



IMPROVING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH THE DEBATE METHOD FOR GRADE XI STUDENTS

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Abstract

This classroom action research aimed to improve the English speaking skills of eleventh-grade students through the implementation of the debate method. The study was conducted at SMAN 1 Waringinkurung during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year and involved 40 students as research participants. The research was motivated by students' low speaking performance, limited confidence, and minimal opportunities to actively participate in oral communication during English lessons. The study was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Data were collected through speaking tests, observation sheets, and documentation. The findings revealed a significant improvement in both students' speaking skills and classroom participation. Students' activeness increased from 60% in Cycle I to 85% in Cycle II, while the percentage of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criterion improved from 57.5% to 82.5%. The results indicate that the debate method effectively enhances students' confidence, fluency, and ability to express ideas orally. Therefore, the debate method can be considered an effective and communicative instructional strategy for improving English speaking skills at the senior high school level.

Keywords: speaking skills, debate method, classroom action research, EFL students

Abstrak

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris melalui penerapan metode debat pada siswa kelas XI SMAN 1 Waringinkurung. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh rendahnya kemampuan berbicara siswa yang disebabkan oleh kurangnya kepercayaan diri, keterbatasan kesempatan berbicara, serta pembelajaran yang masih berpusat pada guru. Penelitian dilaksanakan pada semester ganjil tahun ajaran 2025/2026 dengan melibatkan 40 siswa sebagai subjek penelitian. Penelitian dilakukan dalam dua siklus yang masing-masing meliputi tahap perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Data penelitian dikumpulkan melalui tes keterampilan berbicara, lembar observasi keaktifan siswa, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan pada keterampilan berbicara dan keaktifan siswa. Persentase keaktifan siswa meningkat dari 60% pada siklus I menjadi 85% pada siklus II, sedangkan ketuntasan keterampilan berbicara meningkat dari 57,5% menjadi 82,5%. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa metode debat efektif dalam meningkatkan kepercayaan diri, kefasihan, dan kemampuan siswa dalam menyampaikan pendapat secara lisan. Dengan demikian, metode debat dapat dijadikan sebagai alternatif strategi pembelajaran yang komunikatif untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris di tingkat SMA.

Kata kunci: keterampilan berbicara, metode debat, penelitian tindakan kelas, siswa SMA

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English plays a crucial role as an international language and a medium of global communication. Among the four language skills, speaking is considered the most essential for academic communication, professional settings, and social interaction. Moreover, speaking skills support the development of students' critical and creative thinking, which aligns with the objectives of the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, English instruction at the senior high school level should place greater emphasis on the development of students' speaking abilities.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at SMAN 1 Waringinkurung, many eleventh-grade students still experience difficulties in expressing ideas orally in English. Low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities to actively speak in class were identified as major factors inhibiting students' speaking development. In addition, teacher-centered instructional practices tend to dominate classroom activities, resulting in limited student participation and insufficient improvement in speaking aspects such as fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Structured speaking activities such as debate can help students improve fluency and self-confidence in oral communication (Richards, 2017).

To address these challenges, innovative, communicative, and participatory teaching methods are required. The debate method can be categorized as a communicative instructional method because it actively engages students in expressing and defending arguments orally. (Brown Douglas, 2001) emphasizes that effective language teaching should provide learners with opportunities for authentic and meaningful communication. Similarly, Harmer Jeremy, (2023) states that discussion- and debate-based activities promote authentic interaction in EFL speaking classrooms. Therefore, the debate method is considered a relevant instructional approach for improving students' speaking skills.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of debate in enhancing students' speaking performance. M. Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, (2014) and Firmansyah et al., (2019) reported improvements in students' participation, fluency, and accuracy through structured debate activities. Zare & Othman, (2015) further highlighted the role of debate in developing students' critical thinking skills. However, most of these studies were conducted in higher education institutions or urban Islamic senior high schools. Empirical research on the implementation of debate in public senior high schools located in semi-rural areas remains limited. Furthermore, affective aspects such as students' confidence and motivation after participating in debate activities have not been extensively explored.

