



DEBATE AS AN INTERACTIVE TEACHING TECHNIQUE FOR EFL LEARNERS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18397564>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 25th January 2026

Accepted: 26th January 2026

Online: 27th January 2026

KEYWORDS

debate-based learning, EFL learners, interactive teaching techniques, communicative competence, critical thinking, speaking skills, learner-centered approach

ABSTRACT

Debate has increasingly been recognized as an effective interactive teaching technique in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. This article explores the pedagogical value of debate-based instruction in developing EFL learners' communicative competence, critical thinking, and active participation. Debate activities encourage learners to use language meaningfully by expressing opinions, defending arguments, and responding to opposing viewpoints in authentic communicative contexts. The study examines different debate formats suitable for EFL learners, such as structured debates, role-play debates, and problem-based debates, and analyzes their impact on language skills development, particularly speaking and listening. Special attention is given to the role of the teacher as a facilitator, as well as to pre-debate preparation and post-debate reflection as essential components of successful implementation. Based on theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies, the article argues that debate, when systematically integrated into EFL instruction, enhances learners' linguistic proficiency, motivation, and confidence, making it a valuable interactive technique in modern language education.

Introduction

In recent years, the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has increasingly emphasized the importance of interactive and learner-centered teaching techniques. Traditional approaches that prioritize grammar instruction and rote memorization have been criticized for their limited effectiveness in developing learners' communicative competence and real-life language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). As

globalization and international communication continue to expand, EFL learners are required not only to possess linguistic knowledge but also to demonstrate the ability to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and engage in critical discourse in English.

One interactive teaching technique that has gained considerable attention in EFL pedagogy is debate. Debate provides learners with meaningful opportunities to practice language skills in authentic communicative contexts, where language is used as a tool for reasoning, persuasion, and interaction rather than mere form-focused practice (Harmer, 2015). Through debate activities, EFL learners actively participate in discussions, formulate arguments, respond to opposing views, and develop confidence in public speaking. This process aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching, which emphasize interaction as both the means and the goal of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, debate-based instruction is grounded in constructivist and sociocultural learning theories, which highlight the role of social interaction in cognitive and language development. Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning occurs through meaningful interaction within a social context, making debate an effective technique for promoting collaborative learning and scaffolding language use. In EFL classrooms, debates create a supportive environment where learners co-construct knowledge and develop linguistic competence through peer interaction.

Moreover, debate as an interactive teaching technique contributes significantly to the development of critical thinking skills among EFL learners. Engaging in debates requires students to analyze issues, evaluate evidence, and construct logical arguments, all of which are essential components of higher-order thinking (Paul & Elder, 2006). Research indicates that EFL learners who regularly participate in debate activities demonstrate improved speaking fluency, vocabulary use, and discourse organization, as well as increased motivation and learner autonomy (Zare & Othman, 2013).

Despite its numerous advantages, the implementation of debate in EFL classrooms presents certain challenges, including varying language proficiency levels, limited classroom time, and learners' anxiety about speaking in a foreign language. However, studies suggest that these challenges can be effectively addressed through careful planning, appropriate scaffolding, and the use of structured debate formats tailored to learners' needs (Kennedy, 2007).

Main body

The use of debate as an interactive teaching technique in EFL classrooms requires a systematic methodological approach that takes into account learners' language proficiency, cognitive development, and instructional objectives. Debate-based instruction is most effective when it is carefully planned, structured, and integrated into the overall language curriculum rather than used as an occasional classroom activity (Harmer, 2015). This section examines the pedagogical functions of debate in EFL learning, common debate formats, and practical strategies for effective implementation.

Pedagogical Value of Debate in EFL Classrooms. Debate plays a crucial role in developing EFL learners' communicative competence by providing opportunities for meaningful language use. Unlike controlled practice activities, debates require learners to produce extended spoken discourse, negotiate meaning, and respond spontaneously to

others' ideas. These processes contribute to the development of fluency, accuracy, and pragmatic competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Through debates, learners practice essential communicative functions such as agreeing, disagreeing, persuading, and justifying opinions, which are vital for real-life communication.

