

The Extensiveness of Debate Pedagogy in Improving English Language Proficiency among Public Secondary School Students in Kigoma Region, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined the extensiveness of debate pedagogy on improving English language proficiency among public secondary school students in the Kigoma region. It was grounded in Dell Hymes' Communicative Competence Theory, a mixed research approach was employed with a convergent research design. The target population included 1 regional education office (REO), 158 heads of schools (HOS), 134 English subject teachers (EST), and 56598 students from 158 public secondary schools. A sample of 1 REO, 17 (HOS), 34 (EST), 384 secondary school students making a total 436 respondents who were selected using purposive and stratified random sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and achievement tests. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed through coding and thematic analysis. Reliability for quantitative research instruments was determined by Cronbach's alpha value, where the coefficients of students' questionnaires was 0.78. Reliability for qualitative instruments was determined by the triangulation of research instruments. Research instruments were piloted in Kigoma district. Ethical issues were maintained by getting research permit, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of information. The study found that debate pedagogy positively impacts students' language skills, confidence, and articulation. However, poor implementation, lack of commitment, low attendance, and language proficiency dominance hinder its effectiveness. The study recommends that the government prioritize funding, resources, and teacher training to improve debate pedagogy, ensuring implementation quality and supporting schools in promoting student participation.

Keywords: Extensiveness, Debate, Improving, English Language Proficiency, Public Secondary Schools

1. Introduction

Debate pedagogy has emerged as a promising approach to addressing the limited speaking and writing skills among secondary school students in Tanzania. Research increasingly supports the potential of debate programs to enhance students' English language speaking skills. For example, Koul and Ganai (2019) discovered that debate-based learning activities can strengthen students' speaking skills and boost their confidence in acquiring the English language. Similarly, Mulyana and Saepuloh (2019) reported that debate pedagogy can improve students' English language speaking skills while promoting collaboration and teamwork. Insufficient access to English language opportunities has been shown to hinder the academic performance and job prospects of Tanzanian students (Mushi et al., 2016). Similarly, Tilya and Komba (2017) found that poor English language skills among secondary school students in Tanzania limit their academic and career prospects. Debate programs have been incorporated into the English secondary school syllabus since the revision in 2005, and many schools in Tanzania have adopted debate programs as a teaching method. Therefore, integrating debate programs into the curriculum not only addresses the language proficiency gap but also provides students with valuable skills for their academic and professional future.

Despite the increasing popularity of debate programs in Tanzania, challenges persist in effectively implementing debate pedagogy in the classroom. For instance, Kim and Lim (2017) emphasized the importance of providing adequate training for teachers to implement debate pedagogy effectively. Addressing the limited speaking skills among secondary school students in Kigoma region of Tanzania remains a significant challenge that requires effective strategies (Maro, 2017; Mvungi, 2016; Ali et al., 2020). Although debate activities are integrated into English language education, most public secondary schools in the region exhibit aversion towards debates, leading to limited participation and the dominance of a minority with limited language skills. Furthermore, evidence suggests that debate sessions in the region contribute little to students' language proficiency, with some teachers mixing languages such as English and Swahili, negatively impacting students' mastery of speaking skills. Additionally, students from Swahili medium primary schools often lack fluency in speaking, making them apprehensive about speaking in front of their peers, hindering their mastery of English language proficiency.

Numerous studies have highlighted the challenges students face in mastering the English language, particularly in terms of speaking skills. Mapunda and Mafu (2014) found consistent weaknesses in English proficiency among first-year university students, including challenges in transferring concepts from Swahili, incorrect word choice, spelling errors, and overgeneralization of grammar rules. Similarly, Shishiwa (2016) observed weak communication skills, particularly in the use of English, among Tanzanian graduates. These challenges significantly impact students' academic and career success, underscoring the importance of addressing the issue of limited speaking skills.

While studies have acknowledged the potential of debate pedagogy in improving English language proficiency, there is limited knowledge about its extent in the Kigoma region (Maro, 2017; Mvungi, 2016; Ali et al., 2020). Furthermore, educational stakeholders in the region have expressed concerns about the limited command of English language speaking and reading skills among public secondary school students, despite weekly debate sessions (Maro, 2017; Mvungi, 2016; Ali et al., 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to fill this knowledge gap and

address the issue by conducting further research to determine the best approach for effectively implementing debate pedagogy in Kigoma region. By gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges specific to the region, educational policymakers and practitioners can develop tailored strategies to enhance English language skills through debate programs, ultimately benefiting the students in their academic and future professional endeavors.

