

Taiwanese High School Students' Participation in Competitive English Debate: A Motivation and Efficacy Study

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Abstract

Although students' experience of competitive forensic involvement has long been researched in the US, it is a topic yet to be explored in Taiwan. To achieve a preliminary but broad understanding of Taiwanese students' competitive English debate participation, a study was conducted which surveyed 64 high school students for their perceptions on participating in the 2007 Taipei Cicero English Debate Tournament. Among other findings, the study showed that like their American counterparts, Taiwanese debaters deemed educational needs followed by competitive and personal needs as incentives to participate in the competitive debate. In addition to improved English skills, Taiwanese debaters also considered enhancement of communication/public speaking, critical/analytical thinking, and debating/argumentation skills as the major benefits, and time-related factors as the chief cost of debate involvement. Over all, the findings of the study spoke powerfully for the educational values of competitive English debate involvement for Taiwanese high school students.

Key words: Competitive English debate participation, debate motivation, debate efficacy, Taiwanese high school students, The Taipei Cicero English Debate Tournament

INTRODUCTION

Despite the great popularity and esteemed status it enjoys in secondary and tertiary education in much of the West and some Asian countries (e.g., the Philippines, Malaysia, Korea, and Japan), competitive English debate has generally been overlooked in Taiwan, possibly due to Chinese people's reservations toward debate as a form of communication (Her, 1993). While a myriad of English speech and drama contests have been held at national and regional levels each year to elevate students' oral English ability, English debate competitions were never seen at the high school level until 2004 when the Educational Department of the Taipei City Government first began to hold an annual English debate competition called the "Taipei High School Cicero English Debate Tournament." Initially conceived as a short-term project to promote English learning for high schools in Taipei, the tournament has had five years of history. It is an English debate competition open to all (i.e., 47) high schools located in Taipei City. Adopting the cross-examination debate style, it is a policy debate, contending local or national policies mostly aiming at teenager issues. Due to the intense academic pressure in high school and the small number of participating teams¹, the Cicero Tournament is a one-day event, usually held close to the end of the year, instead of a seasonal competition program like how most competitive academic debates are in the US.

While commending the Taipei City Government for

¹ Admitting only 16 teams with each school registering at most two teams, the Cicero Tournament is fairly small-scaled with 10 to 13 schools entering the competition.

acknowledging competitive debate participation as a potentially valuable learning experience conducive to students' cognitive and language development, the educational benefits actually enjoyed by high school students from partaking in the competition are yet to be proved. In an era of increased educational accountability and budgetary cutbacks, any uncertainty regarding the effect of an interscholastic academic competition exigently argues for studies that carefully look into its pros and cons as indicated by the participants' experience and performance as a way of validating or improving its educational values. It is for these very reasons that an investigation² was called for to unveil how high school students perceived and experienced this one and only interscholastic English debate competition in the history of Taiwan's secondary English education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The marginal attention academic debate has received in Taiwan is certainly reflected in the meager amount of local research available on debate. Most local debate studies only delineated the purpose, features, content and/or activities of either a Chinese or an English debate course taught in college (Chang, 1994; Her, 1993; Ing, 1997; Chi, 2000). Three other studies empirically documented the pedagogical merits of debate in cultivating students' oral English proficiency or critical thinking ability (Chi, 1996; Lee 2005; Yeh &

² The study reported here is part of a forensics research project which includes a content analysis of debate performances, and a descriptive study of high school students' perceptions of debate participation.

Tasy, 2001). Given the unpopularity of debate contests, only two studies (Chang, 2008) were found that examined students' competitive debate involvement. One is a Bakhtinian analysis of reported speech in two intercollegiate academic debates between Mainland China and Taiwan (Yu & Wen, 2004), and the other, a content analysis of ten debates from the 2004-2006 Cicero English Debate Tournaments (Chang, 2008). While these studies have shed light on certain linguistic features and the strengths and weaknesses of students' debate performance, it is still unclear how students perceived their competitive debate participation.

While little research was found that investigated Taiwanese students' competitive debate involvement, a good number of studies exist that surveyed US college and high school students for their motivations to debate or the perceived efficacy of debate participation (e.g., Hill, 1982; Jerome & Algarra, 2005; Jones, 1994; Littlefield, 2001; Matlon & Keele, 1984; Williams, McGee & Worth, 2001; Wood & Rowland-Morin, 1989). Hill, for example, analyzed 315 motivational responses from college debaters at three southeastern tournaments in the US and identified the 15 most frequently mentioned motivations (e.g., competition, enjoyment/fun, traveling, improve communication skills, improving analytic skills, social interaction, educational/learning experience, improving research skills, preparation for law school and improving argumentation skills) in six broad categories (i.e., educational needs, social needs, competitive needs, career preparation needs, miscellaneous needs, and financial needs). Among them, educational needs were the most frequently mentioned type of motivation.