Therefore, this study aims to improve the English speaking skills of eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Waringinkurung through the implementation of the debate method. This research is expected to provide empirical and pedagogical contributions to the development of communicative English teaching practices in Indonesian senior high schools.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the research design, as its primary focus was to improve the teaching and learning process through direct instructional actions implemented in a natural classroom setting. Classroom Action Research is commonly used to address learning problems continuously through a series of planned actions that are implemented, observed, and reflected upon. The research design referred to a spiral model proposed by Lincoln & Denzin, (2005), which emphasizes reflective and collaborative activities between the teacher and the researcher to enhance instructional practices. This model consists of four recurring stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This approach is consistent with Cresswell John, (2014), who states that qualitative research allows for in-depth analysis of learning processes and changes in participants' behavior.

The participants of this study were 40 eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Waringinkurung during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were selected purposively based on preliminary observations indicating that students' speaking skills were relatively low, particularly in terms of fluency, grammatical accuracy, and self-confidence. The instructional actions were conducted during regular class hours to maintain a natural learning context without excessive intervention, in line with Fraenkel et al., (2011), who emphasize the importance of preserving natural settings in educational research. The English teacher served as a collaborator who assisted in implementing the actions, assessing students' performance, and providing feedback at each reflection stage.

The research instruments included observation sheets, speaking assessment rubrics, interview guidelines, and documentation in the form of photographs and videos. Observation sheets were used to record students' activities, interactions, speaking confidence, and level of engagement during debate sessions. The speaking assessment rubric was developed based on the main components of speaking skills as proposed by Cresswell John, (2014), namely fluency,

accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence. Interviews were conducted with selected students to obtain in-depth information regarding their experiences during the debate activities, including challenges encountered and perceived improvements. Documentation was used as visual evidence to support the research findings and to enhance data credibility through methodological triangulation (Sugiyono, 2013).

The research procedures followed the CAR cycle adapted from Lincoln & Denzin, (2005). During the planning stage, lesson plans based on the debate method were developed, debate topics were selected, and research instruments were prepared. The action stage involved several activities, including providing examples of debate formats, dividing students into affirmative and opposing teams, preparing arguments, and conducting classroom debates. Observation was carried out throughout the debate sessions to record changes in students' behavior using observation sheets and documentation tools. The reflection stage was conducted after each cycle to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the implemented actions and to determine necessary improvements for the subsequent cycle. The sequence of the research procedures is summarized as follows:

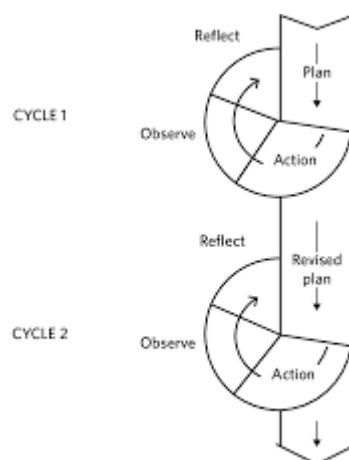


Figure 1. CAR Cycle Based on (Kemmis et al., 2014)

The data collection techniques employed in this study included speaking tests, observations, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using the model proposed by Miles Matthew & Huberman Michael, (1994), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, key points from the observation results, interviews, and speaking tests were selected and focused on indicators of improvement in students' speaking skills. Data display was carried out in the form of score comparison tables, descriptive narratives, and interview transcripts to facilitate the identification of patterns in students' behavioral changes. Conclusions were then drawn based on the consistency of the data obtained in each cycle.