2. Statement of the Problem

Poor English speaking and writing abilities among the majority of public secondary school students in Tanzania have long been a persistent issue that hampers their academic and career prospects (Shariff, 2018; Mosha, 2019; Mohamed, 2021). Despite the integration of debate activities into English language education, students continue to struggle with the development of their language skills (Majidi et al., 2021; Ideh, 2021). This problem is particularly pronounced in the Kigoma region, where graduates with limited English language proficiency face restricted opportunities that impede their academic and career prospects, including higher education and the job market (Shariff, 2018; Mosha, 2019). The ramifications of inadequate English language proficiency among students are substantial and can impede Tanzania's economic growth and development (Maliva et al., 2022). While previous studies have addressed this issue, few have explored the extent to which debate pedagogy improves English language proficiency among secondary school students in the Kigoma region (Mariba, 2015; Kirui, 2017; Songati, 2018; Nyamubi, 2016). Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap by examining the extensiveness of debate pedagogy on enhancing English language proficiency among public secondary school students in the Kigoma region.

3. Research Question

To what extent does debate pedagogy improve English language speaking and writing skills among public secondary school students in the Kigoma region?

4. Significance of the Study

The study findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers regarding the extent to which debate pedagogy is effective in helping public secondary school students in the Kigoma region improve their English language speaking and writing skills. This information will be beneficial for English subject teachers, school principals, and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in understanding the role of debate as a pedagogical tool for enhancing students' language proficiency. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology can utilize these research findings to develop an intervention program aimed at promoting a debate culture in all secondary schools. The research will evaluate the implementation of debate pedagogy by teachers in Kigoma secondary schools, which can contribute to the development of appropriate learning strategies to improve the use of proper English language in the curriculum for both teachers and students. Ultimately, this study has the potential to expand the existing knowledge base on English language education and serve as a valuable resource for future researchers interested in improving students' writing and speaking skills in the Tanzanian secondary school context.

5. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Communicative Competence Theory (CCT), as proposed by Dell Hymes in 1966. According to CCT, language learning is a gradual process that involves creative language use and learning through trial and error. It emphasizes the importance of exposure to and use of language in the surrounding environment for students to acquire

language skills. The theory prioritizes interaction, problem-solving, and real-world communication through activities like role play and group work, enabling students to communicate effectively in various contexts. While CCT does not focus on error reduction, it aims to develop students into competent communicators who can adapt to different situations.

In this study, CCT is applied to explore the use of debate pedagogy as a strategy to improve English language speaking and writing skills among public secondary school students in the Kigoma region. Debates provide a meaningful and purposeful environment for students to engage with the English language, allowing them to argue with communicative goals in mind. Speaking in debates serves as a means to synthesize and analyze arguments, providing opportunities for language practice.

6. Empirical Review

This section contains an empirical review based on the use of debate as a pedagogical tool to improve students' writing and speaking skills. Various studies have been conducted globally to examine the contributions of debate to improving second language proficiency.

In 2018, Elsay conducted a study in French to examine how debate strategy impacts the ability of French department college students to learn English words and make decisions. The study utilized both descriptive and semi-experimental approaches and involved 30 third-year French college students as the experimental group. The participants underwent a vocabulary exam and a decision-making scale before and after engaging in debate activities over a two-month period. The results, analyzed using paired samples t-tests, showed significant improvements in vocabulary and decision-making skills. Despite providing valuable information on how debate impact French department college students, however, the study did not extensively explore the impact of debate on students' English language proficiency, which is the focus of the current study. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the extent to which debate pedagogy improves English language proficiency among secondary school students in the Kigoma region.

In 2020, Sahril et al. conducted a study in Denmark to assess the impact of debate pedagogy on enhancing English language proficiency among students using English as a foreign or second language. This action study adopted a qualitative research approach and involved 11 students. A survey questionnaire consisting of yes-or-no questions and one need-statement question was used to gather data. The findings indicated that learning to communicate through argumentation is engaging, thrilling, and beneficial for vocabulary acquisition. The study contributed valuable information to the existing knowledge about the effect of debate on language proficiency. However, the study's use of a qualitative approach with a survey questionnaire raised concerns about the credibility, validity, and reliability of the findings as survey questionnaires are typically quantitative in nature. To address this gap, the current study employed a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods under a convergent research design, allowing for generalization of the findings. While the qualitative approach primarily collected numerical data for statistical analysis, the quantitative methods gathered detailed information to enhance and complement the quantitative findings.

In 2021, Majidi conducted an experimental study in the Netherlands to explore the impact of debate instruction in a second language on various aspects of argumentation. The study aimed to investigate how debate instruction can enhance the quality and structure of reasoning in both oral and written forms. The research employed a quasi-experimental design, with an experimental group receiving debate instruction and a control group without such instruction.

The results indicated that the experimental group demonstrated improvement in the quality and structure of reasoning in both oral and written forms. However, it is important to acknowledge potential limitations associated with the experimental design, such as confounding variables and the influence of unaccounted intervening factors. To minimize these limitations, the current study employed a convergent parallel research design, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the impact of debate on reading skills among secondary school students.

