

## **The Effectiveness of Engaging Students in Debate in a Language Class**

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Making the students competent in speaking English is a challenging job for an English language teacher. Many university teachers opine that it is very hard to make students talk in English. However, there are various activities that a teacher can apply in a language class to make it effective. Debating is such an activity that signifies presenting an argument in a formal way and in a disciplined manner. The present paper finds out how engaging students in debate in a language class can facilitate their learning of English language. It through both quantitative and qualitative methods vindicates how English debate can benefit the students in gaining confidence in speaking, increasing their knowledge of English vocabulary, and making them have the ability of good reasoning. So, the teachers can sometimes divide a class into groups and can give them a simple topic to talk about where they will talk on the same topic in different ways. The paper will also put light on the fact that the teachers, by creating a friendly environment in a language class, can engage the students in debates that will help them gaining strong argumentative ability.

**Keywords:** Debate, Argumentation, Performance, Confidence.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning a language. Speaking has been reported by many students to be the most difficult of the four skills of learning a language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). So, it is always a huge challenge for an English language teacher to make his/her students competent in speaking English. In order to do that, a teacher takes help of different teaching techniques that may include dialogues and role plays, games for speaking, using audiovisual aids, oral presentations, spoken English for academic purposes, interviews and questioning, and so on. Debate is another technique that can help students improve their English speaking skill by increasing their confidence.

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Although English is taught compulsorily in all the tertiary level institutions in Bangladesh, some students cannot speak in English fluently even after completing their graduate level. So, the present researcher tended to find out the reasons behind the weakness of students in spoken English and offer debate as a way of improving speaking English.

### **1.2 Research questions**

Through the study this paper found out the possible answers to the following questions:

1. What are the reasons behind some students' weakness in speaking English?
2. How much effective engaging students in debate in a language class is?
3. How debate can work as a way of improving the Speaking skill of the students?

To find out the possible answers, the questionnaire was made and the necessary field survey was conducted.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The main objective of the study is to find out the effectiveness of engaging tertiary level students of Bangladesh in debate in an English language class. Some other objectives are:

1. To sort out the techniques that tertiary level English language teachers in Bangladesh adopt in a language class to improve the speaking skill of students.
2. To explore how engaging students in debate in an English language class can help students improve their speaking skill of English language.
3. To recommend some possible ways in which teachers can arrange debate sessions in an English language class and motivate or accelerate Bangladeshi tertiary level students' learning and comprehension of English language.

### **1.4 Rationale behind the study**

It is an imperative for people, especially tertiary level students, to have a good command over English language nowadays. This paper is an initiative to accelerate the process of motivating students and teachers to get interested in debate more and more. As not many studies have been done in Bangladesh regarding this issue, this paper will help people step forward in digging further and finding out how debate can be included in the syllabus of an English language course.

### **1.5 Limitations of the study**

As the paper has been done within a very short period of time, it only covered a small area. Some more questions could have been added in the questionnaire. Some more interviews could have been taken. However, there is a scope of further studies in near future.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Ali Alasmari & Sayed Salahuddin Ahmed (2013) proposed the use of debate in EFL classes and proposes a few modules of debating which, if practiced properly, will make students confident users of English language in academic, social and professional settings. They said, “Debating can be used to learn English in both formal and informal settings. It is such an activity that engages learners in practicing all skills of English language.” (p. 151)

According to a book published by Education Bureau of The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region titled *Learning English through Debating (Secondary 4 – 6) A Resource Package*, “Debating is not only an intellectual activity, but also a physical one.” (p. S2) So, debating can improve the speaking skill as well as physical condition by removing nervousness.

Douglas et al (1997) proposed that debate sessions can prepare students to argue clearly and effectively with complete explanations of the various types of debate propositions.

Dominic Hughes and Benedict Phillips (2000) gave tips and advice on all forms of public speaking -- from the wedding address to the boardroom presentation. In this book, Hughes and Phillips showed that debate is one of the most important techniques of increasing speaking skill.

