

Improving Productive Skills through TEE-based Debating

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ABSTRACT

I have three questions for Korean English teachers. “Who are the main heroes in the English classroom?” “Who should study in the English classroom?” “Who should speak in English in the English classroom?” I bet English teachers in Korea would answer the same way: “Absolutely students” However, I have a different answer: “Not only students, but also teachers!” The English classroom should be the playground for both students and teachers to enjoy English. When both of them enjoy the class together, students can improve self-studying skills and teachers can lead the students to the ceiling of the TEE (Teaching English in English) world. Without cooperation and collaboration between students and teachers, the English class limps along. Now, here is what we, as students and teachers, can do in order to achieve these goals. Through research on books, papers, and web-sites, I realized the high road to mastering English is making the classroom a fun place. By making learning fun, I can encourage my students to study English by themselves. But the question remains: “how to make learning fun?” The definite answers to this question can be ‘student-centered’, ‘activity-oriented’, ‘cooperation’, ‘authentic materials’, and finally the ‘teacher’. Struggling with these questions, I came up with the idea of debating. I concluded that by using English debate, I could create a fun but educational atmosphere for me and my students.

I. Introduction

I have three questions for Korean English teachers. “Who are the main heroes in the English classroom?” “Who should study in the English classroom?” “Who should speak in English in the English classroom?” I bet English teachers in Korea would answer the same way: “Absolutely students” However, I have a different answer: “Not only students, but also teachers!” The English classroom should be the playground for both students and teachers to enjoy English. In the classroom, students can be teachers, and vice versa. When both of them enjoy the class together, students can improve self-studying skills and teachers can lead the students to the ceiling of the TEE (Teaching English in English) world. Without cooperation and collaboration between students and teachers, the English class limps along. Now, here is what we, as students and teachers, can do in order to achieve these goals. Through research on books, papers, and web-sites, I realized the high road to mastering English is making the classroom a fun place. By making learning fun, I can encourage my students to study English by themselves. But the question remains: “how to make learning fun?” The definite answers to this question can be ‘student-centered’, ‘activity-oriented’, ‘cooperation’, ‘authentic materials’, and finally the ‘teacher’. Struggling with these questions, I came up with the idea of debating. I concluded that by using English debate, I could create a fun but educational atmosphere for me and my students.

II. Debating Class Model

There are many types of debating formats in the world. Through research I have developed one that works well for my students. The debating format we use has three main steps, Preparing, Debating, and Reviewing. Each debating session focuses on current issues and consists of eight to ten 50 minutes-classes. Furthermore, in order to make the class more productive, some basic regulations were put in place.

1. The Basis of Debating Class

Encouraging students to express their ideas in English is crucial to TEE policy. To achieve effective and interesting debating classes in TEE, some basic principles should be for both the students and the teacher.

A. The three classroom rules

- 1) Be proud!
- 2) Speak only in English!
- 3) Don't sleep!

B. Classroom setting: 24students are divided into 4groups in normal classes, and for the debating classes they are divided in different groups.

C. Team Composition

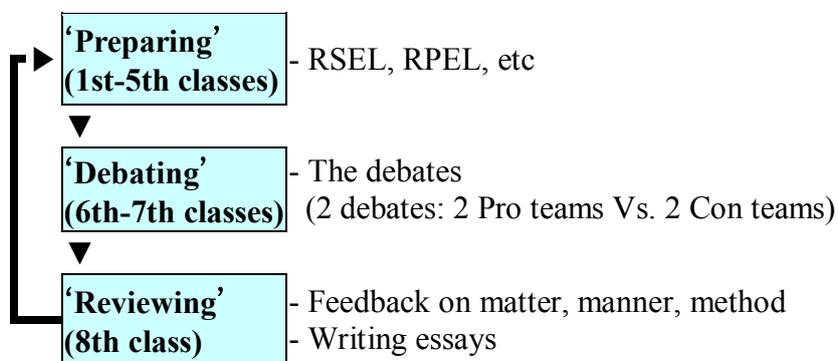
- 1) pro: the team whose opinion is for the debate issue
- 2) con: the team whose opinion is against to the debate issue
- 3) judges: the team who choose the debate winners
- 4) audience: the team who listen for grammatical errors

D. Debating Team Members (pro / con teams)

- 1) captain(C)
- 2) supporter 1(S1)- 3(S3)
- 3) final man(F.M.)
- 4) note taker(N.T.)