To refine Hill's study, Wood and Rowland-Morin (1989) conducted a study which surveyed 387 college debaters from both CEDA (Cross-Examination Debate Association) and NDT (National Debate Tournament) tournaments in 1983 and 1987. Modifying Hill's categories, Wood and Rowland-Morin identified four categories of motivations: educational needs, competitive needs, personal needs and career preparation needs. Among them, they found, as Hill's 1982 survey, educational needs rank highest and competitive needs second in both their 1983 and 1987 surveys. Despite the small variations in ranking for some motivation items between the two tournaments, they concluded the category rankings over all remain constant across the three survey years.

Compared with motivation studies, many more were efficacy studies that ascertained the benefits and drawbacks of competitive debate participation as perceived by the debaters. Matlon and Keele (1984), for example, surveyed 703 former participants of NDT between 1947 and 1980 and found that since 1947, the main advantage cited has consistently been the attainment of public speaking skills, with the development of critical thinking, research, organizational skills, quick thinking and self-confidence following close behind. Among the disadvantages cited (though 320 of 703 respondents did not respond to the question about the disadvantages), becoming too argumentative was cited by the respondents between 1947 and 1968, and speaking too rapidly, by those between 1969 and 1980.

Following the research tradition of asking students to report their own perceptions of the efficacy of debate practice, Williams,

McGee and Worth (2001) analyzed 286 surveys collected at the end of 1990s and found the top ten benefits, in an order of decreasing frequency, are speaking/communication skills, analytic/critical skills, social life/meeting people, research skills, knowledge/education, self-esteem/confidence, argumentation skills, traveling, learning about issues, organizational skills and thinking fast, seven of which are educational in nature. The top two benefits, i.e., speaking/communication skills and analytical/critical skills, were consistent with those found in the Matlon and Keele's study (1984). However, since those two items were not rated as highly in the Wood and Rowland-Morin's (1989) or Hill's (1982) survey on motivations to participate in competitive debate, Williams et al. (2001) argued that benefits of debate and motivation to debate are different concepts, accounting for the different results in the four studies. The top ten disadvantages identified in the study are, in an order of decreasing frequency, time demands, hurting academics, health impact/sleep deprivation/stress, affecting social life, financial costs, travel time, lack of involvement in other campus activities, too competitive/win attitude, loss of work, and workload.

Different from the above studies that surveyed college debaters, Littlefield (2001) assessed 193 high school student perceptions of competitive debate participation and compared their perceptions with those generated at the collegiate level. Among the ten major benefits identified in the study (i.e., communication/speaking skills, knowledge/education, social life/meeting people, research skills, self-esteem/confidence, critical/analytical skills, argumentation skills, thinking fast, improved relational communication/teamwork, and

college admission, in that order), seven corresponded with those identified by the collegiate debaters in the Williams et al.'s study (2001). Like advantages, among the top ten costs identified (i.e., taking time from other things, significant time commitment, causing stress/tension, no social life/isolation, fostering unhealthy habits/choices, costly/expensive, negative stigma by others, perception/criticism of self and other debaters, competition/politics/judging issues, and criticism of the nature of the debate activity), seven were similar to those mentioned in the Williams et al.'s study. Among them, costs which directly involve time as a factor accounted for an overwhelming 35.76% of total disadvantage responses.

Targeting EFL learners, Inoue and Nakano (2004) explored Japanese college debaters for their perceptions of the efficacy of competitive English debate participation. Adopting the method used by Williams et al. (2001), Inoue and Nakano analyzed the responses from 167 college students who took part in a national debate tournament, including both NDT and PD (Parliamentary Debate) styles, in 2003. The top five benefits cited by Japanese debaters of NDT style were analytical/critical skills, English skills, social life/meeting people, knowledge/education, speaking/communication skills, and by those of PD style were English skills, speaking/communication skills, social life/meeting people, knowledge/education and analytical/critical skills. When compared with the top five advantage responses of their US counterparts in Williams et al.'s study, English skills were a benefit specific to Japanese debaters. On the other hand, research skills were an

advantage emphasized by the US but not Japanese respondents. As to the costs of debate participation, Japanese debaters of both debate styles cited the same disadvantages in the same rankings, which include time, health impact/sleep deprivation/stress, financial costs, hurting academics, and affecting social life. When a comparison was made with Williams et al.'s study, it was found that health impact/sleep deprivation/stress was cited much more frequently by Japanese than US debaters. Hurting academics, on the other hand, appeared in many more US than Japanese responses.