H. Douglas Brown (1994) includes the discussion of competence and performance. According to Brown, “competence refers to one’s underlying knowledge of a system, event, or fact... Performance is the overtly observable and concrete manifestation or realization of competence.” (p. 31)

Gary Rybold (2006), in his book titled *Speaking Listening and Understanding: Debate for Non-Native-English Speakers*, wrote “debating will help you to become a better speaker in all situations-private and public.” (p.2) He also wrote, “Debate also develops several other skills that will help you communicate effectively in English- or in any language you use.” (p.2)

According to the National Association for Urban Debate Leagues compendium of research (NAUDL 2010), studies of students in Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, Seattle and New York (2004) concluded that academic debate improves performance at statistically

significant levels on reading test scores, diminishes high-risk behaviors, and improves academic success and student attitudes towards higher education.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

It is a fact that a fruitful research work demands both library research and empirical survey. A researcher must employ appropriate methodology and instrument to achieve his/her objectives. The main objective of this research is to seek out the effectiveness of engaging tertiary level students in debate in a language class so that it can benefit their speaking skill of English. Along with these, it is also concerned with finding out how students can receive the maximum benefit of doing English debate. This chapter brings to focus on the method of data collection employed in this study. It also entails an elaborate account of the questionnaire design and construction of research instruments, the sampling plan of the empirical survey, and method of editing, processing and analyzing the collected data.

#### **3.2 Purpose of empirical survey**

It has been said that this paper makes an attempt to find out how doing English debate inside a classroom can work as a motivation for students in learning English language. As debate is related to speaking; therefore, it looks for the ways how fluency can be developed through it. The purpose of this empirical survey is to sort out the practical data.

#### **3.3 Methodology of empirical study**

In view of the nature and motive of this study, I decided to follow the survey method for the empirical study. In fact survey method includes three techniques. They are:

1. Questionnaire survey
2. Observation
3. Interview

The methods of data collection employed for the study are:

- a. Students' Questionnaire Survey
- b. Classroom Observation
- c. Students' Interviews
- d. Teachers' Interviews

In order to carry out these methods of data collection properly the researcher tried to be careful in designing and administrating the instruments of the research.

### **3.4 Instruments used for the study**

The instruments that have been used in this study are:

1. Questionnaire for the students
2. Interview of the students (talking and writing about the importance of the engagement of university students in debating in a language class)
3. Interview of the Teachers
4. A Classroom Observation Scheme

### **3.5 An Account of the Instruments for the Students' Questionnaire Survey and Interview**

In the instruments for students' questionnaire survey there are two sections. A brief account of the two sections is as follows:

a) Section- 01: Personal details

It is a short section that presents the personal details of the respondents. The personal details include name, roll, department and present address of the students.

b) Section- 02: Students' response to the questions in the questionnaire

This section includes questions with a view to extract information about the effectiveness of debate in an English language class.

The instrument for the students' interview is used for the empirical survey which is constructed following the objectives and necessity of the study. As one of the goals of this paper is to identify how effective debate is in terms of increasing or improving speaking skill, the study seeks to investigate the proficiency level of those students and their opinions regarding their classes. For construction of empirical instruments, several books such as *Research Methodology in Language Teaching* by David Nunan, *Understanding Research in Second Language Learning* by James Dean Brown, and *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* by C. R. Kothari have been consulted. In designing questions for the interview, certain factors like respondents' intelligibility and their command over English as a foreign language have been paid due attention. Students' interview focuses on 4 questions including the types of topics for debate, the time allocated for a student participating in debate, and some other topic to describe and a list of 48 words to investigate their pronunciation.

### **3.6 An Account of the Instruments Used for the Classroom Observation**

Apart from the questionnaire survey and interview, classroom observation scheme was conducted as an empirical part of the empirical study. The points that were taken into account on purpose to make classroom observation are as follows:

- 1) Size and condition of classroom
- 2) Medium of instruction
- 3) Time allotted for class
- 4) Observation teaching -learning activities in classroom through debate

### **3.7 Sampling Plan for the Empirical Survey**

For this research ten (10) students and five (05) teachers from different Bangladeshi universities were interviewed. For the questionnaire survey fifty (50) students from different universities were considered. As time was limited, the researcher could only attend and collect data only from five (05) classes.

## **Chapter Four: Data Analysis**

For the analysis, the data were collected through questionnaire survey, interview, and classroom observation. The findings of the study include the interview of 10 students and questionnaire responses of 50 students, interview of five teachers and five classroom observations of undergraduate level. The interview sessions mainly focus on the targeted perspective that is to identify and analyze how debating on various issues can improve the speaking skill of the students. The questionnaire was arranged in addition to the interview to elicit background or rationale behind the respondents' individual position on the selected issue.

