



## Students' Perceptions about Debate and Their Ability to Debate

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### ABSTRACT

This is a research of correlation study that aims to find the level of relationship between the ability to debate (in English) of the students of English Language and Culture Department at Darma Persada University and their perception of debating. The relationship is measured based on 3 variables, namely: 1) the students' knowledge about debating, 2) the students' self confidence in debating, and 3) the teaching process the students have to improve the debating skill. This study involves 75 students from 3 different classes. The students first went through a learning process about the concept of debating. Then they practiced debating. The students' perception was measured through a research instrument in the form of a questionnaire, while the relationship values were taken from the scores obtained after students carried out tests in the form of debating. The result of this research indicates that the score for the correlation coefficient between the students' ability in debating and the students' knowledge on the definition on debating and technical ability on debating is 0.195. This means positive correlation between the variables. Secondly, in term of students' self-confidence, the data analysis results a positive correlation coefficient between the students' ability in debating and the students' self-confidence. The score is 0.195 meaning a positive correlation. Lastly, in term of the teaching process in the course related to debate, the correlation coefficient is considerably high; 0.222. This means that the students have very positive attitude on the course.

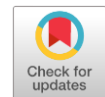
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## INTRODUCTION

According to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (online version), perception means a direct response (acceptance) of something. For example, perception of a virtual class means a person's immediate response or acceptance of a virtual class. According to this meaning, perception is more about how someone receives something. In the example given, the perception of a virtual class means how one perceives a virtual class. Thus, perception can be in the form of negative (not receiving) and or positive (accepting). Negative or positive perceptions about something are determined based on a research result; in this case, it is called research of perception. An example of perception research is students' perception on debating. Thus, as described above, this study finds the level of student acceptance of an activity called debating. The results of this study indicates whether the students think debating activity as a positive activity (accept) or on the contrary a negative activity (reject).

Debate activity is an activity that can be found in everyday life. A younger sibling may argue with an older sibling who he or she considers too authoritarian; a student may be found arguing with his teacher about a concept; even someone accused of stealing may be found arguing with those who accuse him. In essence, in debating activities, we find one or both

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parties present an argument to make the opponent believe that the argument is better and acceptable. Whoever is able to present the best argument in a convincing manner can generally be considered the winner of the debate. The ability to give arguments and convince opponents of the debate is what students in many universities learn.

The ability to argue that makes someone win a debate is certainly not owned by everyone. Many factors influence a person can argue as expected. These factors have been widely studied and found their level of influence on a person's ability to argue. Call it the factor of mastery of the topic being debated. If someone has more control over the topic being debated, then this factor can affect the level of his ability to argue. Logically, someone who knows a lot will be more courageous and confident in defending his argument. But of course, there are other factors to consider.

This study raises one of the factors that will measure the level of its influence on the ability to argue. That factor is the level of student perception. How much influence the level of student perception on the ability to argue is an interesting thing to study, especially for students in the Department of English Language and Culture at the Darma Persada University campus who happen to be taking the Debating on Current Issues course? The hope of this research is to know the level of influence of students' perceptions of debating on the ability to argue in English.

### Understanding Perception

Marleau, as translated by Colin Smith (2002, p. 5), states that 'we make perception out of things perceived' or perception is something that arises when we identify or observe something. He continues that '... since perceived things themselves are obviously accessible only through perception, we end by understanding neither' which means the perception that arises from something shows our understanding of that thing. Marleau (Colin Smith, 2002, p. xi) also emphasizes that 'Perception is not a science of the world, ... it is the background from which all acts stand out ...' which means perception does not explain something we observe, but perception becomes background of a person acting on something according to his observations. Finally, Marleau (Colin, 2002, p. 7) concludes that our perception of something is something that is observed by us or the 'world of perception', which is the world as we perceive it, the 'perceived world' (le monde perçu). as it is often called.

Furthermore, Barosso (2013) states that perception is the foundation of human knowledge. She explores that humans construct our knowledge of the world using information captured by our senses and the cognitive abilities associated with different intellectual competences. That information is then interpreted to give it value (doubtful, imprecise, incomplete, vague, inexistent, etc.). The estimated value of the information allows meaning to be attributed to it (adequate, inadequate, acceptable, etc.). Barosso concludes that finally, degrees of validity are assigned to the attributed meanings (possible, probable, improbable, etc.). All of this constitutes the process by which humans develop our perception of the world and construct our knowledge.

