

Virtual Debate Community: A Study on Students' Perception and Improvement in English Debating Skills

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in technology have significantly enhanced global learning, particularly in debate. With debating competitions like the National University Debating Championships (NUDC) becoming mandatory, universities face the challenge of preparing skilled debaters. The advent of virtual debate communities through platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and Discord has addressed logistical issues like scheduling and finding sparring partners. This research, utilizing qualitative methods including questionnaires, interviews, and documentation, reveals that students appreciate these platforms for improving their English and debating skills, expanding their networks, and boosting motivation, and create an effective platform for practices. However, internet connectivity issues often hinder the effectiveness of feedback and engagement. Future research should focus on solutions for connectivity problems, compare the effectiveness of different virtual platforms, and explore the long-term impact and experiences of diverse student groups.

Keywords: *Virtual debate communities; students' perception and improvement; English Debating Skills.*

INTRODUCTION

Debating is an invaluable activity for higher education students, providing them with essential skills and experiences that enhance their academic performance and prepare them for future professional and personal challenges. By engaging in debates, students become better thinkers, communicators, and leaders. Debating enhances critical thinking, improves public speaking, and promotes comprehensive research skills among students (Snider, 2002). Engaging in meaningful dialogue is not just about improving communication skills; it is also essential for cognitive development and educational success. Debate is particularly important for students at higher education levels (Mercher, 2007).

In Indonesia, debate has become an important aspect of the educational curriculum. Annually, the Indonesian government, through Puspresnas (Pusat Prestasi Nasional), holds national debate events: the National University Debating Championship (NUDC) for English Debate and the Kompetisi Debat Mahasiswa Indonesia (KDMI) for Bahasa Indonesia. NUDC champions advance to compete in the World University Debating Championship (WUDC). To prepare for these competitions, every university is mandated to send their debater candidates each year.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges, making it difficult for students to conduct on-site practices. As a result, competitions and practices shifted online. Virtual media platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and other online learning platforms became essential in supporting learning. During the pandemic, the quality of online learning was significantly influenced by service quality, teacher engagement, and overall system infrastructure, which positively affected student satisfaction and performance (Hongsuchon et al., 2022).

For the debating community, this shift led to a hybrid model (both virtual and on-site) for practices and competitions. This new approach has created new habits for students, positively or negatively impacting their learning experiences. Issues such as more flexible learning and easier access to sparring partners have been resolved through the virtual debate community. However, differences in student perceptions towards online learning still exist and need to be assessed.

Students' perceptions of online learning are multifaceted and influenced by various factors, including the ease of use and usefulness of the technology, the presence of interactive and supportive elements, and the ability to meet their psychological needs (Mutalib et al., 2022). Despite the vital role of online platforms in the learning process during the new normal era, some students remain unmotivated due to technical issues and limited interaction. Students appreciated the flexibility and accessibility of online learning but were challenged by technical issues and a lack of interaction with instructors (Alsayed and Althaqafi, 2022).

The current literature emphasizes the importance of debate in higher education and its benefits for student development (Snider, 2002; Mercher, 2007). The integration of online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic has been well-documented, highlighting the advantages and challenges of this mode of learning (Hongsuchon et al., 2022; Mutalib et al., 2022; Alsayed and Althaqafi, 2022). However, specific studies focusing on the perceptions and improvements of students after joining virtual debate communities remain limited.

Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap by exploring how students perceive and improve after joining virtual debate communities. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for educators to enhance the current state of virtual debate communities, thereby maximizing their benefits. This research is timely, given the continued reliance on hybrid learning models post-pandemic. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of virtual debate communities, educators can implement strategies to improve student engagement, motivation, and skill development.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher employed a qualitative approach to address the research objectives. A qualitative research approach is particularly relevant for this study because the phenomenon being studied—students' perceptions and improvements in virtual debate communities—is deeply intertwined with its context. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the complex perceptions and issues related to how students join and engage with virtual debate communities.

Using a case study method, the research aims to unravel the intricate dynamics of students' experiences in virtual debate communities. The case study approach is suitable for this research as it provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2013; Stake,

2010). This method allows for an exploration of contemporary phenomena within their real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin, 2014).