2. General Procedures and Activities

One complete debate session consists of eight to ten 50-minute classes. During each semester, I organize three or four debate sessions, following an issue extracted from the textbook. One debating session can be divided into three steps, 'Preparing', 'Debating', and 'Reviewing'. General procedures are as follows:



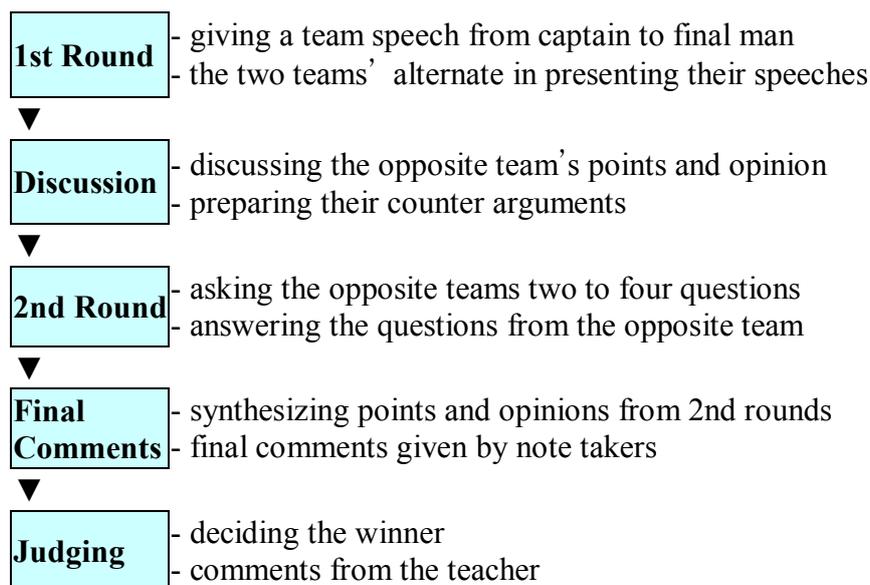
A. Preparing

Before the real debating classes, students learn background knowledge about the debating

issues through diverse interesting activities. These activities are based on the multiple intelligence theory in order to trigger each student's own intelligence. The teacher's job is to provide the students with a variety of activities that are appropriate to the students' individual ways of studying English.

B. Debating

Through their preparation classes, students gain a lot of background knowledge and supporting ideas. This means that the debate is just around the corner. One debate consists of five steps; 1st round, discussion, 2nd round, final comments, and judging. The steps are:



C. Reviewing

After two debates, the reviewing or feedback class takes place to make the next debate better. Each team has information about the previous debates, so they can present and share ideas about how effectively speakers delivered their speeches. They can also discuss their posture or tone of voice, how logical and persuasive the team's reasons were, and what was good and bad in general. The teacher writes all ideas on the board and finally gives some comments and encouragement for the next debate. Students then revise their own speeches into individual academic essays. There is one regulation for writing the essay. No first person pronoun can be used in the essay, which leads to more objective academic writing. After gathering all individual essays, the note taker writes the team essay. The note taker must consider cohesion and coherence in the team essay. Later, all individual and team essays are given to the teacher in order to be evaluated as a performance test.

3. Extra Activities

A. Essay Writing

The procedures of the first round in a debate are remarkably similar to the structure of the essay writing. The speeches from each member (from captain to final man), are altered a little and become the team essay. Note takers must consider cohesion and coherence in compiling the team essay. Later, team essays are given to the teacher in order to be evaluated as a performance test.

essay writing structure			team member's job
Introduction		◀▶	Captain
Body	Supporting Idea 1	◀▶	Supporter 1
	Supporting Idea 2	◀▶	Supporter 2
	Supporting Idea 3	◀▶	Supporter 3
Conclusion		◀▶	Final Man
editing & issuing		◀▶	Note Taker

B. Keeping a reading-diary

Debate classes can motivate students to study English by themselves and Teaching English in English (TEE) classes are really beneficial for the students. However, some drawbacks exist. Student-centered and activity-oriented classes may lack the proper amount of grammar instruction. So the students are encouraged to keep a reading diary every week. After reading approximately ten pages, they write any ideas about what they have read in their reading-diaries. They can express their feelings about the book, send a letter to the author or the protagonists, or describe the story by drawing pictures. They do not need to finish reading a whole book before they write in their diary. The purpose is to make students read a book every day, even if they read only a few pages each day. It is true that reading is a fundamental part of English learning. By expressing their opinions and feelings in their reading diaries, students can build up their vocabulary, develop their creativity and reinforce their grammar skills.

