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Effectiveness of Debate in ESL/EFL-Context Courses in the Arabian Gulf: A Comparison of Two Recent Student-Centered Studies in Oman and in Dubai, U.A.E.

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Abstract

Using debate as a tool for non-native English speakers' language acquisition and fluency is not a new practice, but it has been little studied in the Arabian Gulf region. In our admittedly limited study of the efficacy of formal "in-class" debates with first- and second-year students in an advanced, skills-integrated "Effective Reading" course in Oman's Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and a comparable reading/writing course in "Advanced Composition and Research" at American University in Dubai (AUD), the researchers found positive student responses for "in-class" debates despite the stress of time-constraints and quick reassessment responses in rebuttals. Indeed, students reported a high-level of agreement to Likert-scale statements such as "debate encourages students to be critical and evaluate what they hear or read" and "debates encourage polite and appropriate cross-gender interaction." Overall, more than two-thirds of both student samples felt debates improved their English in academic and real-life situations, helping them to "practice what [they] have learnt." Altogether, this relatively small (62 respondent) comparative study suggests that more research should be conducted about "in-class" debates for effective English-language processing, critical thinking, speaking confidence, peer interaction and fluency.

Key Words: ESL/EFL, debates, Oman, Dubai

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Introduction

The term "debate" has a general meaning as argument or discussion about specific issues that evoke differences of opinion, calling to mind intense verbal exchanges in political contests. In the ESL/EFL classroom, teachers have found ways to formulate and structure differing opinions in a parliamentary type of "in-class" debate which can improve many aspects of students' English-language proficiency and create more confidence in public speaking skills. Recent studies suggest that these skills can add strength to language components that students have already mastered, leading to better in-depth understanding of content, analytical writing, and critical thinking in argumentation.

The basic aspects of "formal" debate include the division of students into two teams—one affirmative and one negative—that will debate a resolution/proposition of the three basic types of fact, value, and policy by giving speeches that have time-limits, including limits for intervals between speeches. Other participants include a debate chairperson, a time-keeper, several judges, and an audience. After the debate is concluded, the judges discuss the major relevant points and designate a winner. The process models an orderly way to present evidence about a specific issue in a competitive format and to select a winning argument.

However, in many cultures where consensus is valued, students might feel discomfort with oppositional positive and negative stances that seem to eliminate any possibility for compromise. Recently, some researchers have suggested that confrontational "either-or" discussions are somewhat culturally specific and not always appropriate for all ESL/EFL learners in all countries. Despite this reservation, educators worldwide in ESL/EFL contexts have found skills honed in debate can greatly assist students' progress in reading, writing, listening, and, most particularly, speaking in English. Additionally, several observers caution that students with under-developed skills in argumentation might be at a disadvantage in the globalized marketplace thus making debate training even more necessary and desirable.

Possibly because of this concern and acceptance of the communicative language approach, use of debate seems to have grown more popular in recent years. Notably, debate is a well-explained category in many textbooks and "how to" articles, that are often linked with modified debate structures, topical dialogues, and "Socratic" questioning. Initially, to deal with some educators' reservations about debate in the past, teachers and researchers created adaptations. In their popular student-centered book, Lubetsky, Lebeau and Harrington (2007) tackled the issue of the suitability of debates for many types of basic-level learners, including ESL/EFL students, with incremental and effective "step-by-step techniques" in their teaching and research (p. ii). This approach showed that, although teachers are challenged to engage their students at all levels within large class debates, they can divide responsibilities within each in-class debate team and adapt material when needed so all students can benefit. As Lustigova (2011) points out, topics can be "consistently targeted to the language level and background interests of the class" (p. 22), yet she has found students usually accept responsibility for both individual and group work as part of a team.

In addition, in modified debate formats at a slightly higher level, some educators require students to switch sides and argue for an opposing view which exposes them to other aspects of a contentious issue. Overall, these strategies enable the development of better evaluation skills by students that can be employed to separate biased opinion from fact and logical sequences from flawed reasoning. With more practice and modifications, many ESL/EFL teachers feel strongly

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that debate improves all English language skills along with critical thinking and enables students to better assess the strengths/weaknesses in their own and others' use of evidence in propositions, rebuttals, speeches, and other forms of persuasive speaking and writing. Unfortunately, "in-class" debate in Middle Eastern university courses has been largely both under-utilized and under-researched. This could be due to the differences between Anglophone and Arab cultures, as well as cultural sensitivity that could cause discomfort when discussing controversial debate topics within Arabian contexts. The perceived reluctance to introduce a debate component in courses by teachers could be due to the prevalence of teacher-centered methodologies in the region that give authority to teachers as the main imparters of knowledge. Hence, this study explores the use of debates from the point of view of students in the region to discover their actual experiences and feelings about them, along with specific benefits they can identify after participation in debates.

