EFFECTS OF CLASSROOM DEBATE AND SOCRATIC METHOD ON CRITICAL THINKING AND SPEAKING ABILITY OF MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATE ESL LEARNERS

PEZHMAN ZARE

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By

PEZHMAN ZARE

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DEDICATION

To accomplish a challenging task, every individual needs to have strong internal self-determination and perseverance as well as external support from family and friends. This journey could not have been completeted without the support of my beloved family and friends.

This dissertation is sincerely and humbly dedicated to my sweet and loving

Father, Mother & Siblings

Who always believed in me; whose constant encouragement, guidance, and unconditional love gave me peace, confidence, and courage to push forward and achive this goal,

Along with all supportive friends.

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April 2016

Chairman : Moomala Othman, PhD
Faculty : Educational Studies

The present research is an attempt to study the effects of classroom debate and Socratic Method on critical thinking and speaking ability of Malaysian undergraduate ESL learners. In addition, the study tries to determine which of these two methods is more effective in developing the participants' critical thinking and speaking ability. Furthermore, students' perceptions and feedbacks are investigated and explored toward these two methods.

The study adopts a quasi-experimental mixed method design (pre-test, post-test design) in which both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection is employed. The participants of the study consisted of an intact class of thirty two undergraduate students doing TESL at the Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia. The participants had completed two years of their degree program; the class was selected based on purposive sampling. The New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (NJTRS) and content analysis method (Newman et al., 1995) were administered to assess the learners' critical thinking skills at the beginning and at the end of the study. Participants' speaking ability was measured at the beginning and at the end of the study. To triangulate the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the students' perceptions on the two teaching methods of the study. In addition, the participants provided their responses to a number of open-ended questions. Furthermore, ongoing observations were made to monitor the developments in participants' behavior and the classroom atmosphere.

Based on the findings, the learners' critical thinking showed improvement after going through classroom debates and Socratic discussions for nine and ten sessions respectively. Both classroom debate and Socratic Method were equally effective in improving the participants' critical thinking. The participants' speaking ability showed significant progress after going through the classroom debates and Socratic discussions. Classroom debate, however, showed to be more effective in improving speaking ability. The research participants also found the two methods of the study innovative,

interesting, constructive, and helpful to teaching and learning. The respondents also believed that participating in classroom debate and/or Socratic discussions helped them overcome the fear of talking before a crowd, boost their confidence to talk and express their opinions, improve their speaking ability, and enhance their critical thinking skills.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KESAN PERBAHASAN DI BILIK DARJAH DAN KAEDAH SOCRATES
PADA PEMIKIRAN KRITIS DAN KEBOLEHAN BERCAKAP DI KALANGAN
PELAJAR PRASISWAZAH ESL MALAYSIA**

Oleh

PEZHMAN ZARE

April 2016

Pengerusi : Moomala Othman, PhD
Fakulti : Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian ini adalah satu usaha untuk mengkaji kesan perbahasan dalam kelas dan
Kaedah Socrates terhadap pemikiran kritis dan keupayaan bertutur Mahasiswa Ijazah
Sarjana Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua di Malaysia. Di samping itu, kajian ini
bertujuan untuk menentukan kaedah yang paling efektif terhadap pemikiran kritikal
dan keupayaan bertutur para pelajar. Justeru, persepsi dan maklum balas pelajar dikaji
dan diterokai di dalam kedua-dua kaedah ini.

Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah campuran kuasi-eksperimen (ujian pra, ujian pasca
reka bentuk) di mana kedua-dua kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif digunakan dalam
proses pengumpulan data. Responden kajian terdiri daripada tiga puluh dua orang
pelajar ijazah pertama TESL di Fakulti Pengajian Pendidikan, Universiti Putra
Malaysia (UPM). Responden adalah mahasiswa yang telah menyempurnakan dua tahun
pengajian Ijazah. Responden dipilih bertujuan persampelan. Merujuk kepada Ujian
Kemahiran Penaakulan The New Jersey (NJTRS) dan kaedah analisis kandungan
(Newman et al., 1995) penilaian kemahiran pemikiran kritikal responden hendaklah
dilakukan pada permulaan dan pada akhir kajian. Justeru, kemampuan bertutur setiap
responden diukur pada permulaan dan pada akhir kajian. Untuk triangulasi data, temu
bual separa berstruktur telah dijalankan bagi mengkaji persepsi responden terhadap
kedua-dua kaedah pengajaran yang dikaji. Responden juga diberikan ruang untuk
memberikan jawapan mereka kepada beberapa soalan-soalan terbuka. Selain itu,
pemerhatian yang berterusan telah dibuat untuk memantau perkembangan tingkah laku
dan suasana responden di dalam kelas. Berdasarkan dapatan kajian, secara
keseluruhannya tahap pemikiran kritikal responden menunjukkan peningkatan yang
baik selepas responden melalui sembilan ke sepuluh sesi perbahasan dalam kelas dan
perbincangan yang menggunakan kaedah Socrates. Ini menunjukkan kedua-dua kaedah
ini sama-sama berkesan dalam meningkatkan keupayaan pemikiran kritis responden.