III. Obstacles and Possible Solutions

While applying the English debating method to my classes, my students and I often encounter obstacles which have been overcome. Even though we have solved many problems by reviewing the classes, some difficulties still remain unsolved. I am lucky, because thanks to these unsolved difficulties, I always challenge the students to find an effective way of making the debating classes more successful. This means that their teacher also has to constantly study and research in English education.

1. Lack of Confidence

It is not easy for students, who have hardly experienced English, to speak in English behind the podium. To encourage them to open their mouths in English, I emphasized the importance of confidence by showing them my English. Before urging students to stand behind the podium, I give them all the chances to speak in a smaller group during the preparing classes. Some students who felt extremely nervous were able to relieve their tensions by speaking English and then speak in a smaller group.

2. Speech Domination

Most teachers have experienced the classroom domination which means a few students dominate the class. This occurred when I began to use debate as a teaching tool, especially during the 2nd round of the debates. This meant that other students were deprived of their chances to talk from the debating table. To fairly distribute speaking chances to each student, I am now using two methods. One way is by devising the RSEL activity. During the RSEL activity, every student has to explain his or her summary in turn. Another way is by using chance cards during the 2nd round of debating. Each student has only three chance cards on the debating table. This means he or she can ask or respond at most three times during the 2nd round. Owing to these methods, all students are now sharing their chances equally.

3. Error Correction

There is no foreign teacher at my school, so all the students depend on me. However, I am not a native speaker, so it is hard to correct the students' errors and mistakes in their speeches and essays. At the beginning of this year, I decided and promised my students that I would do my best to correct most common errors and mistakes. This limited correction made my students less afraid of making mistakes and they now enjoy using English without fearing whether it is perfect or not.

IV. Students' Achievement

While using this debating model to teach English in English, I was very curious as to whether the students' test results would improve or not. At the beginning, I promised myself that I would be satisfied with teaching a class where the students and the teacher enjoyed English (even if test results did not improve). However, as time went by my curiosity grew enormously and I began to expect that my students might achieve good test results, because they were always doing what they enjoyed. Fortunately, as I predicted, the test results, which represent students' English abilities, have been gradually improving. In addition, the last survey results showed that most students were satisfied with the debating class and felt they were improving in English speaking and writing.

1. Survey Results

Here are two survey results from March and September.

Q1) How much do you enjoying English debating class?

59 students (83%) were satisfied with debating class. It proves that the majority of students enjoy debating class. Students considered English to be an unimportant subject before, but now they think English can be one of their friendly subjects.

Q2) Do you like English?

57 students (80%) were in favor of studying English in September. This result means that 20 students(28%) have positively changed their attitudes toward studying English during the research period.

Q3) How much do you think you are motivated to study English?

56 students (78%) were motivated to study English in September. This means 17 students (24%) have changed their minds toward studying English over the last several months.

Q4) What do you think of your English ability?

35 students (50%) thought they were good at English in September. According to the first survey, only 16 students (23%) answered positively. However, during the research, the number of students who are confident in their English has doubled.

Q5) Do you prepare or review English class after school?

38 students (53%) prepared or reviewed English class after school in September. According to the first survey, over 70% of students answered that they hardly prepared or reviewed the class. For the seven months, students’ attitudes have steadily been changing.

Q6) How often do you read an English book?

Thanks to the reading diary, 45 students (63%) are now reading a book more often than before. They have become aware of the importance of reading for the last six months. Even though keeping a reading diary is a students’ assignment for their performance test, most students do not feel that it is homework.

Q7) Do you think that group work is good for you and for studying English?

58 students (82%) thought that they benefited more from group activities than from individual works in September survey. They know how important and efficient group work is.

Q8) How much do you like the debating class?

54 students (76%) preferred the debating class which is conducted only in English. Amazingly about 75% of students debate in English.

At school, English (as one of subjects) is not considered as important as Science or Mathematics. In addition, students are not so good at speaking and writing in English. However, as time goes by, students are showing me a miracle. Two survey results tell me that generally students’ attitudes to studying English have changed in a positive way.

