



EMPLOYING DEBATE TECHNIQUE TO ENHANCE SPEAKING CONFIDENCE FOR VIETNAMESE EFL LEARNERS IN COLLEGE

Dao Thi Yen Thuⁱ

MA,

Cao Thang Technical College,

Vietnam

Abstract:

The aim of this research is to investigate how debate techniques can help improve confidence in speaking English for Vietnamese college students. The study took place over 15 weeks, with 80 students from Cao Thang Technical College participating. The information obtained from speaking exams, interviews, questionnaires, student replies, and self-evaluations was examined using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Both the test results and the reactions from the students show that the debate strategy increased their confidence when speaking. Additionally, the data shows that their speaking proficiency has increased significantly. The participants' experiences with different learning difficulties also provide insightful recommendations on how teachers and students should work together to adopt them in other courses.

Keywords: confidence in speaking, debate technique, college students

1. Introduction

Despite studying English for 12 years, many Vietnamese students still struggle with communicating in English. (Ho & Truong, 2022). Speaking is the ability that students will be assessed on the most in real-life situations (Brown & Yuke, 1983). Students in Vietnamese schools are typically taught English from the examiner's perspective, meaning grammar and vocabulary are the primary topics covered. Regarding the numerous elements that impede communication competence, lacking confidence is the most crucial (Dewi, Widhiasih, Widiastuti, 2021). Until now, several studies have been conducted to increase the confidence of EFL students in Vietnam. However, most focus on university students, whereas scarce researchers prioritize college students who tend to be more submissive and have low self-esteem regarding their English language skills. The study intends to solve this gap by applying a debate method to boost speaking confidence in Vietnamese college EFL learners.

ⁱ Correspondence: email doanthuy.tn@gmail.com

2. Literature and Review

2.1 The Importance of Speaking in Learning Language

The fact that humans are designed to speak before learning to read and write emphasizes the centrality of speaking among the four language skills. Rao (2019) claimed listening and reading are passive skills since the learners do not show their talent by exhibiting these skills. With the other two, learners are required to produce sentences.

According to McDonough and Shaw (1993), speaking allows users to construct sentences for genuine communication, meaning they genuinely enjoy using language to communicate to achieve particular goals. As a result, language speakers have greater options for employment across various businesses and organizations (Baker and Westrup, 2003). Furthermore, the learning process is more enjoyable when learners are able to effectively articulate their ideas or emotions in communication exchanges (Hosni, 2014).

2.2 Self-confidence Influences Speaking Skill

Self-confidence is the belief in one's abilities and values to overcome obstacles, make sound decisions, and achieve one's goals. In the context of learning a foreign language, the subject of self-confidence is crucial. Cole *et al.* (2007) claim that confidence holds equal significance to competence in the context of speaking and listening.

Abdallah and Ahmed (2015) state that self-confidence and success in EFL learning are significantly correlated, especially when it comes to speaking and academic performance. It serves as a driving force for individuals to effectively convey their ideas through verbal communication. Confidence is a fundamental component that can facilitate pupils' properly articulating and expressing their ideas through spoken communication.

According to Bandura (1997), students' self-efficacy beliefs can be enhanced through teachers' encouragement and constructive feedback, as well as students' successful experiences and/or observation of their peers' success.

2.3 Debate Technique

Lumbangaol and Mazali (2020) presented research on the effect of debate strategy on students' oral communication skills. Their research demonstrated that by employing the debate technique, students enhance their public speaking abilities and develop their confidence in articulating their opinions. Students who are typically passive learners during instruction become active learners because they are motivated to engage in conversation and debate with other students in order to voice their thoughts. During the debate, students are urged to speak up by defending their positions and expressing their thoughts to others.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study was carried out with the participation of 80 students in 15 weeks (33.75 hours per week). The researcher is also teaching English for these two classes; as a result, she is fully acquainted with her learners' English proficiency levels and attitudes towards learning English. After studying for 3 weeks without grading pressure, they had a group debate on a given topic in week 4, which served as a pre-speaking test. After the debate session, each student had their grammar and pronunciation reviewed, and instructions for self-study to improve their speaking.