Keupayaan bertutur responden juga menunjukkan kemajuan yang signifikan setelah
melalui sesi perbahasan dalam kelas dan perbincangan yang menggunakan kaedah

Socrates. Walau bagaimana pun, perbahasan dalam kelas dilihat lebih efektif dalam meningkatkan keupayaan bertutur responden. Responden juga berpendapat bahawa kedua-dua kaedah pengajaran ini sangat menarik, inovatif, membina keupayaan dan sangat membantu proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Responden turut berkeyakinan bahawa perbahasan dalam kelas dan perbincangan menggunakan kaedah Socrates itu telah membantu mengatasi perasaan takut untuk bertutur di hadapan khalayak dan ianya berjaya meningkatkan keyakinan mereka dalam tampil menyatakan pandangan. Secara tidak langsung ini telah meningkatkan keupayaan berfikir secara kritis para responden.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Moomala Othman, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairperson)

Jayakaran Mukundan, PhD
Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Nur Surayyah Madhubala Abdullah, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

BUJANG KIM HUAT, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:

Declaration by graduate student

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Name and Matric No.: Pezhman Zare, GS33484

Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
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Chairman of   Member of
Supervisory   Supervisory
Committee: _____   Committee: _____

Signature: _____
Name of
Member of
Supervisory
Committee: _____

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	American College Test
APA	American Psychological Association
CA	Communication Apprehension
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CT	Critical Thinking
CS	Communication Skills
DV	Dependent Variable
EDA	Exploratory Data Analysis
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
ICC	Intra-class Correlation Coefficient
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IV	Independent Variable
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
M	Mean
MUET	Malaysian University English Test
SD	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Learning a second or foreign language is a complicated task which requires a lot of time and efforts. A language learner would be entirely affected as she/he attempts to reach beyond the boundaries of her/his mother tongue and into a new language, a new way of thinking, a new culture, feeling, and acting (Brown, 2001). The language learner must dedicate herself/himself totally in learning the new language. She/he must get involved her/his physical, intellectual, and emotional capabilities to be able to successfully send and receive messages in a second language. Numerous connected variables are involved in the process of learning a new language. It is not a series of simple steps that can be taken and easily master the language. So much is at stake that courses in foreign languages are often inadequate training grounds, in and of themselves, for the successful learning of a second language (Brown, 2001). Many different methods of language teaching and learning have come into play, used for some time and been replaced by a new one.

1.2 Background

In the mid-1880s to the mid-1980s, the language teaching profession was involved in what many pedagogical experts would call a search. That search was for a single, ideal method, generalizable across widely varying audiences that would successfully teach students a foreign language in the classroom. Historical accounts of the profession tend, therefore, to describe a succession of methods, each of which is more or less discarded in due course as a new method takes its place. There have been diverse and abundant pedagogical tendencies which have characterized second and Foreign Language (FL) teaching. As Stern (1983; p. 453) phrases it, "The conceptualization of language teaching has a long, fascinating, but rather tortuous history", which Brown (1994; p. 52) portrays as the "changing winds and shifting sands of language teaching". This history has been formulated mainly in terms of diverse teaching methods, each of which has attempted to find more effective and efficient ways of teaching languages and each of which has been based on different views of what languages are and of how they are best taught. Initially, the purpose and focus of language education was to assist the learner to master the grammatical rules and structures of the language and be able to read religious books. But, in the age of communication, language education and learning highlights the importance of communication skills and educating learners who will ultimately be able to use the target language for communication which is the main purpose of language learning/teaching. As a matter of fact, today the ultimate objective of second/foreign language education is to enable language learners to use the target language for meaningful and effective communication inside and outside the classroom context.

