

## The Students' Challenges in Speaking for Debate

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the most difficult and exciting forms of academic communication available to students is debate. One of the most challenging communication obstacles students face in their academic endeavors is debate speaking. This study aims to find and investigate the common issues debated by students. The study focuses on numerous important areas, including speaking anxiety, time management, framing arguments, handling counterarguments, improving debate forms, and team coordination inside a debate team. Data collecting and processing for this study used quantitative descriptive approaches. The debate class consists of forty college students registered. Five student interviews plus a prepared questionnaire helped to compile the data. The results show that most students struggle with controlling limited speaking time during debates, have trouble with spontaneous reasoning, and suffer from speaking anxiety. Two other noted major obstacles were inadequate team coordination and a lack of knowledge concerning discussion procedures. To improve students' speaking ability in debate environments, lecturers and debate coaches should offer specialized training programs stressing debate strategy, speaking fluency, and team collaboration techniques. This study clarifies students' speaking challenges and offers reasonable suggestions for strengthening debate education in universities.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Engaging in debate is one of the most challenging and dynamic forms of academic exchange that students can be involved in. Unlike informal conversations or classroom discussions, participating in a debate demands that individuals formulate logical arguments, effectively advocate for their views, and rapidly address counterarguments, all while adhering to time constraints and formal guidelines. In educational environments, debate serves not only as a competitive endeavor but also as a pedagogical tool that enhances students' critical thinking, reasoning capabilities, and persuasive communication skills. Additionally, debate is utilized as a skill that fosters digital transformation. Nonetheless, taking part in debate introduces a distinct set of speaking difficulties for students, particularly for those who are still acquiring the ability to navigate structured public speaking under pressure. The essence of debate consists of rapid verbal interactions, counterarguments, and compelling delivery, which can be daunting even to assured speakers. Students must articulate their ideas effectively, back them up with evidence, and foresee opposing arguments while maintaining fluency and composure. This makes debating one of the toughest communication challenges that students encounter in their academic experiences (Firmansyah & Valatansa vegian, 2019a). participants in debates often struggle with

structuring their ideas coherently, handling speaking anxiety, and addressing unforeseen arguments, all of which can impact the quality of their presentations and their overall performance in debate sessions. A major hurdle in debate speaking is the constraint of time. In most debate formats, speakers have a set number of minutes to present their arguments and replies. The core of debate involves swift verbal exchanges, rebuttals, and persuasive presentation, which can be intimidating even for confident speakers. Students need to express their thoughts clearly, support them with solid evidence, and anticipate counterarguments while also remaining calm and fluent.

This complexity makes debating one of the most challenging forms of communication that students face in their academic journeys. As highlighted by (Werdiningsih, 2018), debate participants frequently encounter difficulties in organizing their thoughts logically, managing speaking nerves, and responding to unexpected arguments, all of which can affect the quality of their presentations and their overall success in debate events. A significant challenge in debate speaking is the limitation of time. In many debate formats, speakers are allotted a specific number of minutes to convey their arguments and responses. Another major challenge is handling rebuttals and spontaneous arguments. Debating is not simply a one-sided speech; it involves an interactive engagement where speakers must attentively listen to their opponents, pinpoint weaknesses in their arguments, and provide effective counterarguments on the spot. This component of debate requires not only quick thinking but also keen listening abilities and a solid understanding of the debate resolution. (Werdiningsih, 2018), pointed out that numerous students struggle to address counterarguments without losing their focus or confidence, particularly when complex or unforeseen points are presented by the opposing team. The apprehension of being caught unprepared by challenging questions or more compelling rebuttals often leads to hesitation and anxiety among students during debates. The anxiety of being surprised by challenging questions or stronger counterarguments often leads to hesitation and nervousness among students during debates. Speaking anxiety is one of the most frequently reported challenges in debate situations. Unlike standard class presentations, debates present a competitive environment where participants are assessed by judges and watched by an audience, which increases psychological stress. In her study. (Duong & Trang, 2023), discovered that students enrolled in English debate classes faced moderate to high levels of anxiety, particularly when debating in front of their peers and instructors.

