

“The use of debates in English in Secondary Education”

Antonio Daniel Juan Rubio & Isabel María García Conesa
Universidad Internacional de La Rioja – Centro Universitario Defensa San Javier

Abstract

Education in the 21st century revolves around the acquisition of skills that enable students to participate actively in both their public and private lives. In this learning, effective communication plays an important role and language is the main vehicle. Debates can be an interesting method of educational improvement which leads to the development of students' communication skills.

To demonstrate that a dialogical methodology, of debate in English, has a positive educational impact as well as a multidisciplinary effect, this research considers evidence from the most recent edition of the debate tournament in English for Baccalaureate students. The impact of this interschools competition is investigated in the areas of the linguistic, communication and skills development by the participating students.

To this end, the data of completed questionnaires was collected by the 55 students from 11 different schools. This data was considered alongside opinions of the teaching staff of the collaborating schools, (6 in total) collected via email in another questionnaire of specific open-ended questions. The exploration is framed within a bibliographical review of the educational benefits of debate. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between participation in the tournament and linguistic and communication development, as well as an improvement in the students' social skills.

Keywords: Communication, critical thinking, debate tournament, linguistic development, social skills.

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I. Introduction

The competence in linguistic communication is a cross-curricular competence. At the same time, it is a communication instrument and the mediator par excellence of the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, it should be considered an indispensable skill in the 21st century for personal and professional fulfilment. Currently, in order to achieve this, the development of oral language is an objective of every educational stage, of the entire curriculum in general, as well as one of the key competences to be developed in Baccalaureate.

However, today the school is called to respond simultaneously to an increasing number of needs and demands. Likewise, in the face of the challenges of the 21st century, the teaching of oral language is as important, or more, than that of written language. That is why it is necessary to innovate in methodologies and implement, maintain and develop quality processes.

The complexity of communication processes, relationships and international interaction in the 21st century makes influencing the development of oral skills increasingly urgent. However, creating the conditions to achieve this is not an easy task. That is why this research work examines the implementation of a dialogic methodology. In it, the use of the cooperative learning tool that is the debate will be described; a methodology whose ultimate purpose is the development of students' linguistic competence through the English language in the school context.

Verifying that a debate methodology is or is not an adequate formula to meet the various purposes and respond to these growing needs and demands requires abundant research that provides objective and reliable results. In this case, debate training has several purposes including learning to convey meaningful messages in a foreign language, interacting with peers, and learning to appreciate democratic values. To verify its impact, it is necessary to open lines of research that provide empirical results and validate the procedure and method of work with the students.

In the reflection that follows, the benefits of the tournament will be highlighted from its self-defined conceptual framework and with reference to the objectives set by the teachers who started it. Objective data will be corroborated and contrasted with quantitative data provided by the participants who have lived the experience. These data will also be considered in the light of opinions offered by the teaching staff.

It was found that debating made it possible to express personal ideas and treat one's own and other people's opinions in an informed manner. It also seemed that debating was a motivating way to complement the subjective and the objective and, furthermore, to convince. The experience in an educational centre showed that,

with the debate methodology, more global improvements were often perceived in favourable attitudes towards the use of the language and the confidence with which many students developed.

The main objective of this research work is to reflect on the value that an interscholastic debate contest in English contributes to high school students in the educational system. The relationship between the tournament and the perception of its value by the participating students and teachers will be studied. The purpose of the tournament is to create the necessary conditions to promote meaningful student-centred learning and for the latter to develop both their linguistic and social competences from a growing autonomy and with the support of a teacher who acts as a guide.

Thus, the main hypothesis raised is that participation in the tournament has a positive impact on participating students in linguistic, social and personal terms as active members in a democratic society. It is understood that participation in this tournament provides an opportunity for collaboration between centres that has a positive impact on individual learning from the starting point of each student. The hypothesis therefore postulates that there is a direct relationship between the contest and an educational improvement.

To achieve the general objective, the specific objectives are to create a broad conceptual framework that includes the current state of affairs, to carry out a survey about the experience as assessed by the 55 participating students, and to gather information from the teachers who present a team in the tournament about their motivations and experiences both in preparation and in carrying it out.

II. Literature review: the use of debates

In today's liquid society of continuous changes, having an informed and cultured population is more urgent than ever (Bauman, 2017). The transformation of today's society, caused in part by the effects of digital technologies, goes hand in hand with the so-called impatience syndrome. Faced with this reality, it is a vital task of the educational system to train citizens who recover spaces for dialogue and their democratic rights. Thus, the future of society will be in the hands of competent people, with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to consciously decide about the best future for all.

It is the challenge of a quality education to achieve a balance between the integration of being, knowing and doing that goes beyond the limits of the classroom. In turn, for the development of linguistic competence in English, generic and specific measures are required throughout the student's trajectory (Trujillo, 2007). Given the high expectations and the growing demand for generations prepared in terms of both knowledge, skills and attitudes, debates can contribute in terms of knowledge, the development of communication skills and also in terms of democratic attitudes.

As stated by Huber (2007, p.7), debating is “the process of presenting arguments for or against a proposition”. In a debate, oral discourse is a mediating instrument of communication and learning (Lázaro and Pimentel, 2015). It is built from these various components: discursive knowledge - the logical order that the speaker has to follow to make his speech comprehensive; linguistic knowledge - the formal and suprasegmental aspects of the language; contextual knowledge - the adjustment to the concrete scenario with its characteristics and specific interlocutors; and strategic knowledge - which has to do with the rhetorical resources of the language.

Both the structure and the evaluation of a debate are fixed and known by the participants in advance (Prieto, 2017). There are two teams that present arguments, rebuttals and counter rebuttals before jumping to conclusions. Each team is made up of five individuals, four of whom take turns taking part in each debate. Each team presents its arguments for or against the debate question before a jury that assigns a score according to a previously agreed evaluation rubric. Afterwards, this jury declares the winner.

Each team prepares both the position “in favour” and “against” of the debate question and it is only in the minutes prior to the start of the debate that it is decided, by lottery, which position each team will adopt. In this way, the instrumental learning of the language and respect for the opinions of others, self-confidence, reflection, critical ability, contrasted arguments and support for argumentation are worked on.

The formative resource of dialogue through debate dates back to ancient Greece, where it was used for the first time. Thus, it has been used as a teaching method for more than 4,000 years. It implies dialogue since through a more or less symmetrical and horizontal exchange, the participants try to shed light on common points, in addition to identifying what is different to generate built and shared knowledge. It is an eminently linguistic activity and in which communicative competence plays a crucial role. It is a student-centred method and an example of cooperative work. It depends on the interaction between students, as well as the relationship established between them while they work together in an interdependent and coordinated way.

