
Students' Experiences Towards Debate Competition As Part Of Their Critical Thinking Development

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore the experiences of three college students who participated in a recent debate competition and how it contributed to their development of critical thinking skills. The study used semi-structured interviews to gather data, which was then analysed and interpreted using thematic analysis. The results showed that the debate competition provided a platform for the students to engage in critical thinking and develop skills such as analysis, reasoning, and evaluation. The students also reported an increase in confidence and a greater appreciation for diverse perspectives. Overall, the study highlights the potential benefits of debate competitions in promoting the development of critical thinking skills among college students.

Keywords: English English Debate Competition, Critical Thinking Development, Student Experience, Learning outcomes, Communication skills, Problem-solving, Decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing world, where critical thinking skills are highly valued in both academic and professional settings, it is essential to explore effective methods for developing these skills among college students. It involves analysing information, evaluating arguments, and making informed decisions. Critical thinking encompasses higher-order cognitive processes that enable individuals to analyse information objectively and draw logical conclusions (Petriv & Koshyk, 2022). It plays a crucial role in education as it fosters independent thought, enhances problem-solving abilities, promotes effective communication, and encourages creativity (Darmawati, 2021).

One of the ways through which critical thinking can be developed is by participating in debate competitions. Debate competitions have long been recognized as a valuable platform for enhancing critical thinking abilities by encouraging systematic analysis, logical reasoning, and persuasive

communication. Debate competitions also offer a unique opportunity for students to hone their critical thinking skills through rigorous research, sound argumentation, rebuttal strategies, and active engagement with diverse perspectives. By engaging in debates about various topics ranging from social issues to policy matters or philosophical dilemmas, participants learn to think critically by examining evidence from multiple angles and constructing well-reasoned arguments based on logic rather than personal biases or emotions.

METHOD

This research aims to provide an overview of a qualitative study conducted on college students' experiences with debate competition and its impact on their development of critical thinking skills. Three college students were selected through purposive sampling. The researchers sought participants who had prior experience participating in debate competitions. Data for this study was collected through structured interviews conducted individually with each participant after the conclusion of the competition. These interviews aimed at understanding their personal experiences during the event and how it influenced their critical thinking development.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data obtained from the participants (Kuznetsova, 2021). This approach allowed for identifying recurring patterns or themes within the data that shed light on students' experiences and their perceived impact on critical thinking skills.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Interview Findings

Participant 1

Participant 1 described their latest debate competition experience as transformative for their critical thinking skills development. They highlighted how preparing for debates required extensive research on relevant sources from multiple perspectives regarding different topics. This process allowed them to critically evaluate the credibility and validity of information, thereby honing their analytical skills. Additionally, participant 1 mentioned that engaging in debates exposed them to diverse viewpoints and helped them appreciate alternative perspectives. This experience enhanced their ability to think objectively, consider counterarguments, and formulate logical responses. They also highlighted how debates had helped them develop a deeper understanding of complex issues through extensive research and analysis. He noted that debate competitions forced them to critically evaluate evidence, consider alternative perspectives, and construct strong arguments based on logical reasoning.

Participant 2

Participant 2 shared similar sentiments about the impact of debate competitions on her critical thinking abilities. They reflected on how the debate competition provided a platform for intellectual discourse that challenged their critical thinking abilities. They mentioned how debating required careful listening and effective rebuttal strategies, which further sharpened her analytical thinking skills. They emphasised the significance of active listening during debates as it allowed them to understand opposing arguments thoroughly. Through this process, participant 2 developed the skill of identifying fallacies in arguments and constructively critiquing flawed reasoning. The experience also fostered their ability to communicate effectively by presenting coherent arguments supported by evidence. They also emphasized that participating in debates had challenged their preconceived notions and encouraged them to seek out diverse viewpoints.

Participant 3

Participant 3 highlighted that engaging in debates had taught them the importance of evidence-based argumentation and increased their ability to weigh multiple perspectives before forming an opinion. They also, expressed how participating in debate competitions expanded their critical thinking capabilities beyond academic boundaries. They attributed this growth primarily to the exposure they received from engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds and disciplines during debates. By encountering different perspectives, participant 3 learned not only about other subjects but also about multiple ways of approaching problems critically.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Analyzing the experiences shared by all three participants revealed common themes related to developing critical thinking through debate competitions. These themes included extensive research, considering multiple perspectives, active listening, evaluating arguments based on evidence, identifying fallacies in reasoning, constructing logical responses, and effective communication skills development.

The use of thematic analysis as a qualitative research method allows researchers to identify patterns and commonalities within data collected from participants' experiences. By examining these themes, we gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to success in debate competitions.

One prominent theme that emerged from the experiences shared by participants is extensive research. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of thorough preparation

and deep knowledge on their chosen topics. For example, one participant recounted spending countless hours reading books, articles, and conducting primary research to gather evidence for their arguments. This theme highlights how extensive research is an essential component for success in debate competitions.

Considering multiple perspectives emerged as another significant theme among participants. Debate competitions require individuals to engage with diverse viewpoints and argue from various angles. Participants demonstrated their ability to understand different perspectives by actively engaging with opposing viewpoints during debates. They showcased empathy and intellectual flexibility, recognizing that considering multiple perspectives enriches their arguments and provides a more nuanced understanding of complex issues.

