

THE LANDSCAPE OF COMPETITIVE DEBATE IN ACEH: BENEFIT, ACHIEVEMENT, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

With a huge amount of budget allocation, Aceh education, however only reached 32nd position out of 34 other provinces in Indonesia. Indonesia itself ranked last out of 50 countries in a landmark education report. On the other hand, competitive debate is an effective tools to improve students' academic attainment, critical thinking skill, problem solving skill, and other soft skills. However with many challenges in debate proliferation, its practice is still uncommon and developed unevenly only in Kota Banda Aceh and its neighbour, Kabupaten Aceh Besar. This research paper aims to explore the impact of debate activities in Aceh, Acehnese students competitive debate experience and achievement, challenges of competitive debate proliferation and quality of debate competition in Aceh. The study was quantitative in nature. A questionnaire was designed on Likert scale in order to collect data from a group of 54 varsity or secondary school students who had experienced debating activity. Finally on the basis of finding shows that competitive debate improved Acehnese students ability in English, critical thinking, problem solving, logical thinking, team work, self-confidence, networking, social awareness, and competitiveness. Lacking of Acehnese students' participation in national and international level resulted uneven distribution of good qualified debaters in Aceh. The absence of standardized debating curriculum and the lacking of financial assistance and information access were seen as the major challenges of competitive debate proliferation in Aceh.

Keywords: competitive debate, critical thinking, English, Aceh, education

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Aceh Rules (Qanun) No. 5 Year 2008 and the Governor Regulation No. 79 Year 2013 Aceh Government must allocate education budget of at least 20% from special autonomy budget and 33% from oil and gas sector. Nevertheless this huge amount of money could not bring satisfactory result for Aceh education. In 2016, Aceh ranked 32 out of 34 other provinces in Indonesia in term of education quality [1]. Meanwhile Indonesia ranked last out of 50 countries in a landmark education report [2]. On the other hand, competitive debate might be a solution to improve Acehnese students' academic attainment and soft skills, and therefore it can be a solution for the education problems.

Debate is described as a formal discussion of two sides opposing each other upon a given topic in an oral exchange of arguments. Formal debates are practiced in common public meeting and legislative assemblies, and also in schools or university as pedagogical tools. Akerman et. al. (2011) suggested that debate could help students in improving their academic attainment; developing their critical thinking and communication skills; as well as boosting their aspiration, confidence, and cultural awareness [3]. Yang et. al. found that students agreed that debate helped them to understand different perspective, reduce bias, and develop critical thinking [4]. Therefore debate could be a helpful method to improve Acehnese education.

Our purpose of this study is to explore the impact of debate activities in Aceh, Acehnese students' competitive debate experience and achievement, challenges of competitive debate proliferation and quality of debate competition in Aceh. This study is important as an initial step to formulate a solution to improve competitive debate in Aceh. To the best of our knowledge, debate activities in Aceh were not well documented, and therefore questionnaire survey could be the best method for this study [5].

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Objectives and Research Questions

The study was conducted to measure some skills and competencies which is affected by debate. The variables discussed in this paper are impact of debate activities in Aceh, Acehese students competitive debate experience and achievement, challenges of competitive debate proliferation in Aceh, and quality of debate competition in Aceh.

2.2 Instruments

This research adopts a questionnaire. Questionnaire for varsity and secondary students is used to express and verify the research questions. One of the purposes of this study is to map the potential of Acehese debating landscape by assessing its beneficial impacts, achievement, and challenges.

2.3 Data Collection

The questionnaire was taken during three weeks (1-22 December 2016) and distributed to online channels (such as social media). The students required to answer the questions honestly and accurately by themselves. After the data were collected, it will be analyzed by EXCEL.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Characteristic of Respondents

This questionnaire survey was responded by 54 varsity and secondary school students who had experienced debating activities whether in classroom, seminar, training, or competition. We only received responses from 8 out of 24 cities/regencies in Aceh, mainly coming from Banda Aceh (67%). We found that 54 respondents had been representative enough since only few students that were active in debate activities, and there were no previous studies regarding the exact number of Acehese debaters. Debate practice is still uncommon in Aceh, it is well developed only in Kota Banda Aceh and its neighbour Kabupaten Aceh Besar. However a newly debate development had taken progress in Kota Lhokseumawe and Kota Langsa where Malikulsaleh University and Samudra University, respectively, had started proliferating competitive debates.

