



# The Effectiveness of Debate in Developing English Communication Skills among Secondary Students in Burera District, Rwanda

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated how well debate works as a teaching method to help students in Burera district, Rwanda communicate in English. This study's primary goal was to evaluate how well debate might enhance English communication skills in Burera district, Rwanda. Additionally, the study took into account the particular Rwanda educational setting. Data was gathered from Burera district students, using mixed-method research design. All secondary school students in the Burera District were the study's target group. Purposive sampling was used in the study to choose a sample of secondary school students because not all schools have active and functioning English clubs and determine the precise number of students enrolled in English club only 143 students who were chosen from schools with functioning English clubs and random sampling were used to determine the group that are not among English clubs. Descriptive design and experimental design were used and both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed and questionnaire, debate tests and observation were used as data collection methods. The findings were analysed using SPSS 21. The findings indicate that debate significantly improves students' speaking skills, argumentation abilities and engagement in language learning.*

**Keywords:** *Effectiveness, Debate, English Communication skills, Burera District, Rwanda*

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## 1. Introduction

Debate, as an interactive and student-centered learning approach, has gained recognition for its role in enhancing language proficiency, critical thinking and public speaking skills. Engaging in debates allows students to practice structured argumentation, improve their fluency, and build confidence in using English in real-world contexts (Owino, 2017). Despite its recognised benefits, limited research has been conducted on the effectiveness of debate in improving

English communication skills among secondary students in Rwanda (Niyibizi, 2019).

At the global level, the use of debate in education has been well-documented for its effectiveness in improving students' communication skills. Debating fosters an interactive and engaging environment where students practice organising their thoughts, presenting arguments, and responding to opposing views. Countries such as United states, the United Kingdom, and Australia have incorporated debate into their educational curricula, particularly in English language teaching programs.

International debate competitions such as the world schools, debating championships have further demonstrated how debate can develop fluency, confidence, and critical thinking in English (Tampubolon, 2020).

In Africa, the importance of English communication skills is particularly significant due to the continent's diverse linguistic landscape. English serves as an official or second language in many African countries, playing a crucial role in education, business, and international relations. Consequently, there has been an increasing focus on teaching English as a second language, with debate being recognised as a valuable method for fostering practical communication skills (Maharia, 2020). Yumelking, Eni & Gani, (2020) states that there are various organisations and initiatives, such as the African Debate Academy, have promoted the use of debate in schools and Universities across the continent, encouraging students to develop their English Proficiency through active engagement and participation.

In Rwanda, the context is no different. English was adopted as primary medium of instruction in schools in 2008, replacing French (Nsengimana, , 2020). This shift aimed to integrate Rwanda into the East African Community (EAC) and promote global competitiveness. However, challenges remain in ensuring that students acquire strong English Communication skills, particularly in rural areas such as Burera district, where access to quality educational resources is often limited.

The integration of debate as a learning tool has gained attention in Rwanda due to its potential to address these challenges. Debate allows students to practice speaking English in a structured and interactive manner, improving their vocabulary, pronunciation, and the ability to articulate ideas. Additionally, it helps students build confidence and develop critical thinking skills, which are essential for their academic and professional growth. Recognising this, initiatives such as the Rwanda English Proficiency Project and local debate clubs have been introduced to enhance English learning and communication through debate.

In Burera district, where the majority of students come from rural and low-income backgrounds, the use of debate presents a promising opportunity to bridge the gap in English communication skills. Despite limited research on the subject, anecdotal evidence suggests that incorporating debate into educational practices could have a significant impact on students' fluency and confidence in English. This study aims at exploring the effectiveness of using debate as a tool for developing English communication skills among students in Burera District, contributing to both local and national efforts to improve English language education (Zahra, 2019).

## 1.1. Problem statement

The quality of English communication skills among secondary school graduates in Rwanda has been a topic of concern for educators and policymakers. Many secondary school leavers in Rwanda struggle with basic reading, writing, and effective communication abilities, which can hinder their prospects of gaining admission to higher education institutions or securing employment.

The Rwandan education system, similar to those in other Sub-Saharan African countries, has faced challenges in ensuring the quality of education and the acquisition of practical skills by students. Principals' implementation of quality control measures has been identified as a crucial factor in improving secondary school goal attainment. (Nzitatakuze, 2019)

Secondary students of Burera District have problems with English communication as a medium of instruction. Based on the researcher experience living there, the researcher found some issues that students were having. Several issues that students encounter include: lack of confidence and fluency, a fear of making mistakes and anxiety when speaking English. Every growth trend in any nation, including Rwanda, is based on communication, and it has been observed that the majority of secondary students graduate without being able to express themselves in English. As a result, children were unable to answer questions in variety of other subjects including Geography and History.

Strong English proficiency not only helps students pass tests but also puts them in a better position to conduct business after graduation and take advantage of possibilities both domestically and abroad where proficiency in the language is a crucial pre-requisite. Therefore, this research intends to improve students in Burera District on speaking skills through debate. In speaking, students should master the elements of speaking, such as vocabularies, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. Students' inability to fully grasp the speaking component is the root of this issue. In addition, kids hardly ever practice speaking English, since the majority of their peers speak Kinyarwanda, they only get a limited opportunity to practice speaking English outside of the classroom.