It is a pedagogical tool with a tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries and, therefore, its use in Spain to improve English learning has both a linguistic, as well as a sociolinguistic, as well as a pragmatic component. To date, it has been used throughout the world to enhance communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills (Akerman & Neale, 2011). Debating depends on both the content and the expression of the same and this, in

turn, depends on the development of critical thinking of each person in the team. Here, at the same time, its use is framed within a CLIL methodology.

2.1 The debate as a communication process

Brown (2007) argues that all pedagogical tasks should imitate real needs outside the classroom for the learner or be a preparation for demands that they will face in the future. Effective factors of attitudes and motivation play a fundamental role in the acquisition processes, and, therefore, condition the performance and results of students. The traditional classroom often helps to develop receptive competence more than the oral one and Richards (2008) points out that there is often a lack of both oral production practices and spaces to improve this competence. Unfortunately, even when they exist, assignments are neither motivating nor relevant to the lives of students. That is why Richards (2008) insists on the need to open real spaces for dialogue. This can be done through discussion practice.

Accepting that an argument is a communication process in which logic is used to influence others, in a debate, participants can appeal to three types of thesis to support their line of argument: facts, values and future policies (Huber 2007). They all depend on a type of reasoning that can be learned. Lázaro and Pimentel (2015) insist that a good speaker is trained and for this, dedication, effort and practice are essential elements. Also, this learning is interesting not only in terms of learning to influence, but also to recognize how we are being influenced by everything around us in the changing world we live in.

Bellon (2000) shows important cognitive achievements on the part of those who participate in debate activities. For his part, Prieto (2017) ensures that debating is an efficient way to develop cognitive, analysis, expression and argumentation skills. Akerman and Neale (2011) concluded that in an L2 development context, discussion helps improve communication skills. In the same way, Bellon (2000) confirms that the use of the debate tool in an English learning context has a positive impact on the development of language, skills and attitudes.

Nosratinia, Abbasi and Zaker (2015) in their study of the use of the debate tool in an English learning context in Thailand confirm that, through the use of debate in the classroom, communication skills in English are developed. They emphasize that, as a pedagogical tool, it allows the learner to be more active and autonomous and empowers them in their learning of the language. According to their conclusions, debating makes it possible to operationalize the linguistic knowledge already acquired, as well as creating the opportunity to develop vocabulary. That is why it concludes that debating allows the motivated student to develop a balance between communication and precision of language.

On the other hand, to date there is no scientific bibliography on the use of debate to improve linguistic competence in English in classrooms in Spain (Prieto, 2017). There is multiple evidence that linguistic competence extends with the use of the language in different and increasingly complex contexts (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). In addition, in L1 linguistic contexts, there is evidence that academic debate provides the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to perform almost any task that requires oral use of the word (Lázaro & Pimentel, 2015). However, there is a lack of studies on the cross-sectional impact of dialogic methodologies on learning English in Spain.

2.2 The debate and development of critical thinking skills

In a globalized world and oversaturated with information, Lastra (2009) generates a very convincing discourse about the growing need to be able to analyse realities effectively in order to orient oneself towards optimal personal development. Faced with increasingly intense socializing agents, making good choices depends on the development of a series of skills, abilities, aptitudes and attitudes. Intellectual, personal and professional autonomy does not come from a pedagogical approach based substantially on the acquisition of content; but this does not mean that there cannot be approaches in which information is key.

Gilabert and Rojo (2011) argue that, in debate activities in which participants have to generate arguments and convince a jury or audience, there is significant learning and the generation of new knowledge by all the people involved. Verderber (2000) ensures that debating is an exercise in critical thinking as teams transform their previous research and ideas into knowledge, collect data, organize information, formulate objectives, define concepts, pose questions, put ideas together, and evaluate arguments.

In a debate, the justification of arguments comes from the knowledge that is made based on the available information. Participants necessarily postulate hypotheses, give contextualized explanations and consider the coherence of necessarily different conclusions depending on whether they debate for or against at any given moment. It requires the identification of reasons and premises, as well as the serious consideration of disparate points of view and opinions. It requires reflecting, determining, and maintaining focus by focusing on a specific question, as well as identifying and formulating criteria for judging the other team's responses. Each of these processes are learned and refined with practice (Hutchinson, 2013). They are all critical thinking skills.

On the other hand, Schank (2013) emphasizes that lifelong learning is not so much the continuous acquisition of knowledge, but rather the improvement of our ability to carry out these processes through the acquisition and analysis of the experiences provided. The development of the competence of learning to learn, therefore, depends fundamentally on the capacities of reflection and analysis. Practice in rigorous processes such as debate allows the learner to have a feeling of personal competence that results in motivation, self-confidence and a taste for learning.

In terms of learning about the use of objective parameters, types of reasoning and possible weaknesses in proposed arguments, a debate methodology is without equal. Practice in how to interpret data and evaluate the relevance and authority of testimonies sets in motion processes that are available for fine-tuning in other areas of life at the time of debate and later. In the same way, the flexibility that is achieved when debating leads to constructive and cooperative attitudes (Hutchinson, 2013). Asking, negotiating, exposing and convincing are just some examples of critical thinking processes that are consolidated and therefore made available to the student.

2.3 The debate and the development of social and democratic values

We are social beings. However, in the same way that it is being increasingly recognized that oral competence requires educational commitment to enable its optimal development, in the high school stage, as in the entire previous school career, the development of the affiliative component too. An adequate development of social skills requires specific and continuous attention so that the school meets one of the basic objectives because interpersonal skills are and will be key to the public and private life of each student. In addition, the socializing dimension is directly related to a respectful and harmonious coexistence and therefore there are many reasons to work on it specifically.

The pedagogical action that optimizes the teaching-learning process in a socializing key depends on participation, communication and collaboration (Slavin, 1995). In a debate, the observation of one another accompanies the actual practice, which in turn accompanies collaboration before and during the staging of their arguments. In other words, debating is synonymous with communicating, collaborating and participating.

According to Gilabert & Rojo (1985), affective factors of attitude and motivation play a fundamental role in the learning process since they condition student performance. Being part of a team implies the commitment to establish positive affective relationships in the learning processes and in the treatment of participation. Also, working together to achieve shared goals depends on interpersonal skills. It depends on a positive interdependence from which they trust each other. That is why success depends on everyone's participation and that, as Johnson & Johnson (2017) state, through the experience of team debate, the individual becomes not only more social, but more supportive.

According to Castejón (2014), it is essential to dialogue and think to educate. He insists that monologues are currently being lived since there are few structures and ways of being that lead to conversation and create shared spaces and meanings. Being intolerant or, at the very least, indifferent, is the order of the day. Therefore, everything that we can contribute as educators in order to create meaning, as well as to generate understanding and agreements, is welcome.

Since its creation, one of the principles on which the Spanish educational system has been inspired has been democracy. Likewise, the Council of European Ministers in its document called “Education for democratic citizenship” (Council of Europe, 2002) marks education for democratic citizenship as essential and a guarantee of a free, tolerant and just society that defends human rights, pluralism and freedom.