Debate sessions were held every 4 weeks on a different topic. In each session, students were divided randomly into different groups to debate a given topic that they had prepared at home. Their performance was marked in Table 1.

Table 1: Debate Sessions Result Category and Description

	1st session (pre-speaking test)	2nd session	3rd session
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push students to raise their voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student should be able to speak in their own words, not read from the sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve their pronunciation and coherence Able to use linking words
Good (8 - 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak loud and clear, Prepare lots of ideas and be able to protect their own opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to use words or phrases to express their opinion with other students Speak with limited dependence on notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make no or minor pronunciation errors Speak fluently without too much pausing Speak with limited dependence on notes
Average (6.1 - 7.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to add more than one opinion Mainly read from the prepair note 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak loud and clear Be able to protect their own opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to use words or phrases to express their opinion with other students
Pass (5 - 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide one opinion with 0 connections with peers' ideas Speaking with long pauses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak in a full sentence Mostly read from the prepair note 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak loud and clear Able to protect their own opinions
Fail < 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to provide their own opinion or speak to low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only able to speak a single word Like previous session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly read from the preparation note Like previous sessions

For the post-test, each student had to choose a previously covered topic and deliver a presentation within a time limit. They were asked to focus on a more specific issue due to time constraints. Students were graded according to five speaking dimensions, as shown in Table 2. These measurements were based on the IELTS speaking band descriptors, with some adjustments to accommodate the college students' abilities. Since the purpose of this study is to enhance student confidence, the researcher added stage control as the fifth dimension.

Table 2: Post-Speaking Test Category and Description

Result	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range	Pronunciation	Stage control
Good (8 - 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a wide, flexible vocabulary to clarify topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy Uses a mix of simple and complex structures but with limited flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show confidence when presenting and be able to Utilize body language and spoken linking words to connect with the audience Speak loud and clear, and emphasize certain words
Average (6.1 - 7.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited vocabulary range to clarify topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Still has some mispronunciations with complex sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to connect with the audience misused several spoken linking words Talk with a decent, hearable voice
Pass (5 - 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks with long pauses has limited ability to link simple sentences; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited vocabulary range to clarify topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences, but subordinate structures are rare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Still has some mispronunciations with complex sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show minor body language No attempt to connect with the audience Talk with a low voice, but be hearable
Fail < 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to communicate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only produce single words or memorized phrases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot produce basic sentence forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mispronunciations are frequent, causing some difficulty for the listener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show no body language or audience connection Talk with an extremely low voice

3.2 Research Instruments

The questionnaires, students' reflections, and debate assignments were employed to gather data. The data was collected regularly throughout the project and then processed using SPSS to ascertain its effectiveness.

4. Results

4.1 The Source of Vietnamese EFL Learners in College Lacking Confidence?

Before the study, students were asked to self-evaluate their confidence level. After that, 10 of them were chosen from different confidence groups (Figure 1) to explain what affected their speaking confidence in English class. The responses were discussed and transferred to a questionnaire as a five-point scale, from never (1) to always (5); the higher the mean, the more frequently someone experiences anxiety.

Table 3 indicates that those pertaining to judgment appear to be the most worrisome elements. "I'm afraid that the teacher will scold me if I make any mistake" is the one with the highest value mean (M= 3.9). As stated by Cayanus and Martin (2008), there is a strong correlation between students' involvement and the communication style of teachers. Especially since teachers have a high impact on students through their reflection, dialogue, acts, and discussions (Fielding & McGregor, 2005). Fear of peers' judgement is also concerned with the mean of 3.55.

When compelled to engage in English conversations, students frequently felt nervous due to their vocabulary limitations. It can be easy to explain why they highly agree with these statements: "It terrified me because of my poor vocabulary and the fact that I'm unable to express my ideas" (M = 3.66) and "It stresses me out when I don't understand what teacher is saying in English." (M = 3.575) and firmly disapproved of "I feel calm when teacher call me to speak English" (M = 1.975).