In addition to linguistic benefits, debate enhances learners' cognitive skills, particularly critical thinking and reasoning. Engaging in argumentation encourages students to analyze issues from multiple perspectives, evaluate evidence, and construct coherent arguments (Kuhn, 1999). Paul and Elder (2006) emphasize that such analytical processes are central to higher-order thinking and academic success. For EFL learners, integrating language use with critical thinking tasks makes learning more meaningful and intellectually engaging.

Types of Debates Suitable for EFL Learners. Several debate formats have been identified as particularly effective in EFL contexts. **Structured debates**, which follow predefined rules and stages, are suitable for learners at intermediate levels. This format includes clear roles, time limits, and turn-taking, which help reduce anxiety and ensure balanced participation (Kennedy, 2007). Structured debates allow learners to focus on language production within a supportive framework.

Role-play debates are another effective format, especially for lower-level or mixed-ability EFL classes. In this approach, learners assume specific roles, such as professionals, community members, or fictional characters, and argue from those perspectives. Role-play debates promote creativity and empathy while lowering affective barriers, as students speak on behalf of a role rather than themselves (Vygotsky, 1978).

Problem-based debates involve discussing real-life or hypothetical problems and proposing solutions. This format aligns with task-based language teaching principles and encourages learners to use language for problem-solving and decision-making (Ellis, 2003). Problem-based debates are particularly effective in developing functional language and collaborative skills in EFL classrooms.

Strategies for Effective Debate Implementation. Successful debate-based instruction depends on several key strategies. **Pre-debate preparation** is essential to ensure meaningful participation. Teachers should introduce the topic, provide relevant background information, and teach necessary vocabulary and functional expressions before the debate (Harmer, 2015). This scaffolding approach helps learners feel more confident and reduces linguistic anxiety.

Another important strategy is **teacher facilitation**. In debate activities, the teacher's role shifts from knowledge provider to facilitator and moderator. Teachers guide discussions, ensure respectful interaction, and encourage participation from all learners (Omelicheva, 2007). Effective facilitation prevents dominant students from monopolizing discussions and supports less confident learners.

Assessment and feedback also play a critical role in debate-based learning. Assessment should focus not only on language accuracy but also on argument quality, coherence, and interaction skills. Formative assessment and constructive feedback help learners reflect on their performance and improve both language use and critical thinking skills (Brown, 2007).

Post-debate reflection is essential for consolidating learning outcomes. Reflection activities, such as written summaries, self-evaluation, or group discussions, allow learners to

analyze their arguments, language use, and interaction strategies. According to Paul and Elder (2006), reflection strengthens metacognitive awareness and promotes independent learning.

Impact of Debate on EFL Learners. Research indicates that debate-based instruction positively influences EFL learners' motivation, confidence, and willingness to communicate in English. Zare and Othman (2013) report that students who regularly engage in debates demonstrate improved speaking fluency, expanded vocabulary, and greater engagement in classroom interaction. Moreover, debates foster a collaborative learning environment where learners develop social skills and respect diverse perspectives.

Overall, debate serves as a powerful interactive teaching technique that integrates language development with cognitive and social learning. When implemented systematically and supported by appropriate strategies, debate enhances both linguistic proficiency and academic skills, making it an effective approach in EFL education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has examined debate as an effective interactive teaching technique for EFL learners, highlighting its pedagogical value in promoting communicative competence, critical thinking, and active classroom engagement. The analysis demonstrates that debate-based instruction creates meaningful opportunities for language use, allowing learners to express ideas, defend arguments, and interact with peers in authentic communicative contexts. As a result, debates contribute significantly to the development of speaking fluency, discourse organization, and pragmatic language skills.

Overall, this study concludes that debate is a powerful interactive teaching technique that supports holistic language development and prepares EFL learners for meaningful participation in academic and real-world communication. Future research may focus on empirical classroom-based investigations to further examine the long-term impact of debate-based instruction on EFL learners' language proficiency and critical thinking skills.

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