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The use of Debate as a Teaching Strategy to Improve Speaking and  
Communication Skills in Students of Fifth Grade at Sunshine South  
School during the Second Quarter of 2022

**Thesis Submitted to Obtain the Bachelor in English with Concentration in Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

The following research study focuses on the improvement of the speaking and communication skills in fifth grade students at Sunshine South School during the second quarter of 2022. This investigation aimed to analyze the effectiveness of the use of the debate method as a teaching strategy to help EFL students to enhance their oral abilities. Through the development of two debate activities, the researcher pretended to identify the effect of this technique in the students' performance. Methodologically, a qualitative approach was adopted. During the research process, the researcher applied four instruments to collect data. First, an observation was made to recognize the class dynamics and the students' behaviors. Secondly, an oral presentation was conducted as a pre-test to assess the students' oral skills before the application of the debate method. The debates were carried out as intermediate activities in order to activate the students speaking and communication skills, as well as their critical thinking. Then, a post-test was led to assess the students' performance after the application of the debate method. The fourth instrument consisted of a questionnaire, which was applied to know the students' perspective and final thoughts regarding their experience. Finally, through the triangulation and interpretation of the results, it can be concluded that the use of debate as a teaching strategy can help EFL learners to improve their speaking and communication skills.

### **Resumen**

El siguiente estudio se centra en el mejoramiento de las habilidades del habla y la comunicación en el idioma Inglés de los estudiantes de quinto grado de la Escuela Sunshine South School durante el segundo cuatrimestre del año 2022. Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo principal el análisis de la efectividad del uso del debate como estrategia de enseñanza para ayudar a los estudiantes a mejorar sus habilidades orales. A través del desarrollo de dos debates, la investigadora se planteó identificar el efecto de esta técnica en el desempeño oral de los estudiantes. Metodológicamente, se adoptó un enfoque de investigación cualitativo. Durante el proceso indagatorio, se aplicaron cuatro instrumentos para recolectar información. Primeramente, se llevó a cabo una observación para reconocer la dinámica grupal y el comportamiento de los estudiantes que participaron en la investigación. Seguidamente, se realizó una presentación oral como prueba inicial para evaluar las habilidades orales de los participantes antes de la aplicación del debate. Los debates se condujeron como actividades académicas con el fin de impulsar las habilidades de habla y comunicación, así como el pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes. Posteriormente, se realizó una evaluación oral similar a la primera para medir el progreso de los alumnos después de su participación en el debate. El cuarto instrumento consistió en un cuestionario que los estudiantes respondieron para dar a conocer su opinión y percepción sobre la investigación. Finalmente, por medio de la triangulación e interpretación de los resultados, se pudo concluir que el uso del debate como estrategia de enseñanza y aprendizaje puede ayudar a mejorar las habilidades de habla y comunicación de los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introductory Framework

#### 1.1 Problem Statement

Besides historical context, linguistic and social contexts are essential to understand why speaking English has become a main concern for the Cost Rican society nowadays. The importance and interest of communicating in English can be related to the appropriation of the language in regards to job opportunities, mass media, and social interaction. In Costa Rica, learning and teaching EFL has become a priority. In fact, in this country, “rural and urban educational institutions have to provide access to English learning because it was declared as one of the mandatory subjects that students have to take to complete their academic programs” (Araya and Córdoba, 2008, p. 2). Additionally, this governmental decision was taken in order to satisfy the international demand. The strategies and purposes of teaching English have been influenced by the needs of the country, the changes in the national productive system, and the economy. “This proliferation of foreign investment, the result of global neoliberal tendencies, along with a growing and thriving tourist industry also influenced the emergence of great numbers of private “bilingual” schools, language institutions, and higher education English courses offerings” (Solano, 2012, p.169).

Nevertheless, it is inevitable to mention the national breach between private and public institutions regarding teaching ESL. It is known that private schools work with more advanced programs. In addition, most of these institutions have better technological tools and dedicate more than enough lessons to English teaching. These aspects favor students’ learning process and accelerate the development of their communicative skills. However, despite the resources that

private institutions dedicate to teach English, “it is also a commonly recognized fact that achieving proficiency in foreign language speaking in classroom conditions is not an easy task” (Aleksandrak, 2011, p.38). Thus, even advanced students from fully bilingual schools may face the fear of speaking English in real time circumstances.

Many educational English programs focus on teaching reading, grammar, and written skills. Teachers and students commit to traditional methods and activities to teach and learn those skills. In the case of fifth graders at Sunshine South School, they have not taken oral expression lessons. Their communication skills come from the need of speaking the language in English classes only. However, there are few students who can actually express complex and coherent ideas about varying topics. As it happens in many other institutions, there are limited speaking tasks and oral activities used in the classroom. Moreover, students face linguistic issues to communicate and express in a foreign language, mainly associated to accuracy and lack of vocabulary. For this reason, the interest of analyzing the effects of debate on student’s speaking and communication skills.

### **1.1.1 Research Question**

What is the effect of debate as a teaching technique in fifth grade students at Sunshine South School speaking and communication skills during the second quarter of 2022?

### **1.2 Objectives**

The objectives of this study reflect the investigator’s interest to contribute to the improvement of student’s speaking and communication skills through debate activities in the classroom.

### **1.2.1 General Objective**

To analyze debate as a teaching strategy to improve speaking and communication skills in fifth grade students at Sunshine South School during the second quarter of 2022.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To identify fifth grade students' difficulties in speaking English that could affect their communication skills.
2. To apply debate activities during English classes to enhance fifth grade student's participation in speaking tasks.
3. To assess fifth grade students' speaking and communication skills during classroom debates in order to achieve oral proficiency in English.

### **1.3 Justification of the Study**

Stating the importance of this study will help the researcher as well as the audience to understand the convenience of investigating the problem in question. Furthermore, if the purpose is clear, the readers' interpretations will concur with the researcher's perspective. Expectantly, at the end of this dissertation, debate technique will gain popularity among teachers and teaching students who read this paper.

Nowadays, speaking English is considered a fundamental skill to acquire and develop. Among the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), speaking and communicating could be the main goal when learning English as a foreign language. However, in order to communicate successfully in a foreign language, it is necessary to be able to comprehend and express ideas and opinions. Moreover, when it comes to young learners involved in oral training,

it is known that those abilities are not developed enough due to several reasons such as age, social environment, and educational approach.

For this reason, it is essential to create English speaking environments to provide students with the opportunity to communicate in the target language using real time situations. “It means teachers and students must be engaged in tasks which involve meaningful contexts where learners use the foreign language in a real form not only for a grade but for their daily life” (Gutiérrez, 2005, p.85). In other words, teachers face the challenge to come up with innovative activities that include not only functional and meaningful learning, but fun and curiosity, too. In addition, through debate technique, English teachers can improve their class dynamics. They also have the opportunity to apply new teaching strategies such as flipped classroom, which means they can learn about various topics through their students’ investigations and opinions. Teachers and teaching students could use this experience to expand their knowledge and upgrade well known techniques. On the other hand, debate as a learning method, helps students overcome their fear to express orally in class. Moreover, participating in debate activities gives students the chance to deepen challenging subjects and gain vast vocabulary, and at the same time, they develop critical thinking. Additionally, some other benefits associated with debating in class are students’ empowerment and improvement of argumentation and problem-solving skills (Ryerson University, n.d., p.2).

#### **1.4 Antecedents**

In order to provide a better approach to the subject matter, the results of a bibliographic review are presented below. These are recent investigations and articles that stand out the use of debate as a teaching strategy to improve speaking skills.

In Costa Rica, Chavarría (2017), describes in her article “El Uso del Debate como Estrategia Didáctica en un Curso de Genética General,” how 31 students from Biology School, University of Costa Rica used debate as a strategy to deepen controversial subjects and stimulate professional aptitudes such as literature review, critical thinking, and argumentation (p. 47). Chavarría’s objective was to encourage student’s analytic skills, as well as the development of their professional and social competences. To achieve her goal, the author used controversial genetic issues. The reason to use this type of subjects corresponds to the importance of debating about topics that result appealing for the participants.

On the other hand, in the thesis “Students’ perception on the use of debate activities in improving students’ speaking skills in Sman 8 Yogyakarta” developed in Sanata Dharma Univeristy, Wulunday (2017), stated that debate is a technique that teachers and students can use to improve speaking and communication skills, as well as develop critical thinking. Wulunday employed a survey research method to know the students’ perception on the use of debates. According to Wulunday (2017), “based on the students’ perception, debating activity is a strong foundation by enriching their English vocabularies and fixing their mistakes” (p. 57 – 58).

Among other studies related to the use of debate to improve speaking skills, there is the thesis conducted by Bar (2019), entitled “The Role of Debate to Enhance EFL Learners’

Speaking Skill: A Case Study of Third Year Students at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra". Bar (2019) intended "to prove the credibility of using debate activities to enhance learners' speaking skill, and to show that the adopting of this technique by teachers of oral expression can be very interesting" (p.5). Bar used the questionnaire instrument to collect information from students and teachers. The researcher determined that debate is an "effective tool to reduce students" difficulties, mainly lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistakes" (Bar, 2019, p.71). Finally, Bar suggested that teachers should try different versions of debate activities and more important, choose topics that motivate and concern their students.

Onen, (2016), in his thesis "Using Debate to Teach: A Multi-skilling Pedagogy Often Neglected by University Academic Staff," referred to the use of debate as a pedagogical strategy. Onen (2016) used the "descriptive cross-sectional sample survey research design, where both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used" (p. 115). According to the researcher, this particular method allowed him to inquire information only once and generalize the findings obtained from the sampled population. At the end of the study, Onen concluded that even though students and academic staff had a positive perception of using debate as a teaching-learning method, they were unable to use it regularly for many –not specified- reasons (Onen, 2016, p.125).

Najafi (2016) stated that Greek philosophers, Sophists, and later on Socrates, are an important part of the history of debates. They used and shaped this method on the education field. "After Socrates, Aristotle was the first who found fame in this method because he conducted Socratic teaching style into methodological ones," but according to Najafi "the main debate of the history of "debate" refers to the Quran." Finally, Najafi affirmed that debate method "has been

used for many years and specialized in the field of education and religion, but some circumstances faded this process from the formal educational system” (p. 212).

### **1.5 Scope**

- The purpose of this study is to analyze if the debate technique works as an effective teaching strategy that enhances students speaking skills.
- The aim of the researcher is to apply the debate technique with fifth graders at Sunshine South School in order to improve their oral communication skills.
- The investigator expects to develop the study during the second quarter of 2022.

## CHAPTER II

### Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a summary of theories and authors that underlie the research. Additionally, since speaking, communication, and debate technique are the main concern of this study, definitions, types, uses, and relevance associated to these terms are discussed. In regards to speaking, besides the aspects mentioned before, the researcher refers to speaking a second language and teaching speaking skills. As to communication, the process and types of communication will be described in order to provide a better understanding of this linguistic term. Finally, the concept of debate will be re-constructed as from history and uses of this technique. Moreover, it is important to mention that based on the purpose of the investigation, debate will be analyzed from the educational field.

#### 2.1 Speaking

Defining speaking is an extensive and complex task. Furthermore, few researchers have deepened into speaking as a linguistic ability. For this reason, the need to provide or at least try to construct a meaning from the authors that have written about the ability of speaking. In spite of the complexity of the concept, it is important to clarify that the meanings and theories discussed in this section, consider speaking as a human skill and a mean of communication. Agreeing to what it was explained before, Peterson (2018), defines speaking as “the one language skill that requires interaction with other people” (p.6). Besides, in Peterson’s opinion, speaking represents the most difficult skill to acquire and without practice, it can become an issue. Moreover, according to Peterson (2018), “Speaking skills involve not just memorizing rules or knowing information, it is also a physical skill requiring action” (p. 8). Additionally, Carnegie (2019)

explains, in his book, that a successful speaker is a person that achieves the ability to express acceptably, could be during a casual conversation or in public. Carnegie (2019) dedicates his book to public speaking and states that “learning to speak effectively to groups bring other benefits than merely the ability to make formal speeches”.

As evidenced in the previous definitions, investigators agree with the fact that speaking requires practice. Either it is individually, in groups, or in public, practice is imperative in order to develop speaking skills. Among some speaking skills, one of the most relevant is to know the audience and be clear about the message you are trying to send. Secondly, it is fundamental to choose the appropriate words and speak confidently. Another skill consists of evolving an adequate and most importantly, comprehensible pronunciation. Moreover, it is important to acquire a vast vocabulary. Additionally, some linguists believe that a convenient speaking skill to develop is to know when to speak, since there are moments when the speaker must become a listener.

### **2.1.2 Speaking a second language**

It is important to start this section clarifying that speaking a second language does not ensure speaking, linguistic, or communicative competences. In theory, speaking a second language means to learn a foreign language after our native one. In this sense, second language acquisition involves to be part of a training process and, as well as speaking the first language, requires a lot of practice –as stated before-. Furthermore, and according to linguistics’ discussions about the subject, when learning a second language, the main goal of the learner is to be able to successfully communicate when speaking. Therefore, practicing the language orally results more appealing than learning the grammatical aspects of the language or even, written communication.

### **2.1.2.1 Language**

Language theorists approach the concept from several and different perspectives. However, as for the interest of this investigation, language will be analyzed from the socio-cultural point of view. Ashraf Bhat (2017) considers “Language is the only medium through which individuals and groups conceptualize the ‘grammar of culture’” (p. 1). The author also mentions that learning a language involves learning about one’s identity in varying sociocultural environments. Ashraf Bhat (2017) emphasizes the close relationship between identity, culture, and nation and suggests that a persons’ speech cannot be understood without considering his/her background and networks. Likewise, Coulmas (2017) expresses that language is a fundamental part of human nature and the variety of languages constitute the essence of human diversity. Moreover, BurrIDGE and Stebbins (2016) determine that language is part of our human characteristics and more importantly, it is what distinguishes us as social beings and allows us to communicate.

### **2.1.2.2 Learning and teaching English as a second language**

Rivers (2018) explains that when learning a foreign language, students try to use the language as native speakers do. They imitate their sounds, patterns, and roles. This, at the same time, helps students to appreciate an unknown culture. In other words, the study of a foreign language provides a new experience and a progressive acquisition of a set of skills. According to Rivers (2018), some of these skills are a) the ability to gradually understand a new spoken language, b) the increasing facility to speak a language, and c) the aptitude to read or write a foreign language.

Furthermore, Alonso (2017) contributes adding that acquiring a second language involves learning the target sounds and how to use them according to the moment and context. In addition, Zechner and Evanini (2020) state that pronunciation is a “component of language proficiency required for successful communication and additional speaking tasks.” Teaching and learning English as a second language implies awareness of the importance of speaking English nowadays. Carnegie and Esenwein (2017) highlight that “...English has changed with the years so that many words now connote more than they did originally” (p.8). The need of incorporating English to the academic programs, is meticulously related to the following aspects.

### **2.1.3 Teaching speaking skills**

According to Akdeniz (2016), teaching can be defined “as the art of designing and re-designing learning experiences to guide students through their learning process.” The author also believes that “teaching requires enthusiasm, creativity, devotion, open-mindedness, knowledge and skills” (p. 6). Regarding teaching speaking, there is an academic debate about which methods should be used to teach this particular skill. Pörtl (2016) states that “The conventional approaches involve looking at and describing pictures, the teacher asking questions which are answered by students, correction of the students’ pronunciation by the teacher, and also very little exchange of information” (p. 1). According to Pörtl (2016), recent strategies encourage students to participate in small-group interaction and more importantly, to speak about appealing topics they master.

Likewise, Keller (2016) argues that the worlds’ social and cultural evolution are affecting English teaching and learning processes. Keller states that “teachers not only educate students what English is about and how it works, but also the usage of it and particularly communication skills” (Keller, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, English teachers have the opportunity to perform many

different roles in order to fulfill the students' interests and needs. According to Keller (2016), teachers can perform seven different roles in the classroom, which can be found as follows.