To gauge students' perceptions, a questionnaire comprising 20 questions was administered to 32 respondents. These respondents are varsity debaters from different universities, providing a diverse sample. The questionnaire aimed to capture a broad range of perceptions related to their experiences in virtual debate communities. Questionnaires are effective for gathering data from a large group of participants and obtaining quantifiable insights (Creswell and Poth, 2017).

To delve deeper into the students' perceptions and improvements in debating skills, virtual interviews were conducted with 10 students. These interviews provided rich, detailed data and allowed for a nuanced exploration of individual experiences and perspectives. Interviews are a powerful method for obtaining an in-depth understanding of participants' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015).

In addition, observations of virtual debate practices and competitions were conducted to gain insights into the interactions, engagement levels, and overall dynamics within the virtual debate community. This method provided contextual data that complemented the self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews. The researcher did observation in MARS!, Technocrat Training Sessions, EDC Untirta and Disputandum. Observations allow researchers to understand the natural context and behaviors of participants, providing a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

After doing the research from April 16 until July 1, 2024, the research finally gained the result from each instrument which are divided into the result of questionnaire, interview, documentation, and observations.

For the research subject there are 32 participants who filled their data through questionnaires from some debate communities that is displayed in the following table as follow:

Table 1. Students' Demographics

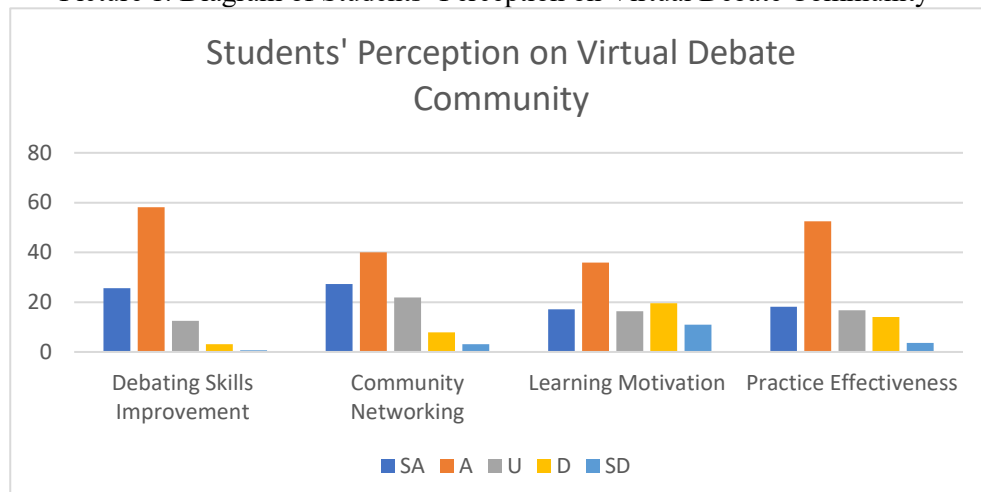
No.	Students Initials	Institution	Years of Debating	Gender	Region (City)	Debate Community/Club Name
1	BA	STBA Technocrat	1 year	Female	Tangerang	Technocrat English Club (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual)
2	UL	STBA Technocrat	1 years	Male	Tangerang	Technocrat English Club (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual)
3	RB	UNTIRTA	4 Years	Male	Serang	EDC UNTIRTA (Hybrid) ; MARS (Virtual); DISPUTANDUM (Virtual); DEBATING404 (Virtual).
4	JAB	Tuna Bangsa	3 Years	Male	Jakarta	DISPUTANDUM (Virtual); MARS (Virtual)
5	KKW	UNTIRTA	3 Years	Male	Serang	EDC UNTIRTA (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual).
6	ZAR	UPI	4 Years	Female	Bandung	EDS UPI (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual).
7	NA	UNTIRTA	1 Year	Female	Serang	EDC UNTIRTA (Hybrid)