Education in any educational system is at the service of the community in which it is located and is accountable to it (Elmore, 2010). Democracy depends on participation and, therefore, it is the role of education to prepare present and future generations to participate in society adequately and effectively. Solidarity, tolerance, respect and justice are concepts whose learning requires reflection and a critical and responsible attitude. As explained in previous sections, debating sets these processes in motion.

Fuentes et al. (2015) argue convincingly that in a democratic society it is totally counterproductive for there to be inhibition and little discursive fluency among the youth population. In fact, shared and varied thinking within a confluence of opinions is synonymous with democracy (Puyal, 2001). It is the basic exercise of participation that leads to individual and shared well-being. That is why the transmission and implementation of the values that favour democratic citizenship is an explicit goal of the Spanish educational system. Debating is understood as a model of democratic citizenship (Lázaro and Pimentel, 2015). In fact, the debate tool is so fundamentally connected to democratic practice that, since time immemorial, its benefits have been considered more than obvious (Bellon, 2000). Concerned citizens who know how to think critically, do research conscientiously, and communicate their ideas convincingly are synonymous with proactive engagement. Preparation in debating skills is expected to be a precursor to competent participation in society today and from the age of 18. If so, the preparation under debate is synonymous with democracy.

III. Methodology

This research is based on both quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, it has used a mixed methodology that includes a bibliographical review on the subject, as well as field work. The fieldwork data come from a survey completed by the participants of the fourth edition of the interscholastic debate contest for Baccalaureate. These data are complemented by the opinions of teachers who submitted a team of students to the contest. In the contest that concerns us, the issue to be debated was whether strict immigration policies are necessary.

An analysis of previous reports has been made about the value of debating to place the investigation in the state of the art today. For this, there have been national authors among others of international renown in the areas of education, communication, collaboration and participation. The analysis of the responses to the survey completed by the students who participated in the tournament considers to what extent their experience aligns with what would be expected according to this literature written on the matter.

The teachers' perceptions were collected through the answers to questions that were asked by email. It is understood that your comments provide understanding and meaning from the contextualization of the processes. They complement the ideas of the texts consulted and are used for this research to support the arguments found both in the literature and those of the students who participated in the tournament. Both in the case of collecting the appraisals of the students, as in that of their teachers, the questions were designed to respond to the objectives of this research.

3.1 Students sample

The sample under study is made up of 55 students with ages ranging between 16 and 18 years. Currently, all study high school, the majority being in the second year and are from the normal school population that we can describe as “ordinary” or “normal” from an academic, social and cultural point of view. They belong to eleven different educational centres, each one with a different ideology. The profile of the students is, therefore, mixed, varied and comes from both public schools and subsidized schools. Of the sample of students, 22 are boys, which is 40%, and 33 are girls, which is 60%.

All students have in common a linguistic profile that includes a minimum level of English of B2, as defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Some have participated in stays abroad, others in intercultural exchanges, others have received support classes in academies throughout their schooling. On the other hand, there is a group that had never used English outside of their classroom before the event. All participated voluntarily both in the tournament and in completing the questionnaire in this regard.

3.2 Questionnaires

The questionnaires have the main objective of measuring and verifying the perception of the contribution of the debate tournament in English regarding the five areas of interest for this study, which are in learning English, in the development of communication skills, in the development of social skills, in developing effective research skills, and in the development of democratic tools.

The information was collected through the application of Google questionnaires called “forms”. The questionnaire is made up of 26 questions. The first 25 are short and closed questions, with the possibility in each case of answering between three options: “totally agree”, “more or less agree”, or “disagree”. The last question is an open question that allows the student to express any circumstance of interest in relation to his experience in the tournament.

Within the first 25 questions there are four differentiated blocks. The first block includes general questions about the importance that each participant attaches to being able to function well in English, as well as to speaking in public. It asks about the opportunities each student thinks they have to improve their oral skills at school. Also, in general if the participant believes that the tournament provided an opportunity to work on these two skills.

Questions 5 to 13 are intended to consider pre-competition work. They inquire about individual and autonomous work and teamwork, the conversations held about the topic of debate and the evaluation of the learning that each individual involved considers. This work is estimated, both in specific linguistic terms at the level of vocabulary and structures in English, as well as in the more global terms of information management strategies and the choice of sources when preparing his speech.

The third section covers questions 14 to 18 and deals with the experience of the tournament itself. Here the opinion of each participant is investigated regarding the quality of the relationships established both with the members of the team itself and their teachers, as well as with the teams of the other participating schools. Questions 17 and 18 are designed to collect information about the ability to listen to respond to the opposing team's arguments and the perceived novelty in the arguments presented by each group.

The fourth and last section deals with a metacognitive reflection. The aim here is to collect verdicts about the value that students place on their participation in the event. Specifically, it consists of 6 questions: four of them have to do with the contribution of the debate in terms of confidence and linguistic skills in English.

The other two questions answer the critical thinking skills that you hopefully also develop through participation. Finally, an open question was included in the questionnaire, such as number 26. With it, the students were given the opportunity to add any additional comments they had regarding the tournament. The questionnaire was enabled online for 20 days. Each participating school was sent an email explaining the reason for it and encouraging the link to be passed to the five participants on their team, strongly encouraging them to reply.

IV. Discussion of Results

Once the information was completed, it was processed, grouped and compared with the different responses. From the data, a descriptive statistical analysis has been carried out that collects general trends and dispersion.

The potential number of responses to the questionnaire was 55. In the end, there were 48 students who completed it. This shows an exceptionally high participation according to Díaz de Rada (2001). The questions the students had to answer were the following:

- *Why did you decide to take part in this competition?*
- *How did you prepare for the competition?*
- *What effect does taking part in the tournament have on you?*
- *In your opinion, what value does an interschools competition add?*
- *How far do you agree that the kind of self-directed, reason and evidence-based learning involved in debating is a good educational practice?*
- *Please feel free to add any further comments.*

The teachers of six of the eleven centres participating in the last edition responded with elaborated responses to the email. They gave qualitative details about the reasons for their decision to participate, the professional practices they develop for the preparation and experience of the tournament and the experience itself. They also commented on how they understand affects the students’ experience of participating in the short and long term, as well as the value they understand the event has.

4.1 Language improvement in English

Cantero (2014) suggests that the need to improve the linguistic competence of students in L2 can be achieved through communicative interaction activities in the language. According to Education First, in 2019, Spain was ranked 32 of the 88 countries studied. This data makes it clear that there is much to do to improve English language proficiency in Spain.

Questions 1, 4, 12 and 19 make explicit reference to the contribution of the tournament in linguistic terms. When faced with the first question, “it is important that you speak English well”, almost 100% of the surveyed students agree. In other words, the participants in the tournament are fully aware of the need for a high command of this language to ensure certain standards of living in accordance with their expectations.