2. National Standard Test Results

According to the test result in March, only 2 students were below the average (5th grade), and most of the students’ English levels were relatively good (although differences in ability existed). Even though I was sure that English debate would be a good way to teach English in English, I was worried about the next test results.

Month	Grade	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	average
March	Students’ number	24	22	16	7	1	1	.	.	.	2.18(grade)
May		10	30	10	4	1	.	.	.	.	2.20(grade)
September		19	30	20	2	.	.	.	.	.	2.07(grade)

In May, 15 top students did not attend the second national test because they had to participate in another National Science Contest outside school. I observed that some low level students had improved their English test scores. 46 students (65%) were placed in first to second grades for the first test in March, but during the second test, 40 students(73%) were placed in first to second grades. It proves that student-centered, activity-based, and fun-filled debating class does work well. Furthermore, test results in September reinforced the expectation that

my students would achieve better scores, as time goes by.

3. National Listening Test Results

In September, students achieved an average score of 17.3 out of 20. Compared to the result from April, due to an increase in difficulty, the scores decreased. But I am confident that students had slightly improved in their listening ability.

Month	Score(20)	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	Average
April	Students' number	13	18	15	17	3	4	.	.	.	18.1
September		9	15	18	4	11	9	2	1	2	17.3

4. Students' Feedback

For the last seven months, my students have become familiar with studying English in English. Preparing speeches, reading books, and writing essays are not an easy job for them, but they have done those things so well. By preparing debates they learned how to organize ideas and reasons more effectively. By writing essays they now know how to compose their writing more logically. Their speech videos and essays show me evidence that their English ability is steadily improving. Feedback from students at the end of September, confirmed that students felt they were improving in English. The students have given me a lot of feedback on my teaching methods.

V. Conclusions and Proposals

When I began TEE two years ago, I faced three obstacles: 1) No native English teacher; 2) A lack of interest toward English amongst my students; and 3) A shortage of time. Many English teachers in Korea, (especially in high schools) think that it is worthless, even impossible, to conduct English classes only in English. I also doubted it before I tried, but now I see that it is not only possible but also beneficial. I am happy and proud of my students and my English classes. To overcome the aforementioned obstacles, I established three classroom rules and try to abide by them with my students. When students break the rules, I threaten to stop the debate classes, this quickly changes their behaviors. During the class, I am not only the substitute for a foreign teacher, but also a talented entertainer with many diverse and interesting activities. Now, students speak in English anytime they want to without hesitation or concern about making mistakes. They have learned how to motivate themselves and how to enjoy learning by becoming accustomed to confidence in English.

It is not easy to devise teaching methods and activities that combine four skills simultaneously, but I have discovered it is possible. Even in a high school, the students can learn English through participative activities rather than by being lectured to. I read the following, "Learners can memorize 10% of the content after listening to it, 30% after watching it, but they can get over 90% of the information after doing it". You can discover for yourself how true this is.

Debate is a perfect method for getting students to enjoy English. By participating in the

debating sessions based on TEE, the students and I have improved our ability to express ourselves in English, through both speaking and writing. It is really true that “Practice makes perfect.” Speaking and writing are productive skills, in contrast to the perceptive skills of reading and listening. In most high schools in Korea, students focus on reading and listening in order to get a good score on the Korean S.A.T. However, using productive skills is more fun. The more students use English, the more they enjoy it. Now they know how to motivate themselves, how to encourage and how to apply the learning strategies to their self-studying skills.

I know some believe that “debating” is only possible because I have really intelligent students. But you don’t need to follow my teaching method exactly, or use it with all of your students. I certainly recognize that there are many different ways to capture the “heart and mind” of students. My way is just one, among many successful ways to do this. Every teacher has their own unique and effective talent, depending on their own circumstances and experiences. Please, don’t forget this: “Make English learning FUN, and not only the students but also the teacher can enjoy English!”

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About the Presenter

Hong Seoung-su is an English teacher in Bigeum High School in Chonnam, Korea. He has taught English in high school since 1999. He won the silver medal in Secondary English Teachers’ Teaching Contest held by Hankook University of Foreign Studies, and the first prize in National English Teachers’ Teaching Case & Research Competition held by Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in 1998, studying how to apply TEE-based English Debating into high school classes. His latest quest is in designing English teaching methods based on book-reading for the island students. Email: hsskorea@hanmail.net