On Thursday 18.04.2024 Rwanda Prime Minister Dr. Edouard NGIRENTE informed the members of the Parliament about the Government's activities in improving the quality of education in all levels of schools. In his speech, he also talked about how the students of the University of Rwanda are going to be taught languages to help them have the knowledge needed in the labour market,

especially in terms of improving the way they will use it. Among these reforms is the emphasis on language teaching in every department, especially in the first year. The Prime Minister said: “first year students will study languages regardless of what they study so that they can explain what they have learned.”

Some students complete their secondary schools studies and leave the schools to the labour market without ability to communicate in English, however, many institutions and organizations prefer to hire strong individuals(workers) who have high English language proficiency as one of language of communication at working place, it is very clearly justified by the interviews conducted prior to starting work, the researcher reasoned that this failure might be the result of inadequate English language proficiency and that school debate plays a significant role in improving both communication skills and overall academic achievement. Researcher decided to carry out an investigation on the efficiency of school debate in developing English communication skills among secondary students, Burera District Rwanda. The main purpose of the study is to assess the effectiveness of using debate in developing English communication skills among students in Burera district, Rwanda. Does debate contribute in developing English language communication skills among students in Burera District?

## **1.2. Purpose of the study**

### **1.2.1. General Objectives**

The main objectives of this study was to assess the effectiveness of using debate in developing English communication skills. This aims to show how debate can improve English communication skills in Burera District, Rwanda.

### **1.2.2. Specific objectives**

#### **This study was set to achieve the following specific objectives**

1. To assess the students’ perception of debate activities in improving English communication skills in Burera District, Rwanda.
2. To explore the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing a debate-based curriculum in the Rwandan educational context.
3. To analyse the effectiveness of using debate on students' ability to research, organize, and present arguments effectively.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual review**

#### **2.1.1 Debate**

Debate is a structured form of argumentation where individuals or teams present opposing points of view on a given topic. It is a fundamental skill that enhances critical thinking, public speaking, and the ability to analyse complex issues. Engaging in debates not only sharpens communication skills but also fosters a deeper understanding of different perspectives.

#### **2.1.2 English Communication skills**

Communication is the foundation of human interaction, shaping relationships, ideas, and progress. It is the process of exchanging information, thoughts, and emotions through verbal, nonverbal and written forms. Effective communication is essential in both personal and professional settings, as it helps building connections, resolve conflict and foster understanding.

Strong communication skills involve active listening, empathy, clarity, and confidence. Effective communication skills in English are crucial for students in Rwanda, as the language serves as the primary medium of instruction in secondary schools (Nadjette, 2022). However, many students struggle to develop proficient English language abilities, which can hinder their academic and professional prospects (Apriliani, Harmayanthi & Fitriani, 2021).

### **2.2 Theoretical Review**

#### **The socio-cultural theory of learning**

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the principles of socio-cultural theory of learning. The communicative language teaching approach emphasizes the importance of using the target language in meaningful and authentic communication, which aligns with the goals of using debate to develop English communication skills (Ahmad & Nik , 2021).

Additionally, the socio-cultural theory of learning, as proposed by Vygotsky, suggests that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration. Debate, as a form of collaborative learning, provides an opportunity for students to engage in meaningful discourse, negotiate meaning, and develop their language skills through interaction with their peers.

The socio-cultural theory of learning and the tenets of communicative language instruction serve as the foundation for this study's theoretical framework. In line with the objectives of using discussion to improve English communication skills, the communicative language education approach places a strong emphasis on the value of using the target language in genuine and meaningful communication (Ahmad & Nik, 2021).

Furthermore, according to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning, learning happens via social interaction and teamwork. Students can participate in meaningful conversation, negotiate meaning, and improve their language abilities by interacting with their peers through debate, a type of collaborative learning.

## 2.3 Empirical Review

### Students' Perception of Debate Activities in Improving English Communication Skills in Burera District, Rwanda

It is commonly acknowledged that debate exercises are a useful teaching method for enhancing communication abilities, especially in situations involving the acquisition of a second language (Maharia, 2020). Students sometimes struggle with competency, particularly in speaking and writing, in Rwanda, where English is one of the official languages along with French and Kinyarwanda. Debate has been investigated as a way to improve students' accuracy and fluency in English since it is an organized activity that calls for the articulation of arguments.

Research on the function of discussion in language learning according to Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, (2019), including students in discussions encourages critical thinking and increases their self-assurance when speaking a second language. Debate exercises, in particular, have been found to help students in Rwanda go beyond rote memory and become more involved in the learning process. As they study difficult subjects and develop their ability to communicate in English, students tend to feel more motivated and becoming more proficient in speaking, listening and even reading (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019).

### Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing a Debate-Based Curriculum in the Rwandan Educational Context

There are advantages and disadvantages to including discussion into the curriculum, particularly in developing nation like Rwanda. One way that debate-based curriculum might enhance English language learning is through

Rwanda's Language-in-Education policy, which aims to promote English as medium of instruction starting in Primary school (Nzitabakuze, 2019). Rwanda's vision 2020 and 2050 goals for educational change are all in line with the active involvement, critical thinking and higher order cognitive skills that debate fosters (Nzitabakuze, 2019), but putting a debate based curriculum into practice is extremely difficult, especially in remote district like Burera. The absence of debate facilitation training for teachers is one issue. Teachers in rural locations might not have the same resources or exposure to contemporary pedagogical practices like discussion, but those in metropolitan areas might have access to professional development opportunities (Yasmine, 2022). Furthermore, the incorporation of debate as interactive, student-centred activity may be constrained by the conventional emphasis on memorisation and exams (Nzitabakuze, 2019)

### Impact of Debate on Students' Ability to Research, Organize, and Present Arguments Effectively

Debate exercises greatly enhance student's research, planning, and presentation abilities all of which are essential for success in school and the workplace. According to research. children who debate are able to acquire advanced literacy skills such as capacity to collect, integrate, and assess information from a variety of sources (Djirly, & Murdiono, 2024). For students studying English, these abilities are particularly helpful while navigating challenging academic materials in a second language.

Debate gives pupils a chance to practise critical thinking and problem-solving in English in Rwanda, where these abilities are valued in the national curriculum (Nsengimana, 2020). According to studies, discussion assist students become more adept at rationally organizing their ideas, putting out cogent arguments, and effectively responding to counter arguments (Cuong, 2023). Because they learn how to construct and defend arguments methodically, students who engage in debating activities, in particular, typically exhibit more order in their written and oral presentations(Christine&Christophe,2020).

Additionally, debate fosters student's confidence in public speaking, which is a crucial ability in both academic and professional contexts. This is especially crucial in Rwanda, where social mobility and employment prospects are correlated with English language competency. Students are better prepared to take part in more extensive civic and intellectual discussions when they improve their research and argumentation skills in a second language (Blake, 2023). Students in rural areas like Burera, however, have

difficulties since they may not have as much access to the internet and research tools. Despite these obstacles, students can get past them and participate in research in a meaningful way by making an effort to include local knowledge and community-based resources into arguments.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

The research design of this study were both descriptive and comparative. In fact, the existing problem was described referring to the role of using debate in developing English communication skills in Rwanda in study area at Burera District, and a comparison was carried out to test the group that always engage in debate and the other group that is not a part of English club, then compare test scores using T-Test, from the problem different objectives were highlighted and helped to gather adequate data respondents taking into account the selected sample size. In this research, the researcher considered opinions of each respondent. Considering objectives, questionnaires were designed and distributed to respondents for data collection by responding on questionnaires by writings or interviews. After data collection, gathered data was described, analysed, interpreted and finally comments, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions were made.

#### 3.2 Research approach

This research employed a mixed-method approach, combining both Quantitative and qualitative approaches. The primary aim was to assess the effectiveness of using debate in developing English communication skills among students in Burera District, Rwanda. The mixed-methods approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions, experiences, and the impact of debate activities on their English Proficiency.

#### 3.3 Target population

While conducting this study, the researcher considered the target population. The target population for this study was all secondary school students in Burera District, Rwanda, this was over 30,720 students within 61 schools. In rural areas like Burera, the presence of English is often scarce, with the language primarily used in larger urban centres. This lack of exposure hinders the development of practical language skills, as students struggle to apply their classroom-based knowledge in real-world contexts.

#### 3.4 Sampling procedures and sample size

To assess the effectiveness of debate in developing English communication skills among secondary students in Burera District, a well-structured sampling procedure was employed where by a Universal sampling was employed to sample four (4) schools with active and functioning English Clubs from sixty-one (61) secondary schools in Burera District. Total number of secondary students in 4 schools is 1838. The study focused on two groups: students who are active members of English Clubs and those who are not.

To determine an appropriate sample size for students who do not participate in English clubs, Slovin's formula was used. This formula is commonly applied when selecting a representative sample from a larger population while maintaining a reasonable margin of error. Using this approach, a total of 144 students who do not actively engage in debate activities through English Clubs were sampled.

In contrast, purposive sampling was used to include all 143 students who were members of English clubs in the same schools. Since these students regularly participate in debate and other English-speaking activities, their inclusion was essential for making meaningful comparisons between students who engage in debate and those who do not.

By combining random sampling (for non-English club members) and Purposive sampling (for English club members), this study ensured a balanced and comprehensive sample. This approach facilitated a thorough analysis of how debate influences students' English communication skills, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of debate as a learning tool.

The sample size is determined by the help of Solvin's formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where **n** is the sample size, N is the population size and **e** is the marginal of error (8%).

$$n = \frac{1838}{1 + 1838(0.0064)^2} = \frac{1838}{1 + 11.7632} = \frac{1838}{12.7632} = 144$$

**Table 1: students sampled at each school**

School	Students who are active English club members	Sampling technique	Students who are non-English club members	Sampling technique
1. GS MUSASA	28	Purposive sampling	28	Stratified sampling
2. GS CYANIKA	24	Purposive sampling	25	Stratified sampling
3. ES KIDAHO	57	Purposive sampling	57	Purposive sampling
4. ES KAGOGO	34	Purposive sampling	34	Purposive sampling
Total	143	Purposive sampling	144	Solvin's Formula

Source: Field data (2024)

### 3.5 Data collection methods and instruments

Instruments are tools which were used for collecting data and information from the field. The tools to be used were scheduled as follows:

#### 3.5.1 Questionnaire

According to Zina, (2021) a questionnaire is a set of questions designed to generate the data necessary for accomplishing the objectives of the research project. Questions to be administered to respondents was both closed-ended and open-ended ones.