8	THS	STBA Technocrat	0 Year	Male	Tangerang	Technocrat English Club (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual).
9	FH	UNTIRTA	3 Years	Male	Serang	EDC UNTIRTA (Hybrid)
10	ANI	UNTIRTA	5 Years	Female	Serang	EDC UNTIRTA (Hybrid)
11	SANA	UIN SMH Banten	3 Years	Female	Serang	ASSES (Virtual)
12	AS	UIN SMH Banten	3 Years	Female	Serang	English Partner (Hybrid)
13	MJP	UNTIRTA	3 Years	Male	Serang	EDC UNTIRTA (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual)
14	BKK	UNTIRTA	5 Years	Female	Serang	EDC UNTIRTA (Hybrid)
15	CD	UAJY	3 Years	Female	Yogyakarta	Critical Thinking Community, English Debate Community (Hybrid)
16	AI	UMN	3 Years	Male	Tangerang	UMN English Student Council (Hybrid –online for competition preparation only); MARS (Virtual)
17	EN	UMN	3 Years	Male	Tangerang	UMN English Student Council (Hybrid –online for competition preparation only);
18	SY	UMN	1 Year	Male	Tangerang	UMN English Student Council (Hybrid –online for competition preparation only); MARS (Virtual)
19	AJ	UIN SMH Banten	3 Years	Male	Serang	ASSES (Virtual); English Partner (Hybrid)
20	ACA	UIN SMH Banten	3 Years	Male	Serang	ASSES (Virtual); English Partner (Hybrid)
21	FA	UIN SMH Banten	2 Years	Female	Serang	English Partner (Hybrid)
22	NIK	TRISAKTI	3 Years	Female	Jakarta	TSM – Hybrid ; MARS – Virtual
23	No.	UPI	2 Years	Female	Bandung	EDS UPI (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual).
24	NK	STBA Technocrat	0 Year	Male	Tangerang	Technocrat English Club (Hybrid); MARS (Virtual)
25	SV	STBA Technocrat	0 Year	Male	Tangerang	Technocrat English Club (Hybrid);
26	FAB	UIN Jakarta	5 Years	Male	Jakarta	EDC (Hybrid)
27	MA	UIN Jakarta	4 Years	Male	Jakarta	EDC (Hybrid)
28	AS	UIN Jakarta	2 Years	Male	Jakarta	EDC (Hybrid)
29	YES	UNPAR	3 Years	Male	Bandung	EC Tarki – Hybrid
30	AC	TRISAKTI	2 Years	Female	Jakarta	TSM – Hybrid
31	R	UNIBA	1 Year	Male	Serang	Yoursay Community
32	PS	UNIBA	1 Year	Female	Serang	Yoursay Community

From the table above, it could be seen that most respondents are from Banten with the debater experience from range 2 until 3 years. In addition, some people joined more than one debate or English communities or even at least one community.

For the questionnaire, there were 20 questions given to the students to know about their response on the existence of virtual debate community and if they feel that there has been any improvement after joining the virtual debate community. The result is discussed into three points. First point is about students' English and Debating Skills Improvement. Secondly, it described the students' community networking. Third it was about learning motivation and lastly it was about the effectiveness of the practice virtually.

Picture 1. Diagram of Students' Perception on Virtual Debate Community



The majority of students reported that these communities significantly enhanced their debating skills, facilitated community networking to find sparring partners and qualified coaches, and boosted their learning motivation due to interactions with members from diverse universities. Additionally, students appreciated the flexibility and ease of organizing practice sessions in virtual environments. However, a notable issue identified was related to internet connectivity. A significant 43.8% of students expressed dissatisfaction, noting that connectivity problems frequently disrupted their practice sessions within virtual debate communities.