Observed that the fear of making errors, facing criticism, and being judged unfavorably by others had a significant impact on students' confidence in debate settings. This anxiety often presents itself through symptoms like shaky hands, quivering voices, forgetfulness, and challenges in articulating ideas clearly, all of which negatively impact debate performance. Furthermore, the intricate nature of constructing arguments presents a challenge for many students. Engaging in debate involves more than just expressing opinions; it necessitates that speakers develop logical, evidence-supported arguments with clear connections between claims, reasons, and examples. (Barseghyan & The, 2023) pointed out that numerous novice debaters have difficulty creating strong, cohesive cases because they either lack adequate background knowledge on the debate topic or struggle to effectively link their arguments. When students encounter motions concerning unfamiliar subjects such as economics, international relations, or ethics, the challenges become more pronounced. Limited understanding makes it more difficult for students to quickly come up with relevant points, undermining both their principal speeches and their capacity to deliver effective rebuttals. Additionally, the rigid structure and regulations of formal debate further complicate students' speaking abilities. Each debate format, such as Asian Parliamentary, British Parliamentary, or Karl Popper, has its own specific procedures concerning speech order, timing, and the roles assigned to each speaker. Students who are not familiar with these formats often become confused about when to interject points of information, how to rank their arguments, or how to interact with opponents without violating the rules. (Werdiningsih, 2018) noted that students who do not have a solid grasp of debate mechanics tend to perform poorly, not due to a lack of ideas, but because they have difficulty articulating them within the necessary framework.

The dynamics of teamwork and roles in debate introduce an additional layer of complexity. In team debates, effective coordination among members is crucial to prevent repetition of arguments or conflicting points. Students must be familiar with not only their own arguments but also those proposed by their teammates, and they must be able to adjust their presentations according to the flow of the debate. (Werdiningsih, 2018) observed that ineffective communication within teams frequently results in weak case development, mixed messages, and inadequate rebuttals. Without sufficient practice in collaborative tactics and clearly defined roles, even teams composed of strong individual speakers may lose debates due to a lack of synchronization. The competitive aspect of debate can also deter less experienced students from engaging. active participation. Debates frequently feature confrontational exchanges where students are required to directly challenge and oppose the ideas of others. In cultures where public disagreement is viewed as impolite or hostile, students may feel uneasy expressing themselves assertively during debates. (Rahila Khan Zainab Akram Sadia Suleman Khan, 2018) noted that cultural values shape students' readiness to engage in debate, with some opting out of participation due to the fear of offending others or seeming disrespectful.

This hesitation impacts both their confidence in speaking and the overall effectiveness of the debate sessions. To counter these particular challenges, various researchers and educators have suggested solutions aimed

at fostering debate-oriented speaking skills. (Firmansyah & Valatansa vegian, 2019b) proposed the creation of nurturing classroom environments in which students feel secure in making mistakes and sharing their viewpoints without fearing judgment. She also recommended a gradual introduction to debating scenarios, beginning with informal discussions before advancing to formal debates. suggested incorporating debate workshops and mock competitions into language learning curricula to acclimate students to debate formats and speaking techniques before they participate in actual contests. highlighted the necessity of teaching frameworks for constructing arguments and providing students with topic briefs and evidence repositories to reinforce their ideas during debates.