Regarding closed-ended questions, respondents were asked to choose one answer from a given list of answers, whereas open-ended questions were replied by each respondent in his/her own words. Questionnaire was administered to respondents.

#### 3.5.2 Observation

In this research, the researcher used observation as a tool to collect data during debate time as he used debate to compare the situations between students who engages in

debate during clubs and new group that does not belong to English Club by scoring using debate rubrics, then compare test scores of students using a T-Test. Also observations were conducted to monitor the students' engagement, participation, and development of communication skills during the debate sessions.

#### 3.5.3 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews was conducted with a sample of students to gather their perceptions, experiences, and feedback on the use of debate in developing English communication skills

### 3.6 Ethical consideration

In conducting the researcher there are some ethics that were considered, the adherence to ethical consideration helps the researcher to have smooth process in data collection. In conducting my research, considered the followings ethics in order to establish rapport with the respondents: informed consent and confidentiality and that collected are meant for academic purpose only.

Confidentiality was great importance while gathering information. This was the reason why the identity of individuals from whom the information was not drawn.

Informants were not pressured to become a subject of the research. This was done to ensure the safety, social and psychological of both people and local leader respondents.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Students' perception of debate in improving English communication skills

Effective communication in English is an essential skill for students, particularly in an increasing globalized world. One interactive approach that has gained attention for its

potential to enhance communication skills in debate. This study explored students' perception of debate as a tool for improving their English proficiency, focusing on key aspects such as speaking, listening, and writing skills.

To gather insights, a survey was conducted among students, assessing their participation in debate activities and their views on its effectiveness. The questionnaire covered areas such as the frequency of participation, perceived impact on speaking fluency and confidence, listening comprehension, and writing abilities. The findings provide valuable perspective on whether debate contribute to language development and how students experience its benefits in their academic journey.

#### Frequency of participation in Debate activities

**Table 2: Frequency of participation in debate activities**

Frequency of participation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Rarely	80	55.9	55.9	55.9
Occasionally	40	28.0	28.0	83.9
Frequently	23	16.1	16.1	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

These findings in table 2 show that debate activities are widely recognised as effective for improving English communication skills (Harmer, 2017, Krieger,2015). However, participation levels remain relatively low, with 55.9% of students rarely engaging in debates. This aligns with previous research indicating that apprehension toward public speaking, lack of motivation and limited opportunities are common barriers (Tsou,2015) Daly, Vangelesti, & Lawrence, 2019). Encouraging broader participation could yield greater benefits in language acquisition (Ellis, 2023).

Despite limited engagement, students overwhelmingly perceive debate as an effective learning tool. A significant 86.7% find debate activities effective, while only 2.8% consider them ineffective. This supports findings by Goodwin (2023) and Alasmari (2013), who emphasise debate's role in developing speaking proficiency and argumentation.

### 4.2 Students' perception about the effectiveness of debate activities

**Table 3: Perceived effectiveness of debate activities**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very effective	4	2.8	2.8	2.8
Effective	120	83.9	83.9	86.7
Neutral	15	10.5	10.5	97.2
ineffective	4	2.8	2.8	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

According to table 3, 2.8%(4 respondents) responded that they perceive debate activities to be very effective in enhancing their English communication skills, the majority of respondents (120 out of 143, or 83.9%) perceive debate activities as effective in enhancing their English communication skills, 10.5%(15 respondents) remain Neutral, indicating that they neither find debates

particularly beneficial nor ineffective while 2.8% (4 respondents) responded ineffective, notably, no respondent rated debate activities as very ineffective, suggesting that debates are generally regarded as useful.

### 4.3 Improvement in speaking skills

**Table 4: Improvement in speaking skills**

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	strongly improved	46	32.2	32.2
	Somewhat improved	83	58.0	90.2
	Not much improved	14	9.8	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

Debate positively impacts speaking, with 32.2 of students reporting strong improvement and 58.0 noting some improvement. These results align with studies demonstrating debate's role in enhancing fluency and articulation (Tuan& Mai, 2015). Listening comprehension also benefits, with 16.1% experiencing significant improvement and 64.3% reporting slight improvement,

corroborating research on debate's effectiveness in fostering active listening (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2022).

#### **4.4 Effect on listening comprehension and ability to understand arguments presented in English**

**Table 5: Effect on listening comprehension and ability to understand arguments**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Greatly improved	23	16.1	16.1
	Slightly improved	92	64.3	80.4
	No change	28	19.6	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

These findings in table 5 contribute to the broader objective of assessing the role of debate in improving English communication skills among students in Burera District, Rwanda. The high percentage of students who reported at least some improvement (80.4%) highlights that debates are generally effective in enhancing listening comprehension. However, the presence of students who saw no change suggests that debate activities might need to

be adapted to better support different learning needs, such as incorporating structured listening exercise or diverse debate formats.