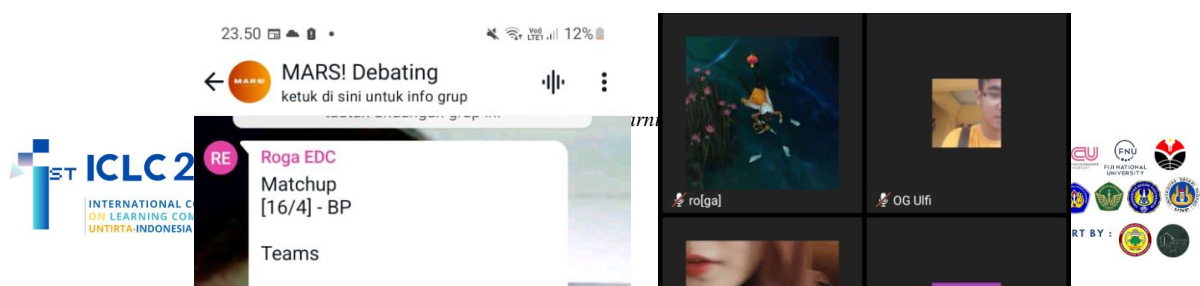
To gain deeper insights into students' perceptions, the researcher conducted observations using field notes within the virtual debate community WhatsApp groups. This method aimed to capture the activities and interactions occurring before and during practice sessions, thereby providing a comprehensive view of the process and visualizing students' responses.

Observations were conducted in three virtual debate communities: EDC Untirta, where the researcher is an alumnus, and MARS! and Disputandum, where the researcher is an active member. The observations revealed similarities in pre-debate activities across these communities. Typically, the practice schedule is announced by the admin on the community's website or WhatsApp group description. Participants then register their teams and join the practice session accordingly.

In the case of virtual competitions or when participants are invited as adjudicators, registration is usually required outside the group or through an invitation from the competition host. During the debate practice sessions, a common practice observed was that participants often used their team names and generally kept their cameras off during exhibitions.

The findings highlight that while virtual debate communities offer substantial benefits in terms of skill enhancement, networking, and flexible practice opportunities, technical issues such as internet connectivity need to be addressed to optimize the overall experience for students.

Picture 2. The Debate Match Up and The Debate Exhibition in MARS!



The practice sessions could proceed smoothly if the internet connection was reliable. However, poor connectivity often led to misunderstandings among participants, resulting in reduced engagement and necessitating further clarifications. After the exhibition, debaters in all virtual communities received feedback from the adjudicators. Feedback for experienced debaters was typically delivered in English or a mix of Bahasa and English, whereas sessions with a higher number of novice debaters were primarily conducted in Bahasa.

Additionally, to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions and improvements, the researcher conducted online interviews with ten respondents. These interviews aimed to provide a detailed elaboration of their perspectives on virtual debate communities. The interview questions were categorized as follows:

Table 2. Interview Questions

Aspects	No.	Questions
Debating and English Skills Improvement	1	Have you noticed any improvements in your debating skills since you started participating in virtual debates? If so, can you describe them?
	2	How has participating in virtual debates impacted your English language skills, such as speaking, listening, and vocabulary?
	3	Do you feel more confident in your public speaking abilities after participating in virtual debates? Why or why not?
	4	Can you share any specific instances where you felt your debating skills significantly improved through a virtual debate?
	5	How do you typically prepare for debates, and what resources do you use to enhance your debating and English skills?
Community Networking	6	How would you describe the sense of community within the virtual debate platform?
	7	What kinds of interactions (e.g., discussions, feedback) do you have with other members of the virtual debate community?***
	8	Do you feel supported by other participants and adjudicators? Why or why not?
	9	Have you formed any meaningful connections or friendships through the virtual

		debate community? If so, can you share an example?
	10	What role do you think community networking plays in your overall virtual debate experience?
Learning Motivation	11	What motivated you to join the virtual debate community, and how often do you participate?
	12	What are the main benefits you perceive from participating in virtual debates that keep you motivated?
	13	How do virtual debates compare to other learning activities in terms of keeping you engaged and motivated?
	14	What aspects of the virtual debate community do you find most inspiring or motivating?
	15	Have your learning goals or motivations changed since you started participating in virtual debates? If so, how?
Practice Effectiveness	16	How effective do you find virtual debates in helping you practice and improve your debating skills?
	17	What are some of the challenges you face when participating in virtual debates?
	18	How do you feel about the technical aspects (e.g., platform usability, connectivity) of the virtual debate community?
	19	Are there any specific tools or resources that you think would be helpful to include in the virtual debate community to make practice more effective?
	20	On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your experience in the virtual debate community, and why?

