

Analysis of the Influence of a Debate Program on Youth and Adults

Guguli Magradze*, Tinatin Tsertsvadze*

** Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia*

(Presented by Academy Member Irakli Imedadze)

This qualitative study explores the impact of a debate training program in Georgia on young people's personal growth, with a particular focus on key aspects of self-image. It examines how participation in formal debates enhances skills such as conflict resolution, self-evaluation, self-confidence, self-esteem, emotional regulation, critical thinking, and presentation abilities. The research aims to understand how these competencies evolve at different stages of self-development through debate training. Data from focus groups and in-depth interviews with youth reveal that the program significantly boosts self-perception and interpersonal skills, particularly in areas like self-awareness, communication, and emotional intelligence. The study highlights the value of debate programs as a powerful tool for fostering social skills and personal development in both academic and informal settings. © 2025 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

self-esteem, debate, anger management

Unlike informal arguments, formal debate programs are structured curricula, similar to elective or mandatory classes in secondary education. These programs teach various debate formats, each with its own set of rules for participants to follow. The most significant difference between formats is the specific set of skills they help develop [1]. In Georgia, Karl Popper's debate format is widely used [2], and it was taught to the target group of this research. The study involved middle and high school students, as well as secondary school teachers. This debate technique, viewed as an instructional game, fosters key skills crucial to personal development, such as critical thinking, public

speaking, organization, teamwork, research, active listening, writing, argumentation, and conflict management. When analyzing conflict management, it is particularly notable that the skills influenced by it include assertiveness and cooperation [3]. Furthermore, self-concept plays a vital role in conflict management [4]. When individuals feel humiliated during conflicts, their self-esteem can drop, leading them to view their actions as less acceptable in the eyes of others [5].

The teaching of formal debates is based on experiential learning strategies, often described as "learning through play" [6]. This approach makes it particularly interesting to examine how a one-

year program, delivered through weekly classes, helps students develop essential skills.

The research aims to explore how participation in debates influences the personal development of both young people and adults enrolled in the full program. Specifically, the study seeks to gather participants' perceptions on how the knowledge gained from debate clubs has been applied in both academic and informal settings. It will also identify the key aspects of personal growth related to involvement in the debate club, focusing on how participants evaluate their personal development over time.

The research will assess changes in the personal qualities and skills of both students and teachers, as reflected through self-evaluation, under the influence of the debate program. Additionally, the study will explore how the program impacts the teaching process for educators, particularly regarding the knowledge gained through debates compared to traditional practices. Key aspects of the study include exploring the development of conflict resolution skills through debate clubs, as well as conducting a long-term impact study to reflect on the sustained effects of participation in the debate program.

Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative methods, focusing on two key target groups: students and teachers living in Georgia. To gather insights, focus groups were utilized, with each group comprising an average of 15 participants.

When designing and implementing the focus groups, several factors were considered, including geographical and demographic criteria. Focus groups were held across a variety of settlements – large cities, small cities, townships, and villages – to ensure a representative geographical sample. Additionally, respondents were grouped according to their status and age, with teachers grouped together and students with their peers. Respondents from the same regions were also grouped together.

This approach maximized the openness of participants and ensured a diverse sample.

In total, 20 teachers and 160 students participated in the research from the following regions of Georgia: Tbilisi, Kakheti, Adjara, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Kvemo Kartli, and Imereti. Ultimately, 15 focus groups were conducted.

The students' responses highlighted the development of several key skills, including teamwork, healthy communication, argumentative thinking, cultural awareness, confidence, critical thinking, willpower, and constructive reasoning. Interestingly, even before being directly asked about conflict resolution, many respondents pointed out its importance in their discussions.

When asked about the benefits of the debate club, students frequently mentioned their improved ability to “sort information more effectively”, “understand themselves better”, and “foster greater team spirit and unity”.

The impact of the debate program extended beyond the classroom, with students noting its positive effects in both academic and informal settings. Debates helped them improve emotional control, storytelling, organizational skills, and the ability to present topics more confidently in front of a class. Students also reported becoming more adept at finding and filtering reliable information, which allowed them to study school subjects in greater depth. Many students specifically mentioned subjects like history, Georgian language and literature, where debate-related skills played a crucial role.

Additionally, respondents highlighted that time management and non-verbal communication skills gained through debate often proved useful both in the classroom and outside of it. Interestingly, overcoming the fear of speaking in public helped some students not only with oratory but also with performing at piano concerts. Others mentioned an improvement in their essay writing skills.