#### **2.1.3.1 Controller**

The teacher is in charge of controlling a fully organized classroom environment. This role refers to traditional teaching strategies. The teacher stands in front of the class and gives instructions (Keller, 2016). When the instructor acts as controller, he/she does most of the speaking and students become listeners.

#### **2.1.3.2 Assessor**

After seeing and analyzing student's performance, teachers evaluate their participation. Instructors are expected to make comments and corrections if mistakes were made (Keller, 2016). It is important to remember that assessment can be quantitative or qualitative, but either way teacher should give students feedback. This role lets the teacher focus on students' speaking.

#### **2.1.3.3 Manager**

Fundamental role that sets up discipline, order, and organization. If the teacher is organized and developed a well-planned class, students will eventually acquire this learning and working structure (Keller, 2016). This role is very beneficial for students, since a well-planned lesson allows to have explanation, practice, and evaluation moments.

#### **2.1.3.4 Resource**

Teacher helps the students if necessary. The instructor provides extra material, information, or activities that will enhance a better understanding of the topic. Moreover, by

talking, the teacher acts as a resource, giving examples of pronunciation, for example (Keller, 2016).

#### **2.1.3.5 Participant**

The instructor acts like another student. By participating in the same level as any other participant, the teacher has the opportunity to interact with the students in a more reliable environment. Moreover, it gives students the chance to work together with the teacher and learn from someone who has more experience and better understanding of the target language (Keller, 2016).

#### **2.1.3.6 Investigator**

This role is not completely related to the teacher's behavior. In this scenario, the teacher becomes a researcher, an observer inside the classroom. The aim is to identify students' learning styles and come up with the best strategies that adjust to the class reality (Keller, 2016).

#### **2.3.1.7 Role model**

Contrary to the investigator's role, the role model is directly related to the personal behavior of the teacher. Actions, words, and manners have a great impact on students. For this reason, teachers must be conscious about the way they teach and influence their students, especially children (Keller, 2016).

Finally, on the subject of teaching speaking skills, Mehlretter Drury (2017) suggests that teaching students not only speaking skills, but argumentation skills empowers them to find and use their own voices. However, Peterson (2018) argues that teachers have insufficient training

and resources for teaching effective speaking skills. Therefore, he proposes that “Speaking skills should be taught using natural exercises and practice of real communicative situations. Students should practice English skills that will be useful to them in their real lives” (p.11).

## **2.2 Communication**

Communication is what makes socialization possible. It allows people to understand others and, at the same time, be understood by others. It implies reciprocal interactions and consents to express ideas, emotions, opinions, and more. According to Young and Travis (2018), “Communication can be intentional or unintentional” (p.3). The authors state that people communicate with the intention of sharing a message. This message could be interpreted correctly or incorrectly, but either way it is still communication (Young and Travis, 2018). Within the second language context, Alonso (2018) refers to the term effective communication “as one that involves abilities that extend beyond the formal grammatical properties of a language” (p. 2).

### **2.2.1 Process of communication**

Communication consists in a complex manner of self-expression and understanding. According to Lefevre (2017),

A good communication process enables the optimization of the relationship by going directly to the essentials and to build using the best in each of us. Conversely, an incompatible process runs the risk of creating “a missed communication,” a source, at first, of misunderstanding and possibly a total lack of understanding leading to conflict.

To communicate, it is imperative to participate in a persistent interaction. This interaction is made of different steps and parts, such as “communicators, message, a channel, circumstances, feedback, and, in some instances, noise” (Young and Travis, 2018, p.4).

### **2.2.2 Types of communication**

According to Young and Travis (2018), there are four types of communication. These are explained as follows.

#### **2.2.2.1 Intrapersonal communication**

When a person communicates internally. This type of communication can develop mentally or vocally, through reminiscence, rehearse, or even self-discussion about particular situations or experiences (Young and Travis, 2018).

#### **2.2.2.2 Interpersonal communication**

It happens when a person communicates with other people. This type of communication can take place in different scenarios, formal or informal. It could be during a casual talk between friends, a discussion with strangers, or a formal conversation in a work environment (Young and Travis, 2018).

#### **2.2.2.3 Small group communication**

This type of communication takes place when three or more people interact and share a common purpose for meeting. It is common to develop small group communication in the classroom. These groups could be teams and they communicate in order to complete a task or to build a relationship (Young and Travis, 2018).

#### **2.2.2.4 Public communication**

Public communication takes place when a person communicates with an audience. In this scenario, speakers have an organized speech, and the aim is to inform or entertain the audience. Therefore, they must be prepared according to the event and type of spectators (Young and Travis, 2018).

In conclusion, it can be said that communication differs from one type to another, depending on the interaction and the number of communicators involved. In addition, face to face interaction makes a big difference when it comes to communication styles and the level of success transmitting a message.

### **2.3 Debate**

Usually, the word debate is associated to arguing and fighting over a particular subject. Nevertheless, debating is part of human socialization, and many people debate every day in changing contexts without awareness of what they are doing. Debate consists of a communicative process that requires active interaction of two or more people that defend a certain point of view. Below, some definitions of debate that understand it as a human practice and take into consideration the exchange of arguments and opinions.

Davis et al (2016) consider “that debate is a fundamental part of human nature and at the core of human interaction”. They also believe that debate is all about interrogation and that research is essential to find the information that best fits the topic in question. Moreover, along with their experience and knowledge, Davis et al (2016) state that debating is about making decisions based on the research results and finding the right words to communicate the ideas. “It

is about listening to and respecting others even when you disagree with them, and, while debate does not always resolve differences of opinion, it can help participants have productive communication across those differences”. Moreover, Bermúdez and Lucena (2019), on the other hand, define debate as a linguistic confrontation that has rules and is determined by a jury. According to Bermúdez and Lucena, there are two parties involved. One group is in favor and the other group is against. Each group defends their ideas using consistent arguments. As in traditional debates, the posture (in favor or against) is raffled and, at the end, the debate teams face during a final tournament (Bermúdez and Lucena, 2019).

Likewise, Mehlretter Drury (2017) defines debate as “the exchange of arguments on a topic”. The author explains the close relationship among debate, argument, and controversy, and clarifies the difference by describing each meaning. Additionally, Mehlretter Drury (2019) states that debates can take place in everyday life in many different moments and places. In other words, it is not committed to formal occasions, as it could happen during a casual conversation, in a written form, or even in a heated discussion. Finally, he mentions that debates imply risks, but it has a deep impact (Mehlretter Drury, 2017).

### **2.3.1 History**

Greeks, Sophists, and Socratics take part in the history of debate, especially in the educational field. According to literature, it has been a long time since this technique has been practiced and applied to share, discuss and defend positions and opinions. Pherson and Heuer (2019) state that “the history of debate goes back to the Socratic dialogues in ancient Greece, and even earlier.” The authors add that since that historic moment, many different types of debates have been used by several groups and with different purposes. Bermúdez and Lucena (2019)

agree by adding that even though debate has remote antecedents in Chinese and Persian societies, its conception, as we understand it nowadays, is due to classic Greek and Roman civilizations where it was used as an educational method. Debate was used to face contenders in academic contexts, as well as in public spaces, juries, and even private competitions.

### **2.3.2 Types**

There are many forms in which debate can be developed. As for the interests of this investigation, two main categories will be described. First, the applied debate and then, the educational debate. Freeley and Steinberg (2013) declare that an applied debate “is conducted on propositions, questions, and topics in which the advocates have a social interest, and the debate is presented before a judge or an audience with the power to render a binding decision...” (p.19). An educational debate, on the other hand, “is conducted on propositions in which the advocates have an academic interest, and the debate typically is presented before a teacher, judge, or audience without direct power to render a decision on the proposition” (p.19). Furthermore, inside this categories there are found more specific forms of debates. Two of the most convenient to define regarding the objectives of this study, are the political and academic debates.

#### **2.3.2.1 Political debate**

According to the definition of applied debate presented above, the political debate fits into this category. Political debates are also considered formal debates. Moreover, they are commonly known just as presidential debates. However, for the purposes of this section the term in question is political debate because it encompasses the use of this technique in formal and informal contexts outside of the education field. Wiesner et al. (2017) refer to debate “as a political

action... an arena and a means of politics” (p. 1). They also state that political debate consists in “putting questions on the agenda, taking a stand on those already there, and persuading the participants to alter their stands or to rethink their justifications” (p.14).

The authors’ intention is to re-construct a meaning of debate that involves its purpose, participants, and procedures regarding the political context. Wiesner et al. explain two possible situations in which political debates can take place. First, debate can mean a confrontation between two or more representatives that make public their points of view. Pre-election debates must be the best example of this debate alternative. Secondly, there are speech competitions where two or more debaters try to win demonstrating their argument skills. In these debate competitions, it is very common that the content of debate is irrelevant (Wiesner et al., 2017). An additional political debate alternative is the British Parliament model. Bermúdez and Lucena (2019) state the difference between this model and the traditional formal debates. Below, the characteristics of the British Parliament model, according to Bermúdez and Lucena (2019).

#### **2.3.2.1.1 The British Parliament Model**

It consists in the recreation of a parliamentary debate. Bermúdez and Lucena consider this is the most internationally used model. It is also one of the most complex types of debates. Contrary to other models, the debate question is announced fifteen minutes before the debate starts. Furthermore, there is a different question for each stage of the debate and the participants are not able to access any kind of resource. In total, four teams participate in the debate. Two teams argue in favor and the other two teams against. Each group has a round to defend their posture.

### **2.3.2.2 Academic debate**

Another context in which debates commonly take place, is the academic field. In this type of debates, students are the protagonist, and the main purpose is to provide them with speaking skills. Debate is a potential educational tool that according to Davis et al (2016), “encourages respectful civil discourse that is thoughtful, evidenced, and well-reasoned”. Another definition regarding academic debates is the one proposed by Bermúdez and Lucena (2019). They state that this model is based on students’ research and evidence they use to formulate their arguments. In this type of debate, two groups participate to debate about one and only question that is announced in advanced. An important characteristic of the academic debates is that content is very important and the form arguments are expressed is also relevant (Bermúdez and Lucena 2019).

Newman (2019) brings up other forms of debate that teachers can apply in an academic context. First, there is the Balloon Debate, which is a popular and fun debate activity used by teachers to introduce the debate technique and motivate students to speak. Then, the author refers to the Boxing Match Debate, in which coaches are assigned to help their peers. According to Newman’s experience, she explains that Table Debates are an excellent way to have all students participate in formal debates, at the same time. Finally, Newman describes Public Meetings, which are a variant of the traditional debate technique. In Public Meetings, different groups meet and participate in an argument in order to make a decision. Another educational debate style is the Karl Popper model. Bermúdez and Lucena (2019) establish, in their book, the difference between these models and the traditional academic debates.

### **2.3.2.2.1 Karl Popper Model**

Even though, this is not the most popular type of debate, it has particular characteristics that make it a great option for beginners. In this model, there are only three speakers per group and their interventions take six minutes. Besides, the participants may know the debate's question months ahead and there are moments during the debate when debaters can ask for "dead time," which is similar to asking for a break (Bermúdez and Lucena, 2019). Additionally, we can mention one more type of debate that encompasses the applied and the academic debate models. The structured debate is developed among analytic teams that hold opposing opinions on a specific issue. According to Pherson and Heuer (2019), this type of debate is carried out following some established rules and in front of an audience. Besides, the authors highlight that it is a useful strategy when there is a difference of opinion or when a decision needs to be made. Regarding the method, the debate starts by defining the issue to be debated. Then, debaters, who demonstrate domains of the topic, are selected and each side present their points of view.

### **2.3.3 Debating in the classroom**

Academic debates imply a change in the way classes are usually carried out. It also requires teachers to embrace new concepts and methodologies, such as the "noisy classroom." According to Newman (2019), a noisy classroom is "...one where students question and interrogate everything that is put before them. They listen with an open mind, are willing to consider all perspectives and are not afraid to defend their views and challenge others or to change their mind if they find themselves convinced" (p. 1).

It has been said by many writers that debate as a teaching-learning technique stimulates student's critical thinking and problem solving. When they develop these abilities, their speaking improves significantly. Moreover, through debate students accomplish creative thinking, which is "putting together information to come up with a whole new understanding, concept or idea" (Moore as cited in Belikusakli-Cardak, 2016, p. 25). Using debates in the classroom is not only a method to improve students' skills, but it also helps to upgrade traditional teaching methods.

Debating in the classroom can be compared to public speaking. Students have to express an opinion and share information in front of an audience. However, it is well known that this is not an easy task for students, especially when they have to do it in a foreign language. Moreover, there is the fact that most of the time they are being evaluated while they debate in the class. For this reason, many teachers have to deal with lack of participation and students' anguish. Therefore, to avoid anxiety and panic while speaking in front of an audience, Grieve (2019) proposes a theory about how to become an effective public speaker, which can also be applied to debating in public. According to Grieve, there are four components that could help students to become authentic public speakers. First, being present in the moment; be aware of what is happening at the moment. Second, being genuine and speak with confidence. Third, lay aside the fear of being vulnerable. Finally, remember no one is perfect, so do not expect perfection in public (Grieve, 2019). Fear of public speaking is very common in students and there is a high probability that this will affect their learning experience, social speaking interactions, and future employment.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodological Framework**

This chapter presents the chosen method to accomplish the current investigation, which focuses on the analysis of the use of debate as a teaching strategy to improve student's speaking and communication skills. Besides, the research approach will be described, as well as the information sources according to the investigator's needs and interests.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

The research approach establishes the investigator's plan to execute the study. This plan includes the methodological decisions based on the type of investigation, which in this case, it is defined as a qualitative. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that researchers could use different approaches, such as quantitative or mixed approaches. Since quantitative and qualitative approaches are commonly used in Education field, these methods are described below.

##### **3.1.1 Quantitative approach**

The quantitative approach is known for the use of numerical data to answer very specific questions and prove theories. According to Hernández et al. (2014), the quantitative approach uses data collection to test hypothesis, based on numerical measurement and statistical analysis (p.4). Quantitative researchers identify and delimit a concrete investigation problem based on a real issue. From there, they start with the literature review and then, collection and analysis of the quantitative information.

### **3.1.2 Qualitative approach**

Qualitative investigations, on the other hand, seek to answer questions based on social circumstances. Strauss and Corbin (2016) state that the qualitative approach does not involve the use of numerical nor statistical data (p.12). This type of research is considered descriptive since the purpose is to understand and describe social and cultural phenomena. According to Strauss and Corbin (2016), qualitative investigators aim to study people's experiences, behaviors, emotions, and interactions.

According to the objectives previously detailed, the method that best adjusts to this dissertation is the qualitative method because of its interpretative nature. The researcher's intention of analyzing the use of debate as a teaching strategy to improve speaking and communication skills, agrees to the characteristics of the qualitative approach described before. In addition, this study can be considered as a qualitative research, as it seeks to answer specific questions based on students' experiences and classroom interactions. Besides, this qualitative approach enhances the relationship between the researcher and the students, allowing a better understanding of the problem in question.

### **3.2 Research Design**

According to Hernández et al. (2014), the research design is the plan or strategy used to obtain information in order to answer the research question (p. 128). It is important to mention that the research design is chosen based on the problem statement, the objectives, and time proposed to develop the investigation. In this case, it is essential to consider that the plan is to work with fourth grade students from a private school. The aim is to analyze if the use of debate as a teaching strategy will have an impact on the student's speaking and communication skills.

Additionally, it is important to mention that is expected to apply and analyze the strategy results during the second quarter of the current year.

### **3.2.1 Descriptive Design**

Since the interest of this research is to approach and understand the effect of debate as a teaching strategy on students' speaking and communication skills, it can be defined as a descriptive design. Therefore, the investigator pretends to comprehend the fourth-grade students' attitudes and behaviors within the English classes. This requires interpreting the conditions and interactions that take place in this context. In this sense, Merriam (2009) states that descriptive designs are intended to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon or the relationships between and phenomena.