Table 1. Number of respondents with city/regency divisions

City/Regency	Respondent	Percentage
Kota Banda Aceh	36	67%
Kabupaten Aceh Besar	6	11%
Kota Langsa	4	7%
Kabupaten Aceh Barat Daya	2	4%
Kabupaten Aceh Tengah	2	4%
Kota Lhokseumawe	2	4%
Kabupaten Aceh Barat	1	2%
Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang	1	2%
Total	54	100%

3.2 Impacts of Debate Activities

Many studies had discussed the benefits of debate, however in Indonesia they merely focused on its effect in English skills (see e.g. [6,7,8]). In this study we asked the students how debate had affected their English skills as well as their individual capacities, the results are shown in fig. 1.

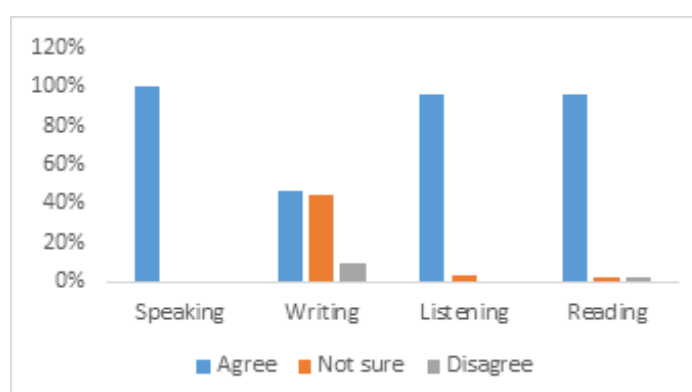


Fig. 1 Competitive debate impacts in Acehnese students skills English skills

The students 100% agreed that debate had improved their english speaking ability. It is understandable since competitive debate requires oral exchange of argument and persuasive performance in English. Both reading and listening scored 96%, means the students believed competitive debate could help them improvie their listening and reading comprehension. In debate, students are required to listen and comprehend their opponent’s substantive speech, thus it makes them more familiar with English vocabularies. To create a strong argument and easily understand the debate context, students are intrigued to read more news articles. The writings are not necessarily in English, but due to limited information given in Indonesian language, thus they commonly used English sources as reading materials. Writing scored the lowest among all english skills, however only 9% disagreed that debate doesn’t affect their writing skill. Though in debate does not required students to write but it does encourage students to absorb many information and generate structurized idea which is important aspects in developing writing skill.

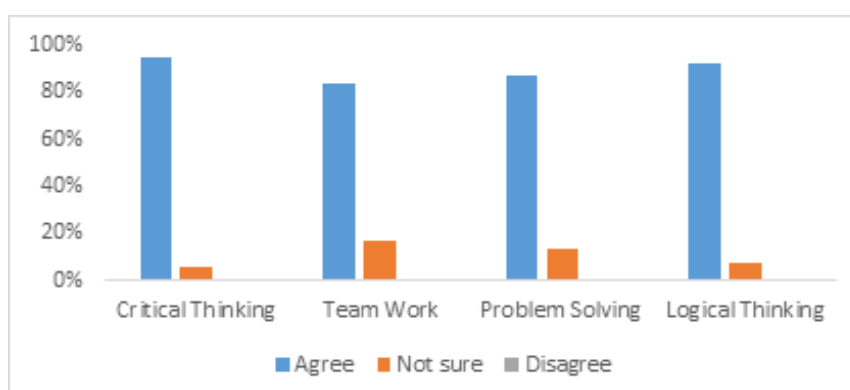


Fig. 2 Competitive debate impacts in Acehnese students ability of critical thinking, team work, problem solving, and logical thinking

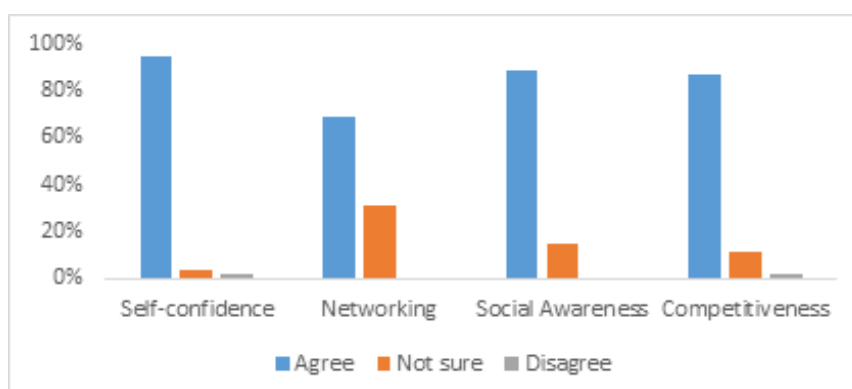


Fig. 3 Competitive debate impacts in Acehese students ability of self-confidence, networking, social awareness, and competitiveness