These questions are designed to delve into specific aspects of debating and English skills improvement, community networking, learning motivation, and practice effectiveness, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and perceptions.

Discussion

From the research result, the students' perception will be divided into four categories. Firstly, it discussed about their feelings regarding the improvement on their English and Debating skills. Secondly, it discussed about the community networking of the students. Third, it discussed about the students' learning motivation. Finally, it discussed about practice effectiveness when the students learned to debate through virtual community.

The Students' English and Debating Skills Improvement

The students had shown good feedback that virtual debate community had helped them to improve their English and Debating skills. 60% students agreed that virtual debate communities had helped them to improve their English and Debating Skills. Most students agreed that virtual debate communities had become a place for them to get more insights in debating, enriching their experience in debating, helping them to get better performance for following competitions, also helping them to improve their English skills.

KKV stated that, "...virtual debate communities help me to get more knowledge in debating karena like I practiced not only with people from my club, but also from other univerisities kak which in their background knowledge and the way they practice aja beda2 gitu. Different, is likely ngebedah motion, or the way they bring up the case...".

UL also thought that virtual debate communities helped him to enrich their experiences in debating and improved his English, "...this is actually my first time getting a proper training for debate, although it is online. I feel like it has helped me a lot and makes me to learn even more and more karena semuanya keren banget. Ngerasa left behind. ... dapet kata-kata baru juga, new words like tangible, rebuttals, POI, apa tadi... it felt so good sih miss. I think my speaking and knowledge in English is also improving."

Meanwhile, SY told the researcher that although his club preferred offline practice, virtual debate communities helped him for competition preparation, "...for NUDC it has helped me a lot sih. It helped me for competition preparation. Really helped me a lot!"

The feedback from students indicates that virtual debate communities significantly contributed to their improvement in English and debating skills. The students agreed that these communities aided their development in both areas. Students reported that virtual debate communities provided valuable insights, enriched their debating experiences, and enhanced their performance in competitions.

It was mentioned that practicing with individuals from various universities exposed the students to different backgrounds and debating styles, which broadened his knowledge and skills. Virtual debate community also offered proper training and introduced new vocabulary, speaking and debating abilities. Additionally, virtual debate communities were beneficial for competition preparation, particularly for events like NUDC.

Overall, students found virtual debate communities to be an effective platform for learning and honing their English and debating skills. The students perception on their English and Debating improvement is also inline with the previous research made by William and Mostert. On the research, it was explained that from virtual debate activities the students could do immediate response and it helped them to give more insights from different kinds of students from different kinds of places like villages or cities, sub-urban or urban areas (Hodgkinson-Williams & Mostert, 2005).

The Students' Community Networking

The advent of virtual debate communities has markedly enhanced student networking opportunities by facilitating connections with peers from diverse universities across Indonesia and globally. The students have shown a remarkable response that 40% of students agreed and 30% students strongly agreed that virtual debate communities have given good impacts to the students' community networking.

These platforms have fostered a dynamic environment where students can engage in varied interactions, thereby enhancing their debating skills. For students from newly established or geographically isolated campuses, such as those in Banten, virtual debate communities have become indispensable. They provide crucial access to coaching, detailed information about competitions, and opportunities to serve as adjudicators in international events. Previously, these students encountered significant challenges in obtaining debate resources and participating in competitions due to their remote locations. The emergence of virtual platforms has mitigated these barriers, enabling students to engage with a broader network, benefit from the guidance of seasoned debaters, and participate in events that were once inaccessible. This development underscores the critical role of virtual communities in democratizing access to debate and significantly contributing to student growth and skill enhancement.

EN told the researchers that his community most of the times practiced for the competition preparation only with the coach from the same institution. However, it is easier to find a coach now. "...yup so we hired a coach from UI and some great campuses. However, they could not arrange it offline, so this kind of online debate way helped us to find the best coach and practice with them."

FAB also explained that "well, long time ago, we could online practice on site kan kak? Now, I even could coach my students online. It is fascinating! Long time ago when I was still in Serang kan, being your junior finding coach and sparring partners were so hard."