Given the tradition of well-developed and thoroughly-researched forensics practice in countries like the US, a single-focus approach as exemplified in most debate participation studies is not only understandable but also desirable for it enables an in-depth understanding of one facet of such forensic experience. This approach, however, may not suit studies that investigate competitive debate involvement of those from a region where debate in general has been devalued and shunned and where competitive academic debate has only started to make its way into schools' extracurricular activities as in Taiwan. In the latter case, a comprehensive approach which grants a preliminary but broad understanding of students' competitive debate participation is deemed exigent and more apposite.

METHODOLOGY

The current study, by adopting a comprehensive approach,

investigated Taiwanese high school students' perceptions and experience of the only officially held high school English debate tournament, named "Taipei High School Cicero English Debate Tournament." A questionnaire (see Appendices) was constructed, which included 6 fixed alternative questions inquiring about debaters' demographic data, previous debating experience, and training received for debate competition, and 5 open-ended questions soliciting debaters' perceptions of debate before and after debate competition, motivation for debate participation, perceived advantages and disadvantages of competitive debate involvement, perceived debate performance, and suggestions for future Cicero debate tournaments. Only a portion of the study, i.e., students' motivation to debate (i.e., responses to question 7) and perceived efficacy of competitive debate participation (i.e., responses to question 9), is reported here.

With the approval of the school organizing and hosting the tournament in December of 2007, 64 high school students, i.e., all the participants enrolled for the tournament, were contacted via their coaches for their consent to take part in the study. All agreed to take part in the study. To give debaters sufficient time to reflect on their experience of the competition, they were allowed to bring back and fill out the questionnaire after the tournament. To secure the maximum number of surveys returned, coaches were asked to help distribute, collect and mail back the questionnaires. Fifty-five questionnaires were returned and comprised the data for this study.

Debaters' demographic data and prior debating experience obtained from items 1 to 5 provided basic profiles of the debaters in

terms of the school they study in, gender, year of school, and prior experience of debating. The 55 debaters were from 10 different schools. Twenty were male, and 35 were female. This female-dominant gender representation, though different from the reported gender make-up in competitive debates in the US, has been common at most competitive English speaking events in Taiwan. Forty were second-year students; 13, first-year students; and 2, third-year students. More than two-thirds, or 38, of the debaters had no prior experience of either Chinese or English debate competition, while 17 did, among whom, 9 were returned competitors for Cicero, 5 competed in the practice or unofficial competitions with other schools, and 3 debated in the school club. Although all 55 respondents were registered participants of the Tournament, only 37³ actually debated in a match.

Data to each of the open-ended questions were first recorded and sorted into different categories by the author. Three of the four motivational categories (i.e., educational, competitive and personal needs) in Wood and Rowland-Morin's study (1989) were adopted to organize the participants' answers regarding their motivations to debate. The categories of benefits and disadvantages of debate involvement in the Williams et al.'s study (2001) were used as reference when sorting and coding participants' efficacy responses. The categories were then refined with some combined, some divided, and some reworded to adequately capture the gist of all responses.

³ The Tournament allowed each school to register, at most, two teams with four debaters on each team. Because only two debaters were required for each side in a match, some debaters, though registered for the Tournament, did not have the chance to get on stage.

With categories being formed, individual answers were then placed in the categories by the author discussing and double checking with another forensic expert to reach 100% agreement for each coding.

The questionnaire was designed to pursue altogether six research questions that tap into Taiwanese debaters' perceptions and experience of (English) debate, before, during and after the debate competition. The two questions relevant to the current paper concern debaters' motivation for debate participation and the perceived benefits of debate involvement. With the obtainment of Taiwanese debaters' self-reported motivation and efficacy responses, the paper also compares and contrasts the responses of these Taiwanese debaters with those of their American and Japanese counterparts. Following are the research questions:

- Q1: What motivations do Taiwanese high school students have to participate in the English debate competition?
- Q2: What do Taiwanese high school students perceive as the benefits and disadvantages of competitive English debate involvement?
- Q3: How are Taiwanese students' motivation and efficacy responses similar to and different from those of debaters from other countries, namely the US and Japan?