Rybold emphasized that debate may improve students' skills in writing, listening, team work, critical thinking, and self-confidence [9]. As shown in fig.2, majority of the students believed that debate had improved their ability in critical thinking (94%), problem solving (87%), and logical thinking (93%). Those abilities are forged during debate competition as they try to construct strong arguments which weigh the highest portion in adjudication. Critical thinking, problem solving, and logical thinking are important to create good skilled workers and able to improve national economic growth [10,11]. Team work (agreed by 87%) can also be improved through debate competition because they are required to work in team and should maintain consistent arguments among their teammates. Meanwhile fig.3 shows competitiveness (agreed by 94%) and self-confidence (agreed by 87%) are the improved aspects by almost all competitions, are also improved by debate competition. Competition that demands good cooperation among the teammates, like debate, could bring good result for students' learning process [12]. While there were 69% students agreed that debate had improved their networking. In debate competition students can meet a lot of people having the same interest in debate, yet coming from various backgrounds, thus could help students develop their networks.

3.3 Acehese Students Experience And Achievement in Debate Competition

Table 2. Acehese students participation in debate competitions

Competition level	Frequency						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	> 5
City/Regency	26%	24%	24%	4%	7%	4%	11%
Province	52%	17%	15%	6%	2%	2%	7%
National	65%	13%	13%	2%	2%	2%	4%
International	96%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 2 shows most of Acehese debaters had experienced municipal and provincial debate competitions. Only a few that had experienced national or international level competition. Competition allows students to exchange idea and knowledge pertaining debate technique. Thus, it is important to boost Acehese students' participation in either national or international level competition.

Table. 3 Acehese students achievement in debate competitions as champion, 1st runner up, and 2nd runner up

Competition level	Frequency						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	> 5
City/Regency	44%	19%	20%	7%	2%	2%	6%
Province	61%	17%	13%	4%	4%	0%	2%
National	85%	6%	4%	4%	2%	0%	0%
International	96%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 3 shows that fewer students had received championship awards. In municipal level (city/regency level), there were 26% Acehese students who had not participated in such competition, and more Acehese students (44%) had not obtained any championship awards. This happened on the same way with provincial debate competition. It shows uneven distribution of good qualified debaters in Aceh. According to our observation, there were only some particular schools (namely Syiah Kuala University, Modal Bangsa Secondary School, Methodist Secondary School, SMAN 3 Banda Aceh Secondary School, and Fajar Harapan Secondary School) who have good qualified debaters and mostly topped all municipal and provincial debate competitions. These schools also had more access towards competitions. While for international competition, due to the lack of financial assistance, Acehese debaters could only afforded it when they were sponsored by Indonesian government after winning a national competition.

Table 4. Acehese students achievement in debate competitions as best speakers

Competition level	Frequency						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	> 5
City/Regency	70%	15%	7%	6%	0%	2%	0%
Province	91%	7%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
National	80%	15%	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%
International	98%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 4 shows Acehese students achievement in various level debate competition as best speakers. Best speaker awards are given to participants who could top the speaking score tabulation. The number of recipients depends on respective discretion of the competition committee. Some competition recognized 10 speakers to be awarded, but some only 3 or 1. There were only two debaters from Aceh who had represented Indonesia in World School Debating Championship, and both of them received best speaker awards [13,14].

