

## APPLYING DEBATE TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS FOR 10TH GRADERS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b> 16/5/2023	The ability to communicate in English, an international language, is of great concern due to globalization and integration. Therefore, teaching English speaking has been increasingly important. In addition, debates have been proven to be an effective method to improve students' speaking skills, which inspired the researcher to conduct formal research to see whether debates could be used in the context of a high school in Thai Binh province. The research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of applying debate techniques to improve English speaking skills for 10th graders at a high school in Thai Binh province. The quasi-experimental method was applied to find out the current situation of teaching English speaking skills and to what extent debate technique can improve English speaking skills for 10th graders. The data collection instruments consist of questionnaires and tests. Sixty students were divided into experimental and control groups. The treatment (using debate techniques in speaking lessons) was applied to students in the experimental group only. The higher results of the experimental group helped the researcher identify the effectiveness of using debate techniques to improve students' speaking skills.
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## ÁP DỤNG KỸ THUẬT TRANH BIỆN ĐỂ NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG NÓI CHO HỌC SINH LỚP 10

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
<b>Ngày nhận bài:</b> 16/5/2023	Khả năng giao tiếp bằng ngôn ngữ quốc tế là tiếng Anh đang rất được quan tâm trong bối cảnh toàn cầu hóa và hội nhập quốc tế. Vì vậy, việc dạy kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh ngày càng trở nên quan trọng. Ngoài ra, tranh biện đã được chứng minh là một phương pháp hiệu quả để cải thiện kỹ năng nói của học sinh, điều này đã thôi thúc tác giả tiến hành nghiên cứu chính thức để xem liệu tranh biện có thể được sử dụng trong bối cảnh của một trường trung học phổ thông ở tỉnh Thái Bình hay không. Nghiên cứu nhằm mục đích khảo sát hiệu quả của việc áp dụng kỹ thuật tranh biện để nâng cao kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh cho học sinh lớp 10 tại một trường THPT ở tỉnh Thái Bình. Nghiên cứu bán thực nghiệm được áp dụng để tìm hiểu thực trạng dạy kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh và kỹ thuật tranh biện có thể nâng cao kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh cho học sinh lớp 10 ở mức độ nào. Các công cụ thu thập dữ liệu bao gồm bảng câu hỏi và bài kiểm tra. Sáu mươi sinh viên được chia thành các nhóm thực nghiệm và đối chứng. Liệu pháp (sử dụng kỹ thuật tranh biện trong giờ học nói) chỉ được áp dụng cho học sinh nhóm thực nghiệm. Kết quả cao hơn của nhóm thực nghiệm đã giúp tác giả xác định được hiệu quả của việc sử dụng kỹ thuật tranh biện để cải thiện kỹ năng nói của học sinh.
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## 1. Introduction

Speaking is a very important skill to be learned when a person studies a new language because it helps to communicate with others, express ideas and give opinions. The ability to speak proficiently is considered one of the most challenging language learning skills. According to prevailing beliefs, verbal communication is considered to hold the highest significance among the four essential language proficiencies. However, several students claim to have invested numerous years in studying the English language yet still struggle to speak it effectively and coherently [1].

For various reasons, Vietnamese students find it difficult to learn how to speak English. First of all, classes frequently have too many students. It might be challenging for a teacher to focus on every student in a large class when teaching English because each one needs individual attention. The second issue is that because Vietnamese is a tonal language, it might be challenging for students to speak English with the right rhythms and intonation. Because of this, it is frequently impossible for native English speakers to understand Vietnamese students when they speak English. Another issue is that students are frequently afraid of making mistakes when speaking a foreign language. However, speaking a language is the only way to learn it. Although Vietnamese students are taught English in educational institutions and can attain good grades on assessments, a large number of them are still insecure about conversing in the language.

For the above issues, the English teacher needs to be aware of creative approaches and carefully chosen teaching methods, especially when it comes to training speaking skills. Dobson [2] asserts that debate style is one of the methods for enhancing speaking. Whether it's a scientific, historical, theological, or political debate, speaking skills are improved. It can aid in the intellectual and ethical growth of its participants by pressing them to reach justifiable decisions in which they must critically examine difficult issues and challenge presumptions. Debatable topics encourage and hone communication skills that enable people to speak for themselves.