RESULTS

Motivations for Debate Participation

Q1 inquired about Taiwanese high school students' motivations

for participating in the debate competition, which were then compared with those of American college students for Q3. Table 1 shows the categories by the frequency with which these items appeared in the questionnaire. Like the findings in Hill's (1982) and Wood and Rowland-Morin's (1989) studies, Educational Needs ranked highest among the categories, accounting for 69 out of 105 responses (65.90%). Items included in this category came from 8 related groups of motivations: Improving English Skills, Improving Logical Thinking Skills, Improving Debating Skills, Improving Communication/Public Speaking Skills, Educational/Learning Experience, College Preparation, Improving Information-gathering Skills, and Learning Teamwork. The highest ranked motivation item in this category, and of all, was Improving English Skills, which contained 27 responses, making up more than a quarter or 25.71% of the total responses. English skills here referred to English skills in general, oral proficiency, lexical competence, and writing ability. Improving Logical Thinking Skills and Improving Debating Skills were the second and third highest ranked motivation items, having 14 and 11 responses respectively, accounting for 13.33% and 10.47% of the total responses. Improving Communication/Public Speaking Skills ranked the fourth, containing 7 or 6.66% of the responses. The other items composed of no more than 3 responses each.

Among the 8 items related to Educational Needs, 5 (i.e., Improving Logical Thinking Skills, Improving Debating Skills, Improving Communication/Public Speaking Skills, Educational/Learning Experience, and Improving Information-gathering Skills) were documented in Hill's (1982) and Wood and Rowland-Morin's (1989) surveys.

Table 1
Motivational Categories and Items

Category/Item	Frequency	% of Total
I. EDUCATIONAL NEEDS		
1. Improving English Skills	27	25.71
2. Improving Logical Thinking Skills	14	13.33
3. Improving Debating Skills	11	10.47
4. Improving Communication/Public Speaking Skills	7	6.66
5. Educational/Learning Experience	3	2.85
6. College Preparation	3	2.85
7. Improving Information-gathering Skills	2	1.90
8. Learning Teamwork	2	1.90
Overall Category Frequency and % of Total	69	65.90
Overall Category Rank	1	
II. COMPETITIVE NEEDS		
1. Winning	10	9.52
2. Self-challenges	6	5.71
3. Ego-gratification	2	1.90
Overall Category Frequency and % of Total	18	17.14
Overall Category Rank	2	
III. PERSONAL NEEDS		
1. Broadening personal experience	7	6.66
2. Fun	4	3.80
3. Improving Confidence	2	1.90
4. Social Interaction	2	1.90
Overall Category Frequency and % of Total	15	14.82
Overall Category Rank	3	
IV. MISCELLANEOUS NEEDS		
Overall Category Frequency and % of Total	3	2.85
Overall Category Rank	4	

Note. N=105

Improving English Skills, College Preparation, and Learning Teamwork, on the other hand, were only noted in this study. By College Preparation, the participants meant that they participated in the hope to win and obtain a certificate of award confirming their English debating ability, which in turn could help with their college applications. Increasing General Knowledge and Improving Organizational skill, two of the top ten motivation items for American collegiate debaters, were not found in this study.

Competitive Needs and Personal Needs ranked the second and third in the present study just as in Wood and Rowland-Morin's (1989) survey. Competitive Needs encompassed 3 motivation items of 18 responses (17.14%), and Personal Needs, 4 items of 15 responses (14.28%). Winning, referring to winning and honoring one's school, was the highest ranked item in Competitive Needs and the fourth most popular motivation item of all categories (i.e., 10 or 9.52% of the total responses). Of all the motivation items in these two categories, two, i.e., Self-challenges, the second ranked item in Competitive Needs (comprising 6 or 5.71 of the total responses) and Broadening Personal Experience, the top ranked item in Personal Needs (consisting of 7 or 6.66% of the total responses), were not found in the previous studies. Being an integrative and highly challenging oral event when compared with speech or drama contests, competitive debate apparently was seen by some participants as a chance to test and hone many of their academic abilities simultaneously. For the same reason, it was perceived by some participants as an opportunity to broaden their horizon and experience in general. On the other hand, Traveling, Team Camaraderie, and Parties, motivations

reported in Personal Needs category in Hill's (1982) and Wood and Rowland-Morin's surveys, were absent in this study.

Benefits and Disadvantages of Debate Involvement

Q2 solicited participants' perceived benefits and disadvantages of debate involvement, which were then cross-referenced with those provided by American and Japanese debaters for Q3. There were 125 benefit responses which were compiled into 10 categories, listed in Table 2.