In 2018, Maiko conducted a study in Kenya to investigate the effects of different instructional methods for integrated English on students' academic achievement. The study aimed to identify teaching methods and their impact on student performance but did not specifically explore the influence of debate on English-speaking proficiency. By focusing solely on English performance, the study may not have fully captured the potential benefits of debate in developing language proficiency and communicative skills. Additionally, the study relied on questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument, which may have introduced bias and limited the depth of information gathered. The study contributed to the existing body of knowledge concerning the impact of discussion on English language proficiency development. However, relying solely on questionnaires for data collection may introduce bias into the study's conclusions. If the sample techniques used were not specified, the conclusions could be considered unreliable. To address these concerns, the current study employed a convergent research design that utilized multiple data-gathering instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The study ensured proper representation of all students and teachers who teach English in public secondary schools in the Kigoma Region through a combination of direct inclusion, stratified random sampling, and convenience sampling.

In 2018, Zamrodah conducted research in Tanzania to examine the effects of teaching methods on students' English language communication skills. The study utilized a mixed-methods research technique, combining a qualitative phenomenological approach with a quantitative survey. The findings indicated that only a small fraction of English teachers incorporated visual approaches in their instruction, while both students and teachers acknowledged the positive impact of debate strategies, particularly debate competitions, on students' language learning and communication abilities. However, the study had several methodological shortcomings, including an undefined research design, a small sample size of less than 32 participants, and insufficient information on the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments used. These limitations may have affected the accuracy and reliability of the gathered information. To address these limitations and improve the rigor of the research, the current study employed a convergent parallel research design with a mixed methods approach, ensuring a larger sample size and utilizing validated data collection instruments.

7. Demonstration of Knowledge Gap

Existing research by Elsay (2018), Sahil et al. (2020), Majid et al. (2021), Maiko (2018), Zamrodah (2018), and Mkulu (2019) has not adequately explored the potential of debate pedagogy to improve English speaking and writing skills among public secondary school students in the local context. Despite the expectation that these strategies would enhance language proficiency, there is a knowledge gap regarding their effectiveness in the Kigoma region of Tanzania. To address this gap, the current study investigated the impact of debate

pedagogy on English language speaking and writing skills among public secondary school students in Kigoma region.

8. Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed methods research approach, specifically a convergent research design, the target population included 158 heads of schools, 356 English subject teachers, and 56,598 public secondary school students from 158 ordinary public secondary schools in the Kigoma region. The sample size comprised of 436 participants, including one regional education officer, 17 heads of schools, 34 English subject teachers, and 384 students. The sampling technique involved purposive sampling for heads of schools and the regional education officer, and stratified random sampling for students and English subject teachers. Data were collected through questionnaires for students, semi-structured interviews with the regional education officer, heads of schools, and English subject teachers, and focused group discussions with students. The study also included an English language proficiency test to evaluate students' speaking and writing skills. Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, employing descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and presenting the results in tables, pie charts, and graphs. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding and interpreting direct quotations. The study ensured ethical considerations by obtaining research permits, maintaining informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of information. The data collection instruments were validated by research experts from MWECAU, and reliability was established through statistical analysis and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for questionnaires. Piloting of the instruments was conducted in two secondary schools prior to the actual study.

9. Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion section presents the study's results and analysis on the extensiveness of debate pedagogy on English language proficiency among public secondary school students in Kigoma region of Tanzania. It combines quantitative data from student questionnaires, supported by tables and figures, and qualitative data through direct quotations. The findings are compared with previous studies to establish the study's unique contribution. Response rates for data collection methods were high, ranging from 85% to 100%. Participant demographics included sex, age, and years of experience, with variations observed among English teachers, heads of schools, and students.

The extensiveness of debate pedagogy in improving English language speaking and writing among public secondary students

This section presents the findings and discussion of a scholarly study investigating the extensiveness of debate pedagogy on the improvement of writing skills among secondary school students in the Kigoma region. The study employed a mixed methods approach, including interviews with English subject teachers, heads of schools, and regional education officers, as well as a Likert scale questionnaire administered to students. The collected data were analyzed to determine the percentages of agreement, undecided, and disagreement opinions. To further support the findings, an English language proficiency test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 1, which displays the responses of secondary school students regarding the extent to which debate pedagogy promotes speaking and writing skills in the English language within the Kigoma region.

Table 1.

Percentages of students' views on the extensiveness of debate on improving speaking skills

S/N	Statement	Students (n=384)									
		SA		A		U		D		SD	
		N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	N	%
1	Debate programs have improved my articulation ability, with the effective and natural use of stress and intonation	98	25.5	89	23.2	102	26.6	55	14.3	40	10.4
2	School debate programs improved my speaking ability	83	21.6	58	15.1	117	30.5	79	20.6	47	12.2
3	I now speak English better after practising speaking loud during the debate	68	17.7	84	21.9	134	34.9	58	15.1	40	10.4
4	I can pronounce some English words better after improving them through debate	69	18.0	93	24.2	132	34.4	64	16.7	26	6.8
5	I can say some difficult English vocabulary after participating in debate programs for some time now	107	27.9	60	15.6	112	29.2	70	18.2	35	9.1
6	I have become more competent in speaking English after participating in school debates for some time now	58	15.1	87	22.7	121	31.5	39	10.2	79	20.6
7	I feel more confident speaking English in front of my fellow students after I engaged in debate programs for some time now	108	28.1	50	13.0	120	31.3	76	19.8	30	7.8
8	I am satisfied with how much I improved my speaking ability from oral reading	63	16.4	82	21.4	124	32.3	46	12.0	69	18.0
9	Participation in school debates is worth doing	69	18.0	90	23.4	132	34.4	49	12.8	44	11.5

