

Improving Critical Thinking and English Communication Skills Through World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) Training at SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa

**Fistytha Hilda Irawan¹, Budiarti ², Clara Aisha Adristi³,
Nimas Condroarum Putrikaloka Pandanwangi⁴, Indah SukmaWahyuni⁵**
^{1,2,3,4,5} Universitas Ngudi Waluyo

E-mail Corresponding Author : budiarti@unw.ac.id

Abstract

Critical thinking and English communication skills are essential competencies for senior high school students, particularly those enrolled in language majors and English club, as they support academic achievement and active participation global discourse. Debate activities, especially those adopting the World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) approach, provide a structured platform to develop argumentation, reasoning and effective oral communication in English. This community service program aimed to enhance student's critical thinking and English communication skills through debate training based on the World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC). The program employed a service-learning method with a training and mentoring approach, actively involving lecturers and students in the implementation process. The training consisted of the introduction of fundamental debate concepts, WSDC debate mechanisms, argument construction and rebuttal strategies, followed by guided debate practice sessions. The results indicated that participants demonstrated improved critical thinking skills, greater confidence in expressing arguments and increased fluency and clarity in English communication. Overall, debate training based on the World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) effectively contributed to the development of critical thinking and English communication skills among senior high school students in language majors and English club.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC)

INTRODUCTION

Spoken language is the most effective means of communication compared to written or signs language, because it is flexible, dynamic, and easily understood by various groups. Every country has its own language, but English is one of the most frequently used languages for communication. It is the primary international language used for communication in various aspects of life, including education, economics, politics, and culture, internationally. As a universal language, English is the language used in technology, education, politics, business, and so on (Wengrum and Adhi, 2022). English language proficiency is a crucial skill for communication and competition in the global era. This has encouraged many English learners to continually push themselves and motivate themselves to study English intensively.

Another aspect needed in communication is self-confidence. Self-confidence is one of the most significant influences in conveying a message when communicating with a large audience. Mastering English language skills can increase self-confidence in public speaking abilities. Confidence in speaking is closely related to the concept of self-esteem, which is how individuals evaluate themselves in various aspects of life, including language skills (Rogers, 1951). According to Maslow (in Dar & Sakthivel, 2022), self-confidence is part of the esteem need that must be met to achieve self-actualization.

Critical thinking skills have become one of the most needed skills in this modern era, especially in the context of decision making. Critical thinking is the intellectual ability to

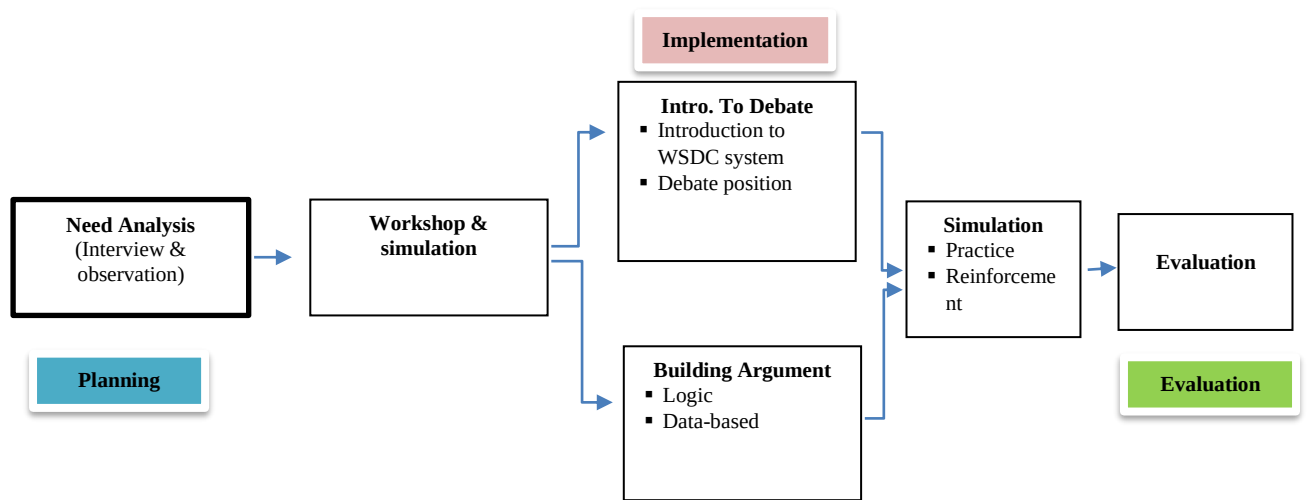
analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information rationally, systematically, and objectively. Critical thinking skills also help us identify and solve problems more effectively and efficiently. Critical thinking is essential for making informed decisions and solving complex problems (Iftirosy et al., 2025; Ariadila et al., 2016). Critical thinking is an essential skill that students must master. Students who possess these skills will be better able to master the concepts and problems presented in learning and apply these concepts to real-life situations. Students who possess critical thinking skills are also better able to make rational and responsible decisions.