Background of Student Participant Populations at SQU and AUD

Qaboos University (SQU), the national university of the Sultanate of Oman, was founded in 1986 as part of education reforms first begun in 1970. The university draws a student body of young Omani men and women from all regions of the country. Most of them are graduates of Omani public schools. Within that population, there is ethnic and language diversity due to the historical/geographical position of the country and its 2,092 kilometer coastline. Though Arabic is the sultanate's official language, many Omanis might speak one of ten other languages as a first language. However, English has long been "regarded as essential for the country's modernization, its acquisition of knowledge of science and technology, and its communication with the rest of the world" (Al-Mahrooqi & Tabakow, 2013:1). In fact, teaching of most specializations in Omani higher education, public or private, is conducted in English, and students strive to develop proficiency to meet their own and the national goals. As an additional factor, almost all Omani students at SQU have a government scholarship that is dependent on making good progress in their studies and maintaining a satisfactory GPA, thereby giving added incentive to continually improve their English proficiency. Broadly characteristic of SQU students, also, is their cultural propensity to be polite and emphasize cooperation in team projects. Therefore, it has been claimed that Omani students tend to look for elements in group projects that all members of a team would agree upon, consent to, and support.

The American University in Dubai (AUD) in the United Arab Emirates is a modest-size private university which has a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural student body that has been a characteristic since its founding in 1995. As noted in the university's *2012-2013 Undergraduate Catalog*, there were more than eighty nationalities represented in 2002 alone, which represents a microcosm of the diversity of Dubai's general population, and around one hundred different nationalities by 2012. Because of this diversity in an English-language based institution with US standard course offerings, students recognize the need to develop their speaking, listening, reading, writing, and research skills to succeed academically and find suitable employment after graduation. Some students have academic scholarships, such as those scholarships available in design, engineering, or architecture, but most paying students attend AUD because they recognize English as a *lingua franca* and feel it is necessary to their future advancement in their chosen profession, regardless of their nationality, first-language status, and previous education. In relation to the current study, there are, according to self-report data, many students at AUD

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from "consensus" cultures in which an effort is expected from individuals to find common ground with others in a group, which might affect team dynamics related to debate.

Review of Literature

Debate and Active Learning

When thinking of "debate," one might recall secondary-school or university competitive debate teams. However, keeping in mind Toulmin's (1958, 2003) broadened conception of argumentation, debate has a surprisingly malleable structure and, like writing position papers, has been adapted in teaching many different subjects in the social and biological sciences, in addition to economics, marketing, nursing, and dentistry (Kennedy, 2007). This is not surprising because, as Kearney (2014) states, "contemporary debate's emphasis on the real world" and relevant topics (p. 4). "In-class" debate has been the subject of much additional research along with increased usage in a number of disciplines, and Louden (2010) suggests that "in-class debate provides a competitive incentive for finding as many innovative and unique approaches to a problem as possible" (p. 305) and conceives of it as "an integrative experience that helps students to do the work of weaving together…seemingly] fragmented components" (p. 292) when doing their own research on topics. As a classroom model, it offers "hands on" learning that uses a variety of skills to engage all students, and studies suggest that the student centeredness of "in-class" debate creates a more effective learning environment.

Gravitt (2008) reports that a "test case" of applying a debate format among "construction law" students improved their understanding of "real industry applications beyond the example cases in the text" (pp. 1-2). This might be because a majority of students prefer active, participatory learning situations, such as Gravitt's "alternative dispute resolution" methods provided by her debate format, as opposed to passive ones. Zare and Othman (2013) say "flourishing classrooms involve interactive learning" (p. 1507). In fact, Rao (2010) found "positive correlations between debates and short and long-term learning outcomes" among business students taking human resource management classes in the United States (pp. 234-235). The versatility of debates allows a student who is actively listening and participating to find many routes to understand a topic. Aclan and Abdul Aziz (2015) emphasize that "debate's interactive nature requiring contextualized and meaningful language use from preparation to actual debate" is critical to students' futures in the global workplace (p. 102).