#### **4.5 Confidence in speaking English in class after participating in debates**

**Table 6: Confidence in speaking English in class after participating in debates**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	31	21.7	21.7
	Often	101	70.6	92.3
	Sometimes	11	7.7	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

These findings strongly support the study's objective of assessing students' perceptions of debate activities in improving communication skills in Burera District, Rwanda. A substantial 70.6% of students reported frequent confidence boosts, while 21.7% always feel more confident during debates. This highlights debate's role in reducing language anxiety and promoting self-assurance (Dorney,2019; Horwitz & cope 1986). Writing skills also

improve through debate participation, with 57.3% of students reporting significant improvement and 30.1% experiencing moderate progress. This supports findings that argumentation and structured reasoning enhance academic writing skills (Hillocks, 2010; Kuhn & Udell, 2023).



## 4.6 Improvement in writing skills

**Table 7: Improvement in writing skills**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, significantly	82	57.3	57.3	57.3
	Yes, to some extent	43	30.1	30.1	87.4
	No change	18	12.6	12.6	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

These findings in table 7 align with the study's objective of assessing students' perceptions of debate activities in improving English communication skills in Burera District, Rwanda. The high percentage (87.4%) of students who reported some level of improvement suggests that debate contributes positively to writing development by encouraging structured thinking and logical argumentation. However, for the small group that saw no change are those with less than six months' duration joining English clubs, therefore, additional support such as writing workshops or integrating debates with formal writing tasks- could further enhance their skills.

## 4.2 Challenges and opportunities of implementing debate-based curriculum

The successful implementation of debate-based curriculum in the Rwandan educational context presents both challenges and opportunities. While debate activities have been recognized as an effective tool for enhancing students' communication skills, critical thinking, and academic engagement, various factors can either facilitate or hinder their integration into the school curriculum. Understanding these factors is essential for developing strategies that maximize the benefits of debate-based learning while addressing the obstacles that may limit its effectiveness.

This section of the study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing a debate-based curriculum in Rwandan schools.

### 4.2.1. Main challenges faced by students while participating in debate activities at school

**Table 8: Main challenges faced by students while participating in debate activities at school**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	lack of time to prepare	53	37.1	37.1	37.1
	Insufficient resources	19	13.3	13.3	50.3
	Lack of teacher training or guidance	1	0.7	0.7	51.0
	Large class size	16	11.2	11.2	62.2
	Limited opportunities to practice	24	16.8	16.8	79.0
	Language barrier	10	7.0	7.0	86.0
	Lack of interests among peers	20	14.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

These findings in table 8 provide valuable insights into the feasibility of integrating debate into curriculum and the barriers that need to be addressed. Challenges in implementing debate activities include lack of preparation time (37.1%), insufficient resources (13.3%), limited

teacher guidance (0.7%), large class sizes (11.2%), and language barriers (7.0%). Additionally, 14.0% of students cite lack of peer interest as a challenge, indicating a need for greater institutional support to foster a culture of debate (Brookfield & Preskill, 2019)

## 4.2.2 Support from school in promoting debate activities

**Table 9: Support from schools in promoting debate activities**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very supportive	21	14.7	14.7
	Supportive	81	56.6	71.3
	Neutral	4	2.8	74.1
	Unsupportive	19	13.3	87.4
	Very unsupportive	18	12.6	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

These findings in table 9 reflect both opportunities and challenges in integrating a debate-based curriculum in Rwanda: (i) opportunity: the majority of schools (71.3%) are at least somewhat supportive, suggesting a foundation upon which a structured debate curriculum could be developed. (ii) challenge: the 25.9% of students who experience little to no school support highlight a need for greater school commitment such as: providing more

resources, incentivizing participation through competition, awards or integration into assessments and teacher training and mentorship programs to help educators facilitate debate activities.

## 4.2.3 Perception of debate integration into curriculum

**Table 10: Perception of debate integration into curriculum**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes, very effectively	112	78.3	78.3
	Yes, somewhat effectively	24	16.8	95.1
	No, It would be difficult	7	4.9	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

These findings in table 10 highlight both opportunities and challenges in adopting a debate-based curriculum in the Rwandan educational context: (i) opportunity: the 95.1% of students who believe in the effectiveness of debate integration (either very or somewhat) indicates that there is strong students demand for structured debate activities in schools. This provide a solid foundation for curriculum planners and educators to develop debate-based learning models. (ii) challenge: the 4.9 who anticipated difficulties

point to potential barriers that need to be addressed, such as: resources constraints like research materials and internet access, time management (managing debates with other academic responsibilities) and teacher training to facilitate structured debate activities effectively.

## 4.2.4 Benefits of debate activities to students overall academic development

**Table 11: Benefits of debate activities to students overall academic development**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	improved English language skills	73	51.0	51.0	51.0
	Enhanced critical thinking	20	14.0	14.0	65.0
	Better research skills	2	1.4	1.4	66.4
	Improved public speaking skills	25	17.5	17.5	83.9
	Increased confidence	14	9.8	9.8	93.7
	Greater engagement in Learning	9	6.3	6.3	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

According to table 11, debates impact extends beyond language proficiency. While 51.0% of student’s highlight improvements in English skills, others cite gains in critical thinking 14.0%, public speaking 17.5%, confidence 9.8%, research skills 1.4% and overall engagement 6.3%. these findings align with studies emphasising debate’s role in fostering critical analysis, logical reasoning and effective communication (Kennedy, 2017; zare& Othman, 2018).