Debate is regarded as an appropriate method and strategy to develop thinking skills and sharpen speaking skills and can also contribute knowledge to students. English debate is an activity that can improve not only students' speaking skills but also improve logical and critical thinking skills in solving problems with ideas relevant to the topic raised and increase self-confidence in public speaking (Wael et al., 2023; Astuti et al., 2024; Jelita Zakaria et al., 2024; Hariati et al., 2025; Naing et al., 2025; Suli et al., 2025). Debates, on the other hand, teach students how to structure arguments and speak confidently. Debates require students to think quickly, defend their opinions, and respond to opposing arguments. This activity is highly beneficial for improving English speaking skills because it involves practicing formal, persuasive, and organized speaking (Kayi, 2006). With this method, students can become more active in using English practically and improve their speaking fluency. They also learn to overcome barriers to speaking and communicating more efficiently and effectively.

This activity aims to facilitate and encourage students to improve their English skills both inside and outside the classroom. In addition to improving English language skills, this activity also greatly helps students prepare for regional and national English debate competitions, which can enhance the school's reputation. The National School Debate Championship (NSDC) is a national debate competition organized by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and is held annually. The winner of the National School Debate Championship will represent Indonesia at the World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC). The World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) is the most prestigious high school English debate competition in the world.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This community service activity was carried out at SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa in the form of service learning with a training and mentoring approach. The service-learning method is a method that integrates academic knowledge to overcome problems in society (Afandi et al., 2022). SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa was established in 1982 and was inaugurated by the Director General of Primary and Secondary Education, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia on November 23, 1982. This school is located at Jalan Yos Sudarso No. 46 Kupang, Ambarawa District, Semarang Regency, Central Java Province. SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa was chosen as the target of community service because it is in accordance with the vision of this school, namely 'The realization of students who have noble character, noble culture, environmental insight, healthy behavior, and high achievement'. It also in line with the track record of championships that SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa has successfully achieved, including 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in English Funvity. English debate training is certainly essential to improve English language achievement for students at SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa and members of the English Club. This mentoring method involves several stages, including the following:



Picture 1. Implementation method

PLANNING

In the initial phase, the community service team conducted a survey and needs assessment at the school to align the community service program with students' needs. This activity was carried out through direct field observations and discussions with Guidance and Counseling teachers, the Principal, and the English Club supervisor. Based on the results of these activities, it was identified that students' critical thinking skills still needed to be improved. The needs assessment results showed that language students needed motivation and provision of communication skills in English, while English Club members needed more intensive practice in developing critical thinking skills through English debate. As in many high schools that tend to emphasize mastery of hard skills, language students and English Club members of SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa still showed limitations in mastery of soft skills, especially critical thinking skills in English debate. In addition, the school also wanted to improve the school's reputation by participating in a national English debate competition, which the school had never participated in, namely the National School Debate Championship (NSDC).

IMPLEMENTATION

To achieve maximum results in the English debate training, this activity was implemented using a demonstration method with a training and mentoring approach. The demonstration method is a learning method that emphasizes the presentation of direct examples of a particular skill or process so that participants can observe and understand the implementation stages concretely (Sanjaya, 2016). Through this method, the facilitator directly demonstrates English debate techniques, such as delivering arguments, using appropriate language, and rebuttal strategies. For students who participate as mentors, this activity serves as an active learning tool to apply academic knowledge in real contexts and develop communication and critical thinking skills. Meanwhile, for lecturers, this activity serves as a medium to identify problems in learning English debate in schools while providing applicable solutions. Training and mentoring are carried out by providing an initial understanding of the basic concepts of debate, followed by demonstrations of debate practice, and mentoring as participants practice the skills acquired, along with providing feedback to improve the quality of debate performance for Language students and English Club members.