A review of methodologies on language teaching/learning reveals that several teaching methods have been developed and implemented over time and then replaced by a more efficient one. Though, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the one

approach which is on the spotlight and has drawn a lot of attention. The CLT teaching promotes communication and assists language learners to initiate and participate in communication frequently in classroom setting, hopeful that this involvement will finally lead to better, stronger, and spontaneous communication out-of-classroom context as well (Brown, 2001; Richards, 2008). One of the most important objectives of the English language education in general and CLT, in particular, is training language learners who are fully capable of using the target language for effective and appropriate communication in various conditions. However, studies have revealed that ESL/EFL learners do not portray a strong command of communication skills, and feel incapable of using the target language to express their thoughts spontaneously (Littlewood & Liu, 1996; Ferris, 1998; Yashima, 2002; Tong, 2010).

Communication skills can have a large impact on the learner's success in communication. The four major communication skills are thinking, listening, speaking, and nonverbal communication (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995). Communication skills provide the learner with the skills that she/he needs to interact successfully with a wide variety of people and situations, while a lack of communication skills will make it more difficult for her/him to achieve the intended goal of communication (Richards & Renandya, 2002; Rivers, 2007; Richards, 2008). However, concerns have been expressed indicating that language learners do not have enough competencies in thinking and speaking skills. It is stated that deficiencies in those two areas of communication skills have caused significant problems for second/foreign language learners in communication (Roy & Macchiette, 2005; Rosnani et al., 2014). ESL/EFL learners who are equipped with critical thinking and speaking skills have shown the ability to initiate and maintain a successful communication, which is the ultimate goal of second/foreign language education. The importance of critical thinking and speaking skills, and the greater need for them have inspired educationalists to study different techniques and methods for improving and promoting these skills in classroom context (Halpern, 2003). Experts started to contemplate on the kind of teaching/learning method which is practical, promote critical thinking skills, improve speaking ability, and also embrace student-centered learning. Browne & Freeman (2000) suggest that classrooms which practice critical thinking and speaking skills need to incorporate a lot of evaluative learning and communicative activities; bringing controversial issues into the classroom produces an atmosphere of developmental pressure that develops reflection, rational judgment, and also necessitates considering various viewpoints. Studies suggest that classroom debate as a teaching/learning method has the potential to improve students' thinking and speaking skills which leads them to stronger communications skills and English language capability (Doody & Condon, 2012: Rear, 2010; Gervey, Drout, & Wang, 2009; Omelicheva, 2007; Roy & Macchiette, 2005).

The Socratic Method of questioning is another teaching/learning method which is modern, innovative and student-centered (Yang, Newby & Bill, 2005). Socratic Method follows a chain of orderly and structured questions which leads to a discussion and ultimately assists learners to become aware of their weaknesses in thinking, lack of knowledge, wrong inferences, and false hypotheses (Copeland, 2005). Previous studies suggest that this method can improve learners' critical thinking skills and speaking

ability (Feng, 2013; Aziz, 2013, Paul & Elder, 2007; Yang, Newby & Bill, 2005). Through this systematic method of questioning and ensuing discussion, students get engaged in an oral discussion, answer various probing questions, clearly express their points, justify their views, take multiple perspectives into consideration, argue classmates' points, and defend their own statements. All of these activities which are done using the target language verbally develop critical thinking skills and get the students to practice their oral communication ability (Oyler & Romanelli, 2014; Byrne, 2011; Paul & Elder, 2007; Yang et al., 2005; Walker, 2003). Studies, experts, and instructors believe classroom debate and/or Socratic Method of teaching/learning can help students improve their critical thinking and speaking skills for academic and work settings (Byrne, 2011; Gervey et al., 2009; Paul & Elder, 2007; Stewart, 2003; Huang, 2002).

1.3   Problem Statement

The problem that lies behind the present research can be viewed from three major perspectives: the shortcomings of English language teaching/learning in Malaysia, the researcher's teaching experience, and the gaps in the literature of the area under investigation, particularly in the context of the current study.