Debate is popular as an extracurricular activity for competition. Debate, according to Harahap [3], is an activity that is able to develop the skill of communication by organizing some arguments to convince and entertain audiences to prove that one's arguments upper hands the opposition. In addition, Sanonguthai [4] defined debate as delivering opposing arguments toward a current issue by two teams to prove to the audience that their ideas are better than the opposite team's cases. The purpose of a debate is not about seeking an agreement between two disputing parties when they leave the debate room. Instead, through the debate, others will make a judgment to support one of the two [5]. Freeley and Steinberg [6] define debates as "... the process of considering multiple viewpoints and arriving at a judgment...".

Debate is a method of discussing ideas or opinions that two rivals are trying to defend. It can be used as a tool in EFL(English foreign language) classes for English language skills practice in real-life situations for learners. . It is a communicative interaction that involves different perspectives by delivering critical arguments [7]. Rubiati explained that debate is an activity in which the students are required to defend their positions on the topic of a particular issue [8]. Similarly, Alasmari and Ahmed [9] also stated that debate was a method of conveying arguments using different strategies of logical thinking to build ideas in the favor of persuading audiences and guiding them to the conclusion of the debate issue.

"Debate" has been viewed as a potentially successful spoken pedagogical technique that can structure and feed the learning process in ways that can result in language growth [10], [11]. During a dispute, speaking commands the lion's share of attention. In addition to scheduled speech, debaters frequently speak impromptu in order to respond to the arguments of their opponents, particularly during the "clash" stage.

Musfirah [12] used a quantitative method to find out whether teaching speaking by using the debate method is effective for the students' speaking ability. The mean score obtained by the students in the post-test (2.470) was greater than that in pre-test (1.529) proving that debate method was effective and interesting to use in teaching English speaking.

B. D. Vu and H. T. Duong [13] finds out the current situation of applying debate in speaking lessons and proposed solutions to improve English speaking response for the second-year English major students at Thai Nguyen University of Education. A. V. Nguyen [14] investigates into the implementation of debate techniques and claims that it is useful to improve students' speaking skills.

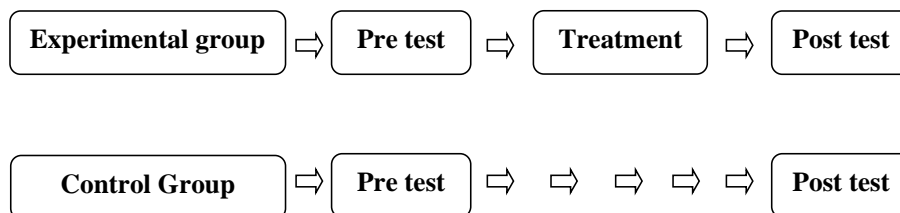
Studies have shown that participating in debates improves students' speaking abilities. According to the debaters in El Majidi, de Graaff, and Janssen's (2018) study [15], debate enhanced their speaking skills by a mean of 4.26 on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants in the studies by Zare and Othman [16] claimed that debate had improved their speaking abilities.

Therefore, the researcher is interested to conduct research on applying debate technique to improve English speaking skills for 10th graders at a high school in Thai Binh Province"

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research setting and participants

The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of applying debate technique to improve speaking skills for 10th graders at a high school. To achieve research objectives, the author designed the study according to the quasi-experimental method. According to Nunan [17], "experiment is a procedure for testing a hypothesis by setting up a situation in which the strength of the relationship between variable can be tested". He also classified three types of experiment, pre-experimental, quasi-experimental, and true experimental research designs. Quasi-experiment refers to the study that collects information from the pre and post-tests between the control and experimental groups of participants. This is also suitable for this study as the researcher used both the control and experimental groups. The respondents were not selected randomly as the researcher, also the teacher had no right to rearrange the students in her class. Afterwards, the test results were compared to look for any difference in their performance that can explain the impacts of the treatment. In this study, the treatment is using debate technique, which is applied to 10th graders. The treatment in each group is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** *Non-Randomized Control Group Design*

The treatment (debate technique) was applied for experimental group only. The treatment time lasted one term and was divided into eight lessons.

The respondents of the study were sixty high school students, who were divided into two groups (experimental and control groups), and ten English high school teachers. The students were in the school year 2022-2023.

### 2.2. Research instrument

The data collection instruments consist of surveys (questionnaires) and tests. The tests are created to examine the difference of student's ability after using debate techniques in speaking lessons in 4 aspects: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication. Sixty students of the same level were divided into experimental and control groups. The treatment (using debate techniques in speaking lessons) was applied to students in the experimental group only.