Debate and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking (CT) has been defined as a "general term given to a wide range of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions needed to effectively identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments and truth claims" and is characterized by "disciplined thinking governed by clear intellectual standards" (Bassham, Irwin, Nardone, & Wallace, 2005:28). Most educators see CT as a necessary attribute in order to successfully engage in debate, and many classify it as a vital objective, particularly in technological fields (Bissell & Lemons, 2006; Scott, 2008;). Indeed, researchers have suggested that debate structure actually forces students to consider and weigh alternative views and information by employing critical thinking (Freeley & Steinberg, 2012). Other research suggests that the process of debate causes students to look carefully at "multiple viewpoints" before making a judgment, whether for individual understanding or to influence others. In fact, Vo and Morris (2006) reiterate educators' awareness that, even though some

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emphasis might be on "short term" interest in accessing information, particular emphasis "should be tempered with the long-term goal of training the mind to think analytically and critically" (p. 16). Furthermore, Hall (2011) acknowledges that "structured classroom debates" promote more analytical thinking in the "development of problem-solving skills" beyond an immediate problem or situation among healthcare professionals as well (p. 2). She emphasizes that such "debates move students beyond the memorization and superficial application of theories, techniques, and evidence to actively integrating and applying… materials under an array of situations" (p. 3). Indeed, the acceleration of changes in a variety of fields worldwide is "likely to continue", and educators need "to focus less on teaching facts and more on teaching students how to use information" that they can access (Kennedy, 2009, p. 2). As Rear (2010) observed, debates are also "centered on… functions that the students would find pertinent once they entered the world of work" (p. 2).

Some Pedagogical/Cultural Objections to Debate

Tumposky (2004) highlights cultural issues in raising objections to the confrontational nature of debate with its "yes or no" final outcome or judgment and suggests that debate's structure, such as in-class debate, might encourage students to "oversimplify and misrepresent" information to reinforce an assigned argumentative position (p. 54). In addition, she cites previous studies indicating that adversarial argumentation is unfamiliar and uncomfortable for some student populations, as witnessed in Clinchy's (2002) research regarding female students. Aspects of many female students' behavior included a tendency "to silence" when faced with discussion/dialogue and ready acceptance of "received knowledge" from external authorities. For these reasons, Clinchy emphasizes the importance of college teachers' messages to students to "move beyond received knowing and on to more active, reflective…thinking" (p. 69).

Nisbett (2003) calls attention to societal and cultural learning styles, particularly between categories of "Western" and "Asian" students, and showed that "very different systems of perception and thought exist - and have existed for thousands of years" (p. xxi). These differences, the author claims, cause some Asians, such as Chinese and Japanese students, to focus on "harmonious relations with the group" which creates a tendency to judge behavior and speech contextually and avoid differences of opinion. He maintains that Westerners, in contrast, generally "value individual distinction" with their personal initiatives encouraged (p. 63). Therefore, Nisbett argues that Westerners feel more comfortable giving opinions and supporting them than Asian students; furthermore, he claims "Debate is almost as uncommon in modern Asia as in ancient China. In fact, the whole rhetoric of argumentation that is second nature to Westerners is largely absent" (p. 73). Supporting this stance, Murray (2003) characterized this alternate view as "differing profoundly from the West's" (p. 397).

However, many Asian educators and researchers have a contrasting evaluation of this perception. Kubota (2004) observes that this culturally specific model in regard to Asian thinking emphasizes a "fixed" view of Far-Eastern, specifically Japanese, culture and is often "produced in discourses that embody politics and struggles for power" that border on stereotyping (p. 1). Alluding to this controversy, McKinley (2013) emphasizes the fact that "Western interpretations, maintaining the negative stereotypes of 'passive' or 'silent' or 'uncritical' East Asian students, are no longer appropriate" (p. 97) and pointedly suggests that greater observation and real understanding is necessary. In addition, Lu (2013) states that, in Taiwan, much emphasis is placed "on English-proficiency levels among Taiwanese college students" and competition about