Source: Field Data, (2023)

The findings from Table 1 indicate that 48.6% of students agreed that the debate program enhanced their articulation ability, focusing on stress and intonation, while 26.6% were uncertain and 24.7% disagreed. Similarly, 42.1% of students agreed that their pronunciation of English words improved through debate, with 34.4% uncertain and 23.4% disagreeing. Furthermore, 41.1% of students agreed that their confidence in speaking English in front of peers increased after participating in debate, while 31.3% were uncertain and 27.6%

disagreed. Additionally, 39.6% agreed that their speaking ability improved by practicing speaking loudly during debates, with 43.9% uncertain and 25.5% disagreeing. These results suggest that engaging in debate activities enhances students' articulation ability, speaking skills, pronunciation, and confidence. The focus group discussions with students confirmed the positive impact of debate on their speaking skills and confidence.

Sir, for sure I can say that in the little time, I have participated in school in inter-class debate competitions my speaking ability has improved somehow...I have learned new words and more importantly, my confidence in speaking English has improved so much. (FGD3, focus group discussion, February 28, 2023).

The quotation highlights the positive impact of debate pedagogy on students' speaking abilities, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence in using English. It suggests that debate pedagogy effectively reduces language anxiety and promotes communicative competence among students. These findings are consistent with a study by Sahril et al. (2020), which demonstrated the effectiveness of debate pedagogy in enhancing language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and confidence in English usage. The study further emphasized that debate pedagogy facilitates social interaction, meaning negotiation, and experiential learning, thereby fostering communicative competence and language development. These findings align with Dell Hymes' (1966) Communicative Competence Learning Theory, which underscores the significance of language use in social contexts. Debate pedagogy offers students opportunities to engage in social interactions and real-life language practice, thereby cultivating communicative competence and boosting confidence in English usage.

Another student shared her experience of success as she said: *Previously, when we were in Form One, we had difficulty with comprehension questions due to limited participation in debate, but with debate practice, our ability to understand and answer comprehension questions has improved.* (FGD1, focus group discussion, March 01, 2023).

The quotation underscores the positive impact of debate competitions on enhancing students' speaking ability, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence in using English. It aligns with the findings of a study conducted by Maiko (2018), which demonstrated the effectiveness of debate competitions in improving language proficiency. This finding relates to Albert Bandura's (1977) Self-efficacy theory, suggesting that individuals' belief in their ability to perform a task influences their performance and motivation to learn. Through participation in debate competitions, students develop self-efficacy beliefs, leading to improved language proficiency and increased confidence in using English. Moreover, the quotation emphasizes the significance of confidence in speaking English for students' language proficiency.

During group discussion, another female student added:

Our understanding of text cohesion and clarity has been much improved with debate practice; we are now able to speak in front of people and even have conversations. We are confident that as time goes on, we will improve more. (FGD5, focus group discussion February 21, 2023).

The focus group discussion participant expressed that their understanding of text cohesion and clarity has significantly improved through debate practice. They further mentioned that they have gained the ability to speak in front of people and engage in conversations. The participant expressed confidence in their continuous improvement

over time. This statement highlights the positive impact of debate practice on enhancing participants' language skills, including text cohesion, clarity, public speaking, and conversational abilities.

The assertions support the notion that student participation in debate activities enhances their English language speaking ability. These assertions were further supported by the findings from focus group discussions and interviews conducted with heads of schools and English subject teachers. The interviews revealed that well-utilized debate sessions have the potential to significantly improve students' speaking competency. In discussing the impact of debate on students' speaking skills, one headmaster provided the following insight:

Interclass and subject debate if well used have the ability to improve students speaking skills.....for example, in my class I normally use debate as a pedagogical tool. I can see how my students speaking skills are improving day after day...it even increases their confidence to speak English in front of others (*HoS13, personal communication, February 21, 2023*).

The positive perspective shared by the heads of schools highlights the beneficial impact of interclass and subject debates on improving students' speaking skills and confidence in using English. It is evident that debate serves as an effective pedagogical tool that continuously enhances students' speaking abilities over time. The findings of the study align with those of Zamrodah (2018), which demonstrated the effectiveness of debate pedagogy in improving language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and self-confidence among students. These findings are in line with Dell Hymes' (1966) Communicative Competence Learning Theory, which underscores the significance of language use in social contexts. Through debate practice, students engage in social interactions, meaning negotiation, and experiential learning, leading to the development of communicative competence and language skills.

To support the assertion above, one head of the school during the interview said. *Debate pedagogy is an effective approach to improving students' speaking fluency in English, and it can help learners build confidence in expressing themselves in English...* (*HoS12, personal communication, February 28, 2023*).

Another English subject language teacher gave his experience on how the debate has helped his students to improve their speaking ability.