In addition, Nassaji (2015) refers to descriptive designs expressing the following:

These types of research have also begun to be increasingly used in the field of second language teaching and learning. The interest in such methods, particularly in qualitative research, is motivated in part by the recognition that L2 teaching, and learning is complex. To uncover this complexity, we need to not only examine how learning takes place in general or what factors affect it, but also provide more in-depth examination and understanding of individual learners and their behaviors and experiences (p. 129).

### **3.3 Information Sources**

For any type of investigation –qualitative and quantitative–, data collection is fundamental. The selection of the appropriate data collection method is also very important. This

decision should be made based on the research approach and the characteristics and interests of the investigator. In this section, the sources of information will be described considering that the goal is to obtain information from people within their natural environment.

Furthermore, it is essential to remember that when working with people, or in this case with children, it is necessary to have in mind that the objective is to collect data related to their emotions, experiences, learning processes, and interactions within the classroom. According to Hernández et al. (2014), data collection occurs in the participants natural and daily environments. When it comes to social beings, the investigator should focus on the way they speak, how they interact, how they feel, and how they think. However, people are not the only source of information when it comes to qualitative investigations. According to the characteristics of the current dissertation, the researcher requires to consult different types of sources. Maranto and González (2015) explain that a source of information includes anything or anyone that provides information to rebuild facts and knowledge foundations. According to the authors, sources of information are a mechanism to search and access information, and there are different types of sources of information depending on the deepness of our research. The reason to use different types of sources of information such as primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, corresponds to the need of contrasting the theoretical proposal against the students' reality and the information provided by the participants.

### **3.3.1 Primary Sources**

Primary sources provide data at first hand. Maranto and González (2015) state that collected information from a primary source is the outcome of perceptions, meanings, theories, and investigations' results. It is also direct information that eventually, needs to be interpreted by

the researcher. Another definition of primary sources of information is the one provided by Gallaud (2015), who defines this type of sources as the sources that have not been previously interpreted, or at least, have not been analyzed in a sense that concerns the researcher. Gallaud also determines that these are original sources, since no one has gathered this information before. According to Gallaud (2015), a primary source could be a book, a manuscript, statistical data, a story, or any other type of official document (p.21). The primary sources of information for this study are the fourth-grade students at Sunshine South School, since they have not participated in any other previous investigation. In other words, the information they provide will be interpreted and analyzed by the investigator, according to the research approach and the methodology described above.

### **3.3.2 Secondary Sources**

On the other hand, Maranto and González (2015) explain the secondary sources consist of those which have processed information from a primary source. This process could be an interpretation, an analysis, or the re-organization of the exposed data. Moreover, Gallaud (2015) states that secondary sources include material that has been an object of expert's analysis. Besides, it consists of facts and materials that are well known or have been transmitted by others. Gallaud clarifies that second sources of information could be criticism books and, in general, any interpretation that arises about a particular subject. As an example, Gallaud refers to a study made regarding Ruben Dario's poetry, asserting that his poems would be the primary source and any other book written about it would be the secondary source (p. 21). Therefore, regarding this study, the intention is to consider updated secondary sources. Thus, based on the subject of this investigation, secondary sources will be any book, article, official document, and thesis that have

emitted an analysis or opinion related to the use of debate as a teaching strategy to improve oral skills.

### **3.3.3 Tertiary Sources**

Tertiary sources of information constitute an additional tool that allows the researcher to find and access information. Maranto and González (2015) detail that this type of sources are used to examine data and obtain a general perspective on a subject. Besides, they add that tertiary sources compile primary and secondary sources. Therefore, they are highly beneficial when it comes to design and start an investigation. Another definition of tertiary sources is given by Gallaud (2015), who explains that tertiary sources comprise a selection of primary and secondary sources. Additionally, it is important to complement that these sources may be found in bibliographies, catalogs, directories, fact books, and other kind of document that contains names, titles, and related publications.

As a final point, the process of choosing the right source of information has a straight effect on the methodology design, and the subsequent development of the investigation. For this reason, Maranto and González (2015) provide some recommendations to identify reliable sources that really contribute to accomplish the researcher's goal and make the best out of them. First, the significance of reading, processing, contrasting, and evaluating the selected information to verify its relevancy and see if it is necessary to search more data. Secondly, draw conclusions and find answers according to the needed information and the problem statement. Finally, trust the author's experience and remember that writers who elaborated these sources have a vast knowledge about the subject matter.

### **3.4 Analysis Categories**

Content analysis is a research technique used by qualitative researchers to provide order, structure, and meaning to the investigation. According to Hernández et al. (2014), theoretical definition is to provide meaning; operative definition consists of the activities done to measure the categories or variables, and the instrumental definition entails describing which items of the instrument are related to the variable. In this section, analysis categories will be described based on literature review and according to the investigators' re-construction of the meanings.

#### **3.4.1 Speaking**

Speaking is considered a human skill that requires practice and interaction. It is also an acquired ability that can be learned through imitation and formal educational processes. However, the speaking learning process is not a simple task. It involves developing additional skills beyond just talking, especially when it comes to speak a foreign language. For instance, it is fundamental to know when a good moment to speak is and when is the time to be a listener. Thus, to become an effective speaker –native or nonnative- it is essential to practice, to know the audience, to use an appropriate vocabulary and intonation, and more importantly, to speak confidently.

#### **3.4.2 Communication**

There are different types of communication that allows a person to communicate with him/herself, with another a person, with a group of people, or even with an audience. In spite of the type of communication, this ability characterized humans as social beings. Communication consents an individual to express feelings, opinions, and ideas. The process of communication

implies speaking and listening; and it requires active interaction and giving and receiving feedback.

### **3.4.3 Debate**

Debate can be understood as a mean of communication between two or more people who discuss controversial subjects and defend their positions. As it requires constant interaction, feedback, public speaking and listening, debate implies a complex and wide definition. Furthermore, as it complies with all the characteristics and demands of a speaking and communication exercise, debate makes an extraordinary teaching strategy to instruct those type of oral skills and help students become competence speakers and communicators.

### **3.5 Data Collection Instruments**

The selection and use of the appropriate data collection instruments is essential for any type of investigation. These tools allow the investigator to obtain the necessary information to answer the question in matter and provide successful and helpful results. In this case, the researcher will use four instruments. First, an observation checklist to get closer to the student's learning contexts and oral abilities. The second instrument consists of a pre-test to identify student's previous knowledge and experience regarding the debate technique. After the pre-test, a post-test will be applied to measure student's progress and acquired knowledge after developing the debate technique. Finally, the fourth instrument is a questionnaire to contrast information obtained through the other instruments and know students' points of view.

### **3.5.1 Observation Checklist**

Observation is a data collection method, historically used in social sciences to gather information about people, social phenomena, and cultures. In the educational field, it has been used as a tool to explore student's behaviors in the classrooms. In this study, the researcher pretends to use a type of observation that favors the identification of fifth grader's speaking difficulties during English classes. For that reason, the observation checklist is the most suitable instrument to observe student's performance and behavior when speaking English in the classroom.

According to Andales (2022), "an observation checklist is a set of questions that assist an observer to evaluate the performance and behavior individual's skills." The author also states that "classroom observation checklist helps an observer to identify skills gaps and problem areas to further improve teaching strategies, classroom settings, and student learning development." Likewise, Worrall et al (2012) explain that "... Observation checklist has been designed to help structure observations of children in school, with the aim of better understanding the needs of the children" (p. 4). Furthermore, the researcher expects to collect information that will help to evaluate students' oral skills and interactions within the classroom, as well as to determine the best strategies to apply the debate technique in question.

### **3.5.2 Pre-test**

The second instrument intended to be used, is the pre-test. The purpose of this tool is to measure student's previous knowledge about debates and their participation experiences -in case they have participated in a debate before-. Evaluation is essential to guarantee a successful teaching and to help students make the most of their learning process. Therefore, Gul and Alam

(2019) enlighten that “the idea of pre-test/post-test evaluation model is to measure baseline knowledge of participants at the beginning of a course/lecture and compare it with the knowledge gained after the course” (p.4). The initial results are necessary to determine the best teaching strategies based on the class needs and skills. According to Lange (2016), “a pre-test is a tool with which you can observe or grade topics before teaching them, in order to have a starting point” (p.99). For this reason, the researcher believes that the pre-test should be created after the observation, according to the students’ English level.

Furthermore, the researcher will create a rubric<sup>1</sup> to assess students’ speaking skills during a three-minute presentation. Each student will be given a topic to develop; first they will have five minutes to prepare their presentation and then, willingly they will go in front of the class to perform. In this task, the researcher will focus on six indicators to evaluate students. These are fluency (speaks confident without making long pauses), pronunciation (intonation, stress, and articulation), communication (ability to communicate an idea), accuracy (use of grammar structures), vocabulary (range of vocabulary and repetition of the words), and interaction (interaction with the audience when speaking). This activity will also allow to measure the students’ comprehension and public speaking skills, which are relevant debating skills.

### **3.5.3 Post-test**

The third instrument that will be used to measure students’ knowledge is the post-test. This phase of the investigation consists of the continuance of the pre-test evaluation planned to be applied before the debate. According to Dell’Olio and Donk (2007), “A post-test is a tool in

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which the teacher can grade the learning acknowledged by the students” (p. 432). In the current study, the researcher’s intention by using this assessment tool is to measure the student’s improvement after their debate presentation. Moreover, the post-test will help to gather valuable data for teacher to use.

Moreover, the pre-test and post-test process should be carried out following the research’s objectives, as well as the students’ performances. As stated by Lynch-Caris et al (2004), the best way to apply this assessment method is to run the post-test right after the pre-test “to get a rough sense of how much and how well they have learned the material” (p.2). In this case, the interest is based on how much the students’ oral skills improved, since their very first oral presentation. As well as the pre-test, the post-test will be evaluated orally. Additionally, to obtain more precisely results, the researcher pretends to use the same rubric used to grade the pre-test.

#### **3.5.4 Questionnaire**

The last instrument planned to be used is the questionnaire. This research tool is useful to know the students’ perception toward the implementation of the debate technique in order to improve their oral skills. The researcher considers this as the most suitable instrument to obtain and then, analyze each student’s response. According to Sabo (2019), “questionnaire is defined as the research mechanism containing a chain of questions for the purpose of assembling information and data from the people” (p. 4). Furthermore, the selection of questions will be made based on the prior observation and assessment results. In this regard, Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) state that one of the reasons why a questionnaire results a very convenient instrument, is because it allows to collect a large amount of information easily and rapidly (p.13).

The main purpose of using the questionnaire is to ask about the students' debating experience. However, other questions will be asked in order to gather more information about their personal beliefs regarding public speaking and oral presentations. Having their perspectives will help the researcher to comprehend and to compare the previous and final results. For this purpose, the questionnaire will contain open and closed questions to give students the opportunity to expose their opinions and perceptions.

### **3.6 Collection Data Process and Data Analysis**

The process of gathering and measuring information is essential to accomplish an investigation. Collecting data makes it possible to answer the established research questions and evaluate the outcomes. In addition, Sajjad (2016) states the following:

The goal for all data collection is to capture quality evidence that then translates to rich data analysis and allows the building of a convincing and credible answer to questions that have been posed. Regardless of the field of study or preference for defining data (quantitative, qualitative), accurate data collection is essential to maintaining the integrity of research (p. 202).

Therefore, four instruments will be applied in order to complete the collection data process. First, an observation checklist will be used to gather information directly by observing the fifth graders in their natural environment, which in this case is the classroom. Then, it will be applied a pre-test that will work as a diagnostic assessment. This means that the researcher will use the obtained information to establish the students' English level and discover their oral skills. The pre-test consists of evaluating an oral presentation using a rubric. Consequently, the post-test

will be applied to measure the students' improvement regarding public speaking. For this purpose, the researcher will use the same rubric previously used for the pre-test. Finally, the students will be given a questionnaire to answer some closed questions about the investigation process. Moreover, there will also be open questions to enable them to express their opinions and perspectives about their performances and learning process.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **4.1 Analysis and Interpretation of the Results**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the information gathered during the application of the instruments mentioned and explained in the previous chapter. Moreover, the results obtained through the observation, pre-test, post-test, and the questionnaire will be presented to enlighten the students' progress and measure the efficiency of the strategies and activities that were carried out with the group. In addition, through the data analysis, the researcher expects to answer the question posed at the beginning of this study, that is: What is the effect of debate as a teaching technique in fifth grade students from Sunshine South School speaking and communication skills during the second quarter of 2022? Furthermore, an important aspect that needs to be clarified is that student's personal information is not revealed in this document to protect their integrity. For this reason, they were assigned letters from A to U, which will be used instead of their real names. Consecutively, essential data, as well as each of the applied instruments will be described.

##### **4.1.1 Observation Checklist**

As explained before, when approaching a group for the first time, it is essential to observe their social interactions and behaviors within their natural environment. In this case, the observation checklist was developed by the researcher during a fifth-grade English lesson inside their classroom. The objective of this observation was the researcher to be introduced to the group, know the students, and learn their class dynamics. For this purpose, a checklist was created and used by the researcher to collect all the facts that will be described later on.

Furthermore, it is relevant to clarify that an observation is generally done in a classroom to identify teaching methods, students' behaviors, and learning styles. Additionally, the observer intended to ensure that students are learning in the best environment possible, according to their interests and needs. The observation checklist was not made to judge the teacher. On the contrary, it was meant to help the teacher to improve her training strategies concerning oral skills. In order to start with the explanation of the collected data, the next figure exemplifies the composition of the group, regarding students' gender.

Figure 1

Class observation- Students Gender

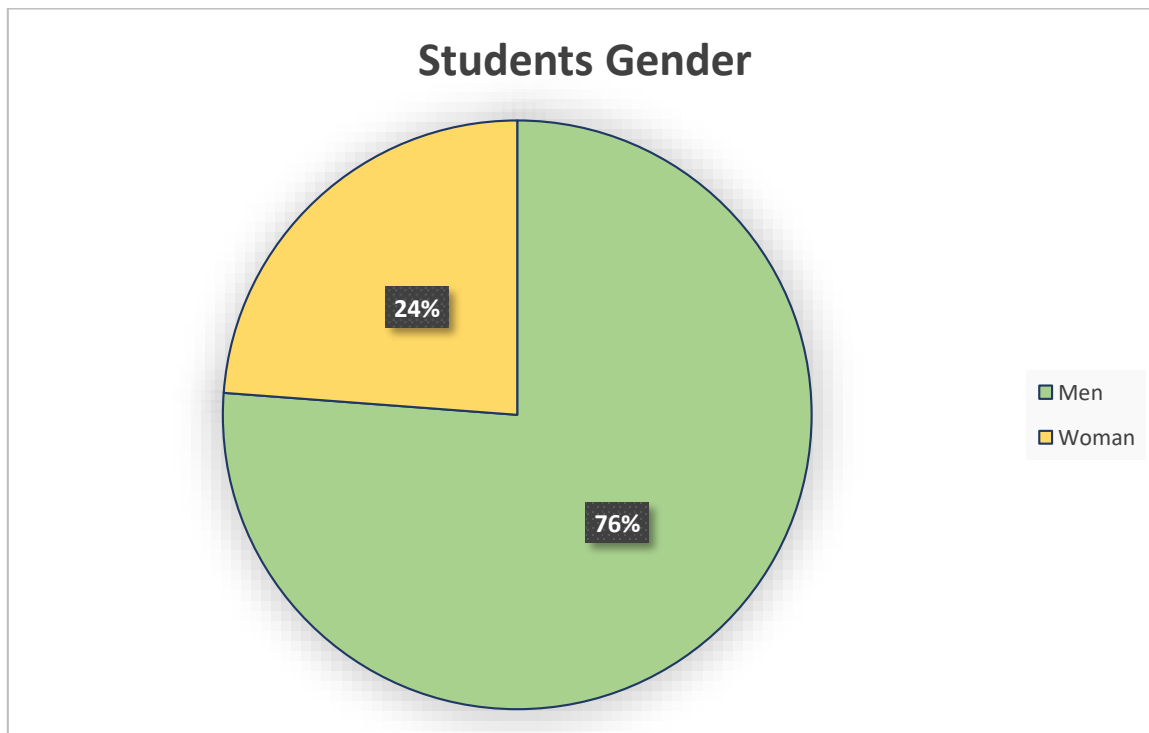


Figure 1. Illustrates de composition of the group, regarding their gender. Researcher's creation.