The training focused on providing an understanding and mastery of basic English debate skills. The material presented included the basic concepts of debate, the function and

purpose of debate, the format and mechanisms of debate, specifically the World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) model, the role of each speaker, argument development, and the rules and ethics of debate in English. Students were also equipped with knowledge of the stages of debate preparation, from motion analysis to argument planning, as well as potential obstacles that could arise during the debate process. Meanwhile, debate skills training focused on the ability to convey arguments coherently and logically, the application of rebuttal strategies, the use of communicative and persuasive English, speaking time, and building self-confidence. The application of debate techniques was carried out through modeling and role-play methods, with the facilitator presenting examples of debate practices followed by debate simulations for participants to implement the skills they had learned.

Mentoring was provided to participants for English Debate role play practice. The team provided input from the English Debate practice carried out. Feedback was not only in the form of criticism, but also motivation for good achievements. Motivating to continue practicing. The implementation of the community service activity was carried out for 1 day with a duration of 4 hours starting at 08.00 to 12.00 with the participation of approximately 180 participants consisting of students of grades X, XI and XII from the Language department, as well as 50 members of the English club which is a parallel 3 classes. The stages of the activity implementation were the delivery of basic English debate material, debate practice and providing feedback.

EVALUATION

At the end of the activity, an evaluation was conducted, providing verbal feedback from the community service implementation team, participating students, and teachers. This evaluation covered the benefits of the debate training and mentoring for both students and the school, as well as efforts to improve school performance through English debate competency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The material presented in the community service activity at SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa includes an understanding of the basic structure of debate, the role and duties of speakers, types of motions, assessment criteria, rebuttal techniques, as well as the British Parliamentary (BP) and World School Debate Championship (WSDC) debate systems that can be directly applied by students. The material is delivered using easy-to-understand and simple language, and is complemented by direct practical examples to strengthen communication skills and train students' critical thinking abilities. The purpose of this community service activity is to provide basic knowledge, techniques, and practical tips that can be applied by students, as well as improve critical thinking skills as an effort to support student achievements in winning English Debate competitions. Through debate practice, students are encouraged to develop critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills in arguing, as well as to grow their confidence in communicating assertively in public.



Picture 2. The training participants

The event began with a cheerful opening by the MC to create a warm and conducive atmosphere. The MC included lighthearted jokes and brief interactions with participants to capture attention and increase audience engagement. The main event then continued with a presentation of the material by the implementing team for approximately 30 minutes. The material was delivered coherently and systematically, and the tempo was adjusted to suit the age of the audience, making it easy for participants to understand. During the presentation, the presenter actively engaged the audience through interactive questions and interspersed Q&A sessions to ensure participants understood the material. After all the material and slides were presented clearly, students were given the opportunity to practice debating using previously prepared motions, applying rules and mechanisms similar to those of the English Debate Championship. This practical activity aimed to apply the knowledge they had acquired while also improving students' self-confidence and communication skills.



Picture 3. Delivering materials

The basic English debate material provided to students includes the definition and purpose of debate, the format and system of English debate, debating techniques such as argument development, rebuttal, and Points of Information (POI), the roles and duties of speakers from both the Government and Opposition sides, and the roles of the first and second speakers. Furthermore, the material covers several types of motions, assessment criteria, and various problems that may arise during debates and how to overcome them. Students are encouraged to think critically about the obstacles they face when debating in English. During the process, participants expressed various difficulties, including nervousness and a lack of confidence when presenting arguments in front of an audience, difficulty developing arguments quickly and systematically, and limited English language skills. Several students expressed concerns about grammatical errors, inappropriate vocabulary choices, and a lack of understanding of English terms used in debates. Furthermore, students often presented arguments with limited information and lacked detail. Therefore, the implementation team provided feedback in the form of criticism and suggestions on how to present arguments clearly and in detail, so that the arguments presented are stronger and difficult for the opposing party to refute. Emphasis is also placed on the ability to convey the negative side of an issue comprehensively, followed by a clear explanation of the solution, so that the arguments presented are complete and convincing and make it difficult for the opponent to rebut the arguments that have been presented.