Figure 1: It’s important for me to speak English well (question 1)

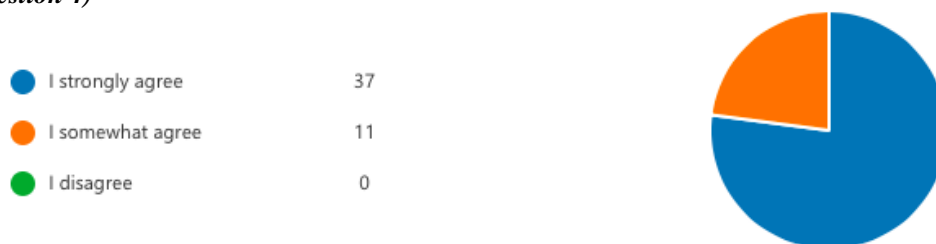


Source: Own elaboration

Students have no doubt about the suitability of a competent handling of this language, which is used for all kinds of exchanges, whether material, service or ideas at an international level. Consequently, when faced with question number 4, 76% of those surveyed affirmed that they understood the competition as an opportunity to improve their language skills in English. And, the answers to question 19, (I am more confident in my oral

skills in English after the tournament), indicate what we wanted to imagine: the students understand that participating in this tournament leads them to improve their linguistic proficiency in English.

Figure 2: This competition gave me the opportunity to improve my English and my public speaking skills (question 4)



Source: Own elaboration

The teachers' responses to the questions posed also show that they believe that participation in the tournament results in linguistic improvement. They highlight that the opportunity to demonstrate the level of acquisition of a second language beyond the classroom encourages a precision that otherwise might not be worked as much.

Likewise, the teachers emphasize the time devoted to rehearsal and repetition in each of the interventions as a significant element. They believe that the process that students undergo, prior to their interventions, is a guarantee of a real linguistic improvement. In the same way, they say they find an improvement in eloquence and fluency thanks to the conscientious preparation that was undertaken. It seems clear that students understand the immediate value of developing their language skills for the tournament, which leads to attending to whatever it takes to achieve it, dedicating their time and effort to approach precision. In turn, teachers also appreciate it.

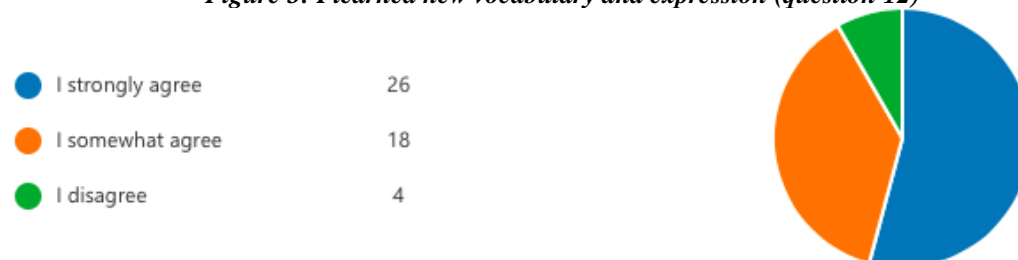
While Aclán (2012) reminds us that vocabulary is the backbone of any language, Bellon (2000) affirms that interacting with contextualized and meaningful language leads to the acquisition of new vocabulary and that, in this sense, the practice of debate is an activity that extends the individual linguistic repertoire.

According to Martínez and Estebán (2005), speaking and listening means being able to understand specific vocabulary and select information, as well as anticipating, memorizing, planning, self-regulating and correcting the broadcast message itself, attending, among other things, to different ideas. Their thesis that, in today's society, the most competent is the one who performs best, is powerful and striking. In this sense, having active access to a wide range of vocabulary and expressions is key.

When answering question 12, it is significant that only 9% of students who completed the questionnaire were not aware of having improved their linguistic competence with new vocabulary and expressions. Consequently, 91% consciously confirm the conclusions of previous studies in this regard.

If our goal is to communicate better, it is clear that vocabulary is key and teachers highlight the fact that when reading from many sources and with an analytical approach, they perceive an improvement in the quality and quantity of active vocabulary that many students demonstrate. It is understood, therefore, that due to the fact that the students consulted numerous articles and other texts on the subject in hand in order to elaborate forceful arguments, the exposure to the language was significant. Similarly, the need to understand these texts in detail was also. Therefore, there was learning of vocabulary and expressions.

Figure 3: I learned new vocabulary and expression (question 12)



Source: Own elaboration

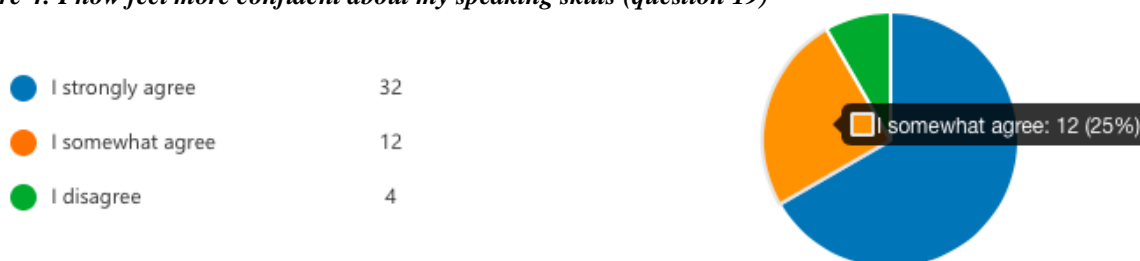
In parallel, several teachers point out the perception that the development that comes from the learning of new vocabulary also improves linguistic proficiency in the other areas of reading and listening

comprehension, as well as that of written production. If so, it would ratify the results of Aclán’s research (2014), which confirms a direct relationship between linguistic development through the acquisition of new vocabulary and a general improvement in linguistic competence.

Qamar (2016) establishes that a proactive environment, in addition to being interactive, is essential to master the entire range of discursive skills necessary for linguistic improvement that is evidenced by spontaneous communication. Among the teachers' responses, it seems interesting to specifically highlight the question about the perceived value of the tournament. Summarizing what has been said, many have the impression that the novelty and pride that goes hand in hand with representing their school in the tournament creates the circumstances to assume different roles, take certain risks when trying to express themselves, as well as actively work to rehearse different speech skills.

In response to question number 19 of the questionnaire, more than 90% evaluate themselves with more confidence when it comes to expressing themselves in English after the tournament. We can deduce that there is, therefore, a direct correlation between this conclusion and the palpable improvement in the linguistic precision of the participants throughout the preparation period, as well as during the two days that the tournament lasts.