The study was considered successful if at least 75% of the students achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (MMC), final test scores showed improvement across all speaking skill aspects, and students demonstrated higher participation and greater self-confidence during debate activities, as recommended by Richards Jack & Renandya Willy, (2002) regarding indicators of successful speaking instruction.

$$Nilai = \frac{\text{total skor}}{\text{skor maksimum}} \times 100\%$$

To interpret the overall percentage results of the questionnaire, the classification proposed by Gusriyanti Putri et al., (2025) was applied, as presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Classification of Students' Learning Interest

| No | Range | Category |
|----|----------|-----------|
| 1. | 80%-100% | Very High |
| 2. | 61%-80% | High |
| 3. | 41%-60% | Moderate |
| 4. | 21%-40% | Low |
| 5. | 0,0%-20% | Very Low |

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This classroom action research was conducted at SMAN 1 Waringinkurung from September to October 2025 and involved 40 eleventh-grade students. The research was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of three meetings. The debate method was implemented in teaching analytical exposition texts to improve students' English speaking skills. The data were obtained from observation sheets measuring students' participation and speaking tests administered at the end of each cycle.

Results of cycle I

In the first cycle, the learning activities focused on introducing analytical exposition texts and implementing the debate method at an initial stage. Students were divided into affirmative and opposing teams to discuss predetermined topics. During this cycle, the teacher provided detailed guidance on debate procedures and the use of English during debates.

The observation results indicated that students' participation began to increase, although it was not evenly distributed. A total of 24 students (60%) were categorized as active, 10 students (25%) were moderately active, and 6 students (15%) were categorized as less active. Several students still showed hesitation when speaking and tended to rely on written notes when delivering their arguments.

Table 2. Students' Activeness Observation Results in Cycle I (N = 40)

| No | Activeness Category | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Active | 24 | 60 % |
| 2. | Moderately Active | 10 | 25 % |
| 3. | Less Active | 6 | 15 % |
| | Total | 40 | 100 % |

The speaking test results at the end of Cycle I showed that 23 students (57.5%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (MMC), while 17 students (42.5%) did not meet the criterion.

Table 3. Results of Students' Speaking Skill Test in Cycle I (N = 40)

| No | Mastery Category | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Achieved MMC | 23 | 57,5 % |
| 2. | Did Not Achieve MMC | 17 | 42,5 % |
| | Total | 40 | 100 % |

Results of cycle II

The second cycle was implemented based on the evaluation of the first cycle. Improvements focused on providing language support, conducting brief pronunciation exercises before debate sessions, and reinforcing debate rules to ensure active participation from all students. The debate topics were also modified to be more relevant and challenging.

The observation results in Cycle II showed a significant improvement in students' participation. Of the 40 students, 34 students (85%) were categorized as active, 4 students (10%) were moderately active, and only 2 students (5%) were categorized as less active. Students appeared more confident and were able to express arguments and responses more fluently than in the first cycle.

Table 4. Students' Activeness Observation Results in Cycle II (N = 40)

| No | Activeness Category | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Active | 34 | 85 % |
| 2. | Moderately Active | 4 | 10 % |
| 3. | Less Active | 2 | 5 % |
| | Total | 40 | 100 % |

The speaking test results at the end of Cycle II revealed that 33 students (82.5%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (MMC), while 7 students (17.5%) did not achieve the criterion.

Table 5. Results of Students' Speaking Skill Test in Cycle II (N = 40)

| No | Activeness Category | Number of Students | Percentage |
|----|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Achieved MMC | 33 | 82,5 % |
| 2. | Did Not Achieve MMC | 7 | 17,5 % |
| | Total | 40 | 100 % |