The three statements related to grammar and intonation, "I feel embarrassed with my intonation and pronunciation", "I'm overwhelmed by how many grammatical tenses I need to remember in order to speak English," and "I usually find it difficult to form a full sentence", received mean below 2.9.

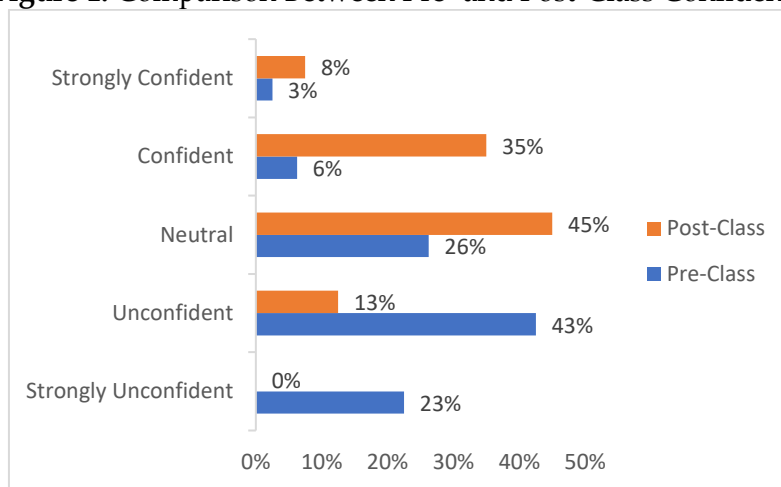
Table 3: Students' Anxiety Rate When Speaking in the Classroom

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel embarrassed about my intonation and pronunciation	80	2.2625	1.2802
I'm overwhelmed by how many grammar tenses I need to remember in order to speak English.	80	2.1125	1.2628
It terrified me because of my poor vocabulary and the fact that I'm unable to express my ideas	80	3.6625	1.2006
It stresses me out when I don't understand what my teacher is saying in English.	80	3.575	1.2904
I'm afraid that the teacher will scold me if I make any mistake	80	3.9	1.2076
I feel calm when the teacher calls me to speak English	80	1.975	1.2115
I usually find it difficult to form a full sentence	80	2.825	1.1111
I'm afraid my classmates might laugh when I speak English.	80	3.6	1.3870
Average		2.989062	1.231612

4.2 The Improvement of Students' Confidence and Proficiency

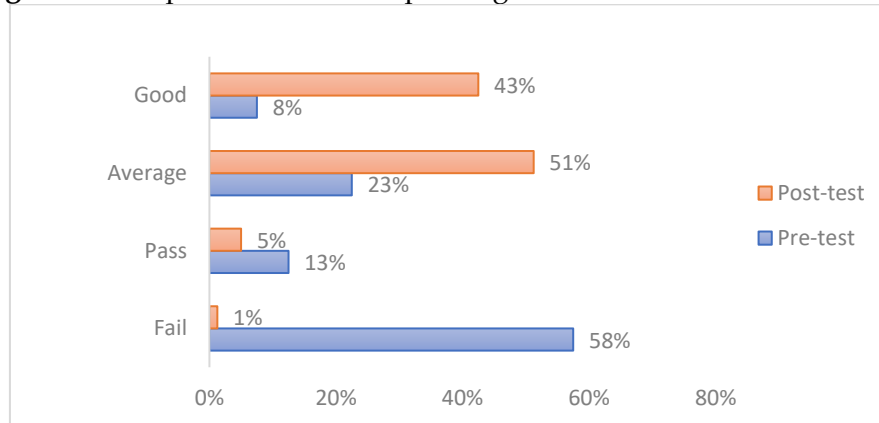
Figure 1 shows a significant improvement in their speaking confidence. The extremely insecure proportion disappeared after applying the teaching technique, while the proportion of confident soared to 35%, nearly a nine-fold rise, and the strongly confident level jumped from 1% to 8%. The unconfident level likewise decreased by 30%.

