

MÁS ALLÁ DEL AULA: ENSEÑAR A DEBATIR, ENSEÑAR A VIVIR

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: TEACHING DEBATE, TEACHING TO LIVE

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Resumen

Este artículo presenta una propuesta de innovación educativa centrada en el uso del debate académico y la oratoria como herramientas para el desarrollo de competencias clave en la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria. La experiencia, llevada a cabo en un centro concertado de Salamanca, combinó sesiones extracurriculares de formación en oratoria con trabajo interdisciplinar en horario lectivo. Participaron catorce estudiantes de 3.º y 4.º de ESO, que prepararon y defendieron argumentaciones sobre una misma cuestión en el marco de una competición oficial. A través de un diseño metodológico mixto, se recopilaron datos cuantitativos

(rúbricas de evaluación) y cualitativos (encuestas de autopercepción, observaciones, testimonios), que evidencian mejoras significativas en fluidez, vocabulario, persuasión, estructura argumentativa y seguridad al hablar en público. Asimismo, se constataron avances en pensamiento crítico, trabajo cooperativo y actitud reflexiva. Los resultados respaldan el valor del debate como estrategia pedagógica innovadora, transversal e inclusiva, alineada con la LOMLOE y el currículo autonómico. La propuesta demuestra ser replicable, sostenible y transferible a otros contextos educativos.

Palabras clave*: *Debate académico; oratoria escolar; competencia comunicativa; innovación metodológica; pensamiento crítico; Educación Secundaria Obligatoria.*

Abstract

This article presents an educational innovation project based on the use of academic debate and public speaking as tools for developing key competences in lower secondary education. The experience took place at a semi-private school in Salamanca and combined extracurricular speech training with interdisciplinary work during school hours. Fourteen students from 3rd and 4th grade of ESO participated by preparing and defending arguments on both sides of a given topic in the context of an official competition. Using a mixed-methods design, the study collected quantitative data (evaluation rubrics) and qualitative evidence (self-perception surveys, observations, and student testimonials), which show significant improvement in fluency, vocabulary, persuasiveness, argument structure, and public speaking confidence. Additionally, progress was observed in critical thinking, cooperative work, and reflective attitude. The results support debate as an innovative, transversal, and inclusive teaching strategy aligned with the LOMLOE

and the regional curriculum. The proposal proves to be replicable, sustainable, and transferable to other educational contexts.

Keywords: *Academic debate; school public speaking; communicative competence; methodological innovation; critical thinking; Compulsory Secondary Education.* *

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's educational context, the development of communicative competence and critical thinking is a priority explicitly recognized in both national and regional regulatory frameworks. These competencies are considered essential for students' comprehensive education and for their active participation in a democratic, informed, and constantly evolving society. Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29 (LOMLOE), emphasizes that the education system must promote students' ability to "express themselves fluently, coherently, and accurately in different contexts, both orally and in writing" (Art. 2.1.k), which translates into a clear commitment to linguistic and civic competence as part of the learner's profile upon completing compulsory education.

However, several studies agree that this aim has not been fully translated into classroom practice, particularly with regard to the systematic teaching of formal orality. While written expression has achieved a consolidated presence in the curriculum, the practice of planned oral discourse—requiring analysis, preparation, strategy, active listening, and argumentation—continues to occupy a marginal position (Churchill, 1903; Flanagan, 2021). This gap between curricular intentions and classroom implementation highlights the need to explore pedagogical strategies that respond to this discrepancy.

Participation in school debate leagues emerges as one such strategy, offering a competency-based, cross-curricular, and inclusive methodology that combines research, cooperative work, active listening, and structured oral exposition. This approach also enjoys institutional support: in the region of Castilla y León, the Ministry of Education regulates and annually calls for participation in the "Liga

Debate" program for students in lower and upper secondary education (Order EDU/1074/2022, of August 16; Order EDU/969/2024, of September 26). This initiative aligns with the provisions of Decrees 39/2022 and 40/2022, dated September 29, which define the curriculum for Compulsory Secondary Education and Baccalaureate in the region, advocating for the design of active, competency-based, and meaningful learning situations (Art. 13).

The experience described in this study was implemented in a semi-private school in the city of Salamanca, involving students from the 3rd and 4th years of Compulsory Secondary Education. It was carried out within the framework of the aforementioned regional program. Although this is a localized case, it reflects emerging practices in the educational landscape and includes elements that may be transferable to other public or private settings. Nevertheless, the importance of comparing this experience with similar initiatives in other Autonomous Communities is acknowledged, with the aim of enriching the analysis and broadening the applicability of the findings.

This intervention pursued two main objectives: first, to analyze the impact of participating in a school debate league on the development of students' communicative competence and critical thinking; and second, to assess the effectiveness of a hybrid methodological approach that combined interdisciplinary work during class time with intensive training sessions outside school hours. The guiding research question was: **What impact does participation in a school debate league have on the development of communicative competence and critical thinking in students in the 3rd and 4th years of Compulsory Secondary Education?**

The following sections present the theoretical foundations of the proposal, a detailed description of the methodology employed, the results obtained, their analysis and discussion, and the final conclusions drawn from the study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Educational research has consistently demonstrated that the practice of structured debate significantly contributes to the development of students' communicative competence. The frequent use of language in formal contexts, the need to adapt speech to different audiences, and the training in persuasive techniques all promote observable improvements in verbal fluency, lexical richness, and clarity of expression (Elmiyati, 2019; Hughes, 2003; Adams & Frith, 1979). Likewise, participation in public speaking activities helps students overcome emotional barriers such as stage fright, thus fostering more inclusive and participatory learning environments (Bellon, 2000, cited in Flanagan, 2021).