Sincerely I can say if well practised and used as a pedagogical tool in teaching English language students could benefit a lot.... for example, in this school every Friday students participate in inter-class debate....since we have stated there is a significant change, particularly with pronunciation ability and confidence in responding to the class question (*ELTS9, personal communication, February 23, 2023*)

The quotation highlight that Debate has a positive impact on students' speaking skills in English, aligning with Dell Hymes' (1966) Communicative Competence Learning Theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of language use in social contexts, highlighting that effective communication involves both linguistic competence and appropriate language use. Debate provides students with opportunities to engage socially, analyze information, and develop argumentation skills, fostering communicative competence and language development. Through debate, students learn to express ideas clearly, listen and respond to others' viewpoints, and negotiate meaning—essential skills for effective communication.

These findings are consistent with Sahril et al.'s (2020) study, which found that debate promotes vocabulary acquisition. Debate creates an engaging learning environment that enhances language development.

Similar response was given by the regional education officer. During an interview REO has this to say;

"As a Regional Education Officer, I strongly believe that debate can play a significant role in enhancing students' English language proficiency. By providing opportunities for students to engage in debate practice, we can help them develop their language skills and build their confidence in using English." (*REO1, personal communication, interview, February 23, 2023*).

The Regional Education Officer believes that debate has a significant impact on enhancing students' English language proficiency. The officer suggests that engaging students in debate practice helps them develop their language skills and build confidence in using English. This aligns with the principles of the theory of self-efficacy proposed by Albert Bandura. According to this theory, individuals' beliefs in their ability to perform a task effectively can influence their performance and motivation to learn. By providing opportunities for students to participate in debate practice, their self-efficacy beliefs are strengthened, leading to improved language proficiency and confidence in using English. The officer's statement indicates that debate practice is an effective method to enhance students' self-efficacy beliefs and promote language development. Engaging in debate practice allows students to practice using English in a supportive and interactive environment.

During an interview with heads of schools, English language teachers and regional education officers revealed that all schools in the Kigoma region were instructed to insert debate periods in their school timetables. During the interview, the regional education officer said:

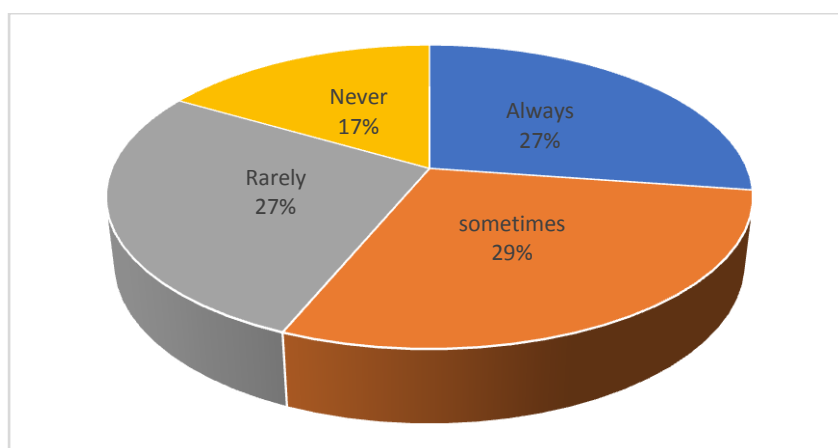
"We have instructed all schools in this region to institutionalize debate in their school timetable. We have instructed heads of schools to ensure that students engage in interclass and school debate programs. I know a few schools which often organized interschool debate competitions. But I cannot say for sure whether all schools in this region are doing the same (*REO1, personal communication, interview, February 23, 2023*).

Responding to the same question, one head of school, said: *Look at our school timetable, you will see debate period.... actually, here is conducted as extra-curriculum activities mainly on Friday afternoons whereby students have a tendency of organizing interclass debate competitions... (HoS 14, personal communication, February 24, 2023).*

These assertions show that all visited schools had debate periods in their school timetable. In the review of all 17 school timetables, it was found that they had debate periods indicated.

These interview and document review findings were supplemented by student questionnaire findings as summarized in Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1: *Students' views on the use of debate to improve speaking and writing skills in the English language*



Source: Field Data, (2023)

The data presented in Figure 1.1 reveals that among the 384 students surveyed, 29% indicated that debate programs were sometimes conducted in their school, while 27% reported that it was always or rarely conducted, and 17% stated that it was never conducted. This data suggests that despite the acknowledgement of debate being on school timetables by heads of schools and regional education officers, it was not regularly implemented. It also indicates that English language teachers did not utilize debate as a pedagogical tool in their classroom sessions. During a focused group discussion, a student shared that their English language teacher only incorporated debate pedagogy during general school debates on Fridays. This lack of regular practice and utilization of debate as a pedagogical tool could contribute to the limited English language speaking fluency among public secondary school students. Elsay (2018) supports the use of debate as a pedagogical tool, stating that it harmoniously integrates content and language skills, promoting the learning-to-speak and speaking-to-learn perspectives. Similarly, Majidi et al. (2021) argue that well-designed debate pedagogy empowers students to actively manage the learning process, fostering deep learning as students engage in meaningful discussions and critical thinking.