RB also added that, "remember kak you told me that it is all about networking! I have got a chance to be an adjudicator in an Asian competition because I joined Disputandum, MARS, and other debating clubs. Someone I know offered me the position. I am so blessed."

In conclusion, the findings underscore the significant impact of virtual debate communities on student networking and skill enhancement. Virtual platforms have become essential in bridging geographical gaps and providing vital resources. Testimonials from students highlight the transformative role of these platforms in accessing expert coaching, participating in diverse competitions, and gaining adjudication opportunities that were previously unattainable. The shift from localized coaching and limited sparring partners to a dynamic, interconnected virtual environment has democratized access to debate resources, enabling students from isolated or newly established campuses to thrive.

This development not only enhances individual student growth but also fosters a more inclusive and robust debating community across Indonesia and beyond. It also showed that offline or online both had given benefit for the learners to learn, even in online they could get more chances to learn from different people from different place and it was said effective (Connel et al, 2013).

In the discussion section, the important point that must be discussed is to fulfill the minimum five discussions. First, it appears that there is a connection between the results obtained and the basic concept. It needs to be emphasized whether there is conformity or contradiction with the results of previous research, better or otherwise. Second, describe the findings from the research results. Third, sharp analysis of research data. Third, an explanation of its relationship to previous concepts or theories. Fourth, there is a critical comparison with another relevant research. Fifth, use constructive arguments. Sixth, there are statements that confirm or correct previous findings. Discussion can be presented in sub-chapters.

Students' Learning Motivation

The integration of virtual debate communities has significantly bolstered students' learning motivation, despite occasional challenges with internet connectivity. These platforms provide an enriching environment where students can connect with peers from diverse universities both within Indonesia and globally, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support. This exposure to a wide range of perspectives and debating styles not only enhances their skills but also ignites their passion for learning and self-improvement.

One of the primary factors driving increased motivation is the access to a broader network of talented students and experienced coaches. The opportunity to engage with top debaters and receive high-quality coaching, which might not be available locally, is a powerful motivator.

THS told the researcher, "the debaters on the 1st and 2nd practices are so good miss! I don't know if I can compete with them. Minder sedikit. Tapi I feel proud and motivated that I ever be in the same room with them."

RB also added that:

"My friends and I (from UPI) at that time had a vision kak that you can access a premium practice through the MARS community and we can improve their motivation to learn as well as improving our connection. Although myself to be honest feel more the offline vibes, duet o sometimes bad connection from my sides and others, I feel like it motivates me a lot and it's really useful to boost my confidence since I meet a lot of friends from other universities. Anyway, I think although we need to leave for like several minutes, we could still give feedback to the debaters on the private whatsapp message. It should not be a big problem."

On the other hand, YES felt that connection issue was the only thing that bothered him a lot when joining a virtual community:

"I was a debater in high school and it used to be offline only. However, when it's pandemic, and I started the MUN and other virtual club, it was all online. It felt so hard to understand the adjudicator when they gave us feedback. It made me lazy to do everything online. But day by day I get used to it. So yeah, we should be prepared to plan B connection."

In conclusion, despite occasional connectivity issues, the substantial advantages of engaging in virtual debate communities—including heightened motivation, improved debating skills, and increased confidence through interactions with a diverse and talented network of peers and coaches—significantly outweigh the challenges. This is supported by existing research, which highlights the positive impact of virtual learning environments on student engagement and skill development (Broadbent & Poon, 2015; Bernard et al., 2004). Therefore, integrating virtual debate communities into educational curricula holds great promise for fostering student growth and academic success in the terms of improving their motivation to learn.

The Practice Effectiveness

Engaging in virtual debate communities significantly enhances practice effectiveness for students through several key factors: ease of registration, timely feedback from adjudicators, practice flexibility, and better schedule management, provided that a stable internet connection is maintained. 52.52% students agreed that virtual debate community is effective for them to use to practice their debating skills, while 18% students strongly agreed to it.

