FACTORS THAT AFFECT STUDENTS' SUCCESS IN ENGLISH DEBATES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aims to investigate the strategy of the English teacher coaching English class debates at SMAN (National Senior High School) Modal Bangsa in Aceh. It also aims to find out the factors behind the success of the Modal Bangsa students in English debating competitions. The participants of this research were 17 students and 4 teachers. The instruments for this research were an interview guide and observation sheets. The data were then analyzed by using analytical content analysis and document analysis. The findings showed that, in coaching the English debating teams the coaches used some approaches and methods of teaching such as opening the students' mindsets, grouping the students and creating good relationships between the team members and the coaches. Four methods of teaching were used by the coaches viz: teacher center, co-operative learning, plus minus interesting and practice debates. Besides these approaches and methods, there were some other factors that triggerred the students achievements in the English debating competitions such as the recruitment process, the coaches' background, the motivation of the students, the school environment and facilities, the classroom atmosphere, teamwork/the team relationships, the background of the students, the parental/community support/involvement and getting advice from a professional debater. Hence, in coaching English debate students, it is suggested that teachers should recruit members of English debate students using appropriate tests and an appropriate recruitment process. In order to make the learning process interesting, it is better to help students understand the advantages of participating in English debates and apply all of the above methods to learn about English debating and to support the progress of the English debating club.

Keywords: *students' achievements, English debating competition, skills.*

INTRODUCTION

Participating in English debating competitions requires student debaters to not only have the ability to express ideas well in English but also to develop good general knowledge plus the ability to analyze issues, to judge issues and to persuade people. In English debates, students will be faced with real problems faced by real people or real nations. Students need to be able to defend their position and persuade the public that their position is right. Therefore, English debating is the right medium for coaching the skills of students in argumentation for the international scale. This is true since the Directorate of Senior High

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School Development *(Direktorat Pembinaan Sekolah Menengah Atas)* of the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture *(Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Indonesia)* holds an annual English Senior High School English Debating Championship known as the National School Debating Championship (NSDC) to motivate senior high school students to develop their skills in verbal communication and argumentation.

As described in their school website, Modal Bangsa have gained many achievements. One of their popular achievements has been scoring in English Debating Competitions. Their achievements in these competition include winning the Aceh Provincial Debating Competition from 2008 to 2010, runner-up in the National Debating Competition in 2010, the winning team in the National Debating Competition in 2011, third place in the Ministry of Trade's Debating Competition in 2012 and also in the National Debating Competition in 2013. These are obviously very impressive achievements for any high school.

There are many factors that have influenced these students' achievements. Various researchers have investigated and found a number of factors that contribute to student achievements such as the efforts of students, previous schooling (Siegfried & Fels, 1979), parents' education, family income (Devadoss & Foltz, 1996), self-motivation, the ages of the students, learning preferences (Aripin et al., 2003), class attendance (Romer, 1993), and entry qualifications. These factors have significant effects on the students' academic performance in various settings (Mlambo, 2011, p. 81).

According to the Jogja Debating Forum Team (2014), there are some steps to start managing a good debating club. The first step is to start a team. In starting a team there are some factors needed including the bare necessities viz: a team room, recruiting of members, the information meetings and building support from the school i.e. the teachers, the school administration, the principal's bottom line and of course the parents. The second step is to run the team. This step includes recruitment and retention of members, weekly meetings, and establishing partnerships and the third is external resources. This step includes seminars and workshops, getting assistance from debating experts and communities.

Based on the above, I wanted to find out how the teachers trained the students to learn how to perform in English debates, also the factors that triggerred the students' achievements in English debating competitions at Modal Bangsa Senior High School, Aceh.

Research Questions
1. How do teachers at Modal Bangsa Senior High School coach their students for debating in English?
2. What factors have influenced Modal Bangsa Senior High School students' achievements in English debating competitions?