### Debate Ability

Freely and David (20000, p. 6) state that 'debate is the process of inquiry and advocacy, a way of arriving at a reasoned judgment on a proposition' or debate is an activity to seek justification and support which is marked by expressing an opinion'. It was continued that debating activities can be done by anyone, including individuals when they want to decide something or 'Individuals may use debate to reach a decision in their own minds'. English Language Education, Section Curriculum Development, Institute Education Bureau, The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (2011, p. S2) states that to argue means to express opinions agree and disagree on something or 'Debate provides reasoned arguments for and against a proposition'. Freely and David (20000, p. 6) emphasize that 'Because it requires that listeners and opposing advocates comparatively evaluate competing choices, debate demands

critical thinking' which means that debating requires critical thinking because those who agree and disagree evaluate each other.

English Language Education, Section Curriculum Development, Institute Education Bureau, The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (2011, p. S2) states 'Debating is not only an intellectual activity, but also a physical one' mental, but also physical activity. It was explained that in order to think well, we need a healthy body condition. The body must be relaxed, the voice must also be trained so that it can come out of the mouth clearly and loudly or 'You will work better on logic if your body is prepared. You should relax your body and prepare your voice to speak out loud and clear.'

## METHOD

This study is a quantitative study that focuses on efforts to measure the level of relationship between students' perceptions of debating and debating ability. The respondents of this study were students of the English language and culture study program who took the Debating on Current Issue course with a total of 75 students divided into 3 classes. In accordance with the focal point, this research begins with measuring the level of perception or acceptance of students on the concept of debating. After the perception level figures were obtained, the research continued to measure the level of the relationship between these perceptions and students' debating abilities.

To be able to measure perceptions, researchers used a questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire consists of questions related to students' understanding of the concept of debating. The level of validity and reliability of the questionnaire items will be measured using the formula from Cronbach using SPSS. Furthermore, to measure the level of influence, the researcher will use the correlation formula from Spearman. The research instrument used was a debate performance test which was measured based on the criteria set out in accordance with theories related to debating, especially from the English Language Education Section, Curriculum Development Institute, Education Bureau, The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region because of the teaching materials. which are used in teaching the Debating in Current Issues course are mostly taken from books published by this institution

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Description of the sample

Respondents participating in the research are students from English Language and Culture Department Program in University of Darma Persada. They are all in semester 7 which means they mostly have learned English for at least 3 years in campus. The total number of respondents is 75 whom they belong to regular class which means they study in the day time while the rest of the student study in the evening because they have to work in the morning till the afternoon. Most of them are able to express their idea or argument in English though they have problems in grammar. Additionally, all students have taken a course named 'Debating' in 1 semester for 2 credits (14x100 minutes). The students have studied several important topics related to debate, such as: the meaning and function of debate, how to debate, how to build good argumentation, and many others. In short, all respondents in this research are knowledgeable about debating as well as speaking in English

### Data analysis

### Questionnaire Items

Questionnaire consists of 18 items of statement. All statements are classified into 3 aspects, namely: 1) Aspect of knowledge about debating with 9 items, 2) Aspect of self-ability in debating with 6 items, and 3) Aspect of course related to debate with 3 items. The questionnaire is made up in a Google form and given to the students after they completed the

course about debate, named 'Debating on Current Issues'. The complete list of item and the student's results can be found in separate files of this article.

### ***Test of Validity and Reliability***

I used the Excel to get the score of validity and reliability. Firstly, I did the calculation to get the validity score. Based on the test, it is found that 18 items in the instrument are valid. It is valid with its coefficient validity score of each indicator is higher than r-table or 0.195. Secondly, I continued my calculation to find the reliability score. After the calculation, it is found that the test is reliable as the score of Alpha Cronbach is 1.045869955 which is higher than 0.70 or the standard score. The complete calculation of validity and reliability can be found in the separated file.

### ***Calculating Linkert Scale and Coefficient Correlation of Pearson***

In order to find out the correlation or effect of students' attitude about debate and debating to the students' ability in debating, I did several steps of data analysis. The steps are: 1) I calculated the score of Linkert Scale from the questionnaire I gave to the students, 2) I made the conclusion from the scale to find out how the attitude of the students toward the debate and debating, 3) I calculated the correlation between the students' attitude with the students' ability in debating, and 4) I concluded the result. The complete description of all those steps is as follows.