In Malaysia, English is a compulsory subject taught to university students regardless of the disciplines they are majoring in. As a matter of fact, English is a compulsory subject since primary school. However, most of high-school/university students are still weak in communication (Thang, 2003 & 2005; Lourdunathan & Menon, 2005; Thang & Azarina, 2007). They are unable to communicate in English and express their thoughts, which is the result of lack of strong communication skills. In The context of English language teaching in Malaysia, a lot of attention is paid to the national examinations in which all the emphasis is mainly on the language skills of reading, writing, and Grammar. There is not much focus on critical thinking and speaking skills which are the main aspects of communication skills. Bahasa Malaysia is widely used in teacher talk and peer interaction (Lim, 1994; Fauziah Hassan & Nita Fauzee Selamat, 2002). Instructors employ more comprehension check questions as opposed to clarification questions in CLT classes (Noor Hashimah, 2007). These types of questions do not promote two-way interaction since they put more emphasis on comprehending definite content. As a result, learners are provided with little opportunities to construct 'modified output' which is considered to be a critical element in language learning. Accordingly, the students experience a lot of challenges, pressure, and anxiety when they try to express themselves in English (Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah & Normala Othman, 2006; Noor Hashimah, 2007). The development of efficient oral communication skills is a significant necessity since students need not only to be able to communicate accurately, fluently, and spontaneously in any situation, but as future professionals will be in charge of educating others and helping them to develop their own communicative competence.

The teaching experiences of the researcher of the present study also reflect the fact that some Malaysian ESL learners are more articulate and enthusiastic in language classrooms to communicate in English and participate in class discussions. Other

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language learners, in contrast, prefer to sit silent during the whole class session and avoid interaction with peers or instructors. These quiet learners are not so eager to speak English and participate in class discussions. The fact is that in Malaysian ESL context, learners are exposed to English language outside classroom. They have ample opportunities to communicate in English and practice their language. However, in most cases they prefer to use Bahasa Malaysia for communication purposes. This will make the learners unable to develop and maintain their communication skills. What the researcher of the current study has witnessed in language classrooms is that when presented with an opportunity to speak, most language learners are not able to express their thoughts. This has always been a concern among language educators, since after all the purpose of modern language teaching/learning is to improve the learner's communication skills (Fauziah Hassan & Nita Fauzee Selamat, 2002). As mentioned earlier, English language is a compulsory subject since primary school, but the teaching method is exam oriented and puts a lot of focus on grammar, reading, and writing. The instructors use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction. The students have little practices which can help develop communication skills. As a result, learners' communication skills in English will not be improved (Mohamed Ismail Ahamad Shah & Normala Othman, 2006).

Another source of the problem is the gaps in the literature of the area under investigation in the context of the current study. Previous studies suggest that debate and Socratic Method have great potentials to improve communication skills (Hall, 2011; Kennedy, 2009; Paul & Elder, 2007; Darby, 2007; Bellon, 2000). However, a review of these previous studies reveals various issues and gaps in the literature. The studies operated on the basis of probability not deterministic model to determine causation. In other words, almost none of these research studies employed experimental approach (pre-test post-test design) to determine the effects of any given treatment on critical thinking and speaking skills. Either action research or correlational design has been employed to determine the relationship between research variables. Moreover, most of the previous studies have conducted data collection mainly through qualitative approaches of observations, interviews, and students' reflective journals. Another gap which has been noticed in the literature is the limited number of research in the context of the current study, especially among undergraduate ESL/EFL learners. The present study attempts to fill in the gaps in several ways. First, it employs experimental approach to study effects of classroom debate and Socratic Method on critical thinking and speaking skill. In addition, the present research makes an attempt to adopt different methods of data collection and triangulate the data via both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Reliable and standardized instruments, pre-test and post-test, in-depth content analysis method, students' reflective papers, individual face to face interviews, and observations are used to collect the required data. The present study is, therefore, one of the first attempts to look into the effects of classroom debate and Socratic Method on speaking ability and critical thinking skills among Malaysian ESL learners with the goal to add to the existing literature on this area and fill in the gaps.