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scores/levels with other Asian countries, such as Korea, therefore overshadow the need for developing critical thinking skills even though Taiwan recognizes "the key role of English in the processes of globalization and… internationalization of higher education" (p. 9). Issues related to Lu's (2013) contention were raised by McLaughlin and Moore (2013) in their evaluation of critical thinking in essays. The authors claim that it is easier to mark essays on grammatical "correctness" than on "logical development" or consideration of "alternative views" (p 145-146). However, these are some typical college-level academic/critical-thinking expectations in first-year writing courses. Amid this ongoing debate, Song and Cadman (2012) have recently stressed that "human beings have the capacity to learn" so there is a need to "grow in understanding each other's ways of knowing about the world" (p. 11) and "bridge the cultural divides that come into focus as these… intersect" (p. 7). In fact, the authors point out that the goal is "to come to terms with the conceptual frames that we ourselves are operating within" (p. 12). Many other researchers state that, even though some aspects of debate emphasize opposition and confrontational stances, it is necessary in a rapidly changing world for students to have an adequate understanding of assessment, critiques, and persuasive strategies to become economically competitive. This is further emphasized in the recent Council on Aid to Education report by Benjamin et al. (2013) which states that higher education is meeting the demands of the marketplace with "less emphasis… on content-specific knowledge and more… on critical thinking skills, such as analytic and quantitative reasoning, problem-solving, and written communication" (p. 3). Of course, these are all promoted and enhanced in the process of using "in-class" debates.

Teaching Academic Expectations and Critical Thinking (CT)

Much discussion in the literature is about how to recognize and focus on key elements of critical thinking, as well as the question of whether or not critical thinking can be taught. A recent study on critical thinking instruction by Tiruneh, Verburgh, and Elen (2014) suggests that, overall, there is little agreement about specific modes of instruction or "the conditions under which instruction could result in greater CT outcomes" (p. 1). Nevertheless, Lu (2013) reported improved CT scores with intercultural "theme-based content" requiring students "to link their learning to…personal experiences through writing assignments" among 50 first-year medical students (p. 20). However, while acknowledging an inconclusive trend in some published studies about teaching CT, Mehta and Al-Mahrooqi (2014) support the idea that "continuous practice, both oral and written, provide opportunities for ESL/EFL students to develop their critical thinking abilities" (p. 1) while noting students' own products need to be examined, along with contextualizing students' struggles with "confidence…reflected in the choice of words and tone adopted for argumentative essays" (p. 12).

Methodology

Research Goals and Sample Populations

The primary research goals for this small comparison study was to examine debate's effectiveness from the perspective of students in an Arabian Gulf context. When reviewing other student-centered studies of "in-class" debate, the authors found few that focused on two separate student populations in Near Eastern/Middle Eastern countries. The current research sample was drawn from two student populations. These were first- and second-year students at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and at the American University in Dubai (AUD) who were taking

basic courses in an English-language sequence that had recently introduced "in-class" debate. In total, the study recruited 62 students who completed the above-mentioned "required" courses: skills-integrated "Effective Reading" at SQU and "Advanced Composition and Research" at AUD. Though there was a gender imbalance in the two student samples (31 females and 14 males from SQU and 5 females and 12 males from AUD), it should be noted that the SQU sample, at least, reflects the fact that more female students are actually enrolled in that university's English Education Department. On the other hand, the fact that more males than females were involved in the AUD sample appears somewhat of an anomaly because both the course and university in which these students are studying generally has a balanced male to female ratio.

Research Instruments and Objectives

A questionnaire consisting of 40 items was distributed to both student samples (see Addenda for the complete questionnaire). In addition, a number of students from the questionnaire phase of the research volunteered to be interviewed. Interviews featured four pre-determined, open-ended questions, and 11 SQU students and 17 AUD students volunteered to take part in the interview phase of the research.

As researchers, we were interested in learning if students would respond positively to this new tool, the "in-class" debate, which they were not likely to have encountered in their secondary-school experience. In particular, we hoped to learn how pedagogically effective debate was in terms of the 10 learning categories offered below. Furthermore, an important part of this research was exploring if there might be some cultural sensitivity to, or reservations about, the confrontational aspects of debate and if the group bond of debate "teams," even within the classroom, would contribute to a cohesiveness of purpose and social rewards for most students and positive effects on students' language confidence.

Question Groupings for Research Areas

The 40 statements featured in the questionnaire were combined into 10 categories to reflect a range of pedagogical objectives in the overall research design. Those categories were (1) debate and interpersonal skills, (2) debate and communicative skills, (3) debate, argumentation, and logical thinking, (4) debate and vocabulary learning, (5) debate and leadership, (6) debate and critical thinking, (7) debate and language practice (output), (8) debate and active participation in the classroom, (9) debate and classroom learning, and (10) attitude toward debate.