The subsequent part of this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section analyses and discusses the results in statistical measures and percentage based on the findings of the instruments for the students' questionnaire survey. The second section analyses and discusses the results in statistical measures and percentage based on the findings of the instruments of classroom observation. Finally, based on the interview questions the last section analyses and discusses the results of the detected errors in spoken English.

### **4.1 Analysis and Discussions of the Instrument for the Students' Questionnaire Survey**

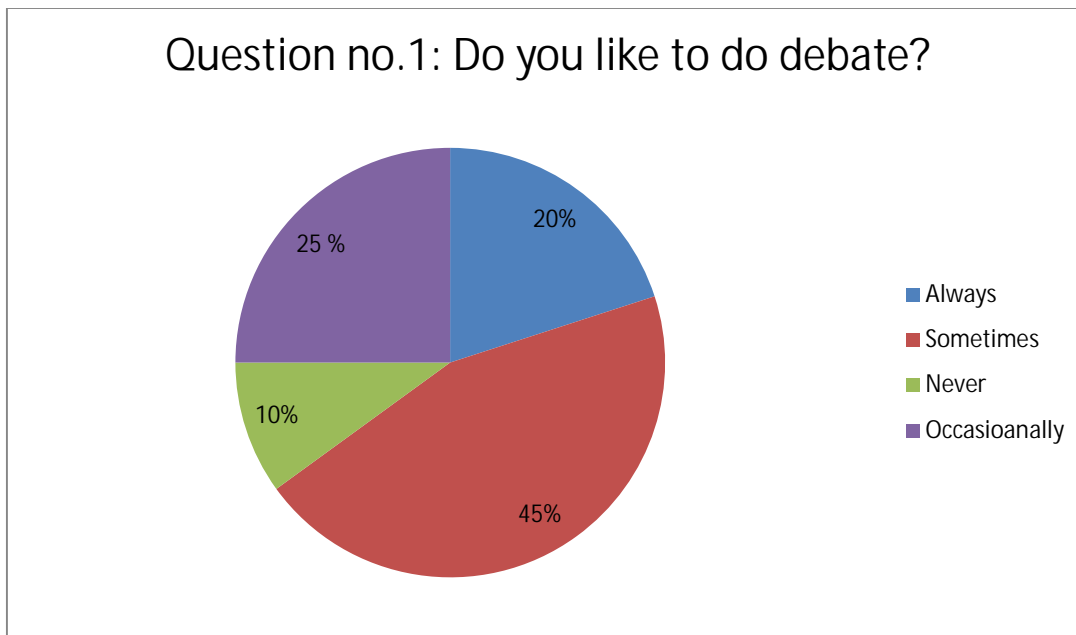
#### **4.1.1 First Part of the Questionnaire**

The first part of the questionnaire deals with the personal details of the respondents to keep documentation for further information which will help to elicit background or rationale

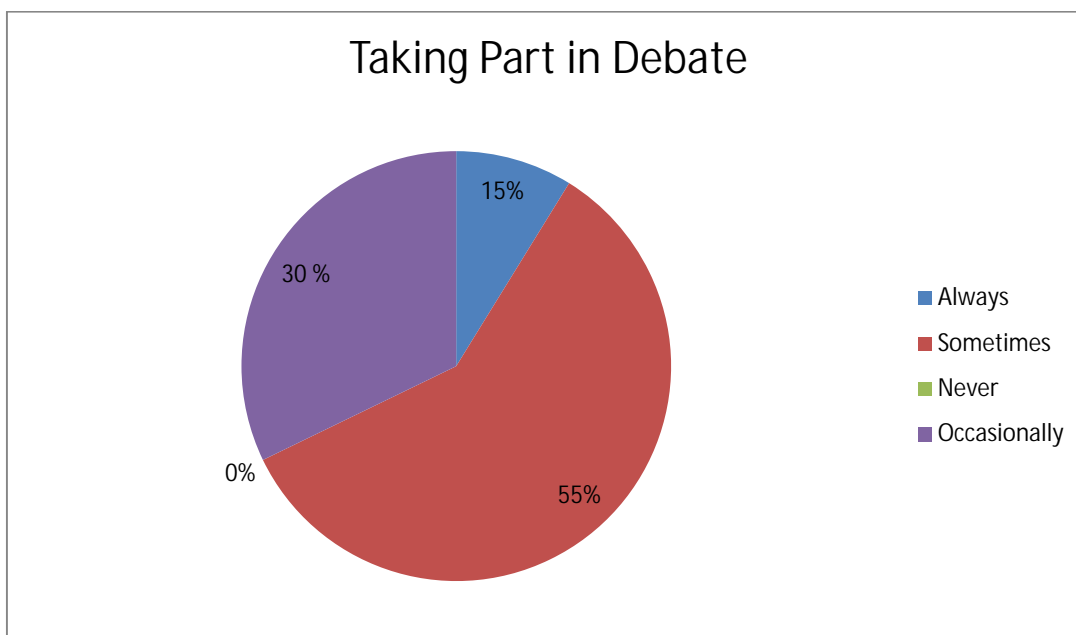
behind the respondents' individual position on the selected issue. However, different types of students have acted in response to this questionnaire.