Figure 1 represents the composition of the fifth-grade class. There are sixteen males and five females, for a total of twenty-one students. This fact is relevant to the investigation due to the class dynamics and students' participation. Since the majority of them are male students, it is perceptible that girls generally, have low participation not only in class, but also in the group decision making. The observation started at the beginning of the class when the teacher checked attendance and explained the schedule for the day. They also reviewed last class's content, which was *Future Will and Future Going To*.

Moreover, the researcher observed a forty-minute lesson, taught by a young female teacher, who is assigned by the school's principal. The relationship among the students seemed to be informal, friendly, and respectful. Likewise, their behavior with the teacher was adequate and they looked comfortable while talking to her or asking her questions. The teacher used English to give instructions, ask questions, and address the group. However, there were times when she used the translation method and used Spanish, specifically when students acted confused about instructions or the subject matter, and to draw students' attention. Concerning teaching strategies, techniques, and classroom activities, the researcher paid special attention to the oral activities and communication skills.

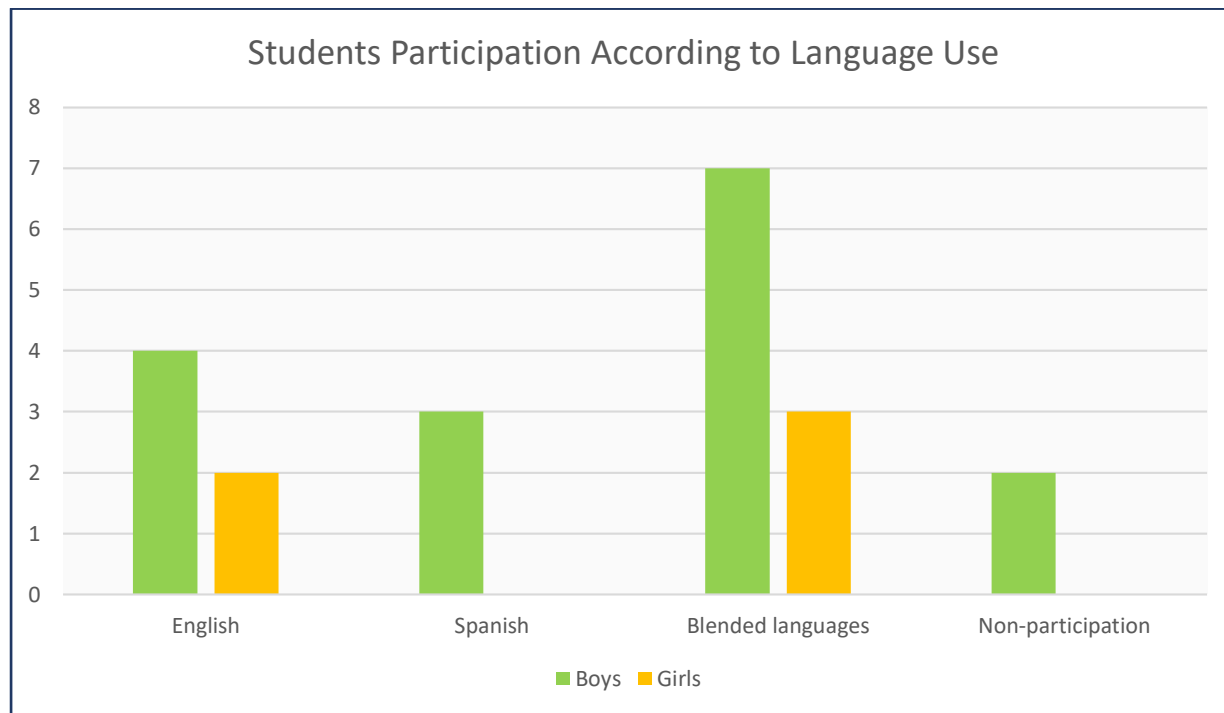
During the observation, the investigator identified four students (boys) who were actively participating in class. Besides, they were speaking English during the entire lesson. The rest of the group had a tendency to speak Spanish, as well as to ask and respond questions in the same language. Occasionally, some of them tried to speak English when answering the teacher's questions or solving books activities. Even though, they seemed a little afraid or embarrassed to speak English, the twenty one students showed basic understanding of the target language.

An important aspect to stand out, is that students were sitting in pairs in double desks. As a teaching strategy, during English lessons, they were accommodated according to their English level and their speaking and comprehension skills. Therefore, the students who were considered advanced students were distributed around the class and seated next to beginner students, in order to help and motivate them to speak English. In regards to class material and the practice of English speech in the classroom, the teacher used technological resources such as the computer, a video beam, speakers, and the Oxford online application. Additionally, there is a whiteboard in front of the classroom, which is used by students and teacher to show examples and practice.

In view of the fact that the observation was carried out in a private institution, it was firstly expected to perceive a high level of English. In addition, since the majority of students have been part of a bilingual educational system for most of their schooling process, the researcher anticipated a fully bilingual class taught in English. Nevertheless, it was observed that some students had difficulties communicating in English, with the exception of those advanced students whose speaking skills were noticeably more evolved. As said before, there were four students who participated the most, and some others, including three girls that sporadically raised their hands to participate. Additionally, their contributions were made in English. However, when they expressed themselves in English, they made common mistakes mainly associated to verb conjugation and agreement, lack of vocabulary, and insecurity. Moreover, the use of English in class was irregular. Few students communicated in English, some of them exclusively spoke Spanish, and the majority of them blended both languages. The students' participation statistics can be observed in the figure below.

Figure 2

Students Participation according to language use during the class observation



*Figure 2. Figure 2 reflects the students' participation according to language use and gender Researcher's creation.*

As it is shown in figure 2, female students –been a minority- participated at least once during the class, and they used English to communicate their ideas; however, they blended it with Spanish. Some male students, on the other hand, communicated in Spanish only, and two of them did not participated in the lesson at all. However, the instructor was constantly motivating them to participate and answer the questions in English. Finally, the students and teacher seemed to enjoy the class and the researchers' presence did not affect the development of that particular lesson.

#### **4.1.2 Pre-test**

With the pre-test, the researcher pretended to identify the students' speaking skills before the application of the debate technique. This instrument was used at the beginning of the

investigation with the purpose of assessing their understanding of English, as well as their communication abilities in this language. The main goal when applying a pre-test, is to analyze the results and then, contrast them with the post-test applied at the end of the research. Moreover, the objective was to measure the students' progress regarding their ability to speak in public and successfully communicate their ideas and personal opinions. To illustrate this information, an oral pre-test was designed by the researcher in order to achieve the objective previously described.

To apply this assessment, the researcher first clarified the reasons that motivated this investigation and explained to the students their role in the research process. For this purpose, they were asked to act naturally, as they would do in any other class. Moreover, it was settled that the goal was to help them improve their communication and speaking skills in English. In addition, the researcher briefly described the activities' procedure, telling them that there would be a pre-test, two debates, a post-test, and a questionnaire. It is relevant to mention that they were also told that these activities would not affect their English course evaluation or final grade. It is important to make these clarifications from the beginning, in order to make the students feel comfortable during the investigation and avoid bias.

The pre-test consisted of a short oral presentation that students had to prepare and present during their English classes. It was an individual assessment, ungraded, and designed for diagnostic purposes. Furthermore, the researcher chose four topics for students to develop, which were virtual education, traditional education, in favor of homework and against homework. It is convenient to mention that these were the same topics assigned for the coming debates. This methodological decision was made in order to give students more time to do some research about

their corresponding topics, prepare their speeches, and share their own experiences. Additionally, these topics were selected because students were familiar with them and according to their English level –perceived during the previous observation-.

It is fundamental to state that the researcher provided students with printed booklets that contained the necessary information about the four chosen topics. This material was used by the students during the pre-test, the debates, and the post-test stages of the investigation process. In the first part of this task, they were given time (fifteen minutes) to scan the booklets. Then, they had ten more minutes to assimilate the information and identify important data. Most of them highlighted details and wrote down relevant facts. Finally, they had five minutes to outline their three-minute presentations.

Since each lesson lasts forty minutes and there were only two lessons available, there was not enough time to listen to the twenty-one presentations. For that reason, only seven students willingly presented their speeches. Moreover, a significant aspect to stand out is that those seven students were the same ones who participated the most during the observation and that showed more and better understanding of the topics. The rest of the students presented their speeches on other day. For this first task, a rubric was designed by the researcher in order to assess the studied population speaking skills during their oral presentations. This rubric contains six indicators - selected by the researcher- that were used as an evaluation tool to measure the students' performance and their progress. The following table shows the chosen indicators and their corresponding punctuation.

Table 1

Indicators to assess the pre-test

Indicator	Punctuation			
	Needs improvement	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Fluency	1	2	3	4
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4
Communication	1	2	3	4
Accuracy	1	2	3	4
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4
Interaction	1	2	3	4

*Table 1. Table 1 contains the indicators used to assess the pre-test. Researcher's creation.*

As it can be appreciated in table 1, all the indicators shown on the left column are related to speaking skills. Regarding the punctuation on the right column, it represents a potential skill scale to evaluate each student and determine the level he or she is performing. As mentioned before, this instrument was applied during four English lessons on two different days. Moreover, it is relevant to say that the researcher directly explained to the studied population what a rubric is and how it works. In this particular case, each of the indicators was clarified, as well as punctuation. In addition, before the oral presentations, the researcher reminded the students the significance of speaking naturally according to their knowledge and their earlier research. The rubric was previously read aloud in the classroom with the purpose of obtaining a clear result of

the initial point of each student. Therefore, the obtained points by the students in the pre-test are reflected in the table below.

Table 2<sup>2</sup>

Obtained points in the oral presentation

Student	Fluency	Pronunciation	Communication	Accuracy	Vocabulary	Interaction
A	1	2	2	3	2	2
B	3	2	3	3	2	3
C	2	1	2	1	2	3
D	3	3	2	3	2	3
E*	1	2	3	2	2	3
F	3	2	3	3	2	3
G	2	3	2	3	2	1
<b>H</b>	4	3	4	3	3	4
<b>I</b>	4	4	4	3	3	4
J	1	3	3	3	2	2
K*	3	2	2	3	2	3
<b>L*</b>	4	3	4	3	3	4
M	2	3	3	2	2	3
N	4	4	3	3	3	3

<sup>2</sup> \*Female students.

Bold letters: students with the highest punctuation.

<b>O</b>	4	3	3	3	3	4
<b>P*</b>	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Q</b>	3	2	3	2	2	3
<b>R</b>	3	2	3	3	2	3
<b>S</b>	4	4	4	3	3	3
<b>T*</b>	1	2	3	2	2	2
<b>U</b>	1	2	2	3	2	3

*Table 2. Table 2 reflects the student's results in the pre-test. Researcher's creation.*

This instrument was applied as an oral activity to measure the students' speaking skills, and the results reflected above agree with the observation's results. Moreover, it is essential to specify the evaluated content with each of the indicators. According to the rubric order, the indicators will be specified. Fluency refers to a way of speaking confidently without making long pauses. Pronunciation comprises intonation, stress, and articulation. Communication considers the students' ability to successfully communicate an idea, experience, or opinion. Accuracy denotes the correct use of grammar structures. Vocabulary refers to the range and repetition of words. Finally, interaction allows to evaluate the speakers' connection with the audience when delivering a speech.

As shown in table 2, none of the students achieved a perfect score in their oral presentation regarding the scale from 1 to 4. However, there were some students who accomplished 4 points (maximum score) in some indicators such as Fluency, Pronunciation, Communication, and Interaction. Furthermore, it was revealed that all students struggled the most with the vocabulary aspect, and only seven of them achieved a score of 3 points, which was the

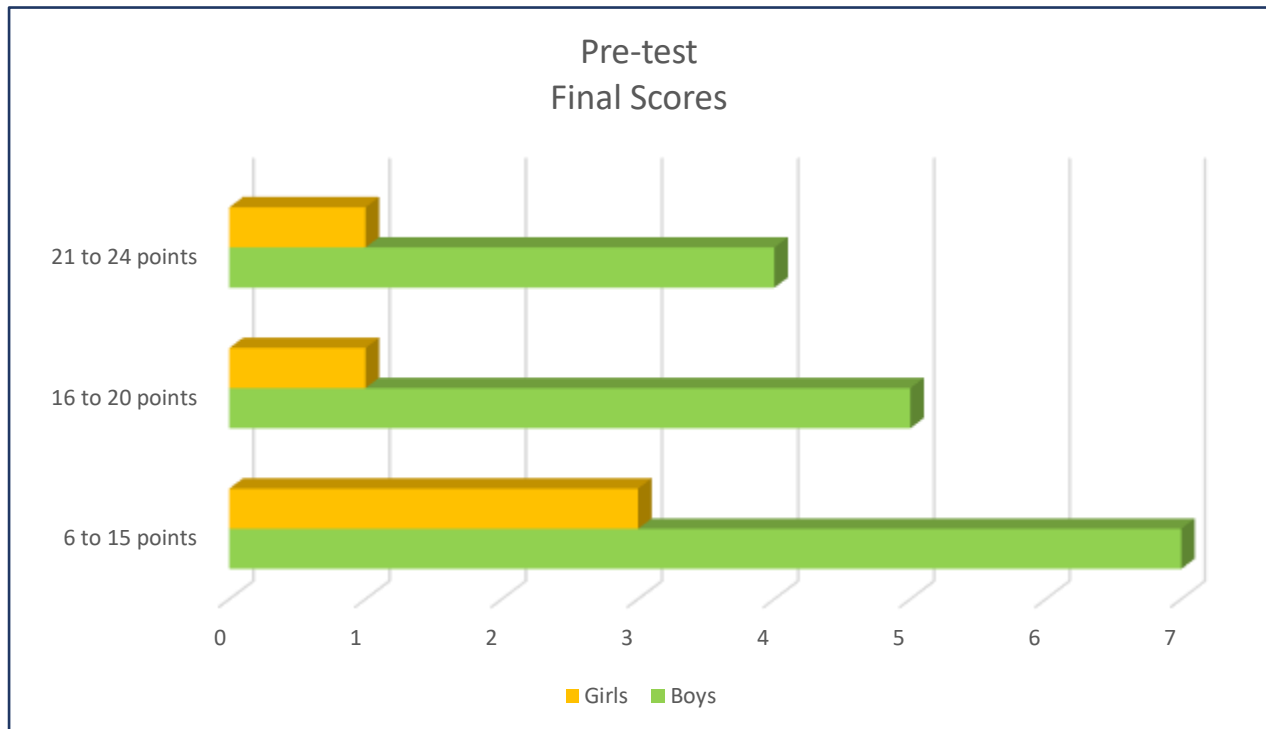
highest punctuation in this indicator. The rest of the students got 2 points out of 4. This means they did an acceptable work, and that even though, they were able to formulate an opinion and they tried to communicate an idea, they did not know the words to successfully express them.

Likewise, another indicator that reflects a low performance is accuracy. This indicator takes into consideration the correct use of grammar structures. This means they made many grammar mistakes when speaking, especially subject-verb agreement errors. Fluency also represented a challenge for most of the speakers. Five students obtained 1 point (the lowest punctuation), three students got 2 points, seven students 3 points, and six students 4 points. Even though, the majority of the group obtained the highest scores (3 and 4) in this indicator, none of them were able to deliver the entire speech without reading or making pauses. In spite of that, it was measured that they did a good job considering their English level, their grade, and the observation results.