Results/Findings in Question Groupings

Overall, the results were positive, with some unlooked-for higher means in question areas anticipated to elicit only modestly positive responses along with others that might appear more problematic. For example, Group 1 had a mean of 4.31 for SQU participants and 4.18 for AUD participants for Debate and Interpersonal Skills with the interesting note that Item 4—"Debates train students to control their emotions—had a means of 3.94 for both samples. This may correlate with interview responses that focus on fear of speaking in public or shyness as the main emotion expressed by both SQU and AUD students. Responding Interview Question 4—"How does it [debate] help you personally?"—both samples listed overcoming "shyness" or "fear of presenting to an audience" as a potential benefit. One SQU student even wrote, "I got over shyness because of debates".

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Group 2 exhibits many of the highest means regarding Interpersonal and Communication Skills. For example, Item 12—"Debates improve students' speaking skills"—produced a mean from SQU students of 4.82 and 4.47 from AUD respondents, while Item 23—"Debates give students a chance to engage in real communication"—recorded means of 4.65 (SQU) and a 4.35 (AUD). This response points to the importance of speaking in English for both student populations as a recognized communication goal and tends to support responses to Interview Question 2—"What skills does it help you develop?"—which elicited 12 responses of "improves language and communication skills" from SQU and AUD students alike.

Group 3 is an illustration of the strong tendency towards high levels of agreement from both samples. For example, means for Item 3, "Debates train students to speak logically" (*M = 4.53* for SQU students and *M = 4.47* for AUD students), Item 25, "Debates teach students how to counter an argument" (*M = 4.47* and *M = 4.35*, respectively), and Item 24, "Debates teach students argumentation skills" (*M = 4.65* and *M = 4.41*, respectively) were among the highest recorded on the questionnaire. This strength of agreement is reflected in SQU's and AUD's final overall means of 4.49 and 4.25, respectively.

Group 4 focuses on Debate and Vocabulary Learning with an overall mean of 4.24 (SQU) and 3.97 (AUD) which indicates a more muted response level than reported in Group 3. Item 77—"Debates improve students' vocabulary acquisition"—recorded means of 4.24 (SQU) and 4.00 (AUD) and generally support responses to Interview Question 1—"What do you think about debate? In reply to this question, participants offered responses including "gives practice and improves language" and "improves learning and understanding abilities."

Group 5 concentrates on Debate and Leadership and has an overall mean of 4.37 (SQU) and 4.16 (AUD). Here, Item 38—"Debates give students a chance to prove themselves"—recorded a mean of 4.59 for SQU and 4.29 for AUD respondents. This result again supports responses to Interview Question 4—"How does it [debate] help you personally?"—with responses of "raises confidence." This response was recorded five times from the SQU sample and 2 times for AUD.

Group 6 deals with Debate and Critical Thinking and has an overall mean of 4.47 (SQU) and 4.09 (AUD). This result is generally supported by responses to Interview Question 2—"What skills does it help you develop?" Responses here included "promotes critical thinking," which was recorded four times from both SQU's and AUD's student sample. Other responses included "challenges and criticizes different viewpoints" from AUD students and "creates awareness of thoughts and ideas" offered by SQU participants.

Group 7 focuses on Debate and Language Practice (Output) and produced an overall mean of 4.30 for SQU and 4.12 from AUD respondents. Examples of items include Item 11—"Debates put into practice what students have learnt"—which received one of the lower means for both SQU and AUD students of 3.94. This group also contains Item 13—"Debates give students the opportunity to discuss important topics in English"—that received a mean of 4.47 from SQU students and 4.18 from AUD students. These means again receive support from participant responses to Interview Question 4—"How does it help you personally?" Responses here included "aids in expressing my opinion," "teaches me different styles of communication," and "helped me speak in front of a large audience."

Group 8 treats Debate and Active Participation in the Classroom with overall means of 4.20 for SQU students and 4.03 for AUD students and features Item 20 –"Debates make students more active in the classroom"—which received means of 4.29 (SQU) and 4.12 (AUD). Responses to Interview Question 3—"What are its advantages in general?"—again supported

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these findings and included "gives more chances for students to participate," "use of teamwork and cooperation," and "share thoughts and opinions." These were recorded between 1 and 3 times each.