The respondents from all regions included in the study unanimously emphasized the significance of teaching debates in managing conflict situations. Specifically, students highlighted several key areas where debating proved beneficial, such as anger management, respecting differing opinions, developing self-defense skills, and reducing family conflicts. As some students shared, “One should debate ideas, not people”, and “Losing and winning are two sides of the same coin”.

Furthermore, the “feedback” method, which students regularly used during debate club meetings, was instrumental in helping them avoid conflicts.

An essential aspect of the research was measuring the impact of debates on self-esteem. In this regard, respondents noted that debates played a crucial role in helping them develop a healthy self-image. Through debate, they learned to defend their positions with greater confidence, find solutions in seemingly hopeless situations, communicate more flexibly, and express their differing opinions freely. Students also reported that they were “no longer complacent and always eager to learn more”, “more confident in their abilities”, and “better able to address their shortcomings”.

In the final segment of the focus group discussions, an intriguing question was posed: What would debaters say to each other or their teachers ten years from now? The majority of participants expressed gratitude, acknowledging that their experiences in the club had equipped them with skills that would be invaluable both in their professional careers and daily lives, particularly in terms of personal growth.

The discussions concluded with feedback, in which students expressed a desire for increased frequency of debate activities, whether in the form of class debates or tournaments. Additionally, many students suggested a greater emphasis on popularizing debates in schools. While some advocated for debates to be taught as a compulsory subject, others felt it should remain optional.

In the teachers’ focus groups, the influence of debates on self-confidence and conflict management was assessed similarly to the student groups. However, different focal points emerged, particularly regarding the changes in teaching methods after learning about debates.

Teachers compared their previous training experiences to their debate training and noted that the latter were characterized by high responsibility, hands-on exercises, and a motivating environment that fostered continuous personal growth. Most teachers unanimously recommended that educators from all disciplines participate in such programs.

One of the key findings from the teachers’ focus groups was how the skills gained from running a debate club were applied in their daily teaching. The majority of respondents stated that they actively incorporated interactive exercises from the debate format into their regular lessons. Teachers also noted the positive impact of their students’ achievements, which were often reinforced through debate methods.

The “feedback” method was frequently mentioned by teachers as a particularly valuable tool in their teaching processes. One teacher, for example, explained how debate techniques helped her teach a classic Georgian poem, *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*.

Similar to students, teachers reported that the debate program positively impacted their self-confidence. One respondent shared, “With increased self-confidence, I’ve become more accepting. I now listen more intently when interacting with colleagues and family members”.

Additionally, the debate program enhanced teachers’ ability to manage conflict. As one of the teachers stated, “Debates have taught me how to handle conflicts; I’m now more balanced and have learned strategies to calmly resolve disputes”.

Results and Discussions

The focus group meetings with students revealed that offering debates as an elective subject is an

important step for more schools to adopt. Although many schools have started introducing debate as an elective, there is a strong need to provide more students with the opportunity to learn debating skills, which the research highlighted as essential.

Similar to the students, the study revealed that debates significantly improved conflict management skills. Teachers reported that debates enhanced their conflict resolution abilities by encouraging active listening and considering multiple perspectives. The majority of teachers recommended placing a greater emphasis on the importance of debate clubs within school management and administration. Many educators also suggested that all teachers should participate in a debate program course before starting their careers in education, underlining the importance of integrating debate

training into higher education programs for future teachers.

In conclusion, the debate program has shown a positive impact on students and teachers alike. Both groups reported significant improvements in conflict resolution skills and self-esteem. Moreover, students found success in academic and non-formal settings beyond the debate club, particularly in tasks such as giving presentations, writing essays, and resolving family conflicts. For teachers, the program proved to be transformative, enhancing their overall teaching strategies and promoting more practical, engaging lessons. Ultimately, a formal debate program is crucial for the self-development of individuals across all age groups, backgrounds, and professions.