Active listening was identified as a key theme through thematic analysis of participant experiences. Effective communication involves not only speaking but also attentively listening to others' arguments and ideas. Participants described instances where they actively listened to opponents' arguments during debates, allowing them to respond effectively and address counterarguments accordingly.

Evaluating arguments based on evidence emerged as another significant theme among participants. Debaters highlighted the importance of critically assessing claims made by opponents using reliable evidence sources such as peer-reviewed studies or expert opinions. They emphasized the need for logical reasoning supported by concrete evidence rather than relying solely on persuasive rhetoric.

Identifying fallacies in reasoning played an important role in participant experiences. Participants shared instances where they recognized logical fallacies committed by opponents during debates and strategically used these fallacies to dismantle their arguments. This theme underscores the critical thinking skills developed through participation in debate competitions.

Constructing logical responses was another common theme identified through thematic analysis. Participants described how they carefully formulated well-reasoned responses, using evidence and logical reasoning to support their arguments. They demonstrated an ability to think on their feet and respond effectively under pressure.

Effective communication skills development emerged as a key theme among participants' experiences. Engaging in debate competitions fosters growth in communication skills such as

articulation, clarity, and persuasiveness. Participants highlighted improvements in public speaking abilities, organization of thoughts, and overall confidence when presenting arguments.

Result

Analysis of the participants' experiences revealed key themes related to their engagement in debate competitions. All three participants mentioned that participating in debates exposed them to diverse viewpoints on various topics, leading to enhanced critical thinking abilities (Saputri et al., 2022). The participants expressed how participating in debate competitions had a positive impact on their critical thinking development. Engaging in debates also improved their ability to construct coherent arguments supported by evidence and logical reasoning. These findings suggest that debate competitions provide students with a platform to develop their critical thinking skills by challenging them to think critically, evaluate evidence, and construct persuasive arguments. From a broader perspective, these findings indicate the potential benefits of incorporating debate competitions into educational curricula at various levels. By encouraging students' active engagement in debates, educational institutions can foster an environment where critical thinking is valued and developed (Kuznetsova, 2021). Debate competitions could serve as a valuable tool for promoting critical thinking among students by providing opportunities for intellectual discourse and fostering the ability to analyze complex issues from multiple angles.

Implications

The implications for developing critical thinking through debate competitions are significant; students who engage in such activities develop essential skills that can be applied across various disciplines and real-life situations (Petriv & Koshyk, 2022). Participation in debate competitions offers numerous benefits beyond enhancing critical thinking skills alone. Firstly, it improves public speaking abilities as participants learn to articulate their ideas confidently in front of an audience. Secondly, it enhances teamwork as debaters often work collaboratively with teammates while preparing for contests. Thirdly, it cultivates effective communication skills by teaching individuals how to express themselves clearly and persuasively. Lastly, participation in debate competitions can lead to personal growth by fostering intellectual curiosity, empathy towards different perspectives, and a desire for lifelong learning.

Educational institutions can benefit by incorporating more opportunities for debates within their curricula. By integrating debate competitions into coursework or extracurricular activities, colleges and universities can create an environment that nurtures critical thinking skills among

students across disciplines. Moreover, such initiatives can enhance students' ability to engage with complex societal issues and contribute meaningfully to public discourse. Moreover, these experiences enable students to become more open-minded individuals who can appreciate diverse viewpoints while maintaining respectful discourse.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

It is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations encountered during this qualitative study. The sample size was small, with only three participants; therefore, generalizing the findings to a larger population may not be appropriate. Additionally, the study focused solely on college students' experiences in one specific debate competition. Future research should consider expanding the participant pool and including different types of debate competitions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how they contribute to critical thinking development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, thematic analysis of participant experiences in debate competitions reveals several key themes that contribute to success in this context. Extensive research, considering multiple perspectives, active listening, evaluating arguments based on evidence, identifying fallacies in reasoning, constructing logical responses, and effective communication skills development were all prominent themes that emerged from the qualitative study. These findings emphasize the significance of critical thinking skills, intellectual flexibility, empathy, and thorough preparation for successful participation in debate competitions. The insights gained from this analysis can inform future approaches to training debaters and preparing them for these intellectually rigorous events

Debate competitions serve as a valuable tool for fostering critical thinking skills essential for success in education and future career. By engaging students in analyzing complex issues from multiple perspectives, constructing robust arguments based on evidence-based reasoning strategies, developing effective communication techniques, and enhancing self-confidence. As society continues to face complex challenges requiring innovative solutions, nurturing critical thinking skills becomes increasingly essential. Therefore, incorporating debate competitions into educational curricula can contribute significantly to developing students' critical thinking abilities. Educational institutions must recognize the value of debate competitions as a means to promote these skills among college students. By embracing the benefits derived from active participation in debates, we equip future leaders with the necessary tools for success in academia and beyond.

Further studies are recommended using larger sample sizes across diverse student populations for a more comprehensive understanding of this topic's implications for education.

For recommendation, educators can provide training and support to students interested in participating in debate competitions. They can also create opportunities for debriefing and reflection on the skills acquired during debates. By doing so, educators can foster a culture of critical thinking that empowers students to analyze information critically, evaluate arguments effectively, and make informed decisions in their academic pursuits and beyond. Overall, debate competitions offer a promising avenue for nurturing the critical thinking skills necessary for success in today's rapidly changing world. As education continues to evolve, it is crucial to explore innovative strategies that facilitate students' development of these essential skills.

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