### 2.3. Data collection and analysis

Regarding data collection, three questionnaires were used to get the information related to the current situation of teaching English-speaking skills and the use of debates in speaking lessons. The questionnaire comprises of a set of questions in the form of multiple-choice and rating-scale items. The multiple-choice allows the participants to select from various options, while the rating-scale involves respondents to choose from a range of options, categorized from poor to good. In addition, students were required to complete the questionnaire and tests to identify the students' attitudes towards the use of debate techniques in speaking lessons as well as how the use of debates helped them improve their speaking skills. The treatment time lasted one term and was divided into eight lessons.

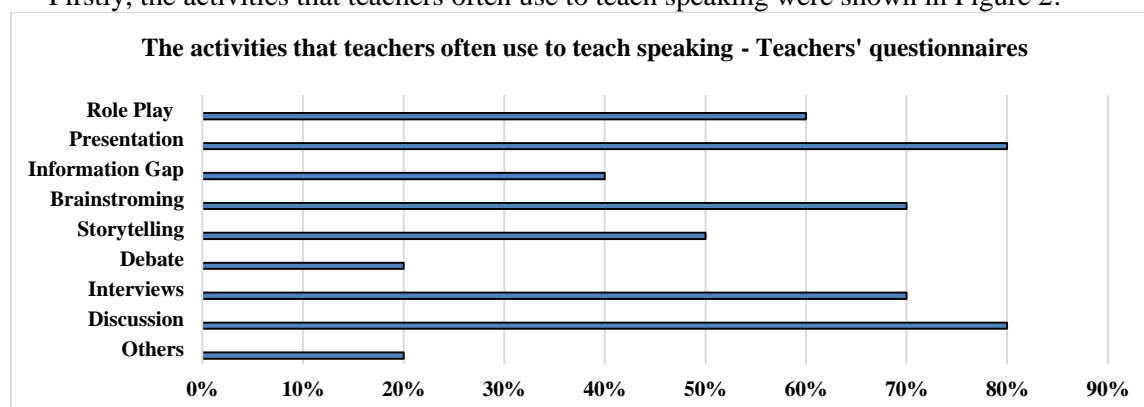
As for data analysis, the survey responses were gathered and entered into Excel for processing. The quantitative analysis was applied to a number of parametric figure types. To assess the effectiveness of applying debate technique to improve speaking skills for 10th graders, statistics from both tests were analyzed and compared.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Results

#### 3.1.1. The current situation of teaching English-speaking skills

Firstly, the activities that teachers often use to teach speaking were shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** *The activities that teachers often use to teach speaking*

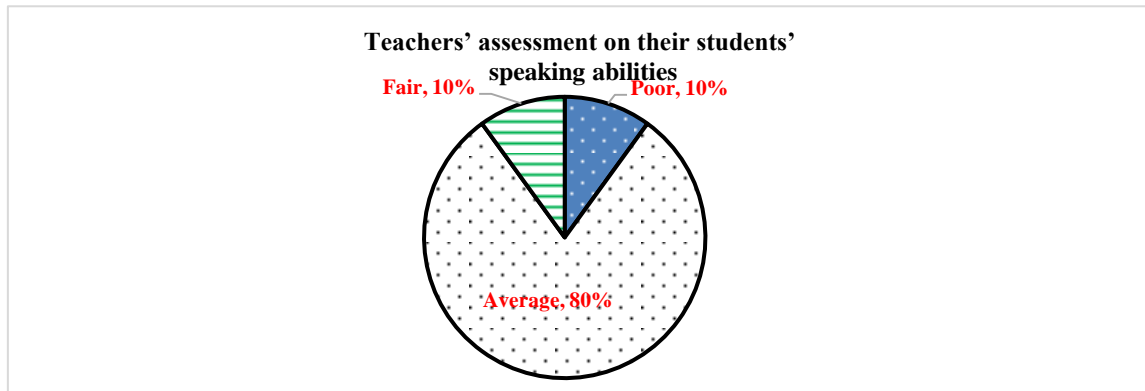
Figure 2 illustrates the activities that were often used by the teachers to teach speaking. Discussions and presentations were used the most frequently, accounting for the same percentage (80%). In second place were interviews and brainstorming, both of which took up 70%. Other activities selected by the teachers were role-play (60%), storytelling (50%), information gap (40%), and debate (20%). 20% of the teachers also added two more activities that they used in teaching speaking, including picture description and reporting.

Secondly, the teachers' questionnaire collected information on the teachers' assessment on their students' speaking abilities, which were demonstrated in Figure 3.

