

English debate thrives all around the world. While there are many influential English debaters in Britain, America, and Australia, there are also numerous excellent debaters who speak English as a second language in other places such as Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Debaters start training at an early age. For example, in Shanghai, many top-tier high school students go to debate institutions like Learning Leaders. In Hong Kong Debate Open 2018, a junior school student from Southeast Asia made it to Grand Final. Many high schools have listed English debate as an elective course such as Beijing National Day School, one of the best high schools in mainland China. However, English debate should be a compulsory course in all schools because English Debate can improve students' critical thinking, communication skills, persuasiveness, and courage.

Practicing English debate improves students' critical thinking. According to Longman Dictionary, critical thinking is "thinking about something and giving a careful judgment about how good or bad it is." There are pros and cons to every controversial topic. However, people do not think critically. Limited knowledge and experience make people intuitively take a stand and argue for their intuitive choices. After taking a stand, people are more likely to reject or neglect the facts and arguments that oppose their views. This is harmful after people act according to their biased views. For example, the fascists followed Adolf Hitler blindly and neglected the welfare of the Jewish people. They slaughtered the Jews with little regret and caused one of the severest tragedies of humanity. Practicing debate stops people from going extreme because the essential requirement of debate is to evaluate the trade-offs between the benefits and harms in every topic. For example, Tom Horlick-Jones et al. (2007) said that the British *GM Nation?* Public debate about genetic modified food was successful in generating widespread interest and discussion about complex

matters of science and policy (p.1). The productive yet potentially dangerous technology creates huge trade-off for people to analyze. Sophia Scott (2008) also argued that “Debate was a natural fit for Science, Technology, and Society course because the topics were tied to current events, and students were allowed to critically analyze a controversial topic while practicing other competencies like writing, presenting information and higher level thinking” (p.39). If debaters want to win on these topics, they have to identify the pros and cons of the action they propose. They have to analyze the benefits and admit the harms. They have to explain why the benefits outweigh the harms in order to persuade the judges.

Also, debate rules randomly assign debaters to argue for or against an opinion on a topic. There is a fifty percent chance that debaters have to argue for an opinion that they dislike, or against an opinion that they prefer. Debaters often force themselves to think or argue against their intuition by considering the welfare of other stakeholders. For example, if some enthusiastic teenage fans are debating against celebrity-maniac culture and they want to win, they have to question their standpoint. According to Suchada Sanonguthai (2011), “This brainstorming session of the big groups gave them some ideas of various perspectives regarding the topic. The students gained knowledge about some concerns of advertising; celebrity endorsement, overstatement, and distortion of images” (p. 53). As a result, the fans are still passionate but in a more critical way. Debaters can obtain comprehensive views toward the debate topics and develop a habit of analyzing issues from different perspectives.

Practicing English debate improves student’ communication skills. It helps students better express their thoughts and understand others' opinions. First, students practice English when they debate in English. Debaters deliver speeches in English.

They listen to their opponents' speeches carefully in order to rebut. They read English materials such as newspapers, articles, and books every day. They also write debate reflections in English. This amount of English practice significantly improves debaters' English ability. Better English gives debaters the tool for better communication. English is the dominant language globally. David Crystal (2012) mentioned that English is the most widely taught language in over a hundred countries including China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt, and Brazil. In most of these countries, English is becoming the primary foreign language at school (p.5). Excelling in English helps debaters communicate with 70% of the people around the world.

Second, debaters need to express their ideas in a short time. Searching for the facts or argument is one thing and having a very limited time to collate information is another (Yang, Chien-Hui & Rusli, Enniati, 2012, p.141). Debate rules require debaters to prepare and deliver the speeches in a short time. For example, the British Parliament Debate requires debaters to prepare for fifteen minutes and address their ideas in seven minutes. In fifteen minutes of preparation, debaters should not only identify the trade-off of a topic, but also develop several arguments, and they need to settle strategies to rebut the potential arguments from their opponents as well. In the seven-minute speech, debaters address every argument with a thesis, reasoning, examples, and impact analysis. Seven minutes are never enough for most debaters to finish their speeches. As a result, debaters have no time for unnecessary words either when preparing or presenting. They form a habit of expressing their views in a clear and precise way.

Proper structure of a speech is an implicit requirement of debates. Major debate contests require four rounds of debates per day, which means six hours of

listening and jotting notes. Tired judges can only understand speeches with clear structures. Therefore, debaters divide their speeches into several parts, such as arguments, rebuttals, and story-telling. They arrange the order of the parts logically. Debaters also "signpost" a lot. "Signposting" means telling audiences what they are going to talk about, talk about it, and then tell them what they just talked about (Jader, 1993). "Signposting" clarifies the structure of the speech. As a result, the audiences can comprehend and remember the speeches more easily. Debaters address their ideas in a structured way so that the audience can comprehend easily.