Figure 4: I now feel more confident about my speaking skills (question 19)



Source: Own elaboration

4.2 Communication skills

Cantero (2014) reminds us that competence in linguistic communication is the mother of all competences. In the questionnaire, questions 2, 3 and 20 can be directly related to the development of communication skills. Regarding the teachers’ responses, without exception, they all mention the positive contribution of the tournament in this regard.

Successful face-to-face intervention as the final step in the process depends, above all, on the communication skills of the students. The teachers highlighted the challenges faced by their students, emphasizing the positive contribution of the methodology in encouraging clarity in the interventions, as well as in promoting direct, short and concise responses. The need to make yourself understood within a restricted time frame requires practice and the tournament justifies continuing to insist and practice these skills.

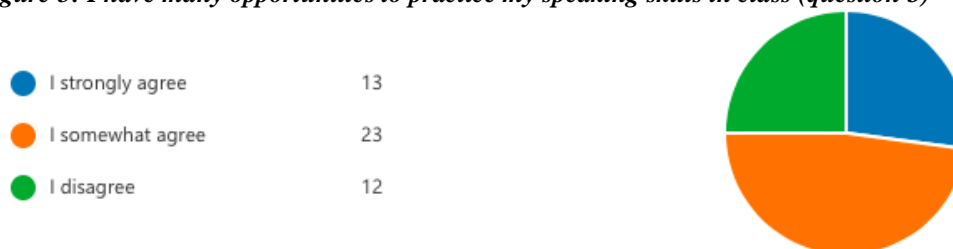
According to Salinas, Benito & Lizana (2014), for the student to be competent at a communicative level, it is necessary to encourage prolonged practice in activities that go beyond transmitting concepts. During the preparation and the staging of each debate, the students were necessarily combining transversal communication skills such as the ability to formulate questions, strategies to respond to questions posed, as well as the concretion of tangible examples and reasoned explanations.

Although it is true that there are people with more predisposition, the good speaker is formed, and as stated by Lázaro and Pimentel (2015), for this, practice, effort and training are essential. Two teachers mention that the idea of future debates contextualizes the learning of specific skills such as rhetoric, and thus invites their students to pay more attention to specific details on a day-to-day basis.

Question number 3 asks about the opportunities available to students in their educational centres to improve their oral competence. In their responses, 74% fully agree that they have many opportunities to work on oral skills. On the other hand, 18% more or less agree, while the remaining 8% disagree. These differences surely demonstrate the disparity of school realities in which students coexist.

When it comes to commenting on how they help their students to prepare for the contest, there is also disparity in the responses of teachers from different educational centres. Interestingly, it seems that for some schools working on communicative competence in English is a priority, while for others, it is rather part of an extracurricular activity.

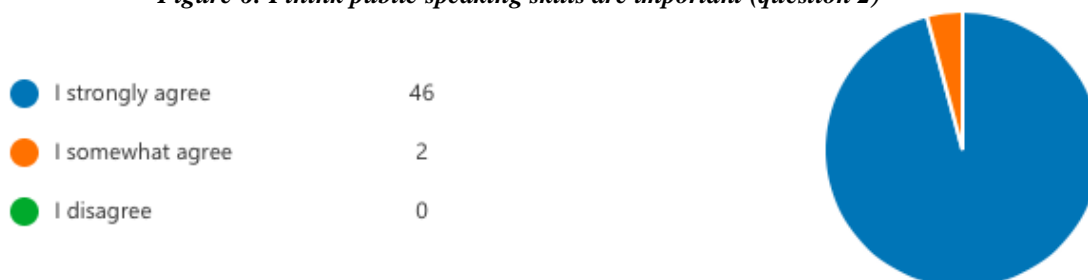
Figure 5: I have many opportunities to practice my speaking skills in class (question 3)



Source: Own elaboration

Freire (2002) developed a dialogic perspective for education in which he differentiates between ‘issuing communications’ and dialoguing. Dialogue means participating in a communication between people and not just ideas and depends fundamentally on the interlocutors listening to each other. When answering question 2, 100% of the students affirm that they believe that communication skills are important. In the same way, they claim that public speaking is. However, communication skills are developed not only speaking, they also depend on the listening capacity of each individual. When answering question 17, 98% say they have listened carefully to their opponents.

Figure 6: I think public speaking skills are important (question 2)



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 7: I had to listen carefully to others to come up with counterarguments (question 17)



Source: Own elaboration

In line with the postulate of Freire (2002), which ensures that activities that improve communication are based on relationships of authenticity, self-awareness, autonomy and the perception of usefulness, the contest created the conditions to develop all these aspects. In fact, in line with the opinions of many professors and juries, it is evident that the teams that best debated were those that listened to the arguments of their opponents and responded to them. Therefore, we can affirm that in successful interventions dialogues were established thanks to the fact that the teams listened to each other.

4.3 Social skills

Learning is always individual, but this does not mean that cooperation and companionship should be set aside. According to Delors (1996), education should help us understand the world around us and this includes and fundamentally depends on developing the way of feeling, thinking, living and living together. Questions 6, 8, 14, 15 and 16 are directly related to the social part of the tournament.

In this debate contest, as in all of them, the groups were heterogeneous and those that made it up necessarily had to interact to organize themselves. Each team has had to find arguments, distribute tasks and interventions and manage their time to work effectively. Irremediably, all this requires internal dialogue and social relationships are forged according to these interactions between the individuals that make up the team.

In a world of increasingly specialized roles, it will be essential to know how to work as a team and in a network, collaborate effectively and create new relationships based on trust. When asked if, thanks to the tournament, the students got to know their teammates better, 98% answered that they totally agreed. In parallel, when answering the question of whether they got to know people from other teams and, therefore, schools, 98% answered that they totally agreed. Likewise, the teachers consider that the possibility of working on a common project thanks to this tournament is very positive.

Figure 8: My team valued my ideas and we worked well together (question 8)



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 9: I got to know my teammates better (question 14)

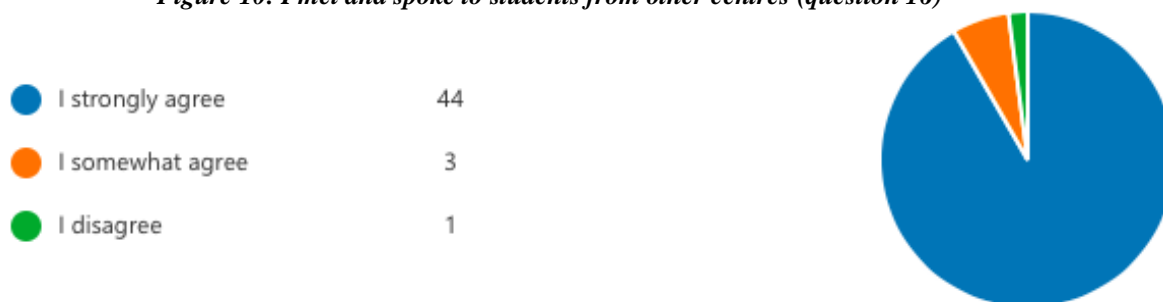


Source: Own elaboration

According to Bellon (2000), in their responses teachers confirm that the debate provides opportunities to develop skills that students need in the real world. Among them, the ability to interact both with students from their school team, as well as with the other students in the contest, stands out in a very prominent way. 98% of the students who completed the survey agree that, throughout the process of preparing and staging the debates, they got to know their teammates better. 100% claim to have worked well as a team.