The researcher's observation of a debate session among Form One and Form Three students on the topic of "Boarding school is better than day school" revealed several significant findings. The primary focus of the observation was to assess the proficiency of English language teachers in providing effective guidance and supervision during the debate. It was observed that while the English subject teachers were present during the session, their ability to deliver guidance in fluent English was hindered by code-switching, indicating a lack of proficiency. This highlights the pressing need for in-service training programs to enhance the English language proficiency of teachers.

The research findings underscore the critical role of effective supervision and guidance in debate sessions within educational settings. The proficiency of English language teachers is crucial, as their ability to utilize fluent and accurate English during debates can significantly impact students' language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and confidence in using English. Prior studies, such as Chirapongsananurak and Chirapongsananurak (2017), have demonstrated that debate programs can enhance students' language proficiency by providing opportunities for practice and application of language skills. Additionally, these programs have been shown to cultivate critical thinking abilities through the evaluation and analysis of arguments and evidence, as indicated by Tsui and Ng (2003).

To optimize the benefits of debate programs for language proficiency, effective guidance and feedback from teachers are imperative. Yulianto and Hayati (2019) emphasize the essential role of teacher feedback in improving students' language proficiency during debates. Therefore, the proficiency of English language teachers in delivering guidance and feedback should be a primary focus of in-service training initiatives. By nurturing students' language proficiency, critical thinking skills, and confidence in using English, teachers contribute significantly to their academic and future career success.

The researcher also examined the inclusion of debate programs in school schedules by reviewing pertinent documents from the English department, such as the school's general timetable and previous lists of principal speakers. It was noted that debate sessions were typically scheduled for Wednesdays and Fridays, with a review of principal speakers indicating repetitive selection, suggesting a lack of equal representation. This observation highlights the necessity of incorporating all students and providing equal representation opportunities within debate programs to enhance their effectiveness in promoting language proficiency.

The observation aligns with the Communicative Competence Theory proposed by Dell Hymes (1966), which emphasizes the significance of language in social interaction and communication. The theory underscores the need for language education to prioritize the development of communicative competence, encompassing grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies. Ensuring equal opportunities for all students to participate in debate programs facilitates the enhancement of communicative competence and language proficiency by providing a platform for real-life language practice. Furthermore, debate fosters critical thinking skills, which are essential for effective communication and problem-solving in any language.

Furthermore, the researcher noted the issue of student attendance during debate sessions, with a significant number of students being absent on those days. This observation undermines the objective of debate sessions in developing students' language proficiency. Additionally, during the debate session, some students appeared disengaged, focusing on personal activities instead. These observations raise concerns regarding the organization of debate sessions and the level of student engagement. Addressing student attendance issues requires identifying the reasons for absenteeism and implementing strategies to mitigate them. Moreover, debate sessions should be structured in an engaging and relevant manner, selecting topics of interest to students and providing opportunities for them to express their opinions and ideas.

The researcher administered an English language proficiency test to selected secondary school students, revealing notable findings. While the majority of students demonstrated moderate proficiency in pronunciation, with approximately 70% able to pronounce English words accurately, their proficiency in grammar was lacking. Only around 20% of students achieved moderate grades in grammar proficiency, while approximately 50% scored low grades, and the remaining 30% were unable to answer at all. This indicates a widespread deficiency in grammar skills among students in public secondary schools in the Kigoma region, negatively impacting their ability to write and speak in English accurately and effectively. On the other hand, students displayed some proficiency in communication, despite grammar difficulties. However, a lack of vocabulary proficiency was evident, with some students resorting to a mix of Swahili and English words. These findings are consistent with prior research highlighting the challenges faced by students in developing countries concerning English language proficiency, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. Studies conducted in Tanzania, such as

that by Kimaro, Kavishe, and Mdee (2017), have revealed low levels of English language proficiency among students, with grammar and vocabulary posing significant difficulties. Similarly, research conducted in Nigeria by Adesope (2018) has indicated poor English language proficiency due to a dearth of qualified teachers and inadequate teaching materials.

To address the low levels of English language proficiency among students, schools should invest in effective English language education programs. This includes recruiting qualified English language teachers, providing ample opportunities for students to practice their oral communication skills, and implementing appropriate teaching methods aligned with students' proficiency levels. Additionally, instilling policies that foster a reading culture, encourage attendance at debate sessions, and promote the use of English in everyday interactions can further enhance language proficiency.

The observation of the debate session among Form One and Form Three students on the topic of "Boarding school is better than day school" revealed several significant findings. The proficiency of English language teachers in delivering effective guidance and supervision during debates was hindered by code-switching, highlighting the need for in-service training programs. Effective guidance and feedback from teachers play a crucial role in enhancing students' language proficiency and critical thinking skills during debate sessions. The inclusion of all students and providing equal representation opportunities within debate programs is essential to maximize their effectiveness. The observation also raised concerns regarding student attendance and engagement, which should be addressed through comprehensive strategies. The English language proficiency test administered to students indicated deficiencies in grammar and vocabulary skills, emphasizing the need for improved English language education programs.