Research Objectives
1. To find out how the teachers at Modal Bangsa Senior High School coach their students for debating in English.
2. To find out the factors that have influenced Modal Bangsa Senior High School students' achievements in English debating competitions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Quality

Agyeman (1993) as cited in Etsev (2005, p. 2) has stated that a teacher who does not have both academic and professional teaching qualifications would undoubtedly have a negative influence on the teaching and learning of her subjects. He further stated that a teacher who is academically and professionally qualified, but works under unfavorable working environment would be less dedicated to his work and could thus be less productive than a teacher who is unqualified but works under a favorable environment.

Class Size

Kraft (1994, p. 98) in his study of the ideal class size and its effects on effective teaching and learning in Ghana concluded that class sizes above 40 have negative effects on students' achievements. Asiedu-Akrofi (1978, p. 163) have indicated that since children and teachers have differences in motivation, interests and abilities and also differ in health, personal and social adjustment and creativity; good teaching is generally best done in classes with smaller numbers that allow for individual attention.

School Facilities

Chan (1996) conducted a study on the impact of physical environment on students' success. This study classified 165 Georgian schools into one of three categories viz: modern learning, obsolete learning, or half modern learning environment. Other than building age, differences in the three categories included lighting, color schemes, air control and acoustic levels. As one might expect, Chan found student achievements to be highest in modern learning environments and lowest in the obsolete learning environments. Chan concluded that technology and adaptabilities of modern environments better equipped students for success and that to ignore that fact was to disregard the physical difficulties of learning.

Parental Involvement

Epstein's framework of six major types of parental involvement is among the most useful tools developed in that field so far for defining parental involvement practices and linking them with certain types of outcomes (Epstein, 1995, in Booth (1995). This widely accepted framework is a guide to help educators develop comprehensive family-school partnerships. The six types of parental involvement include:

> Parenting (helping families with child rearing and parenting skills),
> Communicating (developing effective home-school communications),
> Volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school),
> Learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula),
> Decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school councils and committees), and
> Collaborating with the community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community).

Each type of involvements encompasses a variety of practices to be undertaken by teachers, parents, and students and is theoretically linked with a variety of distinct outcomes for students, teachers, and parents as well.

Students' Basic Skills

According to Harvey-Smith (2011, p. 8), there are some basic skills that must be mastered by students who will join the class debates. The basic skills can be summarized as SALSA (Speaking, Arguing, Listening, Synthesizing, and Arranging). He has also stated that:

"Speaking means talking loudly, fluently and without hesitation.
Arguing means condensing what you have to say into persuasive point(s).
Listening means hearing and understanding the points made by others.
Synthesizing means matching the points you and the others have made.
Arranging means structuring your points into a persuasive speech."

Harvey-Smith (ibid) also gave some suggestions to beginning debaters. The suggestions are switch (willingness to speak in front of class), bluff (the ability to express your opinion toward one problem by speaking), change the world (primarily a speaking and arguing exercise), and balloon a debate. In addition to this, the knowledge of the topic and the rethorical pattern of the debate are important for students to show their ability to defense their idea and at the same time to contradict the opponents' argument in a structured way (Samad, 2016; Samad & Fitriani, 2016; Samad & Adnan, 2016; Samad, 2013).

Learning Style

Collinson (2000) conducted a study amongst elementary students to investigate the influence of learning style on academic achievement. The sample of 110 students was selected randomly from public school students in grades three, four and five. The researcher used a learning style inventory developed by Dunn and Dunn (1972) to assess the students' learning styles. The Academic achievements of the students was based on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) composite scores which were obtained from student cumulative progress folders. A one way ANOVA was used to measure the relationship between the learning style and the academic achievement. The results showed significant differences between academic achievements with three out of twenty two learning style elements. The study concluded that low achievers prefer to learn in a formal classroom with peers during the afternoon, whereas high achievers preferred studying alone with self-directed objectives.

Students' Attitude

Kara (2009) as cited in Alzwari (2012, p. 121) has stated that positive attitudes lead to the exhibition of positive behaviors toward courses of study, with participants absorbing themselves in courses and striving to learn more. Such students are also observed to be more eager to solve problems, to acquire the information and skills useful for daily life and to engage themselves emotionally.

