Using Debate Project to Enhance ULIS 2nd Year Students’ Language and Academic Skills

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Overview

- Rationale
- **Benefits** of using projects in language teaching and learning
- Introduction of the **Debate Project** in the language proficiency development
- **Findings** about the benefits and challenges of using this Debate Project
- Conclusions
Rationale

• **Need** for teaching English effectively in non-native language environment

• Importance of **maintaining motivation** among language learners

• The increasingly **effective use** of projects in English language teaching

→ **Introduction of the Debate Project** in the language proficiency development

→ **Findings** about the benefits and challenges of using this Debate Project
Benefits of using projects in language teaching and learning

• Doing projects helps Ss to **develop lots of qualities**:
  • Ss develop their confidence and independence.
  • Ss demonstrate increased self-esteem and positive attitudes towards learning.
  • Ss’ autonomy is enhanced.
  • Ss increase their social, cooperative skills and group cohesiveness.

• Project-based learning helps students to **improve language skills**

• Project-based learning **motivates** students to learn

• Through doing projects, students **develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills**

*(Fried-Booth (2002) and others)*
The Debate Project in a proficiency course (1)

• **Embedded** in an Academic English course for 2nd year English-majored students at FELTE
• Students *debate in two teams*. Each team consists of 4 to 5 members.
• The teams are presented with a *topic or ‘resolution’ of controversy*.
• The team *affirming* the resolution *speaks first*.
• The *opposing* team then must *refute* the arguments of the affirming team + offer the *arguments rejecting* the resolution.
• As the debate progresses, debaters have to *adapt to circumstances*. 
The Debate Project in a proficiency course (2)

• Neutral judges (other students):
  • evaluate the persuasiveness of the arguments
  • offer constructive feedback on such elements as faulty logic, insufficient evidence and overlooked arguments

• Three suggested topics for debate:
  1. Animal testing should be banned. Do you agree with this statement?
  2. Developed countries should be more responsible in combating climate change than developing countries. Do you agree or disagree with the statement?
  3. Illegal immigrants should be repatriated. Do you agree or disagree with the statement?
The required procedure for each team

• Step 1: Discover the issue
• Step 2: Form and strengthen arguments
• Step 3: Debate
Step 1_Discover the issue

• **Forming** groups/teams and receiving their topics
• Casting lots to **choose the standpoint** on the given topic for debate
• **Receiving the selected videos** about the issue to debate from the teacher
• **Watching** the videos and **sending their summary** to the teacher prior to their debate
Step 2_ Form and strengthen arguments

• **Forming arguments** to support position for each team

• Doing searching to select *suitable ground* and form *reasonable warrants* to strengthen the team’s arguments

• **Citing** the sources appropriately

• **Anticipating** the opponent’s potential arguments and having appropriate refutation
Step 3_ Debate

- Lasting **40-45 minutes**
- **Teacher** acting as the judge to **facilitate and monitor** the debate
- The **sequence** for each debate is as follows:
  - Opening speech: teacher announcing the resolution and the two teams
  - Round 1
  - Round 2
  - Round 3
  - Round 4
  - The voting: audience voting their winning team
Step 3_Debate: Round 1

• **Supporting team** presenting their arguments
• **Opposing team** presenting their arguments
• Time out: each team thinking of questions for the other team
Step 3 _ Debate: Round 2

• **Supporting team** raising the questions
• **Opposing team** raising the questions
• Time out: Each team thinking of the ways to answer these questions
Step 3_Debate: Round 3

- **Supporting team** answering the questions
- **Opposing team** continuing to question the answer and the debate going on until the teacher moves to the next part
- **Opposing team** answering the questions
- **Supporting team** questioning the answer and the debate going on until the teacher ends it
Step 3_Debate: Round 4

• Supporting team *summarizing* their points
• Opposing team summarizing their points
Methodology

• **Observation** (throughout the course)

• **Survey questionnaire:**
  • to collect students’ feedback on benefits, challenges and recommendations

• **Informal interviews** (with other teachers):
  • To get in-depth reflection on the debate project
Findings about the Debate Project

• **Benefits** for students
• **Challenges** facing students
• Suggested **recommendations** to improve this project
Benefits for students

- Language skills: 86%
- Research skills: 94%
- Presentation skills: 79%
- Ability to work collaboratively: 72%

Students improvement in skills and competencies.
Benefits for students

- Interpersonal skills: 69%
- Interdisciplinary knowledge: 52%
- Communication skills: 61%
- Ability to persuade others: 67%
- Students improvement in skills and competencies.
Benefits for students

• *Time management* skills: 45%
• *Maintaining motivation* throughout the course: 30%
Challenges facing students throughout the debate project

• Working under **time pressure** (44 students): 74%
• Lack of **reliable documents** (39 students): 66%
• Lack of **exposure to real debates** in Vietnam: (31 students): 52%
• Lack of **training in project-based language learning**: 45%
• **Unequal contribution** od group members: 28%
Suggested recommendations

• More detailed instructions and provision of official documents
• More exposure to real debates with the analysis of strengths and weaknesses
• More practice with mini-debates in daily practice
• More flexible choice of topics
• More student-friendly topics
Conclusion

• Debate project is *beneficial* to language learners.
• Students at FELTE, ULIS *improved both language skills and academic skills* throughout the implementation of this project.
• **Challenges** also caused some difficulties for FELTE students
• **Recommendations** from both teachers and students for improvement of debate project in the coming courses
THANK YOU