In speaking classes, teachers frequently use diverse criteria to evaluate their students' speaking proficiencies, ultimately assigning objective grades. This assessment methodology also encompasses the tracking of students' progress and furnishing them with constructive feedback to foster their linguistic development. The aforementioned criteria typically encompass elements such as pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, and intonation.

Generally speaking, the teachers assessed their students' speaking abilities ranging from poor to fair. Specifically, 80% of the teachers rated that their students had average speaking abilities in

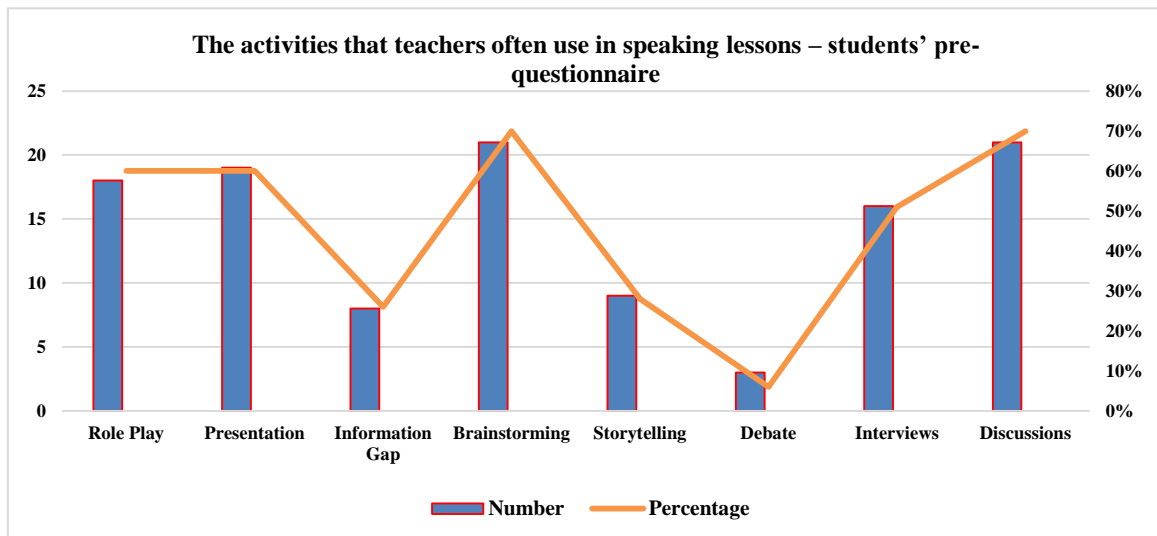
general. 10% of the teachers believed that their students' level of speaking was fair, and the same number thought that their students were poor at speaking.



**Figure 3.** Teachers' assessment on their students' speaking abilities

The activities that teachers often used in speaking lessons were also collected in the students' pre-questionnaire.

The information on the activities that the teachers often used in speaking lessons collected from the students was quite different from the one collected from the teachers. While according to the teachers, they used discussions and presentations most frequently, 70% of the students thought brainstorming and discussions were used most (Figure 4). Presentation and role-play were in second place. Though there were some differences in the most frequently used activities, the least frequently used one remained the same with storytelling, information gap, and debate.

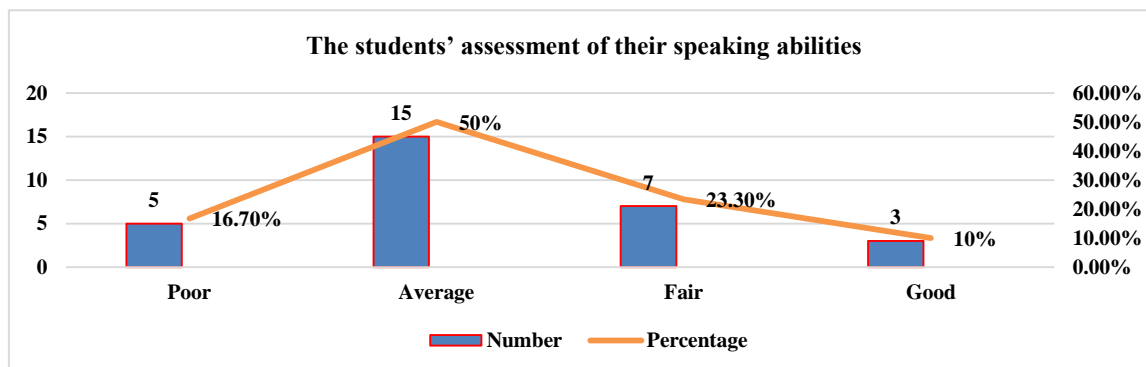


**Figure 4.** The activities that teachers often use in speaking lessons – students' pre-questionnaire

The pre-questionnaire also collected information on how the students assessed their speaking skills, which was shown in Figure 5.