1.4   Objectives of the Study

The present research studies the effects of classroom debate and Socratic Method on the critical thinking and speaking ability of Malaysian undergraduate ESL learners. In other words, the objectives are to find out whether the students' critical thinking and speaking ability will benefit from attending classroom debate and/or Socratic Method. In addition, the study tries to determine which method (classroom debate/Socratic Method) is more effective in developing the participants' critical thinking and speaking ability. Furthermore, students' perceptions and feedbacks toward these two methods are explored and illustrated. Specifically, the study pursues the following objectives:

1. To study the influence of classroom debate and Socratic Method on critical thinking of Malaysian undergraduate ESL learners
2. To determine which method (classroom debate and/or Socratic Method) is more effective in improving students' critical thinking
3. To explore the effect of classroom debate and Socratic Method on speaking ability of Malaysian undergraduate ESL learners
4. To determine which method (classroom debate and/or Socratic Method) is more effective in improving students' speaking ability
5. To evaluate learners' perceptions toward classroom debate and/or Socratic Method.

1.5   Research Questions

The present research is an effort to study classroom debate and Socratic Method and determine the extent to which these two methods affect critical thinking and speaking ability. Moreover, it evaluates the learners' perceptions on the usefulness, benefits, advantages, and shortcomings of these two methods. Specifically, the study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent does classroom debate and Socratic Method influence students' critical thinking skills?
2. Which method (classroom debate and Socratic Method) is more effective in developing critical thinking?
3. What effect does participation in classroom debate and Socratic Method have on learners' speaking ability?
4. Which Method is more effective in improving speaking ability, classroom debate or Socratic Method?
5. What are the research participants' perceptions toward classroom debate and/or Socratic Method as a teaching/learning method?

1.6   Significance of the Study

This study can be considered significant as it makes contributions to the body of knowledge. Specifically, material developers and syllabus designers can benefit from the findings of the study and also get to know more about the needs of students in Malaysia and try to take these needs into account and integrate them in the curriculum. With this knowledge, they can create and design curriculums which are more helpful in

enhancing students' critical thinking and speaking skills. The results of the study would also help instructors get aware of the significance of these skills and help the students to be more successful in language learning and in the job market. The findings would assist Malaysian ESL instructors to be more successful in the area of teaching by realizing how classroom debate and Socratic Method can assist them in achieving their goals.

Another significance of this study relates to the area of assessment and evaluation as it makes contributions to this field, as well. The assessment of participants' critical thinking and speaking ability was done using different methods via multiple tools. Such being the case, the findings would inform the instructors about the importance of assessment and evaluation and also affect the public view in that regard. To assess the participants' critical thinking skills, the present study employed two different techniques (pre and post-test by a test and content analysis method) and found different results. Accordingly, the findings argue the assessment of critical thinking skills and/or any other construct, raise a question, and call for further studies in that regard. Besides, the participants' speaking ability was also measured via a different method. To assess the participants' speaking ability in the present study, their authentic communicative performances during the classroom activities were recorded and assessed. This way of assessment is considered to be more valid with minimum negative washback effect (Messick, 1996). Moreover, the current study made an attempt to fill in the gaps which were identified in the literature. As discussed earlier, one noticeable gap was that previous studies did not employ experimental approach (pre-test post-test design) to determine the effects of the methods on critical thinking. Either action research or correlational design was adopted to determine the relationship between research variables.

Moreover, most of the previous studies have collected their data mainly through qualitative approaches like observations, interviews, and students' reflective journals (e.g., Musselman, 2004; Darby, 2007; Kennedy, 2007; Hall, 2011; Rear, 2010). Accordingly, this study makes use of experimental approach to study effects of two distinctive teaching/ learning methods (classroom debate, Socratic Method) on critical thinking and speaking skills. In addition, the present research makes an attempt to adopt different methods of data collection and triangulate the data via both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Reliable and standardized instruments, pre-test and post-test, in-depth content analysis method, students' reflective papers, individual face to face interviews, and observations are used to collect the required data. Finally, the findings would also provide useful recommendations to help modify and improve these two methods, eliminate the weaknesses, and make them more productive and student-centered. However further research is required to find out if these changes can lead to a better and more significant outcome.

1.7   Limitations of the Study

Like any other studies, the present research carries a number of limitations which needs to be discussed. First, although both quantitative and qualitative data were used to meet

the objectives of the study, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the specific learners and the context where the data were collected. However, as Cameron & Larsen Freeman (2007) suggest, it would be more rational to consider particular generalizations rather than universal generalizations. Thus, as with any research, the particularity of the study needs to be taken into account and the findings should be interpreted accordingly. Therefore, any further generalization needs to be done with caution. Second, as Gervey et al., (2009) and Darby (2007) noted, critical thinking and speaking skill are constructs that may change and develop over time. However, the present study was conducted during only one single semester. Therefore, it would be challenging to establish one's concrete level of critical thinking and speaking ability and their improvement by relying on one semester.