Shams (2008) conducted a study attempting to investigate students' attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards the learning of English. The findings underlined that the students had affirmative attitudes and high enthusiasm towards English. This also highlighted that most

of them showed positive attitudes towards the English language and its learning which, in turn, emphasized the value of English language efficiency in their daily life.

Teamwork/Team Relationships

Fisher, Hunter and Macrosson (1997), Johnson and Johnson (1995, 1999), Parker (1990) and Harris and Harris (1996) as cited in Luca and Tarricone (2002, p. 641) have said that teamwork relies upon individuals working together in a cooperative environment to achieve common team goals through sharing knowledge and skills. The literature consistently highlights that one of the essential elements of a team is its focus toward a common goal and a clear purpose. Teams are an integral part of many organizations and should be incorporated as part of the delivery of tertiary units.

Teaching Method

Schwerdt and Wuppermann (2011) used data from the TIMSS 2003 wave for the United States to contrast the effect of lecture-style teaching with that of solving problems in class on standardized test scores. The authors found that teachers who spent relatively more time on lecture-style teaching were associated with higher achievements of students. Second, Lavy (2011) used student survey data from Israel to examine the effect of five aggregate teaching practices on standardized test scores. He found that two of these practices - i.e. "instilment of knowledge" and "instilment of applicative, analytical and critical skills", which he likens to "traditional teaching" and "modern teaching," respectively, are positively related to achievements of students. The author concluded that traditional and modern teaching approaches do not necessarily crowd each other out as is commonly thought, but that both may co-exist in education production programs.

Motivation

Gottfried (1990) found a relationship between motivation and achievement, but she maintains that the causal relationship works in the opposite direction. Similar to results from other studies, Gottfried found that elementary-age children with higher academic intrinsic motivation tend to have higher achievements and IQ, more positive perceptions of their academic competence, and lower academic anxiety.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This qualitative study briefly explores how the teachers coached the English debating students and how the English debating teams from Modal Bangsa Senior High School gained their achievements in local and national debating competitions. For this qualitative research, the writer collected, analyzed and interpreted data descriptively in order to investigate the particular phenomena of interest deeply.

Participants

The participants in this research were 9 students in the English debating class and their coach. There were two English debating teams, the junior English debating team with 6 boys

plus 3 girl students and the senior English debating team with 9 girls known as the Srikandi team.

Technique of Data Collection

To collect the data, the writer used interviews and observation techniques appropriate for the purposes of this research.

Interviews

The interview is a technique that the writer used to get information from the students about their perceptions toward peer assessment. In order to get actual and factual data, the time and place of the interviews were set as well as possible to prevent the teacher from feeling under pressure and/or being inconvenience during the interview process. The interview with the teacher was tape recorded while the student interviews were also done at the school.

Observations

After gathering the data from the interviews, the writer conducted observations to verify that the teachers coaching the English debating teams actually used those strategies while coaching the students and recorded what was observed using an observation sheet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results
Process of Coaching
Opening the Students' Mindsets

In preparing the English debating students, the coaches started to open the students' mindset about the importance and the advantages of English debating. Opening their mindsets is important, because the students should know the importance and the advantages of the English debating club of Modal Bangsa. Besides the commitment, the coach made the relationship students become familiar.

Grouping the Students

The coaches divided the students into two groups, the junior group/team and the senior group/team. The junior group were trained from the beginning. This meant that the coach introduced them to what a debate is, what the rules are and what are the guidelines for English debates. After introducing the rules and guidelines for English debates, they taught the students basic knowledge about debating including the definition of the affirmative team, the negative team, the counter plan, the processes of critique and the steps in an English debate. This coaching took six months before the coaches started to teach them about the skills for debating. For the senior group, the coaches started coaching them in debating skills from the start, these included public speaking, flowing speech, organizing arguments, preparing as a team, cross-examination, research, evidence, rebuttals, briefings, adapting to judges and audiences and verbal sparring.