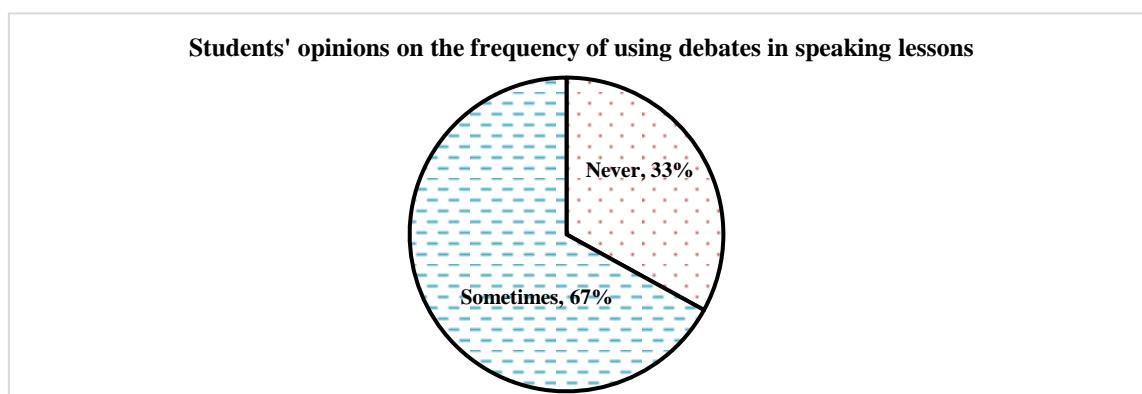
After each speaking class, students are provided with grades and feedback by their teacher. These assist individuals in assessing their own speaking skills, identifying their areas of weakness, and dedicating more effort towards enhancing those deficits. According to Figure 5, only ten percent of the students thought that their speaking abilities were good. Half of the students believed that they had average speaking levels. 40% of them rated their speaking skills

were fair and poor, which in turn accounted for 23.3% and 16.7%. These results are in accordance with the data collected in the teachers' questionnaire.



**Figure 5.** *The students' assessment of their speaking abilities*

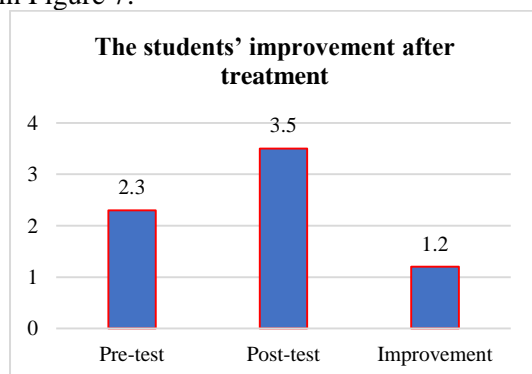
Figure 6 described the students' opinions on the frequency of using debates in speaking lessons. Specifically, according to 67% of the students, debates were used occasionally while the rest (33%) stated that their teacher never used debates in speaking lessons. The statistics reveal the fact that debates were not popular activities among teachers.



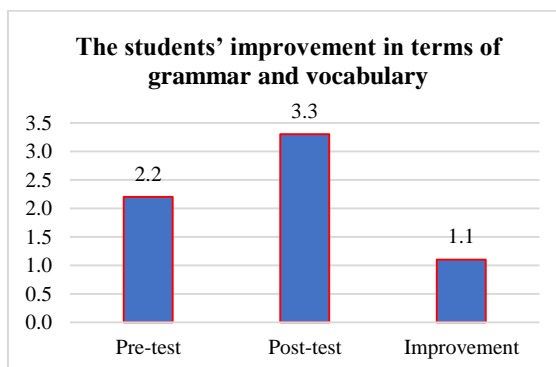
**Figure 6.** *Students' opinions on the frequency of using debates in speaking lessons*

### 3.1.2. How debate techniques help improve students' speaking abilities

The total mean scores of the pretest, the posttest, and the score improvement were illustrated in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** *The students' improvement of speaking skills*