Therefore, it must be said that during the first oral presentation, the majority of the students stated that they felt very nervous when speaking in public. Moreover, they mentioned that this feeling increased when they had to do it in English. For that reason, anxiety was a determinant factor that negatively affected their first performance. However, it is fundamental to remind that these results were obtained prior the application of the technique used to improve the students' oral skills. The following figure graphically presents the students' performance in the pre-test, according to their final score and gender.

Figure 3

Pre-test: Final Scores



*Figure 3. Figure 3 reflects the global results of the pre-test according to the students' final scores and gender. Researcher's creation*

As it can be seen in figure 3, only five students (four boys and one girl) achieved more than 21 points. However, none of them obtained the maximum score, which was 24 points. This small group of students included the four boys who usually participated the most and spoke English during classes. In addition, one girl and another boy who rarely participated in class and did not participate during the observation got more than 21 points in their oral presentations. Then, six students (five boys and one girl) achieved between 16 and 20 points. Finally, the largest group of students (seven boys and three girls) obtained the lowest scores –between 6 and 15 points-. The average score was 16 points.

According to figure number three and after looking closely at the final scores obtained by the students in their oral presentations, it can be stated that during the pre-test, the majority of the studied population scored the average punctuation or less. Moreover, male students got the highest scores and delivered more fluent and accurate presentations. This means that in this particular group, boys have a more favorable activation of their speaking and communication skills. In addition, there were two students who obtained the lowest scores (11 and 9 points) and whose oral skills did not meet the researcher's expectations, either their peers' level. Finally, during the application of the second instrument, the researcher was able to diagnose each student's oral skills. Therefore, this first assessment worked as an initial point of knowledge about student's performance and allowed to measure their progress and improvement regarding their abilities to speak and communicate in English.

#### **4.1.3 Debates**

After the application of the pre-test instrument, two debates were carried out as a teaching strategy to improve the students' oral skills. The purpose of the debates was to help young learners to be able to communicate in English. As said before, during the observation and the first oral presentation, the researcher was able to confirm what it was said by many students and linguistic specialists, which is that speaking in a foreign language is often considered to be one of the most difficult aspects when learning a new language. The debate method was used in an educational context to teach students public speaking skills, help them formulate opinions, and feel more confident when speaking English.

Moreover, it is important to clarify that the classroom debates were developed in a formal learning environment. For this reason, before the implementation of the debate technique, the

researcher introduced the method to the studied population. Through videos, readings, and lectures the students were given examples and details on how to accomplish a debate.

Additionally, a relevant fact is that few students had previously participated in a debate and only some of them were familiar with this method. Most of the students were not aware of the classroom debates. They had only heard about political debates, so it was an entirely new experience for the majority of them. In addition, the researcher provided the students with phrases and vocabulary to use during the debates. Students wrote down the vocabulary words and phrases in their notebooks with the intention of keep using them long term, in real life situations, during English classes, and future activities.

The following table shows the phrases students were given to employ during their debate performance.

Table 3

Useful Phrases for the Debate

How to express opinion	How to disagree	How to present an argument	How to conclude
-In my/our opinion	-I'm/We're sorry, but	-I'd like to state that	-To recap the main
-It seems to me/us	I/we don't agree	-To begin with	points
that	-I'm/We're afraid	-For a start	-To sum up
-From my/our point	I/We disagree	-The next argument I'd	-I/We would like to
of view	-I/We see your point,	like to state is	point out that
	but		-In summary

-I/We honestly think that	-I/We beg to differ - On the contrary	-I/We should also say that	-To reiterate my/our point of view
-I/We consider that	-That's not necessarily true	-In addition to	-My/Our final thoughts are
-I/We strongly believe		-Moreover	-Finally
-I/We feel		-Furthermore	

*Table 3. Table 3 contains a list of useful phrases for debate. Researcher's creation*

As it can be seen in table 3 contains, the list of useful phrases that students used during their debate performance, were written in singular, as well as in plural form, in order to facilitate appropriate vocabulary and phrases that are grammatically correct. These contents were explained to the studied population prior the debates. In addition, they were given time to practice the phrases during class, while the researcher checked their pronunciation. Furthermore, it is important to state that during the observation and the pre-test results, the researcher found out that one of the biggest issues was the students' lack of English vocabulary to express their ideas and opinions. Therefore, after witnessing the debates, it was considered that the contents of table three became considerably helpful for students. It was evident their improvement when speaking during their debate interventions.

As stated before, two debates took place during the investigation process. For these activities, the twenty-one students were divided into four teams, three groups of five members and one group (A) of six participants. Each group was assigned one of the topics previously mentioned. Team A defended the advantages of virtual education against team C, whose members argued for traditional education. On the other hand, team B discussed in favor of

homework and debated team D, whose purpose was to debate against homework. Therefore, it must be said that the topics selection was made by the researcher after the application of the first two instruments (observation checklist and pre-test) and based on the idea of having a strong debate. For this reason, the researcher’s intention was to choose topics that students would know about and provide them with the opportunity to speak from their own experiences and perspectives.

Table 4

Organization of the debates

<b>Debates</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Judges</b>
Debate 1 (2 lessons)	Team A vs. Team D	Virtual Education vs. Traditional Education	Team B Team C
Debate 2 (2 lessons)	Team B vs. Team C	For Homework vs. Against Homework	Team A Team D

*Table 4. Table 4 reflects the organization of the debates. Researcher’s creation*

As it can be seen in table 4, the debates were structured in order to ensure all the students’ participation in both days. Therefore, when two of the groups were debating, the rest of the participants would ask questions, judge, and pick a winning team –based on their arguments and participation. Consequently, after the researcher explained the topics selection and the debates’ procedure, the students were organized in their corresponding teams. Moreover, for the debate activity, the researcher used a complementary strategy to help students to prepare for the debate. This strategy consisted of assigning students to the teams according to their English level and the

pre-test outcomes. As a result, each team would have an advance student, intermediate students, and beginners. This methodological decision was made with the objective of having equitable teams based on their prior oral skills. In addition, team members had to organize their inner structure and assign speaking roles that would determine the order in which they would talk during the debate, as well as the information they would tell. Students had the freedom to assign the speaking roles (from first to sixth speaker), as well as to choose their arguments and the speaking order. From that moment on, the classroom was arranged in four groups and the teams started with the research stage.

Table 5<sup>3</sup>

Speaking roles and teams distribution

Speaker	Team A	Team B	Team C	Team D
Speaker 1	Student <b>S</b>	Student <b>H</b>	Student <b>I</b>	Student <b>O</b>
Speaker 2	Student P*	Student Q	Student U	Student J
Speaker 3	Student B	Student <b>L*</b>	Student D	Student N
Speaker 4	Student F	Student <b>T*</b>	Student <b>K*</b>	Student <b>E*</b>
Speaker 5	Student R	Student M	Student C	Student A
Speaker 6	Student G	-	-	-

Table 5. Table 5 reflects the speaking roles and teams distribution. Researcher's creation.

<sup>3</sup> \*Female students.

Bold letters: students with the highest punctuation in the pre-test.

As shown in table 5, the four teams' members determined that the students with higher English level would be their first speakers. This means they were the ones that presented their purpose and introduced their most important arguments. An important detail is that the researcher distributed the five female students among the four groups to guarantee equal gender participation. Another relevant fact related to the speaking roles is that the last speakers (fourth, fifth, and sixth) were the students who obtained less points than the average punctuation in the pre-test. Furthermore, this could be an indicator that students were aware of their peers and their own abilities and difficulties regarding their English learning process.

Moreover, for the research stage, the students used the printed booklets previously provided by the investigator. This was the same source of information they used to prepare their oral presentations during the pre-test. Nevertheless, they were already assigned the topics for the debate, and they had presented a speech; hence, the researcher considered necessary for them to become familiar with all the topics, as they would have to create counterarguments, ask questions, and assume a position. To accomplish the research period, prepare their arguments, and structure their debate presentation, students had six lessons (three days). In addition, most of the students used this time to practice their speeches and rehearse for possible debate scenarios.

The fourth-team debate format was chosen due to the amount of fifth-grade students. On the other hand, in traditional debates, only three or four people participate in the discussion. Consequently, it was necessary to guarantee that each team member had the same amount of time to present their arguments and rebuttal. The debate process contemplated thirty minutes for each team to debate. Every team member had three minutes to speak and two minutes for rebuttal. Finally, at the end of the debate, there was time for audiences' questions and a three-minute

closure for each team. Additionally, it is relevant to add that this debate format allowed more student interaction, not only among the teams' participants, but among them, and the audience. Regarding the debate date assignment, it was made unsystematically, by taking out papers with the corresponding date from a bag.

#### **4.1.3.1 First debate**

The motion of the first debate was virtual education against traditional education. It is important to state that the first thing to do was to prepare the classroom. For this, the researcher placed two tables in front of the classroom with five and six chairs around each table. The purpose was to arrange the class in order to allow the teams to look straight at their opponents. Teams A and C were responsible of opening the debate stage. Team A in favor of virtual education and team C discussing in favor of traditional education. As expected by the researcher, students from both teams were very nervous to start speaking and although, they had rehearsed before, sitting in front of the class added pressure to their presentations.

Team A first speaker (student S) started the very first classroom debate. He opened the discussion with strong arguments and evidence related to the financial benefits of studying at home. He made an introduction of the topic, mentioned some advantages, and concluded his presentation by talking about his own online classes' experience. Student S did not have time to finish his conclusion since time was over before he finished, but he was able to ask a question for the other team's first speaker. Student P was the second speaker of this team. She used two minutes of her time to detail more advantages of virtual classes, most of them related to the monetary aspect and the easiness of gaining access to digital resources. Students B and F spoke

about supplementary advantages of learning from home. They showed more difficulties presenting their arguments due to anxiety and lack of vocabulary. Likewise, the last speaker (Student G) read most of the information from his booklet. Student R, on the contrary, was able to overcome his public speaking fear and finish his three minutes presentation about disadvantages of traditional education. Students S and B (first and third speakers) took the leadership of the team and helped the others to answer and to reinforce their arguments.

Furthermore, team C first speaker (student I) began his presentation with an introduction about traditional education. Student I's speaking skills stood out during the debate. He spoke fluently, accurately, and used a wide range of vocabulary. His pronunciation skills were also outstanding. This participant took control of the first debate and upgraded the level for the rest of the class. Students D and K (third and fourth speakers) presented their arguments in favor of traditional educational effectively. They referred to the relevance of learners' interaction in the school and the benefits of face-to-face socialization for children's development. Students U and C (second and last speaker) struggled the most during their speeches. They had complications uttering the arguments and answering the other team's questions.

Moreover, it was an interesting discussion and the debaters managed to draw the audience's attention all along, especially at the end, when they shared their final arguments. The audience/ judges were also engaged in the discussion and formulated suitable questions. For instance, Student B from the audience asked team A: "Considering the actual gas price and that we have come to school every day, why do you say virtual education is cheaper? Finally, the audience voted in favor of team C (traditional education) and named them the winning team of Debate #1.

#### **4.1.3.2 Second debate**

The second debate took place a day after the first debate. This activity began with the preparation of the classroom in order to re-create the debate environment as the day before. The researcher again, placed two tables in front of the classroom with five chairs around each table. The purpose was to allow the teams to look straight at their opponents. The motion of this debate was in favor of homework versus against homework. Team B began debating in favor of homework with a large introduction made by their first speaker (student H). He used international data and statistics as evidence to support the advantages of doing homework. Next, second and third speakers (students Q and L) spoke about the benefits of reinforcing school contents at home. Moreover, they added that doing homework encourages families to spend more time together. On the other hand, student T highlighted the negative aspects of not doing homework. However, she had difficulties speaking in public, and even though she had good pronunciation, she was not fluent and she could not finish presenting her arguments.

Team D, on the contrary, argued against doing homework. Their first speaker (student O) spoke mostly about his own experience and provided few evidence to support his arguments. He showed fluency, accuracy, and acceptable vocabulary range. However, he spoke very fast, and it made it difficult for the audience and the other debaters to understand what he was saying. This fact complicated the other team's rebuttal. Next speakers (students J, N, and E) emphasized the stress that homework causes on students. According to their arguments, doing homework after school implicates losing rest and family time. In addition, student A (last speaker) was responsible to end the debate stage of the investigation. He read a brief closure and summarized the benefits of not doing homework. Finally, the audience asked questions to both teams. These

interrogations were associated to how doing homework improved or affected students' learning process. Moreover, the winner of the second debate was team D since the audience found their arguments about the importance of not doing homework more convincing.

Furthermore, the researcher's intention with this activity was to activate the student's speaking and communication skills. Likewise, to stimulate their research and analytical abilities. Moreover, during the application of the debate technique, the researcher was able to acknowledge a general improvement regarding public speaking skills and commitment to the activity. Most of the students were more confident during the debates than during the first oral presentations. Additionally, they showed understanding of the topics and formulated precise questions from their peers' arguments and speeches.

As a final point, the researcher used a rubric to evaluate the students' performance and measure their progress compared to pre-test and the post-test stages of the investigation. Furthermore, this rubric took into consideration three fundamental aspects of a classroom debate. In addition, it is relevant to clarify that the debate activity worked as a teaching strategy to improve students' oral skills. The table below shows the indicators and punctuation scale used to assess the studied population during their debate performance.

Table 6

Debate evaluation

<b>Category</b>	<b>Excellent (4)</b>	<b>Good (3)</b>	<b>Acceptable (2)</b>	<b>Needs improvement (1)</b>
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<b>Organization and clarity.</b> Opinions and arguments are outlined clearly and orderly.	Mostly clear and orderly presentation.	Clear and orderly presentation in some parts.	Clear and orderly in few parts.	Unclear and unorderedly.
<b>Use of arguments and evidence.</b> Arguments and examples are given to support reasons.	Most relevant arguments and evidence given.	Some relevant arguments and evidence given.	Few relevant arguments and evidence given.	Relevant arguments and evidence weren't given.
<b>Use of rebuttal.</b> Arguments made by the other team are responded effectively.	Many effective counter-arguments made.	Some effective counter-arguments made.	Few effective counter-arguments made.	No effective counter-arguments made.

*Table 6. Table 6 contains the indicators considered for the debate's evaluation. Researcher's creation.*

According to the debate results and the researchers' perception, eleven students achieved four points (the highest punctuation) in the organization and clarity indicator. In other words, they were able to express their opinions and arguments clearly and orderly. When they spoke, it was easy to understand their fundamentals and they facilitated the other teams' rebuttal. The rest of the debaters obtained three points, as most of their arguments and opinions were presented clearly and orderly. Three was the lowest punctuation in this particular category.