#### 4.1.2 Second part of the Questionnaire

Question no. 01. Do you like to do debate?



Question no. 02. Do you think students should take part in debate?



Question no. 03. Do you think that doing debate in an English language class helps the students improve speaking skill?

Frequency	Yes	No
Percentage (%)	95%	05%

Question no. 04. Does your English language teacher sometimes engage you in doing debate in English in your class?

Frequency	Yes	No
Percentage (%)	25%	75%

Question no. 05. If your answer to question no .04 is 'YES', write for how long does your English language teacher engages you in debate in class?

N.B. Responses to this question is discussed in 4.1.3

Question no. 06. When your teacher brings you to do debate, does your teacher form the teams for debate or you do it yourselves?

Frequency	Teacher	Ourselves
Percentage (%)	50%	50%

Question no. 07. How may debate improve your speaking skill?

N.B. Responses to this question is discussed in 4.1.3

#### **4.1.3 Discussions of the Findings**

Responses to question no. 01 show that only 20% students are ready to do debate anytime in their class whereas 45% students want to do it sometimes, 25% students would like to do it occasionally and the rest 10% are not interested in debate. Question no. 02 shows that almost all the student think it necessary to take part in debate. Irrespective of the frequency level, no student thinks that they should see debate as a non-resulting phenomenon in language learning. From question no. 03, it is obvious that 95% students believe that doing debate in English can improve speaking skill. Responses to the question no. 04 provide a shocking result. Here it is seen that students are engaged in debate in only twenty five percent of the classes. Question no. 05 was an adjunct question to the question no. 04. Here, the students who think that their teachers sometimes engage them in debate (25%) were told to write their opinions on the time duration of debate that they take part in. Most of the students opined for around 25 minutes. Question no. 06 asked whether the teachers form the teams for

debate or the students do that themselves when their teacher brings them to do debate. The students were equally divided in answering this question. Responses to question no. 07 were basically related to increasing proficiency through practice. Most of the students opined that as debate is related to speaking logically, it provides the students with opportunities of learning how to speak well and communicate with others.

#### **4.2 Analysis and Discussions of Instruments for Classroom Observation**

##### **4.2.1 First Part of the Instruments**

The first part of the questionnaire deals with the detail information of the classroom to keep documentation for further information which will help to elicit background or rationale behind the respondents' individual positions of selected issues. However, five classes had been observed to examine the reliability of the responses to the other questionnaires prepared for teachers and students.

##### **4.2.2 Second Part of the Instrument (Questionnaire)**

No.	Questions	Yes%	No%
1	Does the teacher sometimes encourage the students to take part in debate?	20%	80%
2	Does the teacher arrange any pair work or role play or group discussion to develop oral fluency and accuracy?	55%	45%
3	Is the teacher giving special attention to the improvement of speaking skill of the students?	65%	35%
4	Are the students interacting with themselves and with the teachers in English?	60%	40%
5	Does the teacher become impatient when a student cannot communicate in English?	20%	80%
6	Does the teacher provide proper feedback for the students after each debate session?	55%	45%
7	Does the teacher try to maintain a standard of English while giving lectures in the class?	70%	30%
8	Does the classroom procedure include minimum explanation and maximum of speaking practice?	40%	60%
9	Do all the students in the class use a dictionary which contains phonetic transcription and correct spelling in it?	10%	90%

10	Are the students afraid of class teacher and shy and anxious of committing errors in front of the other students?	80%	20%
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#### 4.2.3 Analysis of the Responses