**Figure 8.** *The students' improvement in terms of grammar and vocabulary*

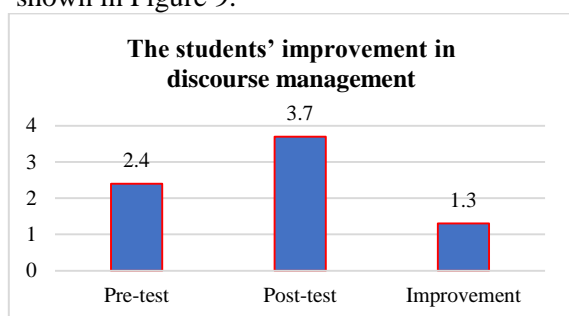
As illustrated in Figure 7, the total mean score of the pretest was 2.3 (the scale was from 0 - 5) while it was 3.5 in the post-test. It means that the result of the posttest was 1.2 higher than that of the pretest, demonstrating the improvement of students' speaking skills.

To investigate further how debates helped to improve each aspect of students' speaking skills, the researcher also compared the improvement in grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and communicative interaction.

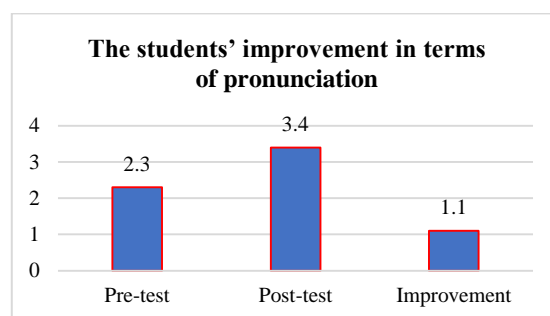
Firstly, the difference in students' grammar and vocabulary before and after treatment was compared in Figure 8.

As could be seen in Figure 8, the posttest mean score of students in the experimental group was 3.3 while it was 2.2 in the pre-test. The difference showed a significant improvement of students in this aspect.

Secondly, the difference in students' discourse management before and after treatment was shown in Figure 9.



**Figure 9.** *The students' improvement in terms of discourse management*



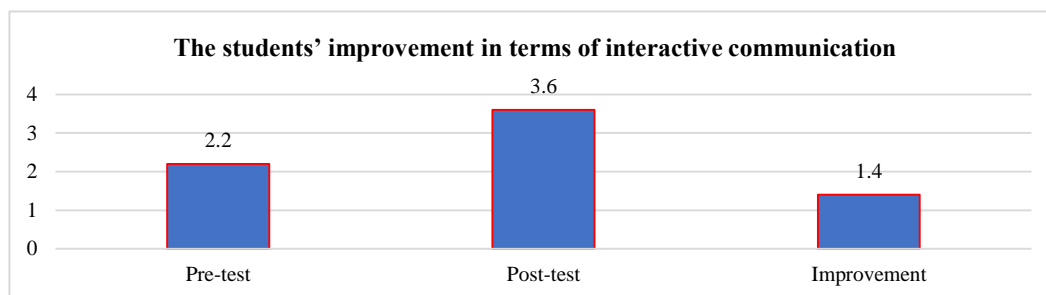
**Figure 10.** *The students' improvement in terms of pronunciation*

Figure 9 showed a considerable difference between students' pre-test and post-test results. The deviation of 1.3 showed that students had a great improvement in discourse management.

Thirdly, Figure 10 illustrated the improvement in students' pronunciation before and after intervention.

Like grammar and vocabulary aspects, the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was 1.1, which is a meaningful number to denote the effectiveness of debate in improving students' pronunciation abilities.

Next, the enhancement in students' interactive communication before and after using debates was demonstrated in Figure 11.



**Figure 11.** *The students' improvement in terms of interactive communication*

As demonstrated in Figure 11, the students' total mean score of interactive communication in the pre-test was 2.2 but in the post-test, it was 3.6. The difference between the results was 1.4, which means that debate techniques can help students greatly improve their interactive communication.

In short, the use of debate techniques could help students improve their speaking skills. Specifically, students' interactive communication, as well as discourse management, was considerably developed, followed by pronunciation and vocabulary, and grammar.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study reached the conclusion that both of the teachers and students were not interested in applying debate techniques in teaching and learning English speaking before treatment.

It has been proven that engaging in debates can significantly enhance students' vocabulary, reaction time, critical thinking abilities, and capacity to organize information post-treatment. The difference between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group and the deviation of the post-test scores between the experimental group and the control group proved the effectiveness of debates in improving students' speaking skills. Specifically, debates assisted students develop their communicative interaction and discourse management.

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