Raising the standard: Assessing the effectiveness of debate activities for English fluency in Indonesian police academy classrooms

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Abstract

This study examines how British Parliamentary Debate (BPD) is used to enhance English-speaking proficiency among third-year cadets at the Indonesian Police Academy (IPA). Grounded in an interpretivist perspective, it used a qualitative, single-site case study design to explore cadets' and lecturers' experiences with debate-based learning in police classrooms context. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis using purposive sampling (34 cadets and 2 English lecturers). The data were analyzed thematically with NVivo 15 and guided by Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis highlights 5 interrelated thematic experiences in speaking improvement: initial involvement, emotional response, preparation process, topic relevance, and activity perception. Overall, debate-based learning offers a holistic approach to developing linguistic, cognitive, and affective skills and can be integrated more systematically into police-academy English curricula, particularly when reinforced through regular practice, collaborative peer work, and constructive feedback from lecturers.

Keywords: *British parliamentary debate; debate-based learning; English speaking proficiency; police cadets; qualitative case study*

INTRODUCTION

Debate-based learning has increasingly been used in language education because it can create sustained speaking practice while simultaneously developing critical thinking and argumentation skills (Nurakhir et al., 2020; Rodger & Stewart-Lord, 2020). In the Indonesian Police Academy (IPA), strengthening English-speaking competence is especially important because police officers are increasingly expected to engage in international collaborations and peacekeeping operations; therefore, English is needed for clear, confident, and accurate professional communication rather than treated as an optional skill (Nugraha et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, the policing profession remains highly respected, and police cadets are viewed as future officers who must be prepared physically, mentally,

and intellectually for demanding service (Eralyanti et al., 2023). However, semi-military police education also tends to prioritize intensive physical training and tactical readiness, which can reduce time and energy available for English learning and limit opportunities for extended speaking practice. To respond to career-development demands and international engagement, the IPA has made English a compulsory subject, and institutional direction has encouraged graduates to pursue overseas postgraduate study pathways through LPDP-related schemes, which, in practice, require meeting recognized English proficiency benchmarks such as IELTS (Baker, 2021; Lemdiklat, 2022). Reflecting this policy pressure, the IPA has developed a structured Semester Learning Plan (SLP) across levels that targets all four skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) through IELTS-oriented academic tasks to prepare cadets to pass IELTS as a requirement for LPDP study abroad and to support their future policing duties (Alkindi, 2023).

Within this institutional context, British Parliamentary Debate (BPD) has been adopted as a promising pedagogical strategy because it obliges learners to build evidence-based arguments, respond spontaneously to counter-claims, and communicate logically within a formal structure (Flynn, 2007). Classroom debate is widely recognized as an active instructional technique that increases engagement and accountability and supports the development of key soft skills—especially critical thinking and communication—alongside speaking proficiency (Aclan, 2015; Zare & Othman, 2015). At the IPA, debate activities are also aligned with professional needs because they simulate real communication demands faced by officers, where structured reasoning, persuasive delivery, teamwork, and composure under pressure are essential for operational effectiveness and leadership development (Deliana & Ganie, 2024; Susilo et al., 2024).

Even so, the effectiveness of debate depends on key pedagogical conditions: lecturers must be able to facilitate and moderate debates constructively (e.g., clarifying roles, ensuring equal speaking opportunities, and providing feedback), while cadets require sufficient linguistic support and motivation to participate meaningfully—particularly given their heavy training schedules (Thi & Nhung, 2021). Empirical and review-based evidence generally supports debate's contribution to speaking development (e.g., fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence). However, research remains limited in specialized disciplined environments such as police academies, where institutional culture, time constraints, and professional readiness shape implementation (Afri et al., 2021; Sahril et al., 2020; Timbu et al., 2022; Waluyo & Abrar, 2024; Wariyati et al., 2024). Accordingly, investigating how BPD is experienced and adapted at the IPA leads to the central research question: How do lecturers and police cadets experience the role of debate as a teaching strategy for English-speaking skills?

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to examine the efficacy of debate as a pedagogical strategy for improving English-speaking skills among police cadets at the Indonesian Police Academy (IPA). The research framework was carefully structured to uphold methodological rigor, provide rich contextual

insights, and ensure analytical clarity, consistent with recognized standards in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2015).