This section presents findings on the effectiveness of debate pedagogy in improving writing skills among secondary school students in the Kigoma region. Data was collected through interviews with teachers, school heads, and education officers, as well as a Likert scale survey given to students. Additionally, an English language proficiency test was conducted to support the questionnaire and interview findings.

The influence of Debate Pedagogy to Promote English language writing skills

Table 2.

Percentages of students' views on the extensiveness of debate on improving writing skills

S/N	Statement	Students (n=384)									
		SA		A		U		D		SD	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	n	%
1	Debate programs have improved my ability to write a clear topic sentence that may identify the topic	24	6.3	72	18.8	153	39.8	65	16.9	70	18.2
2	The debate has improved my ability to organize my ideas when I write a sentence	65	16.9	81	21.1	162	42.2	39	10.2	37	9.6
3	The debate has helped me to improve my sentence	53	13.8	91	23.7	148	38.5	47	12.2	45	11.7

structure											
4	Debate programs have improved my ability in using appropriate vocabulary and word forms to effectively communicate with the reader	73	19.0	86	22.4	139	36.2	50	13.0	36	9.4
5	debate programs have helped me on using appropriate spelling, capitalization and punctuation	56	14.6	104	27.1	142	37.0	22	5.7	60	15.6
6	Debate programs have helped me to be able to revise my own writing	32	8.3	68	17.7	158	41.1	55	14.3	71	18.5
7	Debate programs have given me the ability to edit my own writing to the wording, grammar, punctuation and spelling	59	15.4	73	19.0	139	36.2	48	12.5	65	16.9
8	There is a positive association between debate programs and writing skills	63	16.4	78	20.3	158	41.1	69	18.0	46	12.0
9	School debate programs have improved my ability in identifying problems in my writing and see what should be improved	76	19.8	48	12.5	168	43.8	38	9.9	54	14.1

Source: Field Data, (2023)

According to the data in Table 2.1, a significant percentage of students were uncertain about the impact of debate programs on their writing skills, including their ability to organize ideas and revise their own writing. The findings from the questionnaire and focused group discussion indicate that most students were unsure whether participation in debate programs improved their writing skills.

During the discussion, one student shared their perspective, which may be representative of other students' views. For example, the student may have said:

Debate may help someone to organize his/her idea hence, this may be helpful in writing sentences...this is because debate provides a platform for students to practice English words.... but I am not very sure about that....I am just thinking (FGD1, focus group discussion, March 01, 2023)

The findings from the data analysis and focused group discussion indicate that a considerable number of students expressed uncertainty regarding the potential impact of participation in debate programs on their writing skills in the English language. The percentages revealed a significant proportion of students who were unsure about the extent to which debate programs

could enhance their ability to organize ideas when writing a sentence, revise their own writing, and improve their overall writing skills. This uncertainty stemmed from various factors, including a lack of clarity about the specific objectives of debate programs and their relevance to writing skills. Moreover, students reported insufficient guidance on how to apply the skills acquired from debate programs to their writing tasks. Additionally, some students failed to recognize the connection between debate programs and the enhancement of their writing skills, which influenced their perceptions of the program's effectiveness.

The interview findings from school heads and English subject teachers provided insights into the potential benefits of debate programs in improving students' writing skills. During the interviews, one school head shared the following experience:

If you will ask me, I will say participation in debate programs may help students improve their writing skills in many ways....in this school, our students participate in debate programs and it has an impact on their writing skills because if you compare form four or three and form one or two.... form four and three are better than form one and two (*ELT, S14, personal communication, February 17, 2023*).

The positive perspective shared by the school head provides support for the notion that engagement in debate programs yields positive outcomes for students' writing skills. The teacher's observation, highlighting the superior writing abilities of students who participate in debate programs during their later years of secondary school compared to their earlier years, further reinforces this claim. Empirical research studies have also substantiated the positive impact of debate programs on language proficiency and writing skills. For instance, a study conducted by Li, Li, and Liang (2021) demonstrated that participation in debate programs enhanced the language proficiency, particularly in writing, of Chinese university students. Similarly, Singh and Kaur (2016) conducted a study in India that revealed how involvement in debate programs improved students' critical thinking, communication skills, and ultimately, their writing abilities. Debate programs offer valuable opportunities for students to practice and refine their language skills within a real-world context. Through debating, students are challenged to think critically, logically organize their thoughts, and effectively articulate their ideas, all of which are fundamental skills for proficient writing. The acquired practice and skill development in debate programs can be transferred and applied to writing in diverse contexts.