Improved English Abilities/Skills was the most frequently cited benefit of participating in debate with 37 responses or 29.6% of the total. These abilities and skills included English in general, spoken proficiency, lexical ability, writing skills, reading comprehension, and listening ability, of which the first two were the most commonly mentioned. Trailing slightly behind was Critical/Analytical Skills with 35 responses, accounting for 28% of the total responses. Responses included in this category were "logical thinking," "critical thinking," "diversified thinking," "clear thinking," "thinking training," and "finding fallacies." Communication/Public Speaking Skills were ranked the third, accounting for 20 responses (16%) of the total. Examples for Communication Skills included "knowing how to state one's ideas," "ability to express oneself," "rational discussion with others," "accepting others' ideas," and "being tolerant of different opinions." Responses categorized as Public Speaking Skills were "practicing public speaking skills," "practicing delivery," "improving manner and poise as a speaker," "having the chance to speak publicly," and "overcoming stage fright." The remaining

benefits in the list, i.e., Teamwork, Debating Skills, Research Skills (e.g., “information-gathering” and “data-analyzing”), Knowledge (e.g., “learning new information,” “increasing knowledge,” “forming an opinion about the resolution,” and “in-depth study of the resolution”) Meeting People (e.g., “meeting the top students from other schools” and “competing with and learning from other students”), Thinking Fast, and Organization Skills, together comprised 26.4% of all responses, with most of the items accounting for no more than 5% of the responses.

Table 2
Benefits of Debate Participation

Category	Frequency	% of Total
English Abilities/Skills	37	29.6
Critical/Analytical Skills	35	28
Communication/Public Speaking Skills	20	16
Teamwork	7	5.6
Debating Skills	5	4
Research Skills	5	4
Knowledge	5	4
Meeting People	5	4
Thinking Fast	4	3.2
Organization Skills	2	1.6

Note. N=125

Both similar and disparate benefit responses were noted between Taiwanese and their Japanese and American counterparts. For similarities, English Skills topped the benefit list for both Taiwanese high school debaters and Japanese college debaters of PD (but not NDT) style in Inoue and Nakano's study (2004). On the contrary, Research Skills were not seen as an essential gain by either Taiwanese or Japanese students. Just as Communication/Public Speaking and Critical/Analytical Skills were rated in the top five advantages of forensic participation for American college debaters in studies by Matlon and Keele (1984) and Williams et al. (2001) and for Japanese college debaters in Inoue and Nakano's study, they were also perceived as two major benefits by Taiwanese high school debaters. However, different from their American and Japanese counterparts, Taiwanese high school debaters did not deem Knowledge/Education and Social Life/Meeting People as two critical advantages of competitive debate involvement.

Forty-seven responses were collected which indicate disadvantages of competitive debate involvement. The comments were grouped into 7 categories displayed in Table 3. Those concerning the time required by debate constituted the most prevalent responses, i.e., 27 or 57.44% of all responses. Twenty-five of 27 these responses referred to the regular class hours debaters missed due to their preparation for the competition and the extra hours they had to spend after school to make up the work for the classes they had missed. Though preparation for debate had taken a significant amount of time from their studies, only two debaters noted that debate had had a negative impact on their school work. Health Impact/Sleep

Deprivation/Stress was the second most commonly mentioned disadvantage with 14 or 29.78% of the responses, including comments like “stress,” “lack of sleep,” “very tiring,” “energy-consuming,” and “a burden on both mental and physical levels.” The remaining disadvantage items were cited by only one or two participants. Among them, Speaking Against One’s or Mainstream Opinions referred to the random assignment of position in a competitive debate. Participants who considered it a disadvantage disliked speaking against their or the public’s opinion for a position they were assigned to defend. Not Fair to Debaters Who Speak with an Accent concerned the way the competition was judged, as the participant thought “debaters who speak with a local accent are seen as less capable.” Finally, Being too Persistent with One’s Position reflected the comment, “becoming inflexible when believing one is right.”

Table 3
Disadvantages of Debate Participation

Category	Frequency	% of Total
Time Commitment/Consumption	27	57.44
Health Impact/Sleep Deprivation/Stress	14	29.78
Not Fair to Reflective Thinker	2	4.25
Speaking Against One’s or Mainstream Opinions	2	4.25
Not Fair to Debaters Who Speak with an Accent	1	2.12
Being too Persistent with One’s Position	1	2.12

Note. N=47

Again, both similarities and differences were found in the disadvantage responses between the Taiwanese debaters and their American and Japanese counterparts. For all these cultural groups, Time Consumption and Health Impact/Sleep Deprivation/Stress were ranked among the top three costs of competitive debate participation. On the other hand, while Hurting Academics, Affecting Social Life and Financial Costs made into the top five costs for the Japanese and American debaters in most of these studies, they were absent from the Taiwanese debaters' disadvantage responses.

DISCUSSION

Although debating in a second language at a tournament structured by different rules in a different cultural context, these Taiwanese high school debaters expressed many of the same motivations as their American counterparts. Both Taiwanese and American debaters, regardless of their educational level, had Educational Needs as the major incentive to partake in the debate competition, followed by Competitive and Personal Needs. Many of the specific items cited in these categories were also the same, though rankings have varied for some.