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative single- case study design to investigate the experiences of debate as an instructional strategy for improving English-speaking ability among police cadets at the IPA. This design was chosen because it offered in-depth understanding of the cadets' lived experiences within the distinctive setting of law-enforcement training (Yin, 2016). It also allowed the researcher to examine more closely how debate-based instruction interacted with institutional conditions, including discipline, organizational culture, and patterns of peer interaction. Guided by an interpretivist perspective, the study examined how participants interpreted and engaged in debate activities in their institutional context, thereby illustrating the evolving connection between pedagogical practices and the settings in which they were implemented (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Research Site and Participants

The main subjects of this research were third-year police cadets at the Indonesian Police Academy (IPA) in Semarang, Indonesia. They had completed English study that integrated debate-based learning across their first, second, and third years. The participants were drawn from eight classes, each consisting of 30 to 32 cadets, resulting in a total of 247 cadets. This relatively large pool supported the capture of diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and learning experiences.

To improve the accuracy of participant selection, the researchers relied on IELTS-equivalent mapping results supplied by the IPA academic office. The IELTS-equivalent scores served only to establish a comparable proficiency baseline and to justify the purposive selection of information-rich participants for this qualitative case study. From this population, 36 individuals were deliberately chosen through purposive sampling: four cadets and two lecturers participated in interviews, while 30 cadets took part in a focus group discussion (FGD). The allocation of participants and the coding system used are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Participants

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	NOTES
Initial Population	Third-year cadets of the IPA who had taken English courses incorporating debate from their first through third years.	247 cadets	Drawn from 8 classes, each consisting of 30–32 cadets.
Eligibility Screening	IELTS mapping scores provided by the Academic Division of IPA; focus on cadets with advanced proficiency (Band 7.0–8.0).	45 cadets	Only those meeting the advanced IELTS benchmark were retained.

In-Depth Interviewees	Cadets with the highest speaking scores and extensive debating experience.	4 cadets	Expected to provide rich qualitative insights into using the British Parliamentary Debate (BPD).
Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Participants	Advanced-level cadets not selected for individual interviews. They were divided into two FGD groups.	30 cadets	2 groups × 15 cadets each; within the recommended range of 4–15 Participants per FGD session.
Lecturers	English lecturers actively engaged in delivering debate-based instruction.	2 lecturers	Added pedagogical perspectives to complement cadet experiences.

Table 2. Participant's Code

CADET (C)	LECTURE (L)
C1	L1
C2	L2
C3	
C4	
CADET FGD (CF)	
CF1-CF30	

Data Collection Techniques

This research applied a robust triangulation design by combining classroom observation, individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review. Using multiple sources of evidence made it possible to build a layered picture of how effective debate is as an instructional strategy. The debate activities involving selected cadets and lecturers were examined through systematic observation, but the sessions were captured through video recordings instead of being monitored directly on site. In total, the debates ran for 120 minutes over two meetings. Relying on recorded footage supported a more neutral, stable, and minimally disruptive way to gather data, consistent with methodological recommendations that favor recording-based observation over researcher presence (Anguera et al., 2018).

In addition, participants joined semi-structured interviews delivered through Zoom. As a key technique in Internet-mediated research (IMR), online interviewing enables direct data generation via digital tools and supports close analytical connection to the study's guiding questions (Salmons, 2016). This approach produced detailed accounts of participants' views and lived experiences, including both the benefits and the difficulties of using debate for teaching and learning. Each session lasted about 60 minutes, which allowed enough depth for meaningful discussion while still respecting participants' time. The interviewer used open-ended prompts to guide the conversation and invited participants to elaborate fully on their opinions and experiences. Such open-response questioning tends to yield richer, more thoughtful input and helps the researcher access participants' reasoning more clearly (Roberts, 2020). The

interview guides for lecturers and cadets were developed by modifying an instrument from Linguaggi (2019) to ensure tight alignment between the prompts and the research questions.

To broaden the range of viewpoints, the researcher also conducted two online FGDs, with 15 cadets in each group, to explore perceptions of debate-centered learning in a collective setting. The procedures followed the same general standards applied in the interviews, including informed consent, privacy protection, and voluntary involvement. As a qualitative method, FGDs support targeted investigation of key issues through group interaction and can reveal shared patterns and jointly constructed meanings (Abrar, 2024).