### 4.3. Impact of debate on research, organization, and presentation of arguments

The third objective of this study aimed to analyse the effectiveness of using debate as pedagogical tool in enhancing students’ ability to research, organize and present arguments effectively in English. Debate enhances research skills, with 56.6% of students reporting significant improvement and 41.3% experiencing moderate progress. The necessity of evidence-based argumentation likely contributes to this outcome (Hollihan & Baaske, 2019).

Confidence in organising arguments also improves, with 64.3% of students feeling confident and 20.3% feeling very confident in structuring their ideas. However, 4.2% still experience anxiety, indicating a need for additional support in argument development (Oros, 2020).

Finally, debate has a strong impact on public presentation skills, with 55.2% of students reporting significant improvement and 39.9% noting moderate progress. Only 4.9% reported no change, reinforcing the effectiveness of debate in enhancing public speaking abilities. This finding is supported by Barkely, Cross & Major (2014)

Overall, the findings confirm that debate activities play a crucial role in improving English communication skills, particularly in speaking, listening, writing, and confidence. However, challenges such as low participation, resources constraints, and limited institutional support should be addressed.

#### 4.3.1. Improvement in research skills and gather information in English

**Table 12: Improvement in research skills and gathering information in English**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Significantly improved	81	56.6	56.6	56.6
	Moderately improved	59	41.3	41.3	97.9
	No improvement	3	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

The data in the table 12, provides insights into how participation in debates has influenced students’ ability to research and gather information in English. A significant majority of students (56.6%) reported that their research skills had” significantly improved”, while 41.3% indicated

“moderate improvement.” Only 2.1% of respondents noted no improvement. The option “made it harder” was not reported in the table, suggesting that no students felt debate negatively impacted their research abilities.

### 4.3.2 Confidence in organising arguments logically and coherently after engaging in debate activities

**Table 13: Level of confidence in organising arguments logically and coherently after engaging in debate activities**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very confident	29	20.3	20.3
	Confident	92	64.3	84.6
	Neutral	16	11.2	95.8
	Anxious	5	3.5	99.3
	Very Anxious	1	.7	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

Table 13, provides insight into how debate activities impact students' confidence in structuring logical and coherent arguments.

In summary, the results confirm that debate activities play a crucial role in enhancing students' ability to research, organise, and present arguments effectively. With 84.6%

of students feeling confident, debates are clearly an effective strategy for developing logical reasoning skills.

### 4.3.3 Improvement in public presentation or in class discussions

**Table 14: Improvement in Public Presentation or in class discussions**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Improvement level			
	Yes, significantly	79	55.2	55.2
	Yes, to some extent	57	39.9	95.1
	no change	7	4.9	100.0
Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Table 14 provides insights into how debate activities have impacted students' ability to present their ideas and arguments in public or class discussions. The fact that 95.1% of students reported improvement (either significant or to some extent) confirms that debate is an effective tool for developing strong public speaking and discussion skills. The results strongly support the effectiveness of debate activities in improving students' ability to present

arguments clearly and confidently in public and class discussions. With 95.1% of students acknowledging improvement, debate is clearly a valuable educational tool for developing presentation skills.

### 4.3.4. Enhanced students' ability to critically analyse different perspectives

**Table 15: Enhanced students' ability to critically analyse different perspectives**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Greatly enhanced	87	60.8	60.8
	Somewhat enhanced	49	34.3	95.1
	No chance	7	4.9	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

**Table 16: Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Fluency: Speaks smoothly without long Pauses or hesitations	Equal variances assumed	.158	.705	3.656	6	.011	1.750	.479	.579	2.921
	Equal variances not assumed			3.656	4.973	.015	1.750	.479	.517	2.983
Pronunciation: Clear articulation and correct pronunciation of words	Equal variances assumed	1.500	.267	3.130	6	.020	1.750	.559	.382	3.118
	Equal variances not assumed			3.130	4.927	.026	1.750	.559	.307	3.193
Vocabulary: uses wide range of vocabulary	Equal variances assumed	.158	.705	4.700	6	.003	2.250	.479	1.079	3.421
	Equal variances not assumed			4.700	4.973	.005	2.250	.479	1.017	3.483
Grammar: Uses grammatically correct sentences	Equal variances assumed	25.000	.002	2.782	6	.032	1.750	.629	.211	3.289
	Equal variances not assumed			2.782	4.087	.049	1.750	.629	.018	3.482
Coherence & Clarity: ideas are well-organized, and arguments are easy to understand	Equal variances assumed	3.000	.134	4.899	6	.003	2.000	.408	1.001	2.999
	Equal variances not assumed			4.899	3.000	.016	2.000	.408	.701	3.299
critical thinking: Demonstrates logical reasoning and supports arguments with evidence	Equal variances assumed	25.000	.002	3.576	6	.012	2.250	.629	.711	3.789
	Equal variances not assumed			3.576	4.087	.022	2.250	.629	.518	3.982
Engagement: Maintains eye contact, appropriate gestures, and enthusiasm during delivery	Equal variances assumed	9.000	.024	11.000	6	.000	2.750	.250	2.138	3.362
	Equal variances not assumed			11.000	3.000	.002	2.750	.250	1.954	3.546

Table 15, The findings strongly support the effectiveness of using debate in enhancing students' ability to critically

analyse different perspectives. With 95.1% of students reporting improvement, debate-based learning proves to be

an essential strategy for developing analytical thinking and argument evaluation skills.