As far as the classroom observations are concerned, the first question shows that only 20% students opine that their English language teachers encourage them to take part in debate. 55% students are of the opinion that their teachers arrange pair work, role play, and group discussion to develop the oral fluency of the students. 65% students think that the teachers put importance on the improvement of the speaking skill of the students. From question no. 04, it is found that most of the teachers communicate and interact with the students in English and from question no. 05, it is found that most of the teachers can hold their temper when students make mistake in speaking. Nowadays the teachers are more careful about their teaching standard and question no. 07 is the expression of that. But in question no. 08, it is seen that teachers are not prone to engaging students in discussion; rather, they explain things themselves which is a predicament to improving speaking skill of students. Another problem is found in question no. 09. Here it is found that almost no student (90%) carries or uses a dictionary which contains phonetic transcription and correct spelling in it. Very few have mobile phone dictionaries that contain phonetic transcription and correct spelling. Moreover, the last question shows that most of the students (80%) are afraid of class teacher and shy and anxious of committing errors in front of the other students.

#### 4.3 Analysis and Discussions for the Instruments of the Students' Interview

##### 4.3.1 First Part of the Instruments

The first part of the questionnaire deals with the personal details of the respondents to keep records for further information which will help to bring forth background or basis behind the respondents' individual position on the selected issue. Ten students of different departments of different universities were chosen for the interview. Here, every student was interviewed personally at their free time. After coming to the end of every interview, it has been noticed how many minutes did each student took. It was found that most of the interviewees took 4-6 minutes.

##### 4.3.2 Second Part of the Instruments

The objective of this study is to measure the effectiveness of debate in a language class. So, in the interview sessions, students were asked to talk about it. The general claim is that their teachers do not put enough importance on debate. They just have some

presentations before their final exam at the end of the semester. Two of the respondents said that they have presentation sessions in every class and their teachers keep some marks for that. Seven interviewees think that teachers should involve students in debate on a regular basis. They think that it increases confidence as the students feel shy most of the time because they are not exposed to talk because of various social and cultural reasons. Some students were found to be pronouncing the words inappropriately.

#### **4.4 Analysis and Discussions for the Instruments of the Students' Interview**

##### **4.4.1 First Part of the Instruments**

The first part of the questionnaire deals with the personal details of the respondents to keep records for further information which helped to bring forth background or basis behind the respondents' individual position on the selected issue. Five English teachers from different universities were chosen for the interview. Here, every interviewee was interviewed personally at their free time. After coming to the end of every interview, it has been noticed how many minutes did each student took. It was found that most of the interviewees took 8-10 minutes.

##### **4.4.2 Second Part of the Instruments**

From the teachers' interviews, it is found that most of the teachers think debate to be a very effective technique of teaching English language to the students. They opine that debate develops the combination of competence and performance level of a learner. It improves the production level of speaking. Not only that, debate can help students better their accent. So, they suggested that English language teachers arrange at least four debate sessions in a semester. Mr. Shakhawate Jamil Saikat, a Lecturer of English at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, and debater of the year 2013 of Jahangirnagar University, commented that there are threefold benefits of doing debate in English language. Firstly, it increases the linguistic strength of the students. Secondly, it strengthens argumentation skill. Thirdly, it increases confidence.

#### **Chapter Five: Recommendation**

The discussion above uplifts the need of engaging the students in debate in an English language class because only extensive affiliation of students in expressive activities can make them fluent and competent in speaking.

From the questionnaire and interviews, it is found that in developing students' speaking and decreasing their level of nervousness at the time of speaking, debate can work as a tonic because it increases the confidence in a student and prepares him/her to speak with

argument. But to make a debate session successful and to benefit the students in learning English through debate, the instructor or teacher can do the following things:

- i. Choosing the topics of debate: The topics should mostly include the informative and analytical ones: informative ones will keep them updated and the analytical ones will strengthen their argumentation skill. Teacher should also limit the timeframe for each group and each member of a group.
- ii. Dividing the teams: At the time of sorting the students in groups, a teacher should make it sure that each of the groups includes some strong students and some weak students. Also, teacher should make it compulsory for each and every member of a group to talk during the debate. Teacher can keep some marking system so that the students get obliged to speak. If it can be done, the debate sessions will be more successful and it will benefit the students more.
- iii. Motivating the students: After each session, the teacher should provide positive feedback that work as fuel for the students to speak more and more inside and outside the class by making them more and more competent in speaking with logic.
- iv. Advising the students to learn vocabulary: To make things go on, a teacher may get the students learn essential vocabulary on a daily basis. A teacher or instructor also can tell the students to prepare an audio file that will contain a 2 (two) or 3 (three) minutes presentation given by the students.