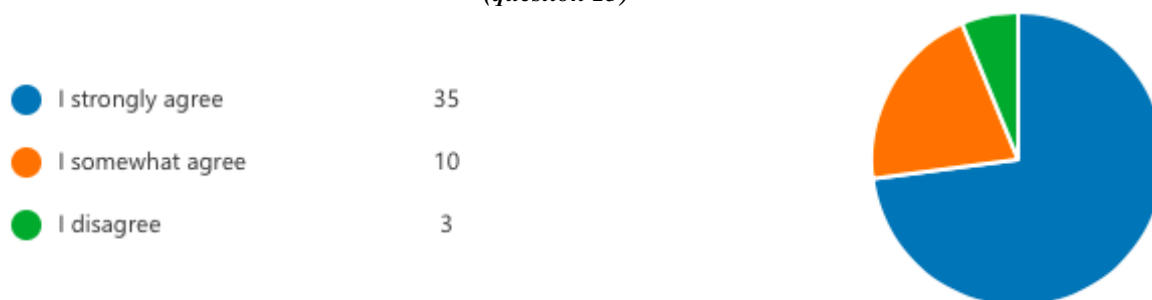
In turn, 98% claim to have related to students from other educational centres and 93% perceived that the relationships were different from those in the classrooms they experience on a daily basis. In addition, many of the comments received in response to the only open question in the questionnaire, question 26, alluded to the social part of the tournament. In these comments, the students expressly valued the possibility of establishing relationships with people from other educational centres with whom, without the tournament, it would have been more difficult. His positive perception of this reality shows us a very valuable side of his assessment of the tournament.

Figure 10: I met and spoke to students from other centres (question 16)



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 11: My relationship with the other students and teachers was different from that of a normal class (question 15)



Source: Own elaboration

4.4 Investigation skills

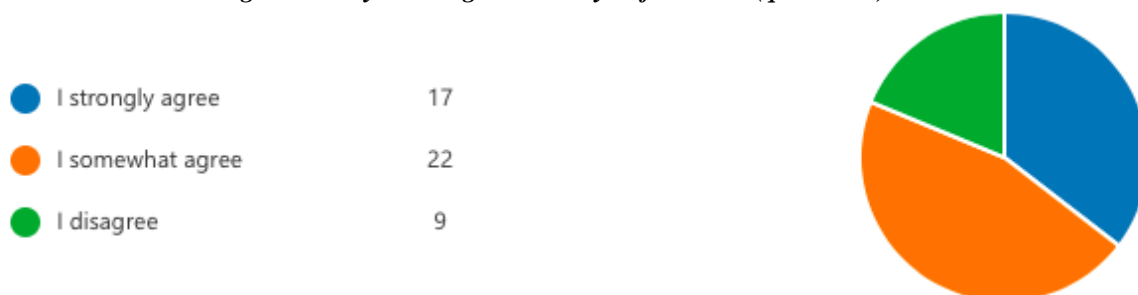
In addition to the linguistic, communicative and social skills developed by a debate methodology, it is also understood that they delve into aspects that provide critical knowledge and skills to people. Thus, the ability to select relevant information and process it depends on, and at the same time contributes to, the development of effective research skills.

Constructing forceful lines of argument requires processes of investigation, analysis, synthesis, organization and evaluation of information (Qamar, 2016). It also involves comparing explanations from various perspectives and generalizing to generate a thesis to defend. Several teachers cite the student's perceived importance of thorough research as the best contribution of the tournament. The fact of having to defend the same position both for and against the debate question makes the students very demanding with their own arguments and this led to the exploration of the subject at hand to be very meticulous. As a consequence, according to Bellon (2000), going through the experience of needing this mental flexibility was shown to influence personal internal reasoning processes.

As the students confirmed during the contest, through in-depth research prior to the tournament, intellectual understanding was increased and a greater conceptual understanding of the topic under discussion was reached. They affirm that in the elaboration of arguments the role of the teacher became central since it served as support in the development of cognitive and meta-cognitive processes through communicative processes. Likewise, they confirm with their answers to the questions in the questionnaire that, as a guide in the research processes, the teachers helped the students to support their ideas with graphs and statistics. Teachers were able to provide perspective and encourage students to go further to consider other nuances. In short, the role of the teacher was key in suggesting ways to improve effective investigative skills on the part of the student.

Regarding question number 7, “my learning was self-directed; I read independently and contributed my ideas to the team”, there is a disparity in evaluations by the students. 33% totally agree, 48% agree and 20% disagree. An explanation for this difference in perception could have to do with the organization of the work and the presence or not of the teacher in the process. The type and depth of the reflections of the teacher with the team was perceived in the arguments presented by the students. When reflections about the research data were shared with the students consistently and seriously, it showed and the teams went further in the tournament.

Figure 12: My learning was mainly self-directed (question 7)



Source: Own elaboration

Bellon (2000) states that the debate methodology is one of the most effective ways to improve critical thinking skills. Before question number 9, 100% of the students agreed that thanks to the tournament they learned to analyse information critically. As active learners in boundless investigation, they not only practiced analytical skills in defending the arguments they had found, but also evaluated the validity and rigor of their own investigations. Another example of this is that 93% of responses agree that they learned to analyse the sources of information consulted (question number 11).

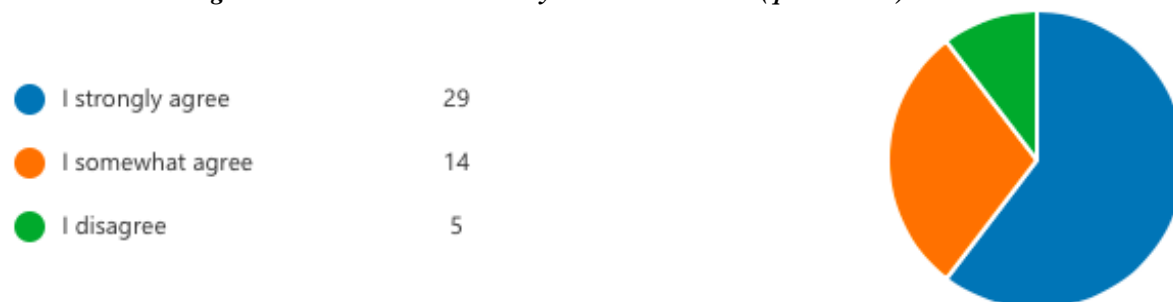
Figure 13: I learned to critically analyse information (question 9)



Source: Own elaboration

Similarly, 89% of the students affirm that, after the contest, they are more critical when thinking about what they read (question number 23). These data suggest that the tournament has had a significant impact on the development of research skills.