Compared with the similarities, the disparities found between the present and past studies are more intriguing and warrant a closer examination. Given the difference between debating in one's mother tongue as in those US studies and debating in a foreign language as in the present study, it is understandable that Improve English Skills did

not emerge in the earlier research on debater motivation but topped the list in the present study. While it was natural for Taiwanese high school debaters to deem Improve English Skills as a major motivation for debate participation, it would be misleading or even counterproductive if it was the sole motivation they had for debate participation because other essential debate-related academic skills would likely be overlooked. Judging from the overwhelming number of responses Improve English Skills received in the category of Educational Needs, administrators and educators can encourage students' English debate participation by emphasizing more the other educational merits debate has the potential to furnish. The absence of Increasing General Knowledge and Improving Organizational Skills—two popular educational motivations in Hill's (1982) and Wood and Rowland-Morin's (1989) surveys—in the current study could result from Taiwanese debaters' lack of adequate understanding of the nature and essence of academic debate. While recognizing that language, logic and verbal skills were indispensable to English debate, Taiwanese debaters seemed to have overlooked mastery of issues debated as another critical component of policy debate, and thus did not develop any motivations concerning knowledge accrument or organizational skills for processing an immense amount of information. The absence of many items in the Personal Needs category in Hill's and Wood and Rowland-Morin's surveys, such as Traveling, Team Camaraderie, and Parties, can be explained by the difference in the organization of the tournament. While the debate tournaments targeted in the earlier studies lasted for months and called for extensive traveling, the tournament in the present study was

only a half-day event that took place in the same city where almost all the participating schools were located. Therefore, little traveling was entailed and no social events like parties were held. Without extensive traveling and training together with teammates, Team Camaraderie naturally was less likely to surface as a personal motivation for the Taiwanese debaters.

The benefits of competitive debate involvement apparently have outweighed its costs for Taiwanese high school debaters as the advantage responses were twice as many as the disadvantage responses. Given the fact that close to one-fourth of the debaters in fact upheld negative perceptions⁴ toward debate before their participation in the Tournament, the overwhelming amount of positive responses obtained in the study spoke powerfully of the advantages of competitive debate participation.

Taiwanese high school debaters' perceptions about the benefits and disadvantages of competitive debate engagement, over all, are also similar to those of Japanese college students and American high school and collegiate debaters in the earlier studies (Inoue & Nakano, 2004; Littlefield, 2001; Williams et al., 2001). For benefits, they all deemed Communication/Public Speaking Skills, Critical/Analytical Skills, Debating/Argumentation Skills, Research Skills, Knowledge/Education, Social Life/Meeting People, and Thinking Fast as the benefits of debate involvement. Yet, while Social

⁴ As delineated in the methodology section, one of the 5 open-ended questions pursued in the study explored debaters' perceptions of debate before and after the debate competition. Those findings are not detailed in this paper because they do not directly pertain to debaters' motivations or the perceived efficacy of competitive debate involvement.

Life/Meeting People was popularly seen as a benefit by American and Japanese debaters, it was much less frequently mentioned by Taiwanese high school debaters. This is possibly for the reason mentioned earlier that the debate competition was only a half-day event and thus did not offer much chance for debaters to meet and socialize with those from other schools. While Research Skills and Knowledge/Education were frequently seen as advantages of debate participation by American debaters, they were not mentioned as benefits by the majority of Taiwanese debaters. This difference may speak of the amount of research, including information gathering and analysis, involved in debaters' preparation for competitive debate in Taiwan as opposed to the US. With a long-lived empirical and positivistic tradition dominating American academia, the standard for research required in case construction, regardless of the debate style, is understandably high. It is even said that the amount of research entailed by a season of competitive debate participation in the US is comparable to that required for writing a thesis for a master's degree (Fine, 2001). This, however, is not the case given the Chinese rhetorical tradition and Taiwanese people's unfamiliarity with and misconceptions about debate. Often the robust content accomplished by solid research does not weigh as much as the prestige and seniority of the speaker or the psychological appeals the speaker resorts to and maneuvers. The alleged but unsupported assertions made by many public figures and reported in the media in Taiwan may have reinforced the perceptions that researching an issue and verifying information are not important or necessary before commenting about it. A possible consequence of not engaging in extensive research for

these Taiwanese high school debaters is their not attaining a great amount of general knowledge or not learning much about a well of issues concerning the resolution as a benefit of debate involvement.