In calculating the score of Linkert scale to find how the students' perception toward the debate and debating, I used Excel. First of all, I got the total number of each element (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). I did this to all 18 items from the questionnaire each. After that, I calculated the total score of each element by multiplying the number of each element with the score of elements (score 4 for Strongly Agree, 3 for Agree, 2 for Disagree, and 1 for Strongly Disagree). After I got the total, I went on to find the score of total from all elements' score. This score indicates how the students' perception toward the statement for each item. If the score is higher than 2.5, it shows positive attitude. Surely, I did this calculation to all 18 items. Finally, I got the average score of all 18 items in order to find out students' general perception. The score is 3.1 meaning that the students have positive attitude toward the debate and debating. In other words, debate and or debating are positive activities.

Next, for getting the score of correlation (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) between the students' attitude toward the debate and debating with the students' ability in debating, I used the formula of CORREL in Excel. In detail, I did several steps as follow: 1) I put score for variable X which is average score of students' attitude toward the debate and debating; and the score for variable Y which is the average score of students' achievement taken from all test measurements during 1 semester (quizzes, midterm test, and final term test), 2) I counted the Correlation Pearson Coefficient by using CORRELL in Excel. At the end of calculation, I got the score of coefficient correlation that shows the level of relation between the 2 variables. The score is 0.222481 which means positive correlation between the 2 variables. The complete calculation of coefficient correlation can be found in the separated file.

### ***Factors Influencing the Students' Perception on Debating***

There are 3 factors that influence the student's perception on the debating. Those factors are: 1) students' knowledge on the definition of debating and technical ability on debating, 2) students' self-confidence on debating, and 3) the debating course that students have taken. Those three factors show significant point on giving the influences on the students' ability in debating.

Separately counted, the score for the correlation coefficient between the students' ability in debating and the students' knowledge on the definition on debating and technical ability on debating is 0.195. This means positive correlation between the variables. In detail, the students have good knowledge on the definition and technique of debating. For examples, they understand that debate is winning the argumentation. They also understand that debate



is making your argumentation better than the other person's. Furthermore, in term of technical thing, the students understand they need data in order to make their argumentation strong. They also understand their body language can help them in convincing people. In addition, the students also know that they need to control their emotion in order them to make better and stronger argumentation. As they have good knowledge on those 2 points, the attitude on the debating and ability on debate is positive. In other words, the more the students know the definition and technical things about debate, the better the students can get the score in their ability.

In term of students' self-confidence, the data analysis results a positive correlation coefficient between the students' ability in debating and the students' self-confidence. The score is 0.195 meaning a positive correlation. In detail, most students feel confident in delivering a debate after they have learnt the theory about debating. Many students are also confident to have argumentation in any topic. Most of them do not mind having debate with anybody. In general, the students feel confident to have debate. In short, the more confident the students are, the better the students' score is.

For the last factor, the course related to debate, the correlation coefficient is considerably high; 0.222. This means that the students have very positive attitude on the course. They believe that the course about debate needs to be conducted to all students. They even add that the course needs more time quantitatively. They agree to have the subject for another more than 2 credits. Finally, the students agree to have more practical sessions rather than theoretical ones. To sum up, the better attitude the students have on the course of debate in campus, the better the students have their score in the students' ability in debating.

## Discussion

### *General Knowledge of Debating*

General knowledge refers to all kinds of information about something that someone has gained. So, general knowledge of debating is about how much someone knows about debating. The scope of knowledge is about the definition of debating, the purpose of debating, the how-to win in debating, why debating is needed, and so on.

Based on the analysis on the questionnaire, the respondents give positive score on all items related to this category of general knowledge of debating. In detail, there are 9 items of question about general knowledge of debating. All items' scores are positively good; indicating most of the students have good basic knowledge of debating. Statistically, these scores support the theory of having good knowledge of debating is closely related to the ability of debating. Specifically, the students who have high score in this category tend to have positive attitude in debating. In other words, the positive score of students' knowledges of debating gives positive effect on the students' ability in debating.