Finally, document review was used to strengthen and contextualize the findings by analyzing institutional records such as the curriculum, instructional materials, lesson designs, and assessment documentation. These sources offered insight into the intended goals and anticipated results of embedding debate within the English program. Reviewing the documents also helped explain how debate was planned and executed as a teaching technique aimed at improving speaking ability, which supported a more grounded evaluation of its impact. This documentary strand also added contextual depth and increased credibility by reinforcing triangulation across data sources (Prior, 2003).

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which encompasses three fundamental components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). All interview and focus group discussion (FGD) recordings were transcribed and subsequently coded using NVivo 15, a specialized software designed for qualitative data analysis (Van et al., 2025). The NVivo 15 visualizes the data to be a project mapping. It was used to show connections across codes, categories, and themes. In addition, triangulation across data sources was used to strengthen trustworthiness and support the study's claims in line with Miles and Huberman's approach. As a result, the analysis was carried out in a structured and transparent manner, with detailed records kept to ensure procedures could be followed and audited when needed, as depicted in Figure 1.
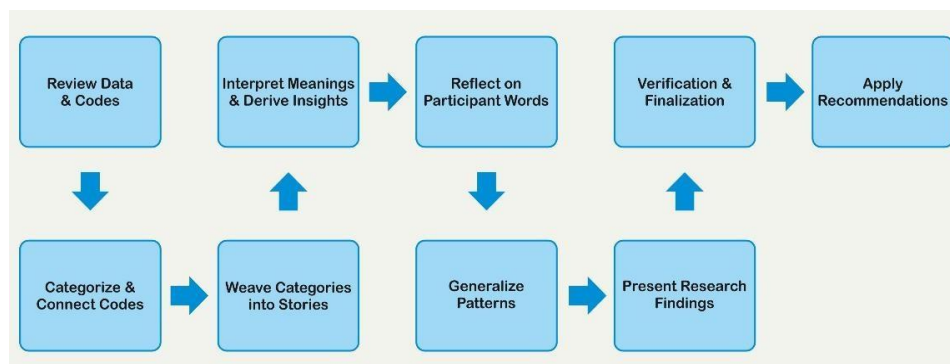

Figure 1. The analysis Process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Result

The data analysis involved open, axial, and selective coding, utilizing NVivo 15 software to systematically examine interview transcripts, observation notes, FGD results, and supporting documents. Codes were generated based on similarities in meaning, recurring narrative patterns, and the frequency of key issues. This rigorous process enabled the identification of recurring thematic patterns across multiple data sources, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings. NVivo 15 further facilitated visualization of the relationships between themes, exploration of inter-code connections, and easy retrieval of illustrative quotes to enrich the analysis.

The analysis revealed five main categories that not only capture the personal experiences of cadets and lecturers, but also illuminate the broader dynamics of debate-based learning within a semi-military educational setting. Each theme is structured according to the intensity and depth of participant discourse, as expressed both explicitly and implicitly. These findings provide a comprehensive perspective on the role of debate, highlighting its effectiveness not only as a teaching strategy, but also as a formative tool for character development, critical thinking, and building public speaking confidence in English.

Based on the results of data analysis using NVivo 15, five main categories (themes) were found, namely: (1) Started from early study, (2) Initially nervous and lacked confidence, (3) Research, team practice, presentation, (4) Relevant Topic, and (5) Challenging and broadened perspective.
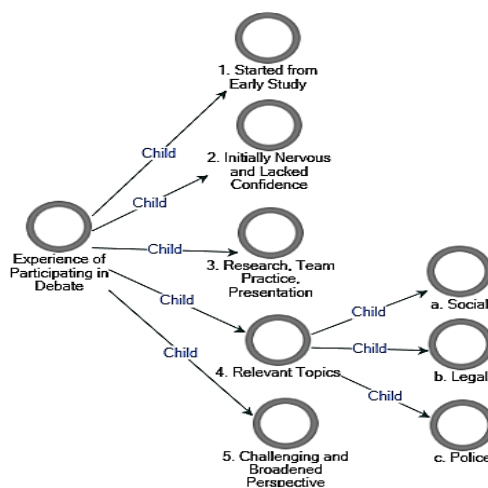