Like the benefits, the disadvantages of competitive debate participation also bore a strong resemblance to those identified in earlier research (Inoue & Nakano, 2004; Littlefield, 2001; Williams et al., 2001). Time Consumption was the biggest disadvantage of debate participation, followed by Health Impact/Sleep Deprivation/Stress. However, different from their Japanese or American counterparts who suffered from physical and mental fatigue as a result of seasonal debate participation, Taiwanese debaters contributed their physical exhaustion and mental stress to the limited time (e.g., 10 days to three weeks) most debating teams had for preparing for the competition. Some never-seen disadvantages, though in a very small number, also surfaced in the present study, including “not fair to reflective thinkers,” “speaking against one’s or mainstream opinions,” and “being too persistent about being right.” A closer examination of those disadvantages indicates a collectivistic cultural orientation of the debaters. Take “not fair to reflective thinkers” as an example. Used to a more reflective and contemplative communication style, a natural product of a collectivistic culture that emphasizes relationship maintenance more than task efficiency, some of these Taiwanese high school debaters understandably could feel they were disadvantaged by the more spontaneous thinking and speaking style required by debate. To keep one’s relationships with others intact, these Taiwanese debaters could also be accustomed to “going with the flow” and therefore consider “speaking against mainstream opinions” and

possibly offending people a downside of debate. Similarly, being right or pursuing truth, as captured in the criticism “being too persistent about being right,” while being the underlying momentum for debating, could arouse concern for Taiwanese debaters who are taught, as part of Confucius teaching, to pursue virtue rather than truth and to be kind rather than right. Again, due to the difference in the way the forensic events are organized between Taiwan and Japan or the US, many commonly perceived disadvantages by Japanese and American debaters, such as Affecting Social Life and Financial Costs were not named as disadvantages of competitive debate involvement by Taiwanese debaters. This may also explain why there were far fewer disadvantages than advantages perceived by Taiwanese debaters for competitive forensics involvement.

An extensive overlapping was found between participants’ motivations for debate participation and their perceived benefits of competitive debate involvement. For example, 7 of the 8 Educational Needs (i.e., Improving English Skills, Improving Logical Thinking Skills, Improving Debating Skills, Improving Communication/Public Speaking Skills, Education/Learning Experience, Improving Information-gathering Skills, and Learning Teamwork) and 1 of the 4 Personal Needs (i.e., Social Interaction) were quoted as the advantages of participating in debate competitions as well. Besides, Improving English Skills and Improving Logical Thinking Skills, the first and second most frequently mentioned motivation items, were also deemed the top two benefits. Such overlapping can further prove competitive academic debates are indeed a type of educational event that enjoys a high efficacy.

CONCLUSION

By surveying 64 Taiwanese high school debaters for their perceptions on involvement in a local English debate tournament, the study has found: (a) educational needs were deemed as the primary incentive to partake in the competitive debate, followed by competitive and personal needs, (b) improving English skills, communication/public speaking skills, critical/analytical skills, and debating/argumentation skills were quoted as the major benefits, and time commitment/consumption as the chief cost of debate participation, and (c) despite some small variations in items and rankings mostly caused by the linguistic means of debate and the organization of the tournaments, Taiwanese and American debaters shared many common motivations to debate, and Taiwanese, American and Japanese debaters also perceived the cost-benefit of competitive debate participation largely in a similar fashion.

Although the study has confirmed the benefits of competitive English debate participation for Taiwanese high school students, they are however self-reported in nature. Future studies can investigate any potential benefit of competitive English debate involvement for Taiwanese students in a more direct and objective fashion (e.g., Colbert's [1987] and Cross's [1971] studies on the relation between competitive debate involvement and critical thinking development in American college and high school students). It is the author's hope that with more empirical research that looks into factors that attract students to debate, and with more empirical evidence that confirms the educational values of competitive debate involvement, English

debate can finally make its way into the English curriculum and extracurricular activities in high schools in Taiwan.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX A

「西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽」問卷調查 (Original Version)

這是一份針對「西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽」參賽者所設計問卷。旨在了解參賽者個人之辯論經驗及想法，所填資料只做研究及日後舉辦此比賽參考之用，故請您盡可能詳盡作答。謝謝您的合作。

台師大英語系 常紹如老師 敬上

個人背景：

1. 就讀學校： _____
2. 性別：男；女
3. 年級：高一；高二；高三
4. 過去參加中文或英文辯論比賽經驗：
有（請說明參加次數及比賽名稱：_____次；_____比賽）
無
5. 您在今年的「西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽」中有無機會上台比賽？
有；無

參加「西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽」之經驗及想法：

6. 您對辯論的觀感為何？有無因參加「西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽」而改變？
7. 請列出您參加「西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽」之動機。
8. 您賽前曾接受下列何種訓練？請於選項中打勾，並就所勾選之項目標示其在訓練中所佔之比重。
英語口語能力（如發音、文法、字彙等）約____%
傳表技巧（如聲調、手勢、眼神等）約____%