Discussion

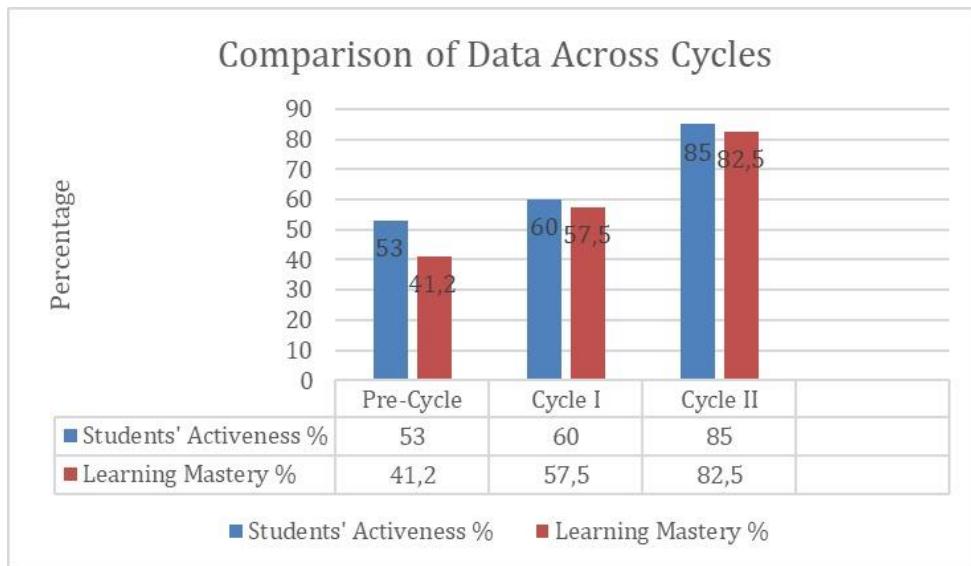
The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the debate method positively contributed to the improvement of students' English speaking skills. In Cycle I, the observed improvement was relatively limited as students were still adapting to a learning method that required active participation and confidence in speaking. At this stage, several students experienced difficulties in delivering arguments fluently and consistently in English.

A more substantial improvement was observed in Cycle II following revisions to the instructional strategies. The provision of language support and short pronunciation exercises prior to debate activities contributed to increased fluency and self-confidence among students. This finding aligns with Richards, (2017) who emphasizes the importance of linguistic support in developing speaking skills in EFL contexts.

Furthermore, the debate method encouraged students to express opinions, defend arguments, and respond to opposing viewpoints logically. Such activities created an interactive and communicative learning environment that provided students with meaningful opportunities to use the target language. This supports the views of (Harmer Jeremy, 2023) and (Brown Douglas, 2001), who argue that communicative and meaningful speaking practices enhance learners' speaking competence.

The findings of this study are also consistent with Kennedy, (2007), who states that classroom debates are effective in developing oral communication skills as well as critical thinking abilities. Through the processes of presenting arguments, rebuttals, and responses, students were encouraged to use English actively and in a structured manner. In addition, (Zare & Othman, 2015) highlight that debate activities increase students' participation, confidence, and fluency in EFL speaking classrooms.

Figure 2. Comparison of Students' Performance Between Cycles



The comparison of results between Cycle I and Cycle II shows an increase of 25% in the percentage of students who achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (MMC), from 57.5% in Cycle I to 82.5% in Cycle II. Students' activeness also improved from 60% to 85%. Therefore, it can be concluded that the debate method was effectively implemented in teaching analytical exposition texts to improve students' speaking skills.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the debate method is effective in enhancing English speaking skills among eleventh-grade students. This method not only improves students' activeness and learning outcomes but also fosters confidence, courage, and critical thinking skills in oral communication.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this classroom action research conducted in two cycles, it can be concluded that the implementation of the debate method effectively improves the English speaking skills of eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Waringinkurung. The improvement is evidenced by the increase in students' activeness from 60% in Cycle I to 85% in Cycle II, as well as the rise in speaking mastery from 57.5% to 82.5%.

From a pedagogical perspective, the debate method encourages active participation, enhances students' confidence, and provides meaningful opportunities for practicing oral communication in English. In addition, debate activities foster critical thinking skills and promote interactive, student-centered learning. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to integrate debate activities into speaking instruction to create a more engaging and effective learning environment, particularly in EFL contexts at the senior high school level.

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