This preparation enhances not only students' knowledge of content but also their confidence in discussing complex subjects. (Sultana & Jamin, 2021) suggested implementing regular collaborative speaking exercises to enhance communication and coordination among members of debate teams. They asserted that engaging in teamwork and collective case-development boosts students' fluency in speaking and their capacity to present organized arguments in debates. In summary, participating in debate formats poses unique challenges for students, including managing time, responding spontaneously to counterarguments, feeling anxious, possessing limited knowledge on varied topics, being unfamiliar with debate structures, and encountering teamwork obstacles. These challenges are intensified by the competitive and rapid nature of formal debates, which require both language skills and cognitive flexibility. To tackle these issues, it is necessary to provide targeted speaking training tailored to debate scenarios, create supportive environments, and utilize strategic preparation techniques that transcend general language teaching methods. (Finch et al., 2013) By recognizing the specific obstacles students face when speaking in debate, educators can develop more effective debate programs and assist students in becoming confident, articulate, and strategic debaters.

## 2. METHOD

This research uses a quantitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of (through) questionnaires and observations. The research subjects consist of fourth-semester undergraduate students in English Education, which was carried to distributed questionnaires containing questions about speaking for debate. Data were obtained from questionnaires distributed to fourth-semester students, as well as observations of the learning process and interactions in the classroom.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

No.	Indicator	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1	Nervousness when speaking in public	2.5%	7.5%	25%	40%	25%	3.8
2	Anxiety due to limited vocabulary	2.5%	5%	17.5%	52,5%	22.5%	3.9
3	Preference for working alone to avoid speaking English	2.5%	7.5%	25%	55%	10%	3.7
4	Fear of being judged or ridiculed by peers	4.9%	22%	12.2%	39%	22%	3.6
5	Difficulty in understanding different accents	-	9.8%	26.8%	63.4%	-	3.6
6	Fear of grammatical mistakes	2.4%	9.8%	14.6%	51.2%	22%	3.9
7	Difficulty maintaining focus when listening	-	19.5%	17.1%	53.7%	9.8%	3.6
8	Difficulty in translating ideas into English	2.4%	2.4%	12.2%	63.4%	19.5%	4.2
9	Insecurity about pronunciation	2.4%	12.2%	19.5%	58.5%	7.3%	3.6
10	Difficulty in time management while speaking	2.4%	4.9%	14.6%	70.7%	7.3%	3.8

The research investigated the difficulties encountered by students participating in English debate speaking tasks and analyzed the elements influencing their speaking abilities. The results uncovered various significant concerns, which are addressed below through thematic subheadings:

### 3.1. Preference for Working Alone to Avoid Speaking English

The findings revealed that 39% of students preferred to work independently to steer clear of speaking English. This indicates a significant inclination among learners to shy away from speaking opportunities in group situations, likely due to anxiety or fear of making mistakes. This tendency aligns (Sultana & Jamin, 2021) research, which found that learners often avoid speaking tasks to reduce their risk of judgment and embarrassment. The implication is evident: EFL instructors need to cultivate supportive, non-threatening classroom atmospheres and create collaborative tasks that gradually encourage students to engage in communicative use of English.

### 3.2. Fear of Being Judged or Ridiculed by Peers

The research indicated that 39% of respondents believed that fear of judgment or mockery hindered them from speaking English. This supports the views of (Sultana & Jamin, 2021), who contended that the fear of negative evaluation is a major factor contributing to anxiety in foreign language classrooms. When students are concerned about how their peers will react, their affective filter increases, reducing their willingness to communicate. Consequently, creating clear classroom norms that encourage peer support, respect, and a safe environment for language exploration is crucial.

### 3.3. Difficulty in Understanding Different Accents

A considerable 63.4% of students reported that they struggle with understanding different English accents. This notable statistic underscores a significant hurdle for EFL students, particularly in today's increasingly interconnected communication landscape. (Akbar et al., 2022) pointed out that insufficient exposure to a range of English accents can impede listening comprehension and, in turn, diminish speaking confidence. The results indicate that educators should incorporate genuine listening resources that feature a variety of English accents into their teaching practices.