Creating Good Relationships

The coaches created good relationships with their English debating group students. After the coaching processes, the students usually had a conversation with the coach about their difficulties during the English debate training processes. The students would tell the coach about their difficulties, and in the next meeting these difficulties would be explored. These conversations were very friendly and relaxed like father-child relationships.

Methods of Teaching

The techniques used by the coaches, based on the writer's observation in the field, included the teacher centered technique, co-operative learning, plus minus interesting technique, the debate sparring technique and practice debates.

Factors that Encouraged High Level Students' Achievements
The Recruitment Process

The recruitment process was carried out in several steps viz: a public speaking test, an insight test and an interview. In the public speaking test the coach asked each student to speak to the group for at least 5 minutes about a current issue. The coach wanted to know the students' ability in speaking, such as manner of speech, pronunciation, suitable words, intonation, body language and gestures. In the general insight test, the coach gave them 20 questions about general insights. This test aimed to measure their knowledge about up-to-date issues in the world. The last step, the interview was aimed to find out their seriousness and motivation for learning and practising English debating.

The recruitment was done in class X, because there was then enough time to prepare them for competitions in the following academic year. After the recruitment process was done, the coach selected nine students with the highest total scores from the tests.

Backgrounds of the Coaches

The backgrounds of the coaches were interesting, they were professional coaches who had been certified and had much experience in coaching English debating. For example, one of the coaches was an adjudicator in the National School Debating Competition (NSDC). He started his carrier as an Accredited Adjudicator for two years (2013-2015) and then achieved the higher level as an Invited Adjudicator (2015 - until now).

Motivation

The English debating group students of MOSA appear highly motivated to practice learning to debate in English. They do not need to be told to read by their coaches to read in English, they are very keen readers, especially reading articles related to their interests. Besides being interested in learning to debate well in English, they also have high learning awareness.

School Environment and school Facilities

Modal Bangsa Senior High School is a boarding school. It has a good location with a good environment to support the teaching-learning processes. It has good views, a lot of trees ruffled by soft zephyrs and is far from the crowd. Furthermore, this school has high discipline, so that all students follow the teaching-learning processes. Besides, Modal Bangsa

Senior High School has a high standard of facilities to support the students including laboratories, a gallery, a *mushalla* (Prayer room), a library, an auditorium, sports fields and a dining room and kitchen, and dormitories and a waiting room.

Classroom Atmosphere

This school has a good classroom atmosphere; the students are happy learning English debating with their coaches who make the process of learning English debating more interesting. Hence they enjoy and pay full attention to learning to debate in English.

Teamwork and Team Relationship

Modal Bangsa Senior High School has solid student English debating teams with strong commitment to learning how to win debates. The members of the team maintain good communications and do not let their egos take over. The members listen to all suggestions from team members and coaches and discuss and make decisions as a team. When a member makes a mistake, the members discuss how to avoid such mistakes in future.

Background of Students

The Modal Bangsa English debating group students are selected students. They are in the top 10 in their class. Besides, their parents are mostly highly educated; all of their fathers are graduates and a lot of their mothers are too. They mostly graduated from famous universities, such as Syiah Kuala University, North Sumatera University, Trisakti University, Lhokseumawe Polytechnic, and IAIN Ar-Raniry (now Ar-Raniry Islamic State University).

Parental/Community Involvement

Parental/community involvement was a factor that contributed to the students' achievements in the English debating competitions. As mentioned, their parents are educated persons, and their parents obviously supported their children's academic activities. The parents gave them permission and funded their trips when they participated in English debating competitions.

Invited a Professional Debater

The English debating coaches at Modal Bangsa invited senior English debating students who participated in the World School Debate Championship (WSDC) to share many insights with the Modal Bangsa English debating students. Some of what they shared were lessons from recent International English Debating Championships like current issues, strategy for analyzing the motion, strategy for the debating process, and ways to win debating championships.

Discussions
Coaching for an English Debating Club

In coaching to win English debates, the coach willl usually use some approaches and teaching methods like open the students' mindsets, grouping the students into groups and creating good relationships. Woolfolk (2007) has written that the teacher's attitude and motivation play a pivotal role in the teaching-learning process. They play a significant role in shaping the classroom environment which has an impact on a student's self-efficacy which

in turn influences student behavior. All of these factors which can be loosely categorized as environmental and personal factors, and interact and play off against each other in a cyclical way.