In the implementation of the English debate practice, the team also conveyed the time provisions that must be adhered to by the participants, starting from the allocation of time after the motion is announced, how to use that time to compile the background and arguments, to the duration given to deliver a speech. In addition, participants were given an understanding of

the time provisions allowed to submit Points of Information (POI), the duration of delivering POI, and the types of POI that can be delivered in the debate. The team also provided tips and tricks for the second speaker in effectively refuting and summarizing the opponent's arguments, and introduced the appropriate use of hyperbole to strengthen the arguments presented to be more persuasive and convincing.



Picture 4. Simulation

The British Parliamentary debate system consists of four teams, each consisting of two members, resulting in eight debaters participating in a single debate session. The four teams have distinct positions: Opening Government, Opening Opposition, Closing Government, and Closing Opposition, with each position represented by two speakers, each separated into a first speaker and a second speaker.

The English debate begins with a case-building session after the motion is announced. Afterward, each debater presents their arguments in turn, according to a predetermined order. The debate begins with the first speaker from the Opening Government team, followed by the first speaker from the Opening Opposition team. Next, the second speaker from the Opening Government team presents their argument, followed by the second speaker from the Opening Opposition team. This sequence of argument presentations is then continued in the same pattern by the Closing Government and Closing Opposition teams.



Picture 5. Role play of the participants

The community service team also provided an explanation regarding Points of Information (POIs) that can be submitted by the opposing team. POIs can only be submitted in the middle minutes of speaking time, namely after the first minute and before the last minute. Therefore, in the first and last minutes, POIs are not permitted to be submitted unless the

Debater allows it. This does not affect the scoring. In addition, there is a provision that the Opening Government team is not allowed to submit POIs to the Closing Government team. Although both teams are competing to increase points, both are in the same position, namely as the pro side. Therefore, the Opening Government team is only allowed to submit POIs to the Opening Opposition and Closing Opposition teams. The same provision also applies vice versa for the opposition team.



Picture 6. Appreciation for the participants

Participants who volunteered to participate in the debate role-play received an appreciation from the community service team. This appreciation and souvenir were intended to enhance enthusiasm and motivation for other participants who had yet to try, and also to recognize the students' courage. Even if their arguments were not perfectly presented, the courage is a positive value and an essential part of the learning process.

During the evaluation phase, both participating students and teachers reported that the English debate training and mentoring program had a positive impact; students were more motivated and enthusiastic to continue learning English and more confident in communicating in English. Furthermore, this activity broadened the participants' knowledge and understanding of debate using the WSDC system, a platform for preparing young talents to participate in the 2026 English Debate Competition. Through this training, students learned to think critically and rationally about emerging issues in society and sought solutions.



Picture 6. Community service activities

CONCLUSION

Based on the implementation of community service activities at SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa, it can be concluded that the English Debate training provided a positive contribution in improving communication skills, self-confidence, and critical thinking skills of

students, especially students majoring in Languages and members of the English Club. Through demonstration methods, modeling, role play, and mentoring, participants gained a comprehensive understanding of the concept, format, and mechanism of English debate, especially the World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) model, and were able to apply argumentation, rebuttal, and Points of Information techniques more systematically and confidently. This activity not only equipped students with communicative and persuasive English language skills, but also encouraged the development of soft skills that support academic and non-academic achievements. Providing feedback and appreciation during debate practice was proven to increase student motivation to continue practicing and actively participating, so this training is a strategic step in supporting the improvement of the quality of student resources and English debate achievements at SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

This community service report is prepared as a reflection of the collaborative effort conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Ambarawa. The program was initiated as part of the academic and social responsibility of the English Literature Study Program, in coordination with the English Students Association and the school stakeholders. The activities aimed to enhance students' English competencies through interactive and student-centered learning approaches while also fostering meaningful engagement between higher education and secondary education institutions.

The author affirms that this report is an original work based on the actual implementation of the community service program. All data, descriptions, and evaluations presented in this report are documented responsibly and ethically. Any references or supporting theories used to strengthen the discussion are properly acknowledged. It is expected that this report will contribute not only as documentation but also as a reference for future community engagement programs, particularly in the field of English language teaching and learning.

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