- 英語寫作能力（如句型結構、論點之陳述組織等）約____%
- 政策性辯論之策略運用（如探討及擬定正反兩方攻防、質詢策略等）約____%
- 邏輯分析及推理 約____%
- 證據分析及運用 約____%
- 相關議題分析 約____%
- 研究能力培養（如收集資料之管道/方法）約____%
- 其他（請描述：
_____）

您覺得自己最需加強哪些項目的訓練（請依先後順序列出前三項，如「最需要者」為1，「次需要者」為2，「再其次需要者」為3；若無則寫「無」）？

9. 您覺得參加英語辯論比賽有哪些優點？ 有哪些缺點？
10. 您對您自己〈若您無機會上台辯論，請針對您上台的隊友〉在此次辯論比中的表現何處最滿意？ 何處最不满意？ 比賽中您〈或就您的觀察，您上台的隊友〉曾遭遇何種困難？
11. 您對英語辯論比賽（可針對「西賽羅盃」或就英語辯論比賽一般而言）及您參賽之經驗還有其他哪些想法？ 歡迎您與我們分享。我們會將您的經驗及想法提供給主辦學校作為日後舉辦此比賽之參考。

問卷到此為止，再次謝謝您的協助。

APPENDIX B
The Cicero English Debate Participation Questionnaire
(English Version)

This questionnaire aims to investigate the experience of the student debaters who participate in this year's Cicero English Debate Tournament. The information you provide will be kept confidential and used solely for a research purpose and for bettering the tournament. To help us better understand your experience and opinions, please answer the questions with as much detail as possible. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,
Shau-ju Chang
Department of English
National Taiwan Normal University

Background Information:

1. School you attend: _____
2. Sex : M ; F
3. Year in school : First year ; Second year ; Third year
4. Before this year's Cicero Tournament, did you have any experience participating in a competitive English/Chinese debate?
 Yes (please specify the number of times and the names of the competitions: _____
_____))
 No
5. Did you have the chance to debate in this year's Cicero Tournament? Yes ; No

Experience of Participating in an English Debate:

6. What do you think of debate as an oral activity? How has your experience of participating in the Cicero Debate Tournament changed your perception of debate?

7. What were your motivations for participating in the Cicero Debate Tournament?

8. What training did you receive before the competition? Please check the following categories that apply to your case and specify the percentage that a particular category weighs in the training you received:
 - Basic English oral skills (e.g., pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, etc.), about ___%
 - Delivery skills (e.g., gestures, eye contact, use of voice, etc.), about ___%
 - English writing skills (e.g., sentence patterns, discourse structure, organization, etc.), about ___%
 - Policy debate strategies (e.g., affirmative and negative strategies for constructing and refuting contentions and for cross-examining), about ___%
 - Logic and reasoning analysis, about ___%
 - Use and analysis of evidence, about ___%
 - Issue analysis, about ___%
 - Research skills (e.g., where and how to collect information), about ___%
 - Other (Please specify: _____, about ___%)

Among the above types of training, which one/ones do you think you need the most (please name the top *three* categories, with “1” indicating the type you need the most, “2,” the second most, and “3,” the third most). If you don’t need training in any of the above categories, please write “none”)?

9. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of participating in a competitive academic English debate?

10. What were you most satisfied with about your performance at this debate competition? What were you least satisfied with about your performance at this competition? What were the difficulties you encountered during the competition? If you did not have the chance to debate, please comment on the performance of your teammates.

11. Are there other thoughts or feelings about English debate (the Cicero Tournament or English debate in general) or your experience of participating in the Cicero this time that you’d like to share with us? Ideas related to the Cicero Tournament will be passed on to the school hosting the tournament for future reference.

This is the end of the questionnaire. Again, thank you very much for your help.

台灣高中生參加英文辯論比賽之動機與成效研究

摘要

學術性辯論比賽之參賽研究在歐美已有多年歷史，但在台灣卻一直付之闕如。為能在此議題上獲得初步之了解，此研究針對六十四名參加二〇〇七年「台北市西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽」之高中生進行以開放性問題為主之問卷調查。研究發現，台灣學生之參賽動機可分滿足「學術性」、「競爭性」及「個人性」需求等三類。在參賽成效上，優點首屈「提升英語能力」，其次依序為增進「溝通/公眾演說」、「批判/分析性思考」及「論辯」等能力與技巧，而缺點則多與時間因素有關，如「準備辯論耗時」及「時間壓力所造成之身心疲累」。大部分之參賽動機和優點及部份參賽缺點與文獻中之記載相同。研究發現證明，對英語有中上能力之台灣高中生而言，參與學術性英語辯論比賽確實深具教育功效。

關鍵詞：英語辯論比賽 動機 成效 台灣高中生
台北西賽羅盃英語辯論比賽