Similarly, the researcher sought an information from English subject teacher. During the interview, the English language teacher has this to say

"Debate programs provide students with a unique opportunity to develop their language skills in a real-world setting. Through participation in debates, students learn to think critically, organize their thoughts, and communicate their ideas persuasively. These same skills are essential for effective writing, and the practice gained through debate programs can transfer to writing in various contexts. In my experience, students who participate in debate programs tend to be better writers, as they have developed the necessary skills to express their ideas clearly and effectively." (*ELT, personal communication, February 17, 2023*)

The English language teacher's statement emphasizes the positive impact of debate programs on students' language skills, particularly their writing abilities. The teacher suggests that participation in debates enhances critical thinking, organization, and communication skills, all of which are crucial for effective writing. This assertion is supported by research studies,

including the study conducted by Ideah (2021), which demonstrated significant improvements in students' writing skills through participation in debate programs. The theory of communicative competence proposed by Dell Hymes (1966) also aligns with this idea, as it emphasizes the importance of using language appropriately in different social contexts to achieve specific communicative goals.

The administration of a test to supplement the data obtained from students' questionnaires, teacher and school head interviews, and focus group discussions revealed concerning findings regarding students' writing skills. The majority of students demonstrated difficulties in all six areas tested, including grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. These areas are integral to proficient writing, and struggling in any of them can significantly impact the quality of students' written work. The findings suggest that students' participation in debate programs has not adequately improved their writing skills.

While debate programs contribute to the development of critical thinking and communication skills, it appears that these skills did not directly translate into improved writing abilities. It is possible that the debate programs did not sufficiently focus on the specific areas of writing skills assessed in the study. Previous research underscores the significance of explicitly teaching and practicing targeted writing skills to enhance overall writing abilities. For example, Graham and Perin (2007) found that instruction in sentence combining, sentence construction, and planning strategies significantly improved students' writing proficiency. Similarly, Brannon and Knoblauch (2011) demonstrated that explicit instruction in grammar and mechanics positively impacted the quality of students' writing.

During the school debate observation, the researcher noted that some students, particularly the secretaries, were recording incorrect spellings without being corrected by their peers or teachers. This observation raises concerns regarding students' writing proficiency, even in the context of debate participation. The lack of proficiency may stem from various factors, such as inadequate knowledge of spelling rules, poor handwriting, or insufficient attention to detail. These factors significantly influence writing quality and can hinder students' academic performance if not addressed.

Although debate programs offer opportunities for practicing critical thinking and communication skills, they may not inherently enhance writing abilities. Recent research by Hsu and Lin (2021) supports this notion, indicating that debate programs improve students' ability to organize thoughts and communicate effectively but may not directly enhance writing skills, particularly in grammar and syntax. Moreover, the absence of corrective measures for spelling mistakes during the debate suggests a limited emphasis on writing skills within the school's curriculum. Contemporary literature emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction and guidance in writing skills to foster students' writing abilities. For instance, Graham and Hebert (2020) found that teaching specific writing strategies, such as sentence combining, significantly improved students' writing skills. Consequently, it is crucial to provide students with adequate instruction and guidance to enhance their writing abilities, as proficient writing is essential for effective communication.

10. Summary of the findings

The findings of the study indicate that debate pedagogy holds promise as an effective approach for enhancing students' English language proficiency. Engaging in debate programs not only boosts students' confidence but also improves their articulation, speaking abilities, pronunciation, and writing skills. However, the study also highlights several factors that hinder the effectiveness of debate pedagogy. These include inadequate implementation and a

lack of commitment from school administrators and teachers. Insufficient emphasis on debate days due to poor attendance further limits the impact of the program. Additionally, the dominance of a minority with higher language proficiency levels poses a challenge to achieving equitable outcomes for all students.

11. Conclusion

Based on the empirical findings, the present study arrives at the conclusion that debate pedagogy proves effective in enhancing students' English language proficiency by cultivating diverse language skills and fostering heightened confidence. Nevertheless, the implementation of this approach is impeded by suboptimal execution, evidenced by a lack of commitment from relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, inadequate attendance on debate days hampers the comprehensive application of this pedagogy. Additionally, the presence of a dominant minority with advanced language proficiency levels constrains the breadth of impact, potentially perpetuating inequitable outcomes.

12. Recommendations

In light of the study's conclusion, several recommendations emerge to address the identified issues and optimize the effectiveness of debate pedagogy. Firstly, it is advised that the government should prioritize allocating adequate funding, resources, and training opportunities to empower teachers in organizing engaging debate sessions. This would enable educators to enhance their instructional practices and effectively facilitate students' participation in debates.

Moreover, a robust quality assurance mechanism should be established to monitor the implementation of debate pedagogy across schools. This would involve conducting regular evaluations, providing feedback, and offering support to schools to improve their approach to debate instruction. By promoting accountability and ensuring adherence to best practices, quality assurance measures can contribute to the refinement and optimization of debate pedagogy.

Furthermore, the development of comprehensive policies and guidelines should be made crucial to promote the widespread use of debate pedagogy and encourage student involvement. These policies should outline the benefits of debate, provide clear instructions on incorporating debates into the curriculum, and emphasize the importance of equitable access to debate opportunities for all students. By establishing a supportive policy framework, educational institutions can foster an environment conducive to the growth and expansion of debate pedagogy.

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