Figure 14: I think more critically about what I read (question 23)



Source: Own elaboration

Several teachers recognized the importance of effective research as key to preparing their team. They emphasized the impact of using English as a tool for students to find information, seek new ideas and take responsibility for their own learning. In their responses they underlined the learning that went hand in hand with locating and interpreting statistics that could be related to the arguments and opinions from various web pages and newspapers. In fact, all the responses on their part alluded to their supportive role in the process of building arguments based on evidence that directly supported or contradicted the question of the debate.

The teachers also emphasized their role in helping to organize the information found through discussions about positions and reflection on the data. In this way, according to the ideas of Salinas, Benito and Lizana (2012), teachers were key players in generating information and knowledge compared to their more

traditional role of transmitting it. They encouraged learning by doing and interacting with information already available, thus conducting research that would keep the team active and with an open mind on the subject.

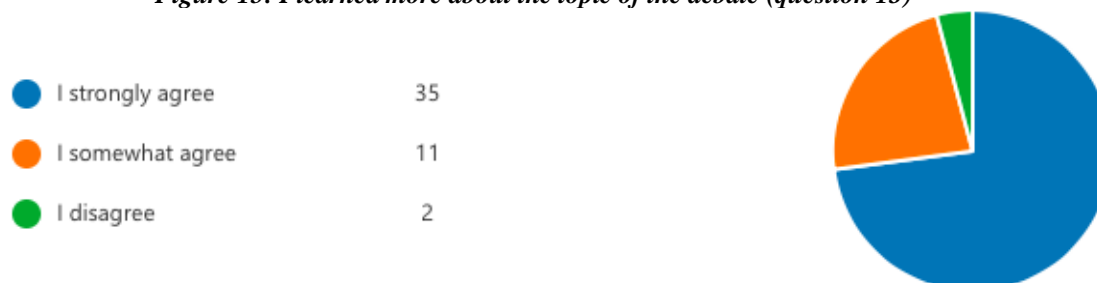
4.5 The development of democratic tools

The domain of communication is alien to moral assessment and that is why it is understood that reflective processes around current questions that culminate in a debate benefit the education of citizens. Not only do they encourage and nurture the level of involvement of the student, but it also introduces them to spaces that are directly related to the environment. Thus, we understand that participation in the event makes the school's mission as democratic and emancipatory preparation a reality.

Martínez (2004) proposes that debating is an extremely valuable learning for the autonomy of the individual who is part of a democratic society. The methodology is ideal because it can cover work by competences that has gained great value today and is an objective of education. Likewise, it invites the student to participate directly in a model of citizenship that values dialogue, considers principles and values regarding human rights, insists on respect and values pluralism and diversity of opinions.

Many authors argue that we are facing the existence of an extended and deep crisis of representative democracy that has led to distrust and apathy. This author highlights that the fact that the debate tournament is contextualized, meaningful and that it poses a challenge to the participating student, creates the conditions for training in the processes necessary to play an active role in society. At the same time, it promotes the involvement of students in important matters of social interest from where they can challenge a set of commonly accepted assumptions. In the specific case that concerns us, 96% confirm having learned about the issue of immigration policies during the preparation period before the debate (question no.13).

Figure 15: I learned more about the topic of the debate (question 13)



Source: Own elaboration

93% confirm that they also learned during the tournament (question no. 18). In addition, the students often found themselves in the position of defending the same arguments both for and against the issue. Thus, they were understanding the complexity of reality, breaking with stereotypes and opening their minds to seek more creative solutions.

Figure 16: I heard different arguments and learned more about the topic (question 18)



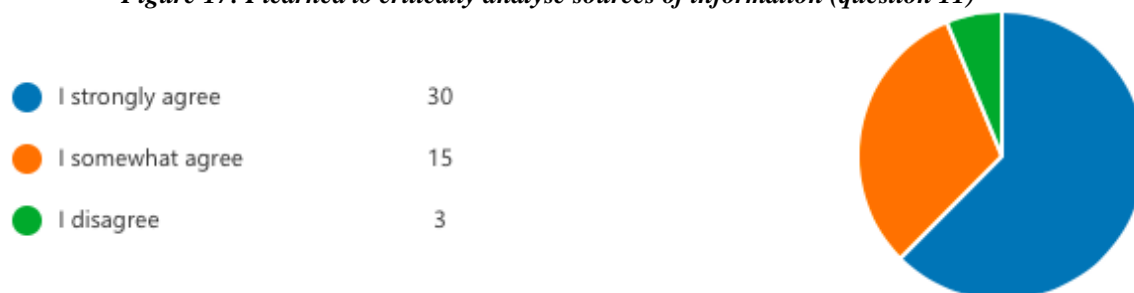
Source: Own elaboration

In turn, several teachers highlighted the contribution of the tournament in terms of encouraging students to go beyond subjective opinions to arrive at concrete evidence. This is considered essential in preparation for living in a democratic world. Going beyond consumerist approaches to education to promote and / or defend ideas with persuasion is considered the development of tools that would be welcome in society.

94% of the students agree that the experience helped them to structure the arguments effectively for their speeches (question 11). They were trained in respect for speaking turns and anticipating counter arguments. This practice in debate activities is understood to reduce the possibilities of media manipulation since it

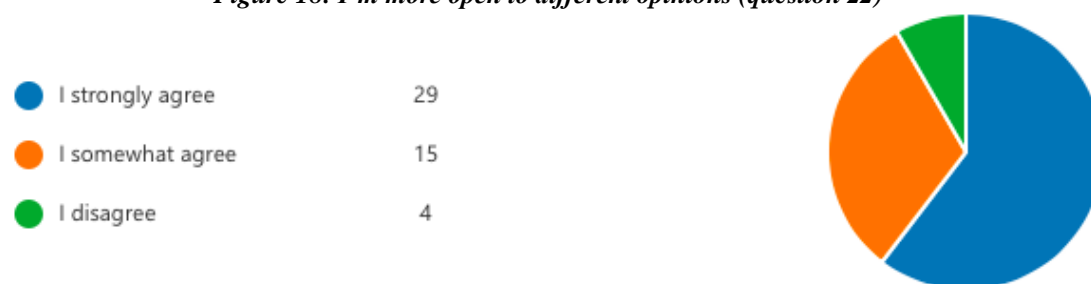
encourages listeners to consider ideas according to their validity as well as from the individual's competence to convince. As a possible sign of success in these processes, 9% of the participants claim to be more open to different opinions after participating in the tournament (question 22).