3.4 Challenges of competitive debate proliferation in Aceh.

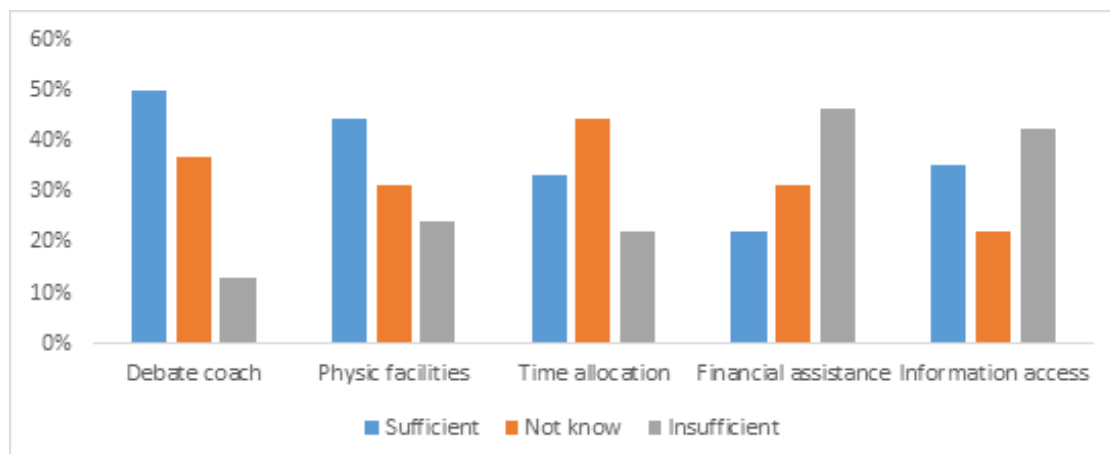


Fig. 4 Challenges of competitive debate proliferation in Aceh

Fig 4 shows that the students felt their schools had provided sufficient debate coach (50%), physic facilities (44%), and time allocation (33%). However many of them also answered “not know” in time allocation (44%), debate coach (37%), physic facilities (31%), and financial assistance (31%). According to our observation, there were no standardized debating curriculum applied in Aceh, thus they did not have information to compare with. Though there were some debating associations had generated the curriculum such as BEYOND Debating (an NGO that works on debate proliferation in national level). The students felt financial assistance (46%) and information access (43%) provided by their schools are insufficient. This shows the lack of supportive responses from their schools. Moreover, most (if not all) of regional or national debate competitions took place in the other provinces, thus made them to pay more then they should. Therefore the major challenges of debate proliferation in Aceh were the absence of standardized debating curriculum and the lacking financial assistance and information access.

3.5 Debate Competition Quality in Aceh

In this section we sorted and reduced the respondents into 42 who had only experienced municipal and provincial level debate competitions. And we received a chart as shown in fig. 5.

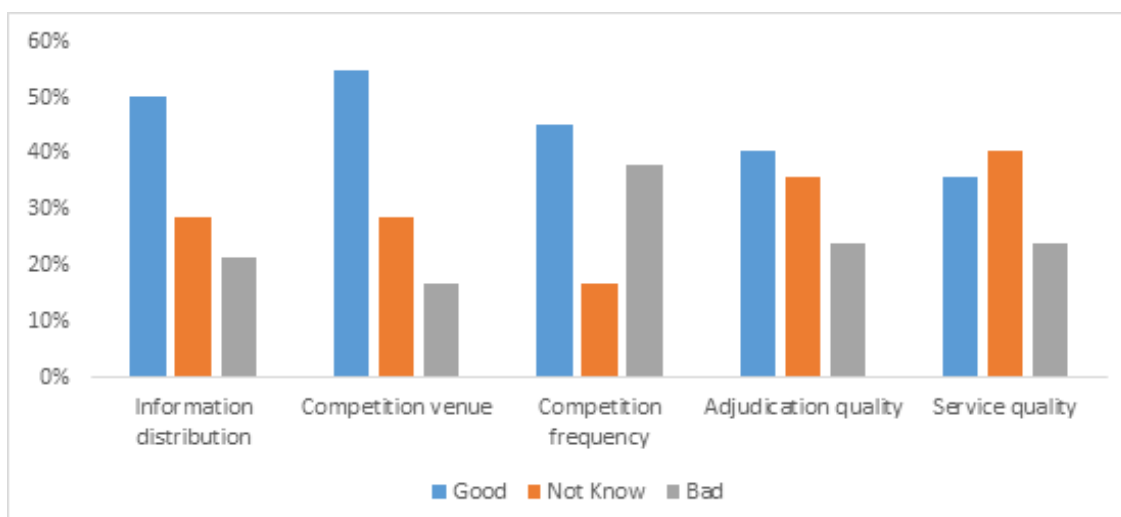


Fig. 5 Competitive debate impacts in Acehnese students ability of self-confidence, networking, social awareness, and competitiveness

Above charts explain the local competition had already had good information distribution (50%) and accessible competition location (55%). The competition frequency (45%) had been considered good by the students, though 38% others thought it needs to be improved. Adjudication quality had been considered good by 40% students, it shows the competitions were gone under fair judgement criteria. Good adjudication quality is important because it determines whether or not the competition could be a learning process for students [15]. Nevertheless 36% and 40% students do not know how to assess adjudication quality and service quality respectively. This shows that most Acehese students who had not experienced national level competition were not well informed about competitive debate standards.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper concludes competitive debate positively affected Acehese students ability in English, critical thinking, problem solving, logical thinking, team work, self-confidence, networking, social awareness, and competitiveness. However, debate practice is still uncommon in Aceh, it is well developed only in Kota Banda Aceh and its neighbour, Kabupaten Aceh Besar. Only a few that had experienced national and international competition. In municipal level, there were 26% Acehese students who had not participated in such competition and more Acehese students (44%) had not obtained any championship awards. The major challenges of competitive debate proliferation in Aceh are the absence of standardized debating curriculum and the lacking of financial assistance and information access. Debate competition quality in Aceh had been considered good by 40% students, it shows the competitions were gone under fair judgement criteria. Nevertheless 36% and 40% students do not know how to assess adjudication quality and service quality respectively.

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