#### 4.3.4. Students’ feelings while presenting arguments in English during a debate

**Table 17: Students’ feelings while presenting arguments in English during a debate**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Confident	42	29.4	29.4
	Somewhat confident	82	57.3	86.7
	Neutral	10	7.0	93.7
	Anxious	7	4.9	98.6
	Very Anxious	2	1.4	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0

This table 17, provides insights into how students feel when presenting arguments in English during a debate, focusing on confidence levels and anxiety.

The findings suggest that debate is an effective method for improving students’ ability to present arguments clearly

and confidently in English. The fact that 86.7% of students feel confident highlights the success of debate in reducing speech anxiety and strengthening public speaking skills, therefore debate activities have proven to be valuable tool in enhancing students’ research, organization, and presentation skills.

This table presents the results of an independent sample T-test to compare two groups on various aspects of speaking performance. Here’s how to interpret the key components:

1. Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances  
 F& Sig. (p-value): this test determines whether the two groups have equal variances.  
 If Sig. (p-value) > 0.05, equal variances can be assumed.  
 If sig. (p-value) ≤ 0.05, equal variances cannot be assumed (so we look at the “equal variances not assumed” row in the T-test).
2. T-test for equality of Means  
 T& df (Degrees of Freedom): The T-Value and associated degrees of freedom indicate the difference between the groups  
 Sig. (2-tailed): The P-value shows whether the difference between groups is statistically significant. If  $p \leq 0.05$ , the difference is significant.  
 Mean difference: the difference between the mean scores of the two groups  
 Std. Error Difference: the standard error of the mean difference.  
 95% Confidence Interval (Lower & Upper): The range in which the true difference in means likely falls. If this range does not include zero, the difference is significant.  
 Fluency, Pronunciation, vocabulary, Grammar, Coherence & Clarity, critical thinking, and

Engagement all have statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the two groups. The largest mean difference is in Engagement (2.750,  $p = .000$ ), indicating a strong difference in how the two groups perform in maintaining eye contact, gestures and enthusiasm. The largest mean difference observed in engagement (2.750,  $p = .000$ ) suggests that debaters excel in maintaining eye contact using gestures, and displaying enthusiasm. This aligns with research highlighting that debate participation fosters an engaging learning environment, promoting active student participation and critical thinking (Iman, 2017). Vocabulary also shows a strong difference (Mean Difference= 2.250,  $p = .003$ ), meaning one group uses a wider range of vocabulary than the other. Grammar and critical thinking have relatively high, Levene’s test significance ( $p = .002$ ), indicating unequal variances, so we rely on the “Equal variances not assumed” row. All confidence intervals exclude zero, confirming significant differences between groups. Overall, the results suggest that the two groups differ significantly in all assessed aspects of speaking, with the most notable differences in Engagement, Vocabulary, and critical thinking.

**Table 18: Group Statistics**

	Debaters group and Non-debaters	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Fluency: Speaks smoothly without long Pauses or hesitations	Debaters Group	4	4.75	.500	.250
	Non-Debaters Group	4	3.00	.816	.408
Pronunciation: Clear articulation and correct pronunciation of words	Debaters Group	4	4.50	.577	.289
	Non-Debaters Group	4	2.75	.957	.479
Vocabulary: uses wide range of vocabulary	Debaters Group	4	4.25	.500	.250
	Non-Debaters Group	4	2.00	.816	.408
Grammar: Uses grammatically correct sentences	Debaters Group	4	4.75	.500	.250
	Non-Debaters Group	4	3.00	1.155	.577
Coherence & Clarity: ideas are well-organized, and arguments are easy to understand	Debaters Group	4	5.00	.000	.000
	Non-Debaters Group	4	3.00	.816	.408
critical thinking: Demonstrates logical reasoning and supports arguments with evidence	Debaters Group	4	4.25	.500	.250
	Non-Debaters Group	4	2.00	1.155	.577
Engagement: Maintains eye contact, appropriate gestures, and enthusiasm during delivery	Debaters Group	4	5.00	.000	.000
	Non-Debaters Group	4	2.25	.500	.250

The table above presents a statistical comparison between debaters and non-debaters across seven aspects of speaking skills according to debate rubrics set by the researcher. It provides the mean, standard deviation, and standard error mean for each skill category, based on a sample size (N) of 4 in each group. Here is an interpretation:

Fluency: debaters mean =4.75, indicating they speak smoothly with minimal pauses., non-debaters: mean=3.00, suggesting more hesitations, this concludes that debaters generally speak more fluently.

Pronunciation: debaters: mean=4.50, showing clear articulation and correct pronunciation, non-debaters: mean=2.75, indicating less clarity, this concludes that debaters pronounce words more accurately. Participation in debates has been shown to improve students' speaking competence, leading to smoother speech with minimal pauses and clearer articulation (Majidi & De Graaff, 2021)

Vocabulary: debaters: mean=4.25, showing a richer vocabulary, non-debaters: Mean=2.00, suggesting a limited range. This concludes that debaters have a more extensive vocabulary.