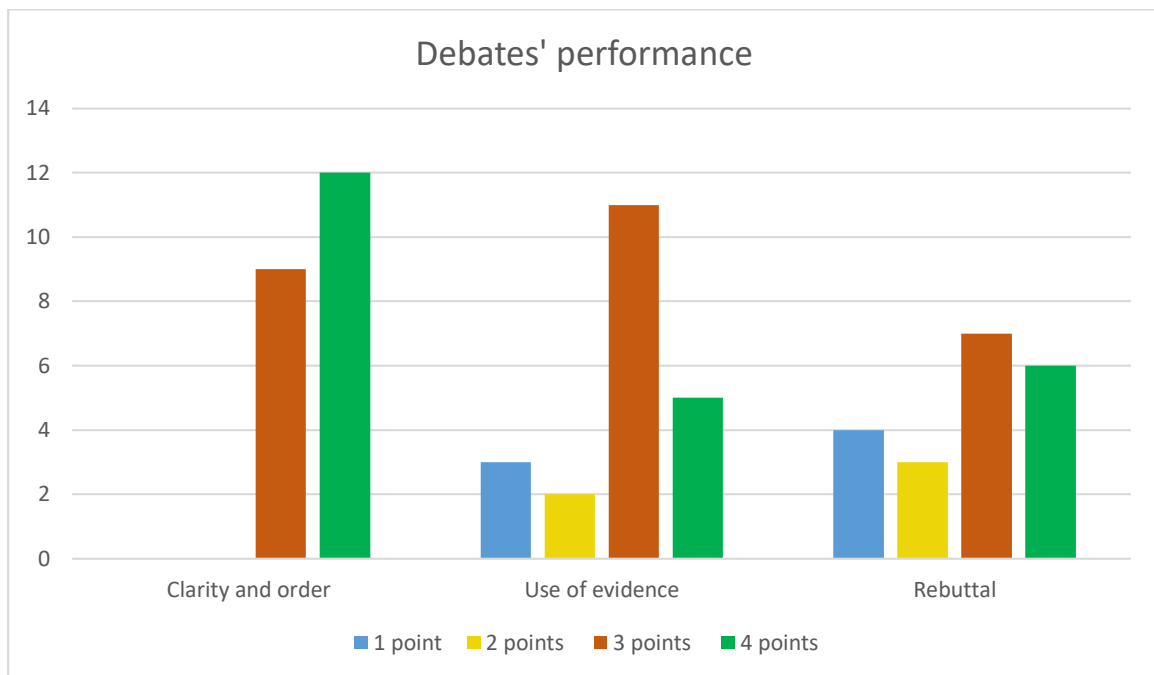
Regarding the use of evidence to support their discourses, only five students obtained the highest punctuation. Casually, they were the same five students who achieved the highest scores during the pre-test application. Additionally, eleven students gained three points. This means that some of their arguments were supported with evidence, examples, or statistical data. Only two

debaters got two points, which means that few evidence was given. Lastly, three students obtained the lowest punctuation (one point) due to their lack of evidence to strengthen their opinions.

Concerning the use of rebuttal, the results displayed that six students responded effectively, presenting four or more counterarguments. Consequently, seven debaters obtained three points in this category, which means that they offered some relevant answers to their opponents' arguments. Finally, four participants did not use the rebuttal because they could not answer the adversaries' questions or they did not understand their arguments. An important aspect to highlight is that one participant (student N) achieved a perfect score in the debate activity. He proved to have practiced and demonstrated preparation. The figure below reflects the students' performance in the debate activity, according to the obtained punctuation.

Figure 4

Debates' performance



*Figure 4. Figure 4 reflects the students' results according to their debates' performance.*

*Researcher's creation.*

According to figure 4, the results indicate that the majority of the students were able to present their arguments with clarity and order. This fact also suggests that students spoke fluently and made themselves understood during their debate performance. Moreover, most of the participants used evidence to support their arguments when speaking. Therefore, they mentioned statistical data while delivering their speeches. Finally, only four students could not refute to their opponents' arguments. The majority of the debaters was confident when answering questions or rebutting. They showed excitement when it was their turn to use their counterarguments and some of them asked for more rebuttal time. Therefore, the previous figure and the debate outcomes suggested that many of the participants overcame their fear to public speaking during the debate activity. In addition, all the speakers used the given phrases (presented before in table

3) during their debate performances. More significantly, they used them appropriately and repeatedly.

#### **4.1.4 Post-test**

To apply the post-test, the researcher first explained that this was the last oral activity and motivated students to keep reinforcing their oral skills. In addition, the researcher thanked the studied population for their participation in the previous activities and encouraged them to keep using the learnt information and useful phrases in the future. With the post-test, the researcher pretended to assess the students' speaking skills after the application of the debate technique. This instrument was used at the end of the investigation with the purpose of measuring their progress regarding the learners' communication abilities in English. Additionally, the post-test was applied in order to analyze the results and contrast them with the pre-test results obtained at the beginning of the research.

Moreover, the objective was to measure the students' improvement regarding their aptitude to speak in public compared to their pre-test performance. For this reason, the post-test, as well as the pre-test, consisted of a short oral presentation. Likewise, it was an individual assessment, ungraded, and designed for investigation purposes only. Furthermore, in this final task, students had to speak about their debate experience and their learning process. However, the difference between the application of both instruments (pre-test and post-test) is that the first one was delivered in a formal context and the second one was planned to be an informal presentation. It is convenient to mention that this methodological decision was made in order to give students the opportunity to communicate in a more usual context for them. Additionally, it was relevant

for the researcher to identify their formal and informal speaking skills in order to determine if this modification could affect their performance.

Another alteration in the application of the instruments was that this time students did not have to read any information or create an outline. For this last task, they were given five minutes to brainstorm and organize their speech. Likewise, they had three minutes to present their first presentation. It is important to state that students were familiar with the brainstorming technique and applied it correctly; apparently, they frequently used it in Reading classes. Moreover, to evaluate this final presentation, the researcher used the same rubric designed by herself to assess the pre-test. This rubric contained six indicators that measured fundamental elements related to the speaking skills. The purpose of using the same rubric is to be able to compare the obtained punctuations and determine if there was any progress. The following table shows the chosen indicators and their corresponding punctuation.

Table 7

Indicators to assess the post-test

Indicator	Punctuation			
	Needs improvement	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Fluency	1	2	3	4
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4
Communication	1	2	3	4
Accuracy	1	2	3	4

Vocabulary	1	2	3	4
Interaction	1	2	3	4

*Table 7. Table 7 contains the indicators used to assess the post-test. Researcher's creation.*

During the application of the post-test, students seemed more comfortable when speaking English around the researcher. This time, it was possible to evaluate all the studied population on the same day –during two lessons.- Most of the students used the three minutes given to present; although, there were eight students who spoke less than three minutes, but none of the students spoke less than two minutes. A positive outcome to highlight is that in contrast to the previous presentation, students were able to deliver their speech without reading, which means they achieved more fluency. Another surprising fact was that even though it was an informal presentation, they included the useful phrases in their presentations. The most used phrases were “In my opinion,” “I believe,” and “I’d like to say.”

Therefore, it is important to state that during their second oral presentation, the majority of the students indicated that they felt less nervous when speaking in public. Moreover, they mentioned that it was easier for them to express their feelings and ideas than during their first performances. In addition, it is essential to say that these opinions were shared by the students after the application of the debate technique used to improve their oral skills. In order to verify the students’ perception, the following table shows the post-test results obtained by each student.

Table 8

Post-test individual results

DEBATE AS A STRATEGY  
TO IMPROVE SPEAKING  
AND COMMUNICATION  
SKILLS.

Student	Fluency	Pronunciation	Communication	Accuracy	Vocabulary	Interaction
A	3	2	2	3	3	3
B	3	3	3	3	3	4
C	3	2	2	1	3	3
D	3	3	3	3	3	4
E*	3	2	3	2	3	3
F	3	2	3	3	3	4
G	3	3	2	3	2	2
H	4	4	4	3	4	4
I	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
J	3	3	3	3	3	4
K*	3	2	3	3	3	3
L*	4	3	4	3	4	4
M	3	3	3	2	3	4
N	4	4	3	4	4	3
O	4	4	4	3	4	4
P*	4	4	4	3	4	3
Q	4	3	4	3	4	4
R	3	2	3	3	3	3
S	4	4	4	3	4	3
T*	2	3	3	2	3	3

U	3	2	2	3	3	4
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*Table 8. Table 8 reflects the students' post-test results. Researcher's creation*

As shown in table 8, one student (student I) achieved a perfect score in his second oral presentation according to the scale from 1 to 4. Moreover, students H and O only lost one point in their final score. An important fact revealed in the previous table, is that all students increased their global punctuation compared to the pre-test results. Furthermore, it seems that all students improved regarding the vocabulary and fluency aspects, and only two of them achieved less than 3 points in this indicator. The rest of the students got 3 or 4 points. This means they were able to use a broader and more appropriate range of vocabulary and spoke without making long pauses or reading.

Likewise, another indicator that reflects an enhanced performance is interaction. This indicator takes into consideration the student's development when speaking in public and their relationship with the audience. This means, they accomplished a better connection with the spectators. According to the students' statements, this was the result of speaking confidently and more relaxed. On the other hand, accuracy and pronunciation were the indicators with the least progress. Only seven students increased their pronunciation and accuracy scores by 1 or 2 points, and the rest of the students, maintained their punctuation. Therefore, it must be said that during the second oral presentation, the majority of the students improved their global punctuation. Moreover, they mentioned that during the post-test, they felt significantly better when speaking in English. The following figure reflects the students' performance in the post-test, according to their final score and gender.

Figure 5

Post-test: Final Scores

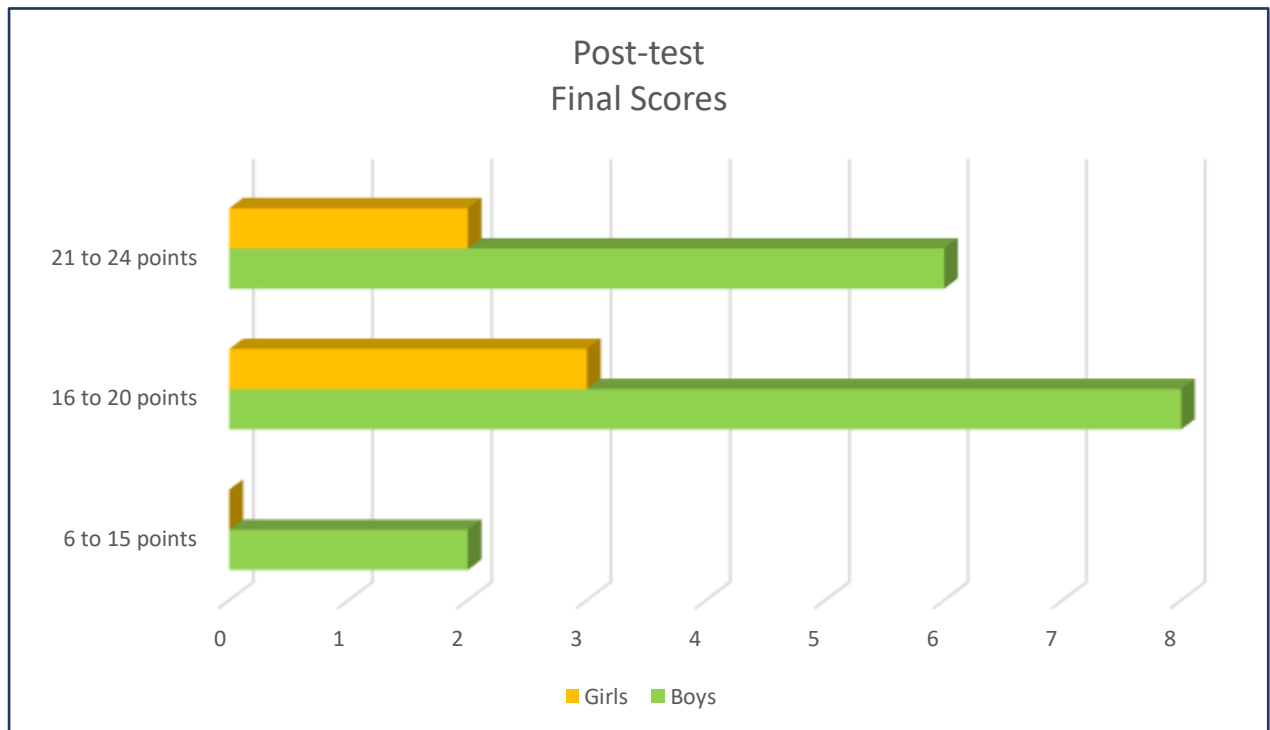


Figure 5. Figure 5 reflects the student's post-test final scores. Researcher's creation.

As it can be seen in figure 5, the global results of the post-test are higher than the pre-test results. The majority of students improved their final grades by at least 2 points. In addition, the five female students achieved between 16 and 22 points. Then, the majority of the male students got between 16 and 20 points. Finally, the smallest group of students (two boys) obtained the lowest scores. Student C obtained 14 points and student G got 15 points. Even so, they improved by 4 and 2 points their final grade. Furthermore, the average score improved from 16 to 19 points, and eleven out of twenty-one students scored the average punctuation or more. Additionally, as mentioned before, one student obtained a perfect score and demonstrated a great potential regarding public speaking and English communication skills. Another performance that

stood out was student Q presentation, whose final score increased significantly from 12 to 22 points. During the post-test, he delivered a fluent and accurate presentation, he used more appropriate vocabulary and established a profound connection with the audience.

In conclusion, as previously mentioned in the pre-test analysis, a particular characteristic of this fifth-grade group, is that boys tended to have a more favorable activation of their speaking and communication skills than girls. Finally, during the application of the third instrument, the researcher was able to evaluate each student's progress and verify their improvement regarding their abilities to speak and communicate in English.

#### **4.1.5 Questionnaire**

The fourth and last instrument used was a questionnaire applied to students at the end of the investigation process. The objective of the questionnaire was to validate information related to the acquired knowledge and the public speaking experience. It is important to mention that the instrument was divided in two parts and mixed two types of questionnaire. The first part consisted of a structured questionnaire that contained five close questions and the alternatives to answer them. The second part was an open questionnaire, which comprised five questions that allowed students to provide more extended responses to reveal their feelings and opinions.

Moreover, the questionnaire was useful to know the students' perception towards the implementation of the debate technique by the researcher to improve their speaking skills. In addition, the researcher used the questionnaire to get specific data that could not be obtained through the other instruments (pre-test and post-test). Therefore, it was short and accurate in order to gather precise answers. Before the application of the questionnaire, the researcher

explained the instrument, its objective, and how to complete it. Furthermore, students were told to ask for the researchers' assistance in case needed. It took one lesson to explain and apply the questionnaire. It was a self-administered questionnaire, which means that students read and responded at their own pace and that all questions were standardized. In addition, it is important to mention that questionnaire was applied in English and answers were provided by the students in English, as well. Moreover, questions were very simple and easy to understand.

Before presenting the answers provided in the first part of the questionnaire, it is important to clarify that one student was absent that day. For this reason, only twenty responses will be analyzed and reflected in the next pages. Therefore, following the order of the questionnaire, the researcher now will proceed to present the students' responses regarding the debate activities. Table 9 will show the five questions listed in numerical order. Then, the answers for each question will be illustrated in the figure below.