Figure 1: Comparison Between Pre- and Post-Class Confidence



To assess the progress, pre- and post-tests were administered. From 56% of students who failed in the pre-speaking test, it was reduced to only 1% in the post-test. The proportion of students with good results is also surged almost 9 times from 9% to 44%.

Figure 2: Comparison Between Speaking Results of Pre-test and Post-test



A paired-samples t-test was used to examine the accuracy of the hypothesis that pre-speaking test results are lower than the post-test. With $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ and mean < 0 means the pre-test results ($M = 3.91$) are lower than post-test result ($M = 7.62$)

Table 4: Mean Comparison Between Pre-and Post-test Results

Pair 1 Pretest – Posttest	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Sig. (2- tailed)
				Lower	Upper	
	-3.70250	2.57387	0.28777	-4.27529	-3.12971	0.000

4.3 Students Post-reflections

After the research, the previous eight students were interviewed again to determine which elements influenced their confidence. Their responses were then considered with problems in Table 3 from which four elements. Those were then transferred to a Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), for 80 students to rate.

Table 5: Students' Reflections about Their Improvements

Element	Statement	Responses (%)				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Motivation	The teacher encouraged me every time I was called to answer questions or speak	0	3.75	27.5	36.25	32.5
Adjust based on an individual level	The teacher corrected pronunciation errors, which made me confident in the next session	0	3	23	23	53
Debate Technique	Through many debate sessions, I improved my speaking skill	0	8.75	11.25	40	40
Interactive task	Lectures combined with interactive tasks help me	0	0	13.8	35	51.2

	understand better without feeling overwhelmed.				
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The result of the Pearson correlation analysis shows that the independent variables are correlated with the dependent variable (post-confident) and, therefore, will be included to explain the dependent variable in the next regression analysis step.

Table 6: Correlation Between Post-confident and Independent Variables

	Motivation	Adjusted	Debate	Tasks
Pearson Correlation	.431**	.150	.589**	.280**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.183	0.000	0.006
N	80	80	80	80

Note: Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Only Motivation and Debate variables are correlated with post confidence.

Table 7: Post-Confidence Coefficient

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
(Constant)	0.840	0.387		2.172	0.033
Motivation	0.194	0.092	0.211	2.118	0.037
Debate	0.429	0.086	0.496	4.972	<0.001

The results in Table 7 revealed that both variables have positive linear relationships with speaking confidence for Vietnamese EFL learners in college, and the equation can be modified as follows:

$$Y = 0.840 + 0.429 * Debate + 0.194 * Motivation$$

5. Discussion

The finding from this research indicates that Vietnamese college students often experience such anxiety levels when speaking English in class (Table 1). Poor grammar, mispronounced words, or an odd tone of voice did not undermine their confidence. Instead, fear of being judged by teachers and peers and limited vocabulary were the features that most affected them. Hence, this finding should be taken seriously, especially by professionals who deal with oral communication tasks. The results from Figures 1 and 2 and Table 7 have highlighted the effectiveness of the debate technique on not just improving speaking proficiency (Lumbangaol & Mazali, 2020) but also confidence for college students.

In conclusion, applying the debate teaching technique with motivation from the teacher boosts the speaking confidence of Vietnamese EFL students in college, who are considered not as active and confident as those in university.

6. Conclusion

The outcomes displayed that the debate sessions had a positive psychological and social impact on students by increasing their motivation, sense of fulfillment, and growth as individuals. Students feel more confident while speaking English, thanks to the implementation of debates based on this methodology. In the end, the researcher concluded that the pupils felt positively about this approach. Through this learning experience, the majority of students discovered that speaking English fluently is not as difficult and intimidating as they had thought. This is because they have the opportunity to practice speaking, listening and acquiring vocabulary through a variety of entertaining and stimulating activities without worrying about being corrected or receiving low marks. Although each individual has a different starting point in English and the study instruments indicated certain challenges, all participants concurred on the efficacy of this instruction.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

About the Author(s)

Dao Thi Yen Thu is a lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, Cao Thang Technical College. She holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) with a specialization in International Business. Her research interests focus on psychology in language learning and teaching as well as educational development.

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