Grammar: debaters: mean=4.75, demonstrating strong grammatical accuracy, non-debaters: Mean=3.00, showing more errors, this concludes that debaters use grammar more correctly.

Coherence & clarity: Debaters: Mean= 5.00, meaning their ideas are well organised, non-debaters: mean=3.00, indicating some lack of clarity, this concludes that debaters present ideas more clearly.

Critical thinking: debaters: Mean=4.25, demonstrating logical reasoning and evidence-based arguments, non-debaters: mean=2.00, showing weaker reasoning, this concludes that debaters think more critically.

Engagement: debaters: mean=5.00, actively engaging through gestures, eye contact, and enthusiasm, non-debaters: Mean=2.25, showing less engagement, concluding that debaters engage their audience more effectively.

The data suggests that debaters outperform non-debaters across all categories, particularly in coherence, engagement, and fluency. The standard deviation for non-debaters are generally higher, indicating greater variation in their speaking abilities, while debaters have more

consistent performance. This supports the idea that participation in debate enhances public speaking skills, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, organisation, critical thinking and audience engagement. (Leaders, 2023)

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 5.1. Conclusion

Based on the findings from the study conducted in Burera District, Rwanda, the following conclusions have been drawn in relation to the three main objectives of the research:

Students' perception of debate activities in improving English communication skills: the research reveals that the majority of students perceive debate activities as highly beneficial in improving their English communication skills. Specifically, the activities were found to significantly enhance speaking, listening and writing abilities. A large percentage of students feeling more confident speaking English, with improvements in their ability to express ideas logically and coherently in both spoken and written formats. Students indicated that debate activities helped them to develop fluency, pronunciation, and the confidence to engage in class discussions.

Challenges and opportunities of implementing a debate-based curriculum: several challenges were identified regarding the implementation of debate-based curricula in the Rwandan Educational context. These include:

Lack of resources, such as limited access to research materials and inadequate internet connectivity, like at Horizon school (pseudonym) students are committed but no computers and internet connectivity almost all students in this school found this as constraint. time constraints for preparation, this was found mostly in day schools where students in English club meet and given a debate but it is not easy to get time for research. Language barriers, most of new students who have less than 6 months in English club struggle to express their ideas effectively in English.

However, there are also opportunities, some students expressed a desire for more structured debate activities, suggesting that such initiatives could significantly improve their academic skills. Schools that are supportive of debate activities can enhance student engagement and foster critical thinking skills, which are vital for students overall academic development.

Effectiveness of debate in enhancing Research, organization, and presentation of arguments: the study shows that debate have a positive impact on students'

abilities to research, organize and present arguments. A large number of students reported a significant improvement in their research and argument organization skills as a result of participating in debates. Students also gained greater confidence in presenting arguments logically and coherently in public settings. The activities encouraged students to critically analyse different perspectives, thus enhancing their overall academic and intellectual development. Despite these improvements, a small number of students reported feeling anxious or unprepared, particularly in organizing their thoughts under time pressure.

### 5.1. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made to further improve the implementation and effectiveness of debate activities in enhancing English communication skills and overall academic development.

#### 1. Enhancing teacher training and support

Professional development programs, for teachers should be introduced to improve their facilitation of debate activities. Teachers can be trained on how to guide students in researching, organizing, and presenting arguments effectively, with emphasis on developing English communication skills. Teachers should also receive training on how to manage large classes during debate sessions, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to participate.

#### 2. Improving resources availability.

Schools should be provided with better access to resources, including research materials, technology, and access to internet. This can help students prepare for debates effectively, particularly when researching various topics and accessing information in English. Debate clubs and classrooms should be equipped with materials that promote critical thinking, such as books, articles, and access to online databases.

#### 3. Increasing preparation time and reducing class sizes

To address the issue of time constraints, schools could schedule more flexible debate preparation sessions, ensuring students have adequate time to research and organize their arguments. Smaller class sizes or rotating group participation could give students more opportunities to engage in debate activities actively.



#### 4. Encouraging a school wide culture of debate.

Schools should foster a culture that values debate and encourages student participation. Debate activities should be integrated more formally into the curriculum, with regular opportunities for students to practice speaking and listening skills in English. Regular debate tournaments or public speaking events could be held to motivate students and build a sense of community.

#### 5. Supporting students with language barriers

Additional support, such as tutoring for students facing language barriers, could help them improve their ability to express ideas in English during debates. Encouraging use of bilingual resources or providing assistance from peers who are proficient in English could also help overcome language related challenges.

#### 6. Promoting mental and emotional support

Given that some students experience anxiety during debates, schools should offer psychological support to help students build resilience and confidence in public speaking. Encouraging peer to peer mentorship and providing opportunities for low pressure, practice debates could help reducing anxiety and boost students' confidence in expressing their views.

#### 7. Encouraging community and parental involvement.

Schools can engage parents and local communities to support debate initiatives, such as volunteering as judges, offering resources, or hosting public debates. This would not only enhance debate program but also foster a broader interest in communication and critical thinking skills outside the classroom.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging the opportunities identified in the research, debate-based activities can become a more integral part of the education system in Rwanda, leading to significant improvements in students' English communication skills and overall academic success.

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