Figure 2. Project Map: Experience of
Participating in Debate

Engaging in English debate activities at the Indonesian Police Academy provides cadets with a transformative learning experience that goes far beyond improving language proficiency. These debates function as a crucible for personal growth, professional preparedness, and the enhancement of critical communication skills. Insights for this study are drawn from the voices of four cadet participants (C1, C2, C3, and C4), two lecturer participants (L1 and L2),

two focus group discussions (CF1–CF30), and observation field notes. Each identified theme is supported by a representative interview excerpt and an extended explanation to offer a deeper understanding of the cadets' developmental journey. The main themes and their corresponding sub-themes are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Thematic summary

THEME	KEY INDICATORS (SUB-THEMES)	MAIN DATA SOURCES	BRIEF EVIDENCE
1. Started since the beginning of the study	Gradual adaptation; routine weekly debate cycle; early identification of weaknesses	Interviews, FGDs, classroom observations	Most cadets entered debate activities from the first semesters, giving time to adjust to English public speaking demands and to build skills progressively through repeated practice and lecturer guidance.
2. Initial nervousness and lack of confidence	Speaking anxiety; fear of grammar/vocabulary mistakes; wrong pronunciation; low voice/pauses/avoidance; reliance on peers; confidence growth over time	Interviews, FGDs, classroom observations	Early sessions were marked by visible nervousness and hesitation, but confidence increased as mistakes became normalized and lecturers created supportive conditions (e.g., encouragement, clearer roles, flexibility).
3. Research, team practice, and presentation	Evidence searching; task division; rehearsal and Q&A simulation; structured argument building; time-pressure response	FGDs, interviews, classroom observations	Cadets described debate as extending beyond class performance into research and team rehearsal, which improved readiness to present and rebut within a structured parliamentary-style sequence.
4. Relevant topics	Policing-related motions; technical vocabulary development; higher engagement; collaborative term clarification	FGDs, interviews, classroom observations	When motions reflected policing realities (e.g., cybercrime/ethics/technology), cadets reported stronger motivation, more meaningful vocabulary learning, and better participation—especially through group problem-solving of difficult terms.
5. Challenging and opening insights	Productive pressure; broadened knowledge; improved reasoning; quicker decision-making;	FGDs, interviews, classroom observations	Debate was consistently described as demanding but intellectually expanding, because it forced cadets to research, anticipate

THEME	KEY INDICATORS (SUB-THEMES)	MAIN DATA SOURCES	BRIEF EVIDENCE
	increased enjoyment over time		counterarguments, and communicate persuasively under pressure, leading to both language and cognitive gains.

Started Since the Beginning of the Study

Across interviews, observations, and focus groups, the Project Map (Figure 2) indicates that most cadets began English debate participation in the first and second semesters, positioning debate as an early, routine component of the English curriculum (Table 3, Theme 1). Early exposure gave cadets time to adjust to formal speaking demands, recognize gaps in vocabulary and delivery, and build confidence gradually through repeated practice in a supportive setting shaped by lecturer guidance and structured weekly activities. These experiences also suggest that debate functioned not only as a speaking task but as a sustained social learning space where cadets could test ideas, learn from errors, and develop reflective habits over time. As C4 expressed:

> *"I joined the English debate since the first semester as part of the curriculum. At first I felt very nervous and lacked confidence, but after a few attempts, I started to enjoy the process..." (C4)*

Initial Nervousness and Lack of Confidence

Data from interviews, FGDs, and classroom observations consistently show that cadets' earliest debate experiences were marked by anxiety, low confidence, and fear of mistakes, largely linked to limited vocabulary, grammatical insecurity, and the pressure of public speaking in a foreign language (Table 3, Theme 2). Observation notes captured typical anxiety markers—low volume, frequent pauses, limited eye contact, and reliance on teammates—indicating that affective barriers initially constrained performance even when cadets understood the topic. Over time, repeated exposure, lecturer flexibility (e.g., allowing notes and topic choice), and peer support reduced these barriers and normalized mistakes as part of skill development. As CF21 expressed:

> *"I usually prepare some key phrases and practice in front of a mirror first. When I'm ready, the nervousness decreases." (CF21)*