In order to actualize the abovementioned discussion, the following things can be done:

- i. The government should come forward to provide the English teachers with extensive training on debating so that they can confer their knowledge and experience on the students.
- ii. Every university should make English debate compulsory for the students. They should take the matter seriously so that the students feel encouraged to take part in debate. They can arrange some debate competitions and can give some reward to the winners to motivate them.
- iii. The language teachers should keep the students busy by giving them some activities like debate so that they can make it an essential part of their daily life.
- iv. The teachers should motivate the students so that they do constant practice.

### **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

Teaching English language is a challenging job. Effective teaching results in fruitful learning of the students. All the English language teachers are requested to come forward in taking the initiative to engage their students in debate sessions inside the classes irrespective

of the level of study-primary level, secondary level, or tertiary level. Vigilant use of debate in a language classroom provides the students with the prospect of grasping maximum benefit of learning English and preparing them for using it in their real life successfully. Lastly, engaging students in debate in an English language class is always effective but the effectiveness, to a great extent, depends on the teachers and the students involved in the process.

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### Appendix-1

#### Instruments for Students' Questionnaire Survey

This questionnaire is designed to find out the effectiveness of debate in a language class and students' benefit through it. It is a part of a research. Your opinion will be kept confidential.

It will not be applied anywhere except this research.

#### Personal information

Name: .....

Department: .....

Institution: .....

Year/Trimester/Semester: .....

Contact email: .....

You are requested to respond with tick mark on the basis of preference given here or write your answer for the questions where you are directed to. Please be serious about your opinion.

#### Questions:

Now answer the following questions.

01. Do you like to do debate?

- a. always                      b. sometimes                      c. never                      d. occasionally

02. Do you think students should take part in debate?

- a. always                      b. sometimes                      c. never                      d. occasionally

03. Do you think that doing debate in English language class helps the students learn to speak English better? YES/NO

04. Does your English language teacher sometimes engage you in doing debate in English? YES/NO

05. If your answer to question no .04 is 'YES', write for how long does your English language teacher engages you in debate in class?

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05. Does your teacher form the teams or you do it yourselves? Teacher/ Ourselves
06. How may debate improve your speaking skill? \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix-02

#### Instruments for Classroom Observation

##### Section 01: Classroom Details

1. Name of the Teacher:
2. Name of the Course:
3. Total Students:
4. Students Present:
5. Date and Time Period:

##### Section 02: Question answer

No.	Questions	Yes%	No%
1	Does the teacher sometimes encourage the students to take part in debate?		
2	Does the teacher arrange any pair work or role play or group discussion to develop oral fluency and accuracy?		
3	Is the teacher giving special attention to the improvement of speaking skill of the students?		
4	Are the students interacting with themselves and with the teachers in English?		
5	Does the teacher become impatient when a student cannot communicate in English?		
6	Does the teacher provide proper feedback for the students after each debate session?		
7	Does the teacher try to maintain a standard of English while giving lectures in the class?		
8	Does the classroom procedure include minimum explanation and maximum of speaking practice?		
9	Do all the students in the class use a dictionary which contains phonetic transcription and correct spelling in it?		

10	Are the students afraid of class teacher and shy and anxious of committing errors in front of the other students?		
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**Appendix- 03**

Interview Questions for the Students

Name:

Roll:

Semester:

Time:

Cue 01: Introduce Yourself.

Cue 02: Tell me something about your family.

Cue 03: How much time do you spend to practice speaking English?

Cue 04: Talk about the effectiveness of engaging tertiary level students in debate in an English language class.

**Please Pronounce the Following Words**

Favorite	Vacation	Above
Fish	Zoo	Globe
Finger	Zero	Adjective
Offer	Freeze	School
Beef	As	Translation
Strange Object	Puzzle	Station
Charge	Usual	People
Page	Carpet	From
Special Generalization	Personal	Habitual
Understand	River	Traffic
Voice	Culture	Grammar
Verb	Departure	Own
Serve	Young	Have

**Appendix- 04**

Interview Questions for the Teachers

Name:

Affiliation:

Time:

Cue 01: Introduce Yourself.

Cue 03: How much time do you allow the students to practice speaking English?

Cue 04: Please talk about the effectiveness of engaging tertiary level students in debate in an English language class.