### *Confidence in debating*

Confidence is one of internal motivations to make people perform better. Confidence shows that the person has enough capacity to do something. This gives positive attitude to someone's performance. Confidence in debating gives the students positive influence to the ability to debate better. When they are confident with their know-how in debating, they tend to perform the debating session well. The score of questionnaire items related to the aspect of confidence approve this theory. The students who are confident tend to perform their debating performance better.

### *Class of Debating*

Class of debating is a subject for students to learn and practice in debating. The students learn some concepts about debating, and they practice the debating based on the concepts they have learned. The process of learning in class of debating happens in the whole 1 semester. Total session of learning is 14.

The items of questionnaire indicate that all students need to learn and practice more on debating. In other words, debating class is an obligatory subject for all students. Secondly, the composition of learning activity must focus on practicing rather than learning the theories. This subject is supposed to be practical not theoretical. Finally, most respondents agree to propose the subject gets more time or credit; it is supposed to be more than 2 credits (Budzyńska-Daca & Rogowska, 2023).

### ***Format of Practicing for Debating***

It turns out that students' debating abilities are obtained not only through learning that has been determined, including the number of face-to-face meetings (14 sessions), the number of credits (2 credits), and the RPS or Semester Learning Plan that has been determined. However, according to the results of observations in this research, students' debating abilities are also influenced by the debating training format.

What is meant by debating training format is how lecturers package training in class so that students can actively participate in 'debate' sessions in the form of applying the debating techniques they have learned. It cannot be avoided that the debate training format greatly influences students' enthusiasm for debating, especially if there are a large number of students in the class. In other words, if the activity format is not created appropriately by the lecturer, then only students who are interested and (feel) capable will be active in the training session, while other students become spectators (Graff, 2022). In the end, the learning targets for debating classes cannot be met. In practice, developing a debating training format must take into account several factors, including: 1) the number of students in the class, 2) the time available, and 3) the specific target of the training. In this section, the researcher discusses point 1 only (Afandi, 2017).

Regarding the number of students, whether large or small, the training format must still force lecturers to implement training patterns that allow all students to be actively involved in debating sessions. In this regard, in this research, researchers implemented a Break-Group training pattern. This training pattern in detail includes the following stages: 1) Initially students are directed to form pairs; In this pair, students determine their position as pro or contra, and then argue about 1 particular topic 'against' their partner. 2) Next, every 2 pairs of students will form 1 more group (so there are 4 students). In this small group, each student is asked to determine their pro and con positions again, and then they will debate in their small group. 3) After all the students have spoken (debated), each group is then asked to join 1 other group to form a large group with a total of 8 students. In this large group, students do the same thing as when they were in the small group, namely determining pro and contra positions, and then each student presents his argument for the same topic as before. Patterns like this can of course be varied according to situations and conditions. But in essence, with this Break-Group training pattern, every student will have the opportunity to speak and argue. Unconsciously, every student will gain valuable experience while undergoing training sessions at that time (Afandi, 2017). With this experience, students can improve their debating skills gradually until the study period ends.

### ***Learning Handbook***

As befits a course, the debating skills learning carried out by researchers also refers to the handbook. This handbook is not given in its entirety to students, but is given in part by part according to the learning targets for each meeting. Apart from that, the lecturer also does not convey all the contents of the handbook, but rather chooses parts that are considered appropriate for the learning process.

The handbook in question is Learning English through Debating (Secondary 4 – 6) A Resource Package, English Language Education Section Curriculum Development Institute Education Bureau, The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Hong Kong. What is interesting and an advantage of this book is that it contains theories about debating activities which are followed by exercises according to the theories discussed. Each exercise can be

practiced as needed to improve debating skills. In detail, this book contains 12 focuses, all of which are closely related to developing students' debating skills. To give students the opportunity to speak (as a basis for debating skills), the lecturer provides more speaking portions in each meeting session, while the written assignments in each discussion unit are carried out by the students at home.

Furthermore, apart from the handbook above, students are also given several other alternative books from various sources (especially internet sources). Books from various sources are only complementary or not required.

## CONCLUSIONS

The perception of students in debating in relation to the ability in debating is significantly high. Positively, the students' ability is influenced by the students' perception. In detail, there are 3 factors that influence the student's perception on the debating, namely: 1) students' knowledge on the definition of debating and technical ability on debating, 2) students' self-confidence on debating, and 3) the debating course that students have taken. Those three factors show significant point on giving the influences on the students' ability in debating.

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