Figure 17: I learned to critically analyse sources of information (question 11)



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 18: I'm more open to different opinions (question 22)



Source: Own elaboration

Teachers insist on the impact of tournament participation for the entire school and beyond. In addition to understanding more about the implications of the arguments for the real world, they emphasize positive input in terms of providing students with new experiences that result in new approaches, new roles, and a sense of new responsibilities. At the same time that we have seen participants gain in terms of autonomy, we have seen them become more capable of using persuasion tools with more consideration for the other. We understand that there has been training in empathy and fair play as well as the desire for the team whose arguments and evidence were best supported to win.

Martínez (2004) insists that the improvement of oral communication skills is of great value today. This author argues that we are more likely to speak if we understand that we have something useful to contribute. And we are more likely to be heard if there is an openness to the world and to others. At the same time, we are more likely to be understood if we have a good command of the skills that are worked on through this discussion methodology. That is why, according to the contributions of other teachers, it is understood that participation in this contest has been a good way to develop skills that are extremely important in a democratic society.

V. Conclusions

This paper aims to demonstrate the positive impact that participation in a debate contest has on the development of specific areas in the high school students who participate, in line with other research in the same sense. These areas are i) linguistic, ii) social development, iii) communication skills, iv) effective research skills, and v) democratic participation. To do this, we have the objective data collected in the recent edition of the interscholastic debate in English, in addition to the experience of previous debates of similar characteristics. For data collection, differentiated questionnaires were designed to be filled out by students and teachers. This information was complemented with bibliographical research on the subject.

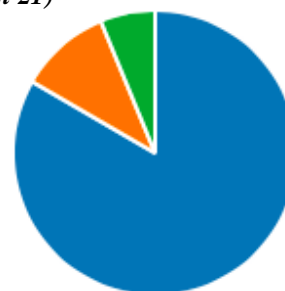
This research has met its three specific objectives. It has created a conceptual framework from which the contribution of the debate tool has been considered in the most recent edition of the debate tournament in English for Baccalaureate. Bibliographical research has revolved around learning English and communicative and social skills. We have also considered the contribution of the tournament in the development of both effective investigative and democratic skills.

The questionnaires were answered by the vast majority of participants. From the analysis of their answers, we can extract the general feeling that participation in this debate has been a benefit in terms of linguistic improvement and especially in the second language, of improving the capacity for social interaction and satisfaction with learning. On the other hand, through the process of preparing and conducting the tournament, improvements were observed in research skills and in processes conducive to active and respectful democratic participation. Therefore, it is understood that the impact of the tournament was positive in the exposed terms. So, it has also met its general objective and confirms the hypothesis that was raised at the beginning.

Aware that satisfaction is key in a quality educational innovation (Bonals, 2013) and that collaborations lead to mutually beneficial objectives (Johnson, 2017), the evidence from the fourth edition of this tournament shows that it meets its objective as a local solution. which helps prepare students for the global world. In detail, the data collected provides the following: 94% of the participants agree that their participation in the tournament has been worth it. The same percentage would recommend the experience to other students.

Figure 19: I feel the experience was worthwhile (question 21)

● I strongly agree	40
● I somewhat agree	5
● I disagree	3



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 20: I would recommend the experience to others (question 25)

● I strongly agree	42
● I somewhat agree	3
● I disagree	3



Source: Own elaboration

Likewise, both the teachers and the jurors observed improvements, in general, in a large number of participants over the course of the tournament. Communicating ideas effectively requires practice and the ability to intervene repeatedly - first behind a closed door and then in front of an audience. In this sense, the students who participated the most showed notable improvements both in terms of competence and in terms of confidence.

The debate tournament in English adds another framework for action to provide an educational response to the complex processes of linguistic comprehension and communication in English as a foreign language. As detailed in the presentation of results, the vast majority of students considered their participation in the tournament another way to improve their linguistic skills, aware that being proficient at an oral level in this language opens many doors for them and allows greater social mobility. They say they have learned new vocabulary and this is an assessment confirmed by the teachers. Therefore, from the framework established by Bellon (2000), we can conclude that, thanks to their participation, they have extended their individual linguistic repertoire.

The results of the questionnaire regarding the perceived improvement of linguistic competence in terms of vocabulary are supported by the teachers. The teachers who accompanied their students in the tournament claim to have seen progress in language improvement in English as L2. It is understood that the fluency in presenting and developing ideas came from careful preparation before the tournament. This, in turn, led, with practice, to greater confidence in speaking. This confidence has meant that many would go through the same experience again. And that is why it has been confirmed that, as was found in the study by Nosratinia, Abbasi, and Zaker (2015), participation has led to a sense of greater empowerment and autonomy on the part of the

student who has a clear interest in continuing to improve their precision when expressing themselves with the English language.

It seems clear that concentrating on making coherent speeches both for and against the topic of debate has created an opportunity to experiment and thus acquire a wide range of expressions and vocabulary useful for the present and the future. In this sense, the interaction beforehand by the student with plenty of information from authentic texts, the negotiation of meanings from an analytical approach and the requirement to produce coherent oral texts, surely has influenced this achievement. The precision of arguments necessary to disagree in part with the opponents, as well as the practice of doing so, is understood to have reinforced and ensured improvement.

There is no doubt that this interscholastic debate tournament in English contributes positively to the development of social skills. Although after observations contrasted with teachers it is stated that the students put more conscious emphasis on their personal and intellectual development, the socialization component is undeniable and, in fact, it is what the students commented the most after the event. That is why it is understood that the tournament extended the traditional learning environment and favoured the improvement of the ability of students and teachers to relate to people who already knew each other, as well as with new people from other educational centres.

The opportunity to interact with students from other schools was considered especially interesting, motivating and stimulating for the students. Therefore, the contest made possible a socialization from an approach of communication and equality of conditions. It allowed people, who might not have done it otherwise, to get to know each other and value themselves from educational parameters. In the same way, it created a common line of work from which the teachers got together, discussed and contributed transparency, respect and positive assessment to the training of their students in an environment of trust, transparency, respect and positive assessment.

According to Cantero (2014), who affirms that training actions that promote a good use of the language as a communication tool have a positive collateral effect, here it is clear that the students progressed in the acquisition of several competences simultaneously. These include learning to learn and of autonomy and personal initiative, and of social competences. In addition, the organizer's experience leads her to intuit the certainty in what Johnson (2017) affirms, when she assures that with dialogic processes not only the levels of sociability are increased, but also those of solidarity between individuals and schools.

Through research, this tournament has helped to train citizens who are informed while being active in both the search and the creation of knowledge. Therefore, there is no doubt that the tournament has made a great contribution to a vital learning for the students involved: that of strengthening effective research skills. Likewise, and according to López (2010), this debate experience has helped students to have more autonomy of thought regarding the topic of debate and knowledge of useful research techniques.

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