First, the streamlined registration process inherent in virtual platforms lowers the barriers to participation, enabling a broader demographic of students to engage in debate activities. This inclusivity is crucial for fostering diverse perspectives and enriching the learning experience (Broadbent & Poon, 2015). ACA noted:

"The registration process for virtual debate platforms is so straightforward and accessible. It really makes it easy for anyone to join, no matter their background or location. This inclusivity has allowed me to interact with peers from various cultures and perspectives, significantly enriching my learning experience."

Second, the immediacy and quality of feedback from adjudicators in virtual debates are pivotal for student development. Digital platforms often facilitate more structured and documented feedback, which students can revisit and reflect upon, thereby enhancing their learning process (Kennedy, 2007).

BA remarked,

"The feedback from adjudicators in virtual debates is incredibly detailed and structured. Having it documented means I can go back and review their comments anytime, which has been immensely helpful for my development and understanding of debate techniques. The feedback is clear when the internet connection is good, but if there is an issue, they try to approach us one by one if there is any time. However, sometimes we pass the time limit—for example, a session that should be done at 9 often ends up running until 9:30 or even later."

Third, the flexibility afforded by virtual debate platforms allows students to practice at times that suit their individual schedules. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for students balancing academic and extracurricular commitments, as it reduces the conflict between different activities and promotes sustained engagement in debate practices (Bernard et al., 2004).

Moreover, the ability to organize practice sessions that fit into students' busy schedules without the need for physical presence fosters consistent participation and skill development. This aspect of virtual communities is essential for maintaining regular practice routines, which are critical for mastering debate skills (Means et al., 2010).

UL commented:

"The flexibility of virtual debate platforms is a game-changer for me. I can schedule practice sessions around my academic and teaching commitments, which means I don't have to choose between different activities. This flexibility has helped me stay consistently involved in debate practices, and I've noticed significant improvement in my skills. Although I prefer offline, being able to fit these sessions into my busy schedule without needing to be physically present is really beneficial for my development as a debater."

Lastly, the overall effectiveness of virtual debate practices is contingent on the reliability of internet connections. When connectivity is stable, students can fully engage in debates, receive real-time feedback, and interact seamlessly with peers and coaches. This uninterrupted engagement is crucial for maintaining the flow of practice and ensuring that students reap the full benefits of their participation (Kuhn, 2018).

FAB stated:

"Jadi, effectiveness of virtual debate practices tuh banget depends on internet connection. Kalau semuanya lancar, gue bisa fully engage in debates, dapet feedback

real-time, dan interact seamlessly with peers and coaches kak. Tapi kalau koneksinya jelek, jadi berasa kurang banget, dan bikin sesi debat jadi nggak maksimal. Really, internet connection bothers"

In conclusion, the effectiveness of practice in virtual debate communities is significantly enhanced by easy registration, timely and quality feedback from adjudicators, flexible practice schedules, and improved management of students' time. These factors collectively contribute to a conducive learning environment, provided that stable internet connectivity is maintained.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of virtual debate communities has significantly advanced the field of debate education, effectively addressing the logistical challenges traditionally associated with on-site debate practices. Platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and Discord have proven instrumental in overcoming issues related to scheduling conflicts and the difficulty of finding suitable sparring partners. This research, through qualitative methods including questionnaires, interviews, and documentation, highlights several key findings such as skills enhancement in students' English and Debating skills, community networking improvement, increasing learning motivation and the effectiveness of practice environment, which had shown positive feedback from the students due to several advantages they had.

Despite these advantages, internet connectivity issues remain a challenge, occasionally affecting the quality of feedback and engagement. Addressing these technical issues is crucial for maximizing the benefits of virtual debate communities. Intermittent or poor connections often disrupt real-time interactions, leading to delays in feedback and fragmented communication between participants. This disruption can hinder the flow of debates, making it difficult for students to fully engage and absorb constructive criticism during practice sessions. Future research could focus on the solution for this issue.

Overall, the research underscores the positive impact of virtual debate platforms on students' skill development, networking, and motivation. These findings suggest that virtual debate communities are a valuable addition to traditional debate practices, offering a flexible and inclusive environment that enhances the overall debate experience.

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