Besides these approaches, the coaches also used some other methods of teaching in coaching the students like teacher at the center, co-operative learning, plus minus interesting and debate sparring. Johnson and Johnson as cited in Siegel (2005, p. 220) have stated that co-operative learning "involves students working together in small groups to complete shared academic tasks [and is] characterized by division of labor, interdependence to reach a mutual goal and group rewards for goal attainment."

Cookiln and Wendy (2012) have stated that PMI is a strategy of teaching language, usually a second language, in which the target language allows students to rate decisions and outcomes as plus, minus, or interesting; then, the teacher asks the students to define the plus, minus, or interesting and the students proceed using English. By using the PMI chart the students can further develop their ideas.

Success Factors that Help Teams Win English Debating Competitions

The recruitment process is one success factor that helps teams win English debating competitions in particular the way coaches recruit the members of the English debating teams by using tests such as the public speaking test, the general insight test and the motivation interview. According to Brown (2001, p. 384), a test is a method to measure a person's ability or knowledge in a given domain. Furthermore, Burns (1994, p. 74) has stated that the purpose of an interview is to conduct a conversation that explores the researcher's focus and ideas.

The coaches of the English debating teams were professional coaches who had had many achievements in coaching English debating teams. Borman and Steven (2005) have used multi-level models (students nested in classrooms) to show that classes taught by higher quality teachers produced higher mean achievements than those taught by lower quality teachers. Teacher quality was operationalized as experience and evaluation ratings.

The Modal Bangsa English debating teams have good teamwork and good team relationships. They have good communication, management, goals, commitment and composition. According to many researchers cited in Luca and Tarricone (2002, pp. 642-643), there are various attributes for successful teamwork such as commitment to team success and shared goals, interdependence, interpersonal skills, open communication and positive feedback, appropriate team composition and commitment to team processes.

Parental support for students to participate in English debating championships is proven by their giving permission for their children to participate and by their willingness to pay the costs for their participation in those events. Henderson and Mapp (2002) cited in Saleem and Khan (2013) have written that in general, parental involvement is associated with children's higher achievements in language and mathematics, enrolment in more challenging programs, greater academic persistence, better behavior, better social skills and adaptation to school, better attendance and lower drop-out rates.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

As a result of this study, several factors were found to affect students' achievements in English debating competitions hence several conclusions can be drawn.

The first conclusion is that the coaches at Modal Bangsa used various approaches and techniques in coaching the English debating student groups. The approaches that were usually used by the coaches included opening the students' mindsets, grouping the students and creating good relationships. In coaching English debates the coach also used several methods of teaching – i.e. teaching center, PMI (Plus Minus Interesting) technique, Co-operative Learning, Debate Sparring and practice debate sessions.

The second factors that led Modal Bangsa students to high levels of achievements included the recruitment process, the experience of the debating coaches, the high motivation of the students, the stimulating school environment and facilities, the classroom atmosphere, the teamwork and good team relations, the favourable background of the students, the parental/community support and getting tips from debaters with competition experience.

Suggestions

In this study the data showed that the English Debating Club at Modal Bangsa Senior High School had good management for coaching and learning at their English debating club. Here are some suggestions for other English debating clubs, English debating students, researchers and readers.

Firstly, for an English debate coach, the writer suggests recruiting the members of English debating clubs by giving potential candidates some tests to evaluate their ability and their commitment learning and practicing English debating. Hopefully, the coach(es) will make the English debating club an extracurricular activity at the school. Thus there will be routine coaching and practice debates, this will help the coach to prepare the students to face English debating championship events.

Secondly, for potential English debating students, they should understand the purpose of the debating process. It will help them to face the issues around them, to respond and to become critical thinkers.

Thirdly, for other teachers, the writer suggests applying the steps above for coaching English debateing clubs at senior high schools and developing their ability for practicing English debating.

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