Research, Team Practice, and Presentation

Focus-group accounts and lecturer interviews indicate that debate outcomes were strongly shaped by preparation practices outside the performance moment, including researching evidence, dividing team roles, rehearsing rebuttals, and simulating Q&A exchanges (Table 3, Theme 3). This preparation cycle strengthened not only fluency but also argument structure and time-sensitive reasoning required by the British Parliamentary Debate format, while making speaking feel more manageable because cadets entered the debate with shared plans and language resources. Observations further suggest that consistent team rehearsal supported visible gains in delivery—steadier voice,

clearer stance, and more responsive engagement—pointing to debate as a combined literacy-speaking routine rather than a single classroom event. As CF19 expressed:

> *"Once, the debate topic was about 'The use of technology in law enforcement.' I felt challenged because I had to look for data and formulate arguments in English. But that's where I really enjoyed the process, especially when I could refute my opponent's arguments with the data I had prepared." (CF19)*

Relevant Topics

Triangulated evidence from FGDs, interviews, and observations shows that topic relevance—especially themes tied to policing roles—was a key driver of motivation, participation, and meaningful vocabulary growth (Table 3, Theme 4). When motions aligned with future professional demands (e.g., cybercrime, ethics, law enforcement technology), cadets reported greater willingness to research deeply and greater confidence using technical terms because the language served an authentic purpose. Classroom observations also suggest that relevant topics reduced passivity: cadets who were initially hesitant became more engaged when they could connect arguments to familiar policing contexts and shared professional identity. As CF27 expressed:

> *"There was once a fairly complicated topic about 'Cybercrime prevention,' and one of our group members had difficulty understanding the technical terms in English. We ended up dividing the task of finding the meaning of the term together, then making a summary in simpler language." (CF27)*

Challenging and Opening Insights

Across interviews, FGDs, and classroom observations, cadets described debate as both demanding and intellectually expanding, because it required them to research credible evidence, anticipate counterarguments, and speak persuasively under time pressure (Table 3, Theme 5). This challenge appeared to deepen learning in two directions at once: linguistic development (more functional vocabulary and more organized speech) and cognitive growth (clearer reasoning, faster decision-making, and stronger mental resilience). Observational data similarly noted improvements in spontaneous speaking and argumentation, suggesting that the debate setting created productive pressure that translated into greater readiness for communication demands in policing contexts. As C2 expressed:

> *"The process is quite intense, from research, practice, to presentations in front of the class. I often felt pressured because I had to speak in English, but over time I started to enjoy the process." (C2)*

DISCUSSION

Incorporating British Parliamentary Debate (BPD) into English instruction for police cadets provides substantial linguistic and professional benefits by requiring learners to construct arguments, respond spontaneously, and speak logically under time constraints, rather than relying on rote learning (Hadi et al., 2021; Kassem, 2021; Nasriandi & Masruddin, 2021; Tami et al., 2021; Timbu et al., 2022) . In this study, those benefits are explained more clearly by the five interconnected themes emerging from the Results—early exposure,

initial nervousness, research and team practice, topic relevance, and the challenging-but-expanding nature of debate—which together describe the learning process that leads to improvement. As a structured speaking activity, debate also helps cadets organize messages from introduction to conclusion, strengthening both communicative competence and reasoning patterns needed for persuasive professional communication (Linguaggi, 2019; Putri & Rodliyah, 2021; Riadil, 2020).

The first theme (from the beginning of the study) indicates that debate was positioned as an early and routine component of the curriculum, allowing for gradual adaptation and repeated practice across semesters. This sustained exposure matters because it gives cadets time to identify weaknesses in vocabulary, delivery, and confidence, then improve through weekly cycles supported by lecturer guidance and peer interaction (Jensen et al., 2021; Szabó & Csépes, 2022). In other words, debate functions not as a single "speaking test," but as a continuous learning space where cadets refine skills incrementally through repetition, feedback, and reflection (Putri & Rodliyah, 2021; Riadil, 2020).

