only linguistic competence, but also critical thinking skills and student confidence.

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