Table 9

Closed Questions

Number	Closed questions	Answer alternative	
1	Before this investigation, did you know what a debate was?	Yes	No
2	Have you participated in a debate before?	Yes	No
3	Did you like debating in the classroom?	Yes	No
4	Would you like to continue using the debate technique in English classes?	Yes	No

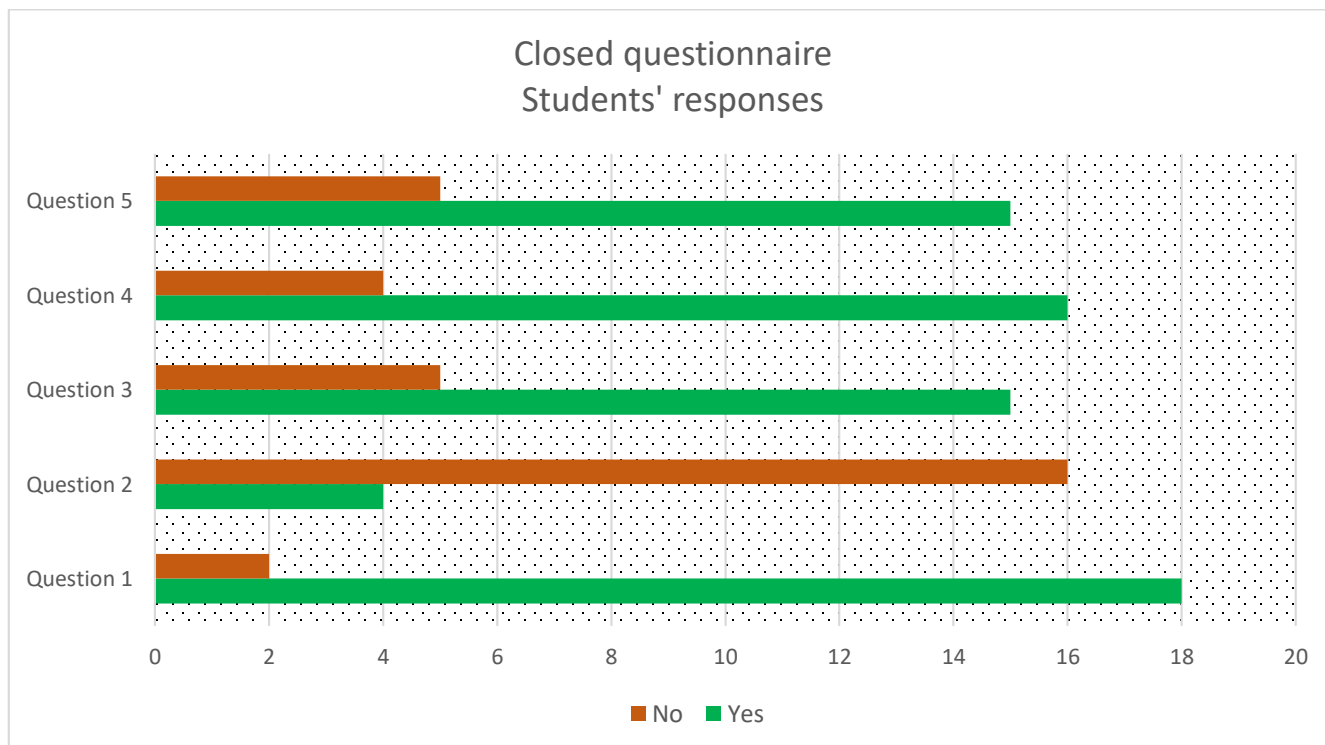
5	Do you consider that debates helped you improve your English speaking skills?	Yes	No
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*Table 9: Table 9 contains the questions of the first part of the questionnaire. Researcher's creation.*

As it can be seen in table 9, in the first part of the questionnaire, students were asked about debates and their previous debating experience. As stated before, questions were short and precise, with limited answer alternatives. In this particular case, they only had yes or no options to respond the first five questions.

Figure 6

Closed questionnaire: Students' responses



*Figure 6: Figure 6 reflects the students' responses of the first part of the questionnaire.*

*Researcher's creation.*

These results suggest that the majority of the studied population enjoyed the debate experience. As shown above in figure 6, eighteen students had prior knowledge about debates. However, later on during an informal conversation in class, they mentioned that they knew about political debates, but most of them were not aware that this technique could be used as a learning / teaching strategy. Regarding previous debating experience, only four students had participated in a debate before. Two of them were new students at Sunshine South School, so their former participation was in a different institution. According to the acquired responses, fifteen students liked debating in the classroom and only five of them disliked this activity. Concerning question four, sixteen students would like to continue using this method in classes. On the contrary, four of them declared that they would not like to keep having this sort of activities in English classes. Finally, the last question of the first part referred to the students' perception regarding the impact of debates on the improvement of their oral skills. To this question, fifteen students responded that debates contributed to improve their English-speaking skills, and five students stated that debates did not help them to develop oral abilities.

The second part of the questionnaire contained five open questions related to the students' perspectives and opinions after concluding the investigation process. Therefore, continuing with the order of the questionnaire, table 10 will show the last questions in the corresponding order.

Table 10

Opened Questions

Number	Opened questions
6	What was your favorite part of the debate activities?
7	What other topics would you like to debate about?
8	How did you feel speaking in public before the debates?
9	How did you feel speaking in public after the debates?
10	What did you learn during this investigation process?

*Table 10. Table 10 contains the questions of the second part of the questionnaire. Researcher's creation.*

As shown in table 10, the open questions were also simple and easy for students to understand and respond. The researcher's intention with the second part of the questionnaire was to validate how the students felt before, during, and after the debate activities. In addition, these questions worked as an evaluation of the debate method used to improve the student's speaking and communication skills. Moreover, since these were open questions, responses were different and varied from one student to another. For this reason, the researcher will proceed to analyze each question separately.

Figure 7

Question 6: Students' responses

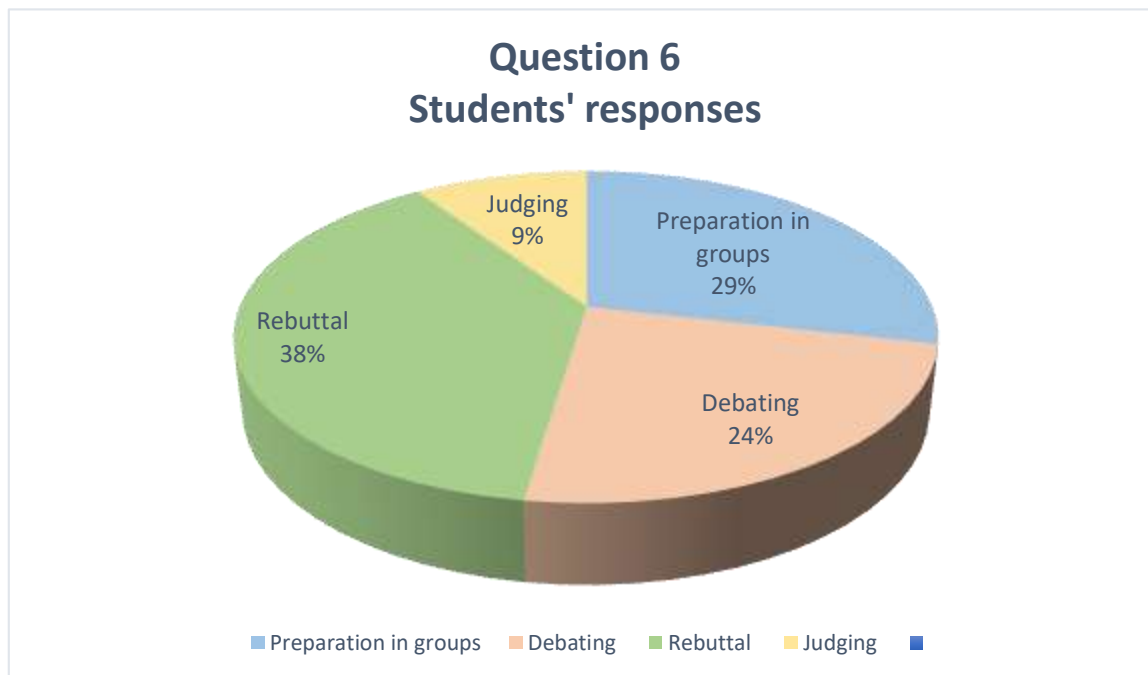


Figure 7. Figure 7 reflects the students' responses of question #6. Researcher's creation.

In the first question of the second part (question number six) related to what students liked the most of the debate activities, eight students (38%) answered that their favorite part was the rebuttal because it was exciting to listen to the debaters' counterarguments. Moreover, they mentioned, it was the best moment of the debates since they felt adrenaline when confronting the opponents. Furthermore, six students liked the preparation stage because they got to work in groups. Five students only responded, "the debate," referring to the argument presentation, and two students stated that their favorite part of the debates was to judge and be part of the audience as it was less stressful, and they only had to ask questions and choose a winner.

Figure 8

Question 7: Students' responses

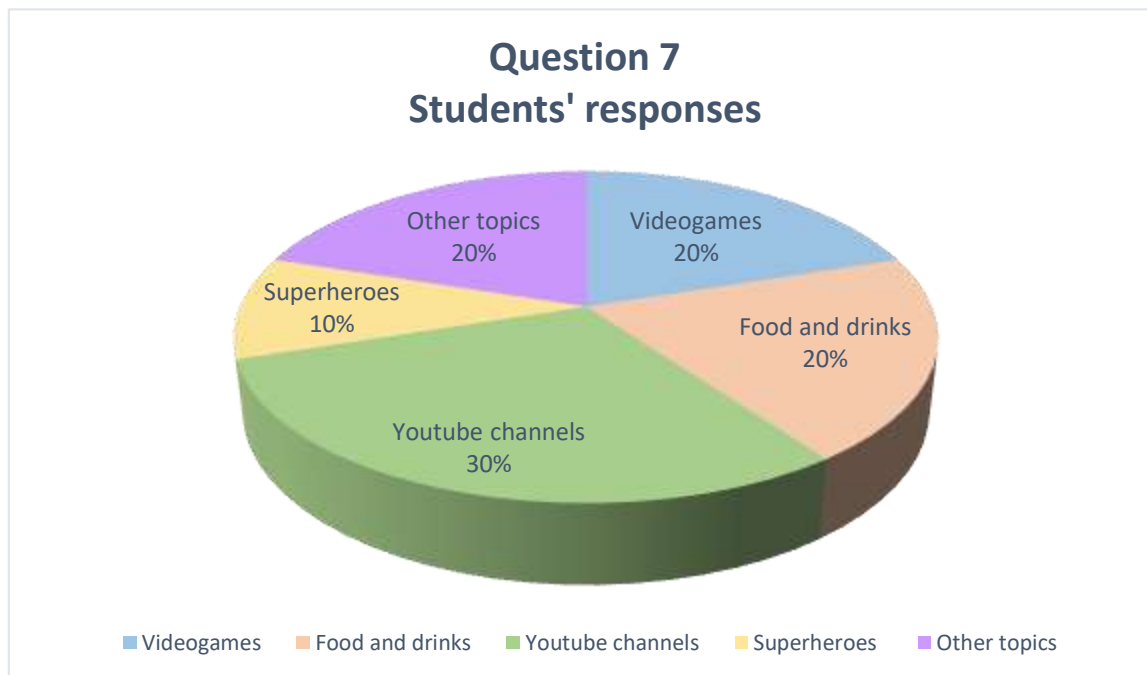


Figure 8. Figure 8 reflects the students' responses of question #7. Researcher's creation.

In the seventh question, students were asked about topics they would like to debate about. Many responses were different, for this reason, the researcher comprised them in five categories. The highest percentage of students, 30%, stated that they would like to discuss Youtube content, channels, or Youtubers. Regarding the second largest percentage, 20% of answers, there was a tie among three topics, which were food and drinks, videogames, and other topics. Finally, two students who represent 10% of the class population mentioned they would like to debate about superheroes.

Figure 9

Question 8: Students' responses

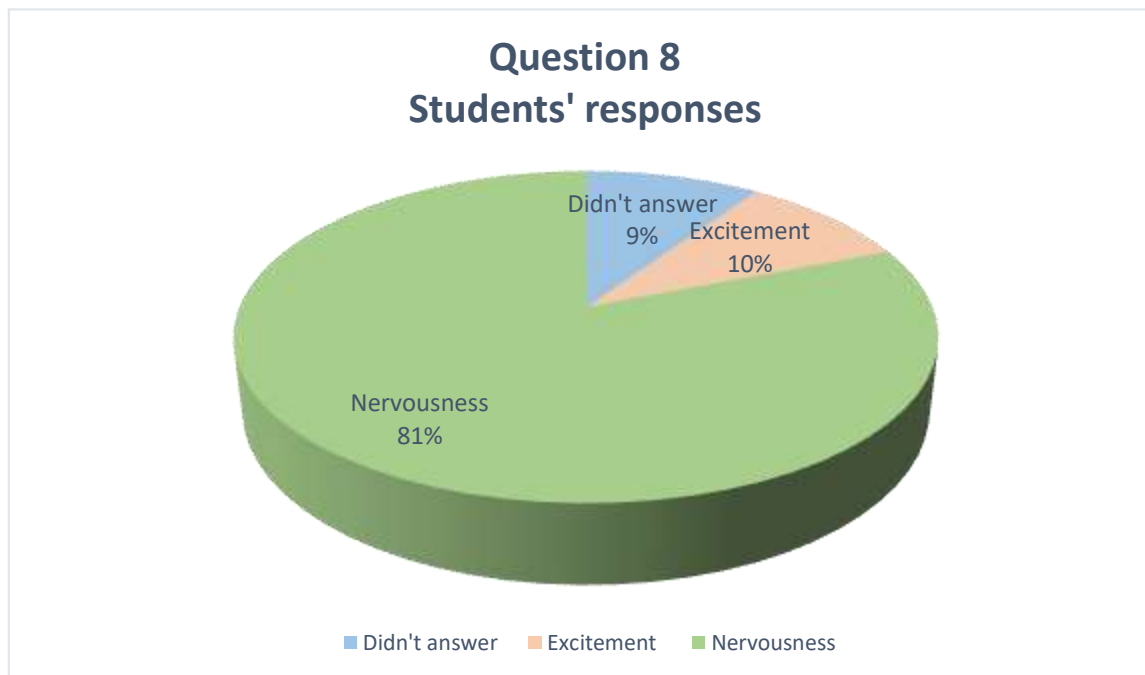


Figure 9. Figure 9 reflects the students' responses of question #8. Researcher's creation.

In regards of question number 8, more than 50% of the studied population specified that they felt very nervous prior the debates. As mentioned earlier in the investigation, students constantly repeated that speaking English in public caused them stress and anxiety. Additionally, two students did not answer the question, and only one student referred to feel excited and ready to present his arguments.

Figure 10

Question 9: Students' responses

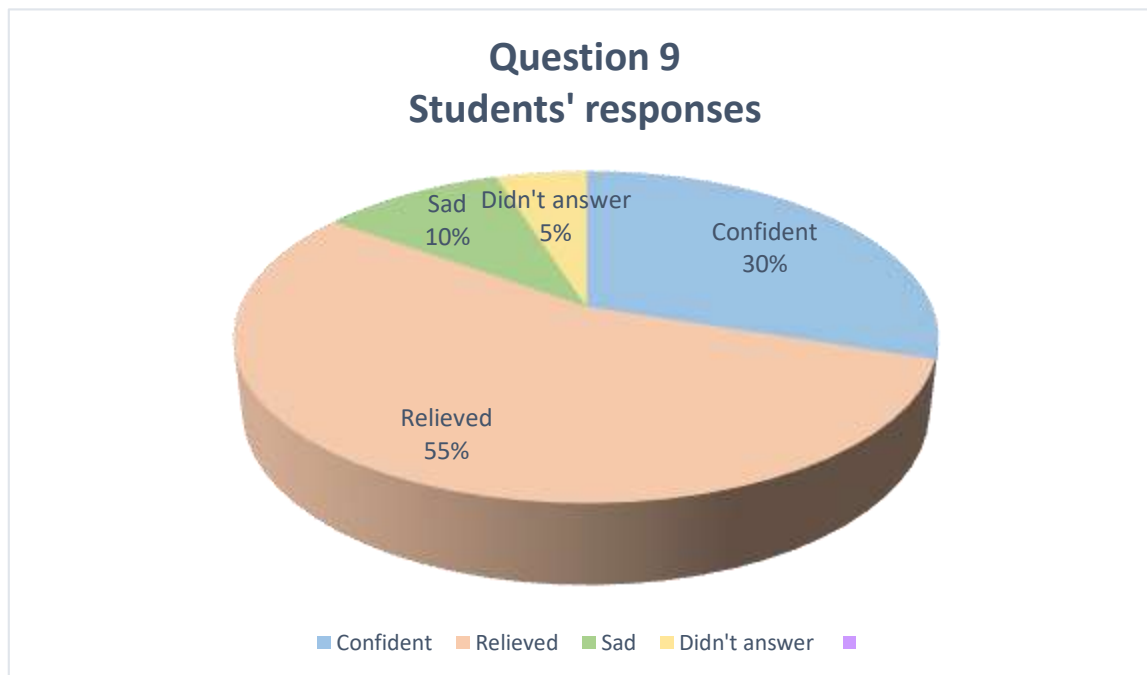
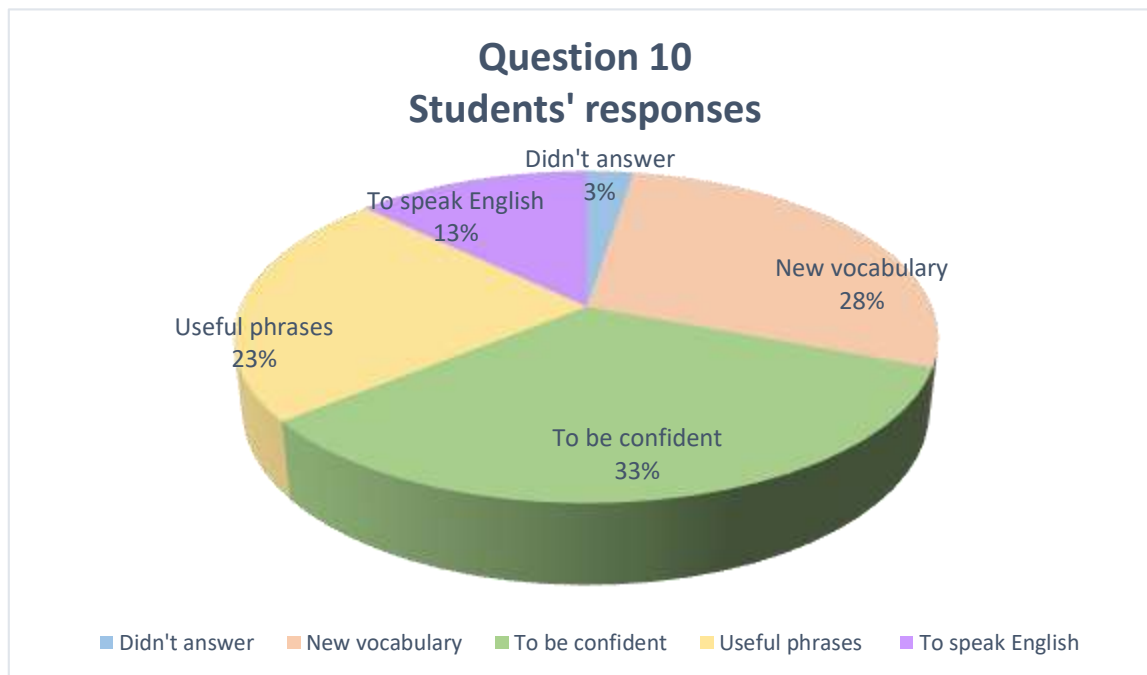