### 3.4. Fear of Grammatical Mistakes

The findings revealed that 51.2% of respondents acknowledged that their fear of making grammatical errors impacted their speaking abilities. This result aligns with (Vasquez Diaz & Iqbal, 2024) assertion that anxiety over grammatical accuracy is a common obstacle to oral communication in EFL settings. When learners concentrate too much on preventing mistakes, they frequently hesitate and sacrifice fluency. To combat this issue, activities aimed at enhancing fluency, where minor grammatical errors are accepted, should be included to boost students' confidence in speaking spontaneously.

### 3.5. Difficulty Maintaining Focus When Listening

The research indicated that 53.7% of students reported having difficulty maintaining attention when listening to English. This finding is consistent with (Zhao et al., 2019), who observed that EFL learners often struggle to concentrate during listening tasks, particularly when faced with complex material or unfamiliar accents. A lack of concentration can impede understanding and restrict preparation for speaking. Consequently, it is advisable to integrate metacognitive strategies such as prediction, note-taking, and focused listening exercises to enhance students' engagement during listening activities.

### 3.6. Difficulty in Translating Ideas into English

A notable 63.4% of participants indicated that they struggle to articulate their thoughts in English when speaking. This finding supports (ERDEL, 2023), which underscores the necessity of speaking practice for learners to reorganize their internalized language knowledge and communicate their ideas smoothly. This result highlights the need for integrating speaking activities that prioritize fluency over precision, enabling students to concentrate on conveying meaning rather than achieving perfect linguistic form.

### 3.7. Insecurity About Pronunciation

The research revealed that 58.5% of participants acknowledged feeling uncertain about their English pronunciation. This is in agreement with (ERDEL, 2023), who observed that anxiety related to pronunciation frequently hinders learners from engaging in verbal activities. To address this, incorporating pronunciation-centered drills, imitation tasks, and speech recognition applications can help gradually enhance students' awareness and confidence in their pronunciation.

### 3.8. Nervousness When Speaking in Public

Research indicated that 40% of students admitted to feeling anxious when speaking English in public environments. This aligns with (ERDEL, 2023) idea of communication apprehension as a fundamental aspect of language anxiety, particularly when learners worry about making mistakes publicly or facing negative judgments. It is recommended that instructors begin with small group discussions and structured speaking activities before progressively introducing larger audience settings to help students become more comfortable with public speaking.

### 3.9. Anxiety Due to Limited Vocabulary

The research revealed that 52.5% of students felt anxious when speaking English due to their limited vocabulary. This finding aligns with (Pratiwi et al., 2024), who suggested that a lack of vocabulary knowledge limits language learners' ability to express themselves and obstructs communication. These results highlight the significance of ongoing vocabulary enhancement activities, including thematic word lists, vocabulary games, and speaking exercises that incorporate newly acquired words.

### 3.10. Difficulty in Time Management While Speaking

Finally, 70.7% of participants acknowledged that they faced difficulties with time management in speaking activities. This finding aligns with (Mendrofa & Wijaya, 2022) study, which indicates that learners benefit from engaging in timed speaking exercises repeatedly to boost their fluency and effectively manage their speaking durations. Implementing consistent timed presentations, storytelling, and organized debates can assist students in improving their fluency while also practicing self-regulated time management during oral tasks.

## 4. CONCLUSION

This research uncovered various speaking difficulties that students encounter in debate scenarios, such as anxiety, restricted vocabulary, problems articulating thoughts, grasping different accents, fear of making grammatical mistakes, and ineffective time management. Additionally, specific issues related to debates, like managing counterarguments, a lack of familiarity with debate formats, and poor teamwork, also surfaced as major hurdles. The results underscore the necessity of offering focused speaking practice, training in debate strategies, and nurturing classroom environments to alleviate anxiety and boost students' fluency and self-assurance. It is suggested to include a variety of listening resources, team-based activities, and organized debate simulations to adequately prepare students for authentic debate experiences. By tackling these challenges, educators can improve the quality of debate-based instruction in EFL contexts.

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