Group 9 is concerned with Debate and Classroom Learning and has an overall mean of 4.26 for SQU and 4.30 for AUD samples respectively. This group features Item 21 –"Debates enrich the language classroom"—which received means of 4.47 (SQU) and 4.12 (AUD). This may find support in responses to Interview Question 4 –"How does it help you personally?" Responses here included "benefits me from other's thoughts and ways of thinking" and "aids expressing my opinion"—both of which were recorded 2 times each by SQU and AUD participants. For AUD students, other responses that add support to this mean include "helps me understand the topics and how [they] affect my opinion" and "develops mental flexibility."

Group 10 regards Attitude toward Debate and produced overall means of 4.53 for SQU and 4.35 for AUD students, featuring only Item 34—"I enjoy taking part in debates." The positive interpretation of this result relates to a number of interview comments, including responses to Interview Question 1—"What do you think about debate?" These include, "It is more useful than tests and exams, especially in the reading class" (SQU), and "It benefits the audience and debates themselves more than it would if they [students] were simply reading an article" (AUD). Possibly feeding into the positive means also was regional concerns about "open discussion" as 7 AUD students mentioned: "The debates were very helpful because they allowed the classmates to share their knowledge and opinion about political topics." This is an issue that is particularly sensitive in a number of Arab nations.

Conclusion

In drawing conclusions from our comparative study, we were surprised by the students' positive responses that were higher than expected to the use of debate in courses in this part of the Arabian Gulf. Interestingly, both student population samples showed a very strong level of agreement to a number of items, such as Question 1—"Debates improve students' social skills." This might be interpreted as agreement that they felt social interaction within their debate teams, or even within their classrooms, was satisfying and stimulating. Other items that elicited high levels of agreement were "Debates train students to speak logically" and "Debates improve students' speaking skills." The latter is likely related to a frequently expressed and noted issue pointed out by Arslan (2013) that students seek to "facilitate interaction with each other and with authentic materials in real life situations" because of "a shortage of opportunities for extended spoken communication both within and outside" the classroom (p. 28). It may also be related to a relatively high means (*M = 4.35 and M = 4.29* for SQU and AUD, respectively) for the item—"Debates encourage polite and appropriate cross-gender interaction"—as this can be somewhat sensitive in this part of the world. As a note on reservations about this, three students in one SQU emphasized agreement to the statement—"Debate face-to-face with the other gender is against our culture and even religion"—thereby signaling that some individual students are troubled by this aspect of debate in mixed-gender classes.

Some items that recorded lower response means by both student samples included Question 11—"Debates help students put into practice what they have learnt"—which might indicate that these learners in the first two years of their university studies may feel they have not learned or mastered as much as they had anticipated when taking these first/second-year courses. Indeed, both samples mentioned challenges and suggested improvements associated with their reading and research skills. In addition, lower-mean responses to the item—"Debates make students feel

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more responsible for their learning and participation"—may reflect a certain level of perceived challenge and, even, anxiety about that very learning and responsibility. Clearly, some of the results suggest the need to elicit more specific responses to separate factors that may be at work among these student populations and to study larger samples from this region. There are implications for future research in the fact that, though there were few apparent differences in data from both genders in each sample, more female students than males were enrolled in SQU's English Education Program from which the sample was drawn and which offered some of the highest means in the study. This might signal changing views among educated Omani women as prospective teachers with an important job to do or among modern Omani women as a whole. This is an area that could benefit from future exploration.

Because we did not find a great deal of correspondence between our student samples' results and projections of "consensus culture" discomfort with the confrontational aspects of debate that has been reported elsewhere, we have concluded that many of these students believe debate contributes to the improvement of their English-language proficiency and individual language-confidence and this has helped them overcome any form of cultural sensitivity related to the practice. Among SQU students, this finding might be related to students' perceptions that, while on government scholarships, they are not only advancing their own personal goals by improving their English but also promoting Omani national goals. For the AUD students, we surmise that they, too, are directing their energies toward English-language proficiency and the ultimate goal of graduation; thus, it might be that their responses to the questionnaires and comments in the interviews reflect the great mix of nationalities and first-language groups that are "goal-driven" and so do not all share discomfort/reluctance in being critical of another debate team's arguments and evidence or in being overly anxious about their own performance.

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