Practicing English debate develops the ability to persuade others. The goal of debate is to persuade. Debaters persuade in various methods. They connect their opinions with what the audience already believe and show the linkages between them. They analyze the opinions' potential benefits for many stakeholders. They tell short but moving stories to arouse the audience's empathy. They use the convincing tones and gestures all the time. Persuasiveness is essential for students' development because it is one of the most important factors of success. People persuade the interviewers to give them the job. They persuade their children to accept their opinions. They persuade business partners to make the deal. Persuasion means making others accept specific ideas. If people believe something, they act accordingly. Persuasive people shape the world in the way that they want. Persuasiveness is a tool for achieving goals. Whether persuasion benefits or harms depends on the intention of the persuader. Debaters make good use of persuasion because debaters care about various stakeholders and evaluate the conflicts of interest instead of thinking only for themselves.

Practicing English debate makes students more courageous. Delivering a speech in front of a neutral audience is already terrifying. Fine Gary Alan (2010)

explained, “Not only are novices intensely nervous about what to say during their speeches, but the very act of speaking terrorizes them, with the possibility of making them look foolish” (p. 25). Debaters not only deliver speeches but also deal with the interruptions from opponents. In British Parliamentary debates, opponents often raise “points of information”, which include direct rebuttals and questioning logical fallacies during a speech. The opponents sometimes knock on the table and shout "shame" when they disagree. People are naturally afraid of rejections. It takes courage to face the rejections and benefit from them. Under most circumstances, people believe in their opinions or they will not speak those opinions out. It is also hard for debaters to challenge themselves, but they find others to challenge their opinions. They seek feedback from judges, senior debaters, and peers. As Gary Alan Fine (2010) mentioned, “most judges provide oral critiques of the two teams, which typically provide a strong indication of which team did the better debating” (p. 21). The feedback of the losing teams contains the things that they can improve on, which also mean the things that they did a lousy job. Feedback is a partial rejection of the previous speech. It takes courage to ask for rejection, and it takes practice to obtain courage. Debaters are familiar with using courage to fight against the negative emotions from rejections and improve with them. Therefore, debaters are more courageous and suffer less from rejections in or apart from debates.

Some people say that teaching debate makes some students too convincing. If an excellent debater proposes an opinion, people believe him or her. If the debater opposes the same opinion, people believe him or her as well. As debaters can make both sides reasonable, they are likely to decide according to their intuition or their own benefit. If debaters persuade others to act for their benefit, they may hurt other groups' welfare. For example, Adolf Hitler persuaded the crowd to believe in Nazism

and caused great harm to the Jewish people and the human race. However, making English Debate a compulsory course can solve the problem. If everyone learns to debate, everyone will be more rational. They will know more about the techniques to persuade and be skeptical about arguments even if they seem persuasive. They will understand that they also need experiments and empirical data to derive a conclusion.

Some people say that focusing too much on talking is harmful because doing things is more important than talking. Concrete actions such as engineering and scientific innovation are worth more than talking. However, learning debate helps students become better in doing things because it improves students' logic. According to Gary Alan Fine (2010), "talk does not fully constitute debate. Ultimately, the justification for debate is that adolescents learn how to create arguments with underlying logical presuppositions" (p.7). Students learn about how to split a problem into parts and decide the sequence to solve those parts. They also know how to conclude accurately based on known facts. They forbid themselves from any logical fallacy or missing parts in the deduction. Concrete actions are necessary, but teaching debate can help students know what the right actions to take are and how to take them effectively.

Talking can do much more than actions if talking makes people believe the right thing. Protecting a black lady in America in 1968 could be a great action. However, when Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his famous *I Have a Dream* speech, he influenced thousands of people and had them protect more black people. Millions of people watched the record or read the script of the speech, changed their views or developed the right views, and took significant actions to fight for racial equality. According to Fredrik Sunnemark (2004), King and his words occupied a central place

in American society and awareness during the years. Talking is vital because good talking gets others to do the right things and benefit society more profoundly.

Because English debate makes students think more critically, communicate more efficiently, persuade more effectively, and live more courageously, schools should make English debate as a compulsory course. The course should cover various modules such as logic, rhetoric, philosophy, ethics, and so on. Schools should assign different modules to different students according to their knowledge and ability. This course is as crucial as languages, mathematics, and physical education because English debate promotes students' development as much as other compulsory courses.

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