The second theme (initial nervousness and lack of confidence) highlights that affective barriers initially limited performance, as evidenced by indicators such as low voice, frequent pauses, limited eye contact, avoidance, and dependence on teammates. This pattern supports the need to interpret speaking development not only as language acquisition but also as confidence-building under public-performance pressure, where a supportive atmosphere and constructive feedback reduce anxiety over time (Syammdianita & Maharia, 2020). Relatedly, prior evidence suggests that selective error correction combined with group-based learning can reduce speaking anxiety and encourage learners to take risks in English, which aligns with the observed shift from fear of mistakes toward more active participation (Jensen et al., 2021; Zulfikar, 2023).

The third theme (research, team practice, and presentation) clarifies that gains were produced through a preparation cycle beyond classroom performance, including evidence searching, task division, rehearsal, and simulated rebuttals (Wahyuni et al., 2020). This finding implies that BPD builds fluency partly by reducing cognitive load during live speaking: cadets enter debates with shared plans, language resources, and role clarity, making delivery and rebuttal more manageable within the parliamentary sequence (Hadi et al., 2021). Such a mechanism also helps explain why improvements were not limited to fluency but extended to argument structure, time-sensitive reasoning, and more stable delivery.

The fourth theme (relevant topics) demonstrates that engagement and vocabulary growth increased when motions were connected to policing realities (e.g., cybercrime, ethics, and law-enforcement technology), because cadets perceived the language as authentic and professionally useful. Results also show that difficult technical terms were frequently solved through collaborative meaning-making (shared searching, simplification, and summarizing), suggesting that debate supported profession-specific vocabulary development through teamwork rather than isolated memorization (Syammdianita &

Maharia, 2020). This interpretation is consistent with broader research on debate, which reports improvements in speaking skills, expanded vocabulary, and increased confidence among EFL learners who engage in structured debating tasks (Oktaviani et al., 2020; Tarigan & Lubis, 2024; Wariyati et al., 2024).

Finally, the theme "challenging and opening insights" indicates that debate created productive pressure: cadets were pushed to anticipate counterarguments, make quick decisions, and communicate persuasively, thereby broadening knowledge while strengthening reasoning and resilience. At the same time, the Results and Discussion acknowledge persistent challenges—fear of error and peer judgment, difficulty with technical vocabulary and sentence formulation, and struggles with time management and complex formats—showing that debate effectiveness depends on instructional support rather than the activity alone (Sahril et al., 2020; Wardana et al., 2019). Therefore, adaptive strategies such as note preparation, class rehearsals, continuous peer feedback, and reflective post-debate evaluation are essential to maximize benefits while managing stress, reinforcing learner autonomy and communication quality (Francis et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that integrating British Parliamentary Debate (BPD) into English instruction at the Indonesian Police Academy can strengthen cadets' speaking fluency, confidence, vocabulary growth (including policing-related terminology), and argumentation-related competencies such as critical thinking and structured reasoning. The findings also suggest that debate supports broader professional capacities—teamwork, emotional resilience, and readiness to communicate under pressure—when implemented as a routine, structured practice supported by lecturer guidance and peer collaboration. Across the five themes identified (early exposure, initial anxiety, preparation cycles, topic relevance, and productive challenge), debate was most effective when it was embedded from early semesters and reinforced through research, rehearsal, clear roles, and constructive feedback.

This study contributes context-specific evidence on how BPD functions within a specialized, semi-military police-academy setting that remains less examined than general EFL classrooms, using triangulated qualitative data (observations, interviews, FGDs, and document analysis). Apparent discrepancies—such as simultaneous reports of improvement and persistent anxiety, vocabulary limitations, and time-management difficulty—can be explained by uneven affective load and linguistic readiness, meaning that outcomes depend on instructional scaffolding and a supportive climate that normalizes errors. Practically, academy leaders and curriculum designers should institutionalize debate with facilitator training, equitable participation structures, and professionally relevant motions, while future research should expand sampling across classes/sites and consider mixed-method designs (qualitative evidence plus speaking-performance measures) to clarify which debate conditions produce the strongest gains and for whom.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Gatot hadi waluyo collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the findings and discussion sections and additionally formatted the manuscript according to the journal's guidelines and thoroughly proofread all drafts of the article. **Urip sulistyo, Mukhlash abrar,** and **Bunga ayu wulandari** assisted with data analysis, co-wrote the findings, and helped ensure the accuracy of both the data and the conclusions derived from it.

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