Another limitation of the present study was the lack of a control group. Only two experimental groups were used to study the effects of the two teaching/learning methods on critical thinking and speaking ability. One important reason was the limited number of research participants (N=32). Forming three groups could result in a small number of participants in each group which could complicate the whole study. In addition, the packed schedule of research participants, and lack of resources, for instance availability of a classroom, were other reasons. Finally, the motions (debate topics) brought about another limitation. They had to be selected based on the course content (Teaching of Aural- Oral Skills). Accordingly, a few of them were a little hard to lend itself to debate structure, namely they were not inherently controversial enough and readily understandable in terms of contrasting points of view.

1.8   Definition of Key Terms

In this section, the constitutive and operational definitions of the key terms that are used in the study are specifically presented.

1.8.1   Debate

Debate is more than a political activity or an academic exercise. The skills and values acquired in debate can be applied in nearly every occupation and in interpersonal relationships. Freeley & Steinberg (2005) stated that debate can be defined as the process of reflecting on various perspectives and reaching at a conclusion or decision, and its function and use might range from one person using it to make up his/her mind to a person or several people using debate to persuade other people or individual to agree with them.

Ericson & Murphy (1987) describe debate as a formal oral controversy of the systematic presentation of opposing arguments on a selected topic. Fryar, Thomas & Goodnight (1993) state that debate is a contest of argumentation. The affirmative team presents arguments in favor of a resolution, and the negative team presents arguments against it. The contest is won by the team which presents the best arguments in the opinion of the judge. In this study, debate is defined as two groups of students on opposite sides of the issue discussing a topic in agreed-upon rules, and the judges listen

to both sides of the argument, choosing the winning team based on the reasoning and evidence provided.

1.8.2   Socratic Method

The Socratic Method is also referred to as Socratic Dialogue/Discussion or Socratic Questioning. It is a teaching/learning method which a group of students go through a systematic method of questioning and ensuing discussion. The discussion is managed by the teacher, the so-called facilitator. It is a rigorous inquiry into a question and our own thinking about it, aiming to investigate our assumptions in a joint process (Saran & Neisser, 2004). Simply stated, as used in the current study, this method involves students' reading a selection and then generating questions and exploring their ideas and questions in an open discussion (Queen, 2000).

Kuhtmann (2005) defines the Socratic Method as "a process of logical argumentation in which a line of questioning is followed via reason to the truth" (p.37). In addition, in The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy the Socratic method is defined as "the method of teaching in which the master imparts no information, but asks a sequence of questions, through answering which the pupil eventually comes to the desired knowledge" (Blackburn, 1994, p. 356).

1.8.3   Critical Thinking

Ennis (1985) defines critical thinking as "reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p.28). In a similar statement, Facione & Facione (2008) views critical thinking as a judgment process which has a goal. "The goal is to decide what to believe and/or what to do in given context, in relation to the available evidence, using appropriate conceptualizations and methods, and evaluated by the appropriate criteria" (p.2). Stall & Stahl (1991) define critical thinking as the "development of cohesive, logical reasoning patterns and understanding assumptions and biases underlying particular positions" (p. 82). It is stated that in order to think critically students need to be capable of examining and assessing the causes and reasons behind their actions, their beliefs, and their knowledge claims. Students must be required "to defend themselves and question themselves, their peers, their teachers, experts, and authoritative texts" (Gieve, 1998; p. 126). In the present study, critical thinking refers to a critical way of thinking which includes the learner's logical evaluation, examination, and judgment of concepts, people, and ideas (including his/her own beliefs and opinions).

1.8.4   Speaking Ability

Speaking can be defined as a communicative procedure focusing on meaning construction that engages in creating, obtaining and processing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking ability though refers to verbal communication ability in a practical, functional and precise way using the target language. A high level of speaking ability involves having the capability to use and apply the linguistic

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knowledge to new contexts (topics) and situations (Hadley & Reiken, 1993). In the current research, speaking ability refers to the student's ability to communicate verbally, get the message across, and speak the target language fluently and accurately with acceptable pronunciation and the ability to select vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate.

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