ფსიქოლოგია

დებატების პროგრამის გავლენის ანალიზი ახალგაზრდებსა და ზრდასრულებზე

გ. მაღრაძე*, თ. ცერცვაძე*

* ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახ. თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, სოციალურ და პოლიტიკურ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ი. იმედაძის მიერ)

თვისებრივი კვლევა გვიჩვენებს, თუ როგორ მოქმედებს საქართველოში დებატების ტრენინგის პროგრამა ახალგაზრდებისა და ზრდასრულების პიროვნულ ზრდაზე, თვითშეფასების მნიშვნელოვან ასპექტებზე განსაკუთრებული ყურადღების გამახვილებით. თვითობის სტრუქტურასა და ფუნქციებთან დაკავშირებული მოდელებიდან საგულისხმოა მე-კონცეფციის მოტივაციური ფუნქცია, რომელიც წარმოადგენს თვითობის სტაბილიზატორს, რათა, ერთი მხრივ, მოხდეს პირადი მდგრადობისათვის იმ ინდივიდუალური მოთხოვნილებების

დაკმაყოფილება, რომლებიც სასიცოცხლო მნიშვნელობისაა და, მეორე მხრივ, თვითშეფასების ამაღლება. ორივე მოტივი ქცევით რეგულაციას ემსახურება. შესაბამისად, მე-ს კონცეფცია მნიშვნელოვან როლს თამაშობს კონფლიქტების წამოწყებასა და მართვაში. შესაბამისად, მისი ერთ-ერთი მნიშვნელოვანი ასპექტი გულისხმობს იმას, რომ ადამიანები არაგნობიერად მუდმივად ახდენენ სხვების ამა თუ იმ საქციელის მოწონებასა და გამართლებას. მაშინ, როდესაც ადამიანები კონფლიქტების დროს თავს დამცირებულად გრძნობენ, მათი თვითშეფასების დონე კლებულობს და თვლიან რომ სხვის თვალში მათი ქმედება ნაკლებად მოსაწონი ხდება. აქედან გამომდინარე, მე-ს კონცეფციის პარამეტრების განხილვისას, მნიშვნელოვანია კონფლიქტის მართვის უნარების გათვალისწინებაც. განსაკუთრებით, აღსანიშნავია ის უნარები, რომელთა განვითარებაზეც უშუალო ზეგავლენას ახდენს კონფლიქტების მართვის ტექნიკები. კერძოდ, კი ეს ეხება ასერტიულობისა და კოოპერაციის უნარების განვითარებას, რომლებიც კონფლიქტების მართვის ორი ძირითადი კომპონენტია. ამიტომაც გადავწყვიტეთ აღნიშნული კვლევის ჩატარება. ის აფასებს იმ გზებს, რომლითაც ფორმალურ დებატებში ჩართვა აუმჯობესებს კონფლიქტების მოგვარების, თვითშეფასების, თავდაჯერებულობის, თვითაღქმის, ემოციების კონტროლის, კონსტრუქციული მსჯელობის/აზროვნების და პრეზენტაციების მოგვარების შესაძლებლობებს. კვლევა აფასებს დებატების სასწავლო პროგრამის გავლის შედეგებს რათა გამოიკვეთოს თუ როგორ იცვლება ეს ასპექტები თვითგანვითარების ფაზებზე. ახალგაზრდებისა და ზრდასრულების მონაცემები შეგროვდა ფოკუს ჯგუფებისა და სიღრმისეული ინტერვიუების მეშვეობით. შედეგები აჩვენებს, რომ დებატების პროგრამა მნიშვნელოვნად აძლიერებს საკუთარი თავის აღქმას და ინტერპერსონალურ უნარებს, განსაკუთრებით თვითშემეცნების, კომუნიკაციის უნარებისა და ემოციური ინტელექტის სფეროებში. კვლევა ხაზს უსვამს იმას, თუ როგორ შეიძლება დებატების პროგრამები იყოს სასარგებლო ინსტრუმენტი სოციალური უნარებისა და პიროვნული განვითარების გასაუმჯობესებლად როგორც აკადემიურ, ისე არაფორმალურ გარემოში.

REFERENCES

1. Djuranovic, M. (2003) The Ultimate Lincoln-Douglas Debate Handbook. International Debate Education Association.
2. Trapp, R., Zompetti, J. P., Motiejunaite, J., & Driscoll, W. (2005) *Discovering the world through debate*. New York: International Debate Education Association.
3. Thomas, K., & Kilmann, R. (1997) Conflict Mode Instrument. Publisher Xicom.
4. Goffman, M. L. (1982) *Enzykolädie der Psychologie Persönlichkeitsdiagnostik*. Hogrefe Verlag (in German).
5. Randolph, P. (2016) *The Psychology of Conflict: mediating in a diverse world*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
6. Colliver, Y. J. (2012) The five debates: simplifying the contemporary play literature. *Early Childhood Folio*, p. 15-21.

Received November, 2024