Figure 10. Figure 10 reflects the students' responses of question #9. Researcher's creation.

According to figure 10, 55% of the students felt relieved after the debate activities. Many of them expressed happiness when they concluded their debate participation, especially because they were very nervous at the beginning. In addition, 30% of the group (6 students) stated that they felt more confident after the first debate, and one student mentioned that she felt confident after her first oral presentation, since it was the same information she was going to use in the debate. Finally, only one student did not respond question number nine.

Figure 11

Question 10: Students' responses



*Figure 11. Figure 11 reflects the students' responses of question #10. Researcher's creation.*

To end with the questionnaire analysis, the researcher decided to comprise all responses for question number ten in five categories. Due to the type of question, some responses were long and mentioned two or more learning outcomes. For this reason, figure 11 reflects more than twenty answers. Moreover, 36% of the studied population stated that they learnt new words from the booklets and the researcher. Thirteen students, who represented 33% of the responses shown above, mentioned that their biggest accomplishment was gaining confidence and losing the fear of public speaking. Nine students referred to the useful phrases and clarified that they were going to continue using them. Finally, five students answered that this experience taught them to speak or improve their English, and only one student did not mention any knowledge acquired.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the questionnaire's responses matched the information provided by students during the post-test presentations. Moreover, most of the students achieved a successfully communication of their feelings, ideas, and opinions.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Purpose of the Conclusions

This chapter presents the conclusions that have been drawn from the application of the instruments and throughout the development of the different phases of this study. Moreover, the findings and recommendations discussed in this section will be supported by the triangulation and analysis of the collected data and theoretical background. To review, the aim of this investigation was to analyze the role of debate as a teaching strategy to improve speaking and communication skills in fifth grade students at Sunshine South School. Furthermore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide English students and teachers with a valuable input on the use of debate as a method in the classroom.

#### 5.2 Conclusions

The inferences provided in this section intend to validate the specific objectives set at the beginning of the investigation. After the implementation of the instruments and especially, after conducting the debates, the researcher pretends to verify the effectiveness of this technique regarding the improvement of the students' oral skills. Afterwards, the researcher's intention is to find an answer for the research question and offer recommendations to future readers who would like to implement the debate as a strategy to improve speaking and communication skills.

##### **5.2.1 To identify fifth grade students' difficulties in speaking English that could affect their communication skills.**

The first specific objective was to identify if the fifth-grade students at Sunshine South School presented difficulties when speaking English and if so, to recognize how these problems

were affecting their communication abilities. For the interests of the investigation, the researcher decided to first observe the students' performance during English classes and formulate an initial perspective on their speaking abilities. Then, it was essential to know their oral skills through a pre-test, which consisted of an individual oral presentation. The purpose of this assessment was to evaluate their pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, communication, vocabulary range, and interaction with the audience when speaking English in public.

Regarding the results, it can be concluded that the major problem that students faced was the fear of speaking English, which significantly increased when they had to do it in public or in front of strangers. Other important issue that affected their initial performance was the lack of vocabulary to successfully communicate their feelings, ideas, and opinions. Students inferred that most of the time they knew the answers for the teacher's questions, or they had an idea they wanted to express; however, they did not know the words to say it in English. This issue also affected their comprehension ability, since many students stated that they did not understand a lot of the information provided by the researcher and they had to appeal to the use of a dictionary to translate and clarify many concepts. Moreover, other difficulties perceived when students spoke, were the lack of fluency, the mispronunciation of several sounds, inconsistency regarding the correct use of grammar structures, and a high level of shyness among the students. These problems definitely affected their first presentations, which resulted on low scores. Furthermore, these problems also caused insecurities in students and stimulated the fear that has accompanied EFL students over time.

**5.2.2 To apply debate activities during English classes to enhance fifth grade students' participation in speaking tasks.**

According to the research's aim, the second objective can be considered the most important, regarding the obtained results. The main purpose was to apply the debate technique in order to activate and improve the students' speaking skills. Moreover, the debate activities were a crucial part of the investigation. It is relevant to mention that fifth grade students at Sunshine South School had never participated in a classroom debate at this school before. After the observation and the application of the questionnaire, it was noticed that the studied population, as well as the teacher, were not used to develop this type of oral activities in class.

The debate stage of the investigation was divided in three parts. First, the preparation of the teams. Second, the debate number one was carried out by teams A and C. Third, the debate number two was carried out by teams B and D. Even though, it was their first debate performance, the four teams followed the guidelines and accomplished a successful participation. To evaluate this task, the researcher used a rubric as an evaluation tool that contemplated fundamental aspects of the debate method. Moreover, during this activity, the researcher was able to assess not only the students' speaking skills, but their critical thinking, their listening skills, their comprehension of the English language, and their improvisation abilities. As mentioned before, the students' performance was acceptable, and according to the rubric indicators, one student achieved a perfect score and some of them gave an outstanding performance.

Furthermore, one of the most important outcomes of the debate activities was the active involvement of the students in the preparation of the arguments. They were asked to speak English only during this period, and surprisingly, this instruction was well received by students,

and they assumed it as a challenge, which stimulated their speaking skills and enhanced their cooperative work. Unexpectedly, due to their first statements, they really enjoyed speaking English with their friends.

Moreover, when using debate as an EFL teaching strategy, it is essential to consider the students' background, their English level, and their prior knowledge. The more the students know about the topic, the better the results will be. In this case, providing them with information previously selected and assigning roles, motivated the students and allowed them to frame the arguments effectively. Furthermore, some students stated in the questionnaire that this was their favorite part of the investigation.

In spite of the pre-test results and the students' first statements, there were more students who enjoyed the debates than those who disliked the activity. The entire debate process (preparation, debating, rebuttal, and feedback) was very favorable for the fifth graders and motivated them to continue participating in speaking activities. In fact, before the last session with the researcher, students proposed to their teacher, having coming debates in class. Indeed, classroom debates proved to be an effective method to reduce students' speaking difficulties, lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistakes. Moreover, the researcher concludes that using the debate as a teaching strategy is helpful for students to develop analytical and communication skills, because they get to share and exchange ideas and opinions and allows them to feel more confident when speaking.

**5.2.3 To assess fifth grade students' speaking and communication skills during classroom debates in order to achieve oral proficiency in English.**

The last stage of the investigation was the assessment of the students' speaking and communication skills. Nevertheless, it is convenient to clarify that students were evaluated during the three oral activities along the research process. First, in the pre-test; then, during their debate's performance; and lastly, in the post-test presentation. To assess those tasks and to measure the students' progress, two different rubrics were used; one for the pre-test and post-test, and another for the debate.

The pre-test consisted of a three minute oral presentation about the assigned topics of the debate, and the post-test was also a three minute oral presentation about their debating experience. In regards to the debates, there were two debates that ensured all the students' participation as debaters or judges. The objective of the oral evaluations was to examine the students' oral abilities mainly, but also their understanding of the topics, improvisation aptitudes, and critical thinking. Moreover, through the evaluation of the three performances, the researcher determined that the students' progress was significant. Nonetheless, their level of listening and reading comprehension was low, which clearly affected their speaking skills, since they were requested to talk about a given topic.

Furthermore, the application of the debate method was beneficial for the students' evaluations. The pre-test and post-test's results demonstrated that there was an improvement because the grades obtained in the pre-test were lower than the grades obtained posteriorly in the final oral presentation. Likewise, the average score increased after the debates, and even one student achieved a perfect score in the debate presentation and in the post-test. In addition,

students that showed an advanced level during the application of the first instruments, upgraded their performance. Moreover, their improvement regarding vocabulary and fluency was noticeable. At the same time, students who presented more difficulties accomplished a significant enhancement of their oral skills, and their final speeches were much understandable.

In conclusion, the three specific objectives of the current investigation were effectively achieved. The theoretical framework and the data analysis supported the final results and the students' progress at the end of the process. It is worthy to say, that the most gratifying result was to listen and observe the students successfully communicating in English during their presentations and among themselves. Moreover, they learnt and carried out a new teaching/learning technique that was unknown for most of them. Therefore, the research's outcomes will definitely influence their classroom dynamics, as well as the students' perception regarding public and English speaking.

### **5.3 Restatement of the Research Question**

For the purpose of the investigation, an interrogation was stated by the researcher at the beginning of this study. The research question was "What is the effect of debate as a teaching technique in fifth grade students at Sunshine South School speaking and communication skills during the second quarter of 2022?" In order to respond to that question, the instruments' results analyzed and discussed in Chapter IV were used as evidence to provide an objective answer. Moreover, the activities contemplated in the instruments were planned and carried out to validate the effects of debate as a teaching strategy in the students' speaking and communication skills. In addition, this study was an attempt to prove that debate could help to improve EFL learners' oral abilities. Therefore, the researcher used a qualitative research approach that enabled students to

express their thoughts and opinions regarding the positive effects of the debate method in the improvement of their speaking skills. Additionally, the evidence provided in Chapter IV allows to confirm the effectiveness of debate as a useful technique to improve the learners' speaking abilities.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

For further research, teachers, and learners who plan to use the debate method in the classroom to improve speaking and communication skills, there are some recommendations suggested in order to fulfill the purpose of this technique. Moreover, it is relevant to state that the recommendations described below are centered on the experience of the researcher and the participants, as well as on the results emerging from the data analysis.

First of all, before the application of a teaching strategy, it is essential to consider the class dynamics, the students' background, and their previous knowledge. Additionally, it is important to establish a reason that justifies the use of a particular method and outline an objective that supports the development of an educational process. Furthermore, if it is an unknown method for the learners, it is fundamental to plan a prior explanation and induction.

For the use of the debate method specifically, it is recommended for teachers and researchers to choose topics that are interesting to students and appropriate to their age and level. In addition, it would be more profitable to select motions in which students can contribute with their own experience. It has been proved that this selection helps shy students to express themselves more easily. Likewise, a convenient strategy to enhance the debaters' performance is

to provide them with useful resources such as debate phrases, vocabulary, and relevant information to use as background.

An additional recommendation is to encourage the debate participants to research the topic and gather evidence that supports and strengthens their arguments and the debate's motion. This way, debates become more engaging, and students activate their critical thinking and improvisation skills. Therefore, it is essential to revise the existing varieties of the debate method in order to select the most suitable according to the stated objective, the students' oral skills, and the class dynamics. Additionally, to carry out a classroom debate, it is important to take into account some relevant factors, which are the number of participants, the students' behavior, and the time availability.

Finally, to use debate as a teaching strategy in EFL classes, the following recommendations are advised:

- Consider the participants' English level and their oral skills
- Incorporate the debate method to the class evaluation strategies
- Encourage students to reinforce their reading comprehension and listening skills
- Vary the debate activities and topics to engage students and motivate them to participate
- Take into account the students' interests and debate proposals
- Occasionally, let the participants choose their groups and topics to enhance teamwork

- Encourage students to accomplish the debate process using the English language only
- Provide students with useful phrases and vocabulary in order to reduce fear and anxiety caused by speaking English
- Give students constant feedback on their pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, and communication skills.

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### Annexes

#### Annexed 1: Observation Checklist

#### Classroom Observation Checklist

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Legend	Yes	No	Comments
Greeting, opening and instructions were given.			
Previous content was reviewed.			
Students were prepared.			
Students actively participated.			
Materials and resources were used (books, notebook, worksheets, technology, etc.).			
Students followed instructions.			
Students showed comprehension of the language and contents.			
Students spoke English during class.			
Students were able to express ideas and opinions in English.			
Additional observations:			

**Annexed 2: Pre-test and Post-test Evaluation Rubric**

**Oral Presentation Rubric**

**Students' name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic:** \_\_\_\_\_

Indicator	Punctuation				Total points
	Needs improvement	Acceptable	Good	Excellent	
Fluency	1	2	3	4	
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	
Communication	1	2	3	4	
Accuracy	1	2	3	4	
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	
Interaction	1	2	3	4	
<b>Additional observation:</b>					

**Annexed 3: Debate's Evaluation Rubric**

**Debate's Evaluation Rubric**

**Students' name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Category</b>	<b>Excellent (4)</b>	<b>Good (3)</b>	<b>Acceptable (2)</b>	<b>Needs improvement (1)</b>
<b>Organization and clarity.</b> Opinions and arguments are outlined clearly and orderly.	Completely clear and orderly presentation.	Mostly clear and orderly presentation.	Clear and orderly in some parts.	Unclear and unorderedly.
<b>Use of arguments and evidence.</b> Arguments and examples are given to support reasons.	Completely relevant arguments and evidence given.	Most relevant arguments and evidence given.	Some relevant arguments and evidence given.	Few or no relevant arguments and evidence given.
<b>Use of rebuttal.</b> Arguments made by the other team are responded effectively.	Many effective counter-arguments made.	Some effective counter-arguments made.	Few effective counter-arguments made.	No effective counter-arguments made.
<b>Additional observations:</b>				
<b>Total points:</b>				

**Annexed 4: Questionnaire**

**Students' name:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>I Part: Closed questions</b>		
1- Before this investigation, did you know what a debate was?	Yes	No
2- Have you participated in a debate before?	Yes	No
3- Did you like debating in the classroom?	Yes	No
4- Would you like to continue using the debate technique in English classes?	Yes	No
5- Do you consider that debates helped you improve your English speaking skills?	Yes	No
<b>II Part: Opened questions</b>		
6- What was your favorite part of the debate activities?		
7- What other topics would you like to debate about?		
8- How did you feel speaking in public before the debates?		
9- How did you feel speaking in public after the debates?		
10- What did you learn during this investigation process?		