Beyond its impact on oral expression, academic debate also stimulates critical thinking. It requires in-depth research, the selection of reliable sources, the comparison of perspectives, the construction of solid arguments, and the ability to respond agilely to counterarguments. This process promotes logical reasoning and evidence-based decision-making, nurturing an open-minded, rigorous, and reflective approach to knowledge (Allen et al., 1999; Roy & Macchiette, 2005, cited in Elmiyati, 2019).

This formative dimension aligns with the key competences defined in the Spanish education system, as established in Organic Law 2/2006 on Education and reinforced by Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), which places linguistic competence and critical thinking at the core of the curriculum (Jefatura del Estado, 2020). At the regional level, Decrees 39/2022 and 40/2022 stipulate that the curriculum for Compulsory Secondary Education and Baccalaureate must be organized around integrated, competency-based, and real-life-oriented learning situations (Junta de Castilla y León, 2022a, 2022b).

Within this framework, Order EDU/1074/2022 regulates the "Liga Debate" program in Castilla y León, aimed at developing students' oratory skills and critical thinking through team-based activities focused on current issues. This regulation explicitly states that the program seeks to strengthen democratic awareness, structured argumentation, and the values of parliamentary dialogue (Consejería de Educación, 2022).

However, the use of debate as a didactic tool is not new. Since the enactment of the LOE in 2006, and especially over the past decade, many educational institutions have introduced public speaking activities, structured presentations, or classroom debates as part of their language projects. What makes the present proposal innovative is not merely its use of debate, but its structured, hybrid, and cross-curricular nature. It integrates interdisciplinary work during class time with stable extracurricular sessions and aligns with the official curriculum and competency-based assessment principles. Furthermore, the initiative is consolidated as a sustained educational project that articulates institutional participation, a coherent training sequence, a clear evaluation design, and a forward-looking vision for growth and scalability.

This model also sets itself apart from other initiatives in regions such as Andalusia, the Valencian Community, or Madrid, where debate projects tend to be extracurricular or limited to the language area. In contrast, this proposal is conceived as a whole-school initiative, involving multiple departments and applying competency-based evaluation. These elements allow it to be considered a methodological innovation aligned with European recommendations on skills development, the learner profile defined in national legislation, and the school improvement strategies promoted by educational inspection.

Recent studies have shown that this hybrid model (curricular + extracurricular) increases student engagement and enables genuine knowledge transfer across subjects (Anderson & Mezuk, 2012; Goodson, 2023). It also promotes educational equity by allowing for diverse modes of expression and participation, provided that an inclusive and diversity-sensitive approach is adopted (Reid-Brinkley, 2008; Texas Debate Collective, 2023).

Moreover, the proposal draws on structured evaluation models, such as that of Elmiyati (2019), which is based on rubrics with objective criteria for fluency, vocabulary, and persuasion, as well as on self-perception tools like those employed by Flanagan (2021), which allow for the monitoring of student progress from a competency-based and reflective perspective.

In summary, the present theoretical framework connects the development of public speaking with the overarching goals of the Spanish education system and justifies the need for implementation models that integrate normative, pedagogical, and organizational dimensions. This vision underpins the proposal described in the following sections.

3. METHODOLOGY

This educational innovation project was carried out during the 2024–2025 academic year in a semi-private secondary school in the city of Salamanca, using a mixed-methods research design that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques. The goal was to evaluate the impact of participation in the “Liga Debate” on the development of communicative competence and critical thinking in participating students.

The intervention involved an experimental group of fourteen students—seven from the 3rd year and seven from the 4th year of Compulsory Secondary Education

(ESO)—compared to a control group with similar characteristics who did not take part in the activity. The 4th-year group consisted of four boys and three girls, while the 3rd-year group included five girls and two boys, all aged between 14 and 16. The experimental group was selected using a mixed criterion: some students volunteered, while others were invited by the teaching team based on their academic performance and proactive attitude. Informed consent was obtained from the students and their families, in line with ethical standards for educational research.

The intervention was developed along two complementary lines. On the one hand, weekly extracurricular sessions of ninety minutes were held—often extended to two hours at the students' request. In the two weeks prior to the regional competition, the frequency was increased to three sessions per week. These sessions focused on key aspects of oratory: speech structure, persuasive techniques, rebuttal strategies, non-verbal communication, and public delivery. On the other hand, interdisciplinary work took place during class time, focusing on the tournament's central question—"Are scientific forms of knowledge more important than humanistic ones for life?"—primarily in Spanish Language and Literature classes, with contributions from the departments of Geography and History, Mathematics, and English. This transversal approach allowed students to explore the issue from multiple perspectives, integrate various discursive registers, and develop critical analysis and rigorous documentation skills.

The training sequence was organized into four progressive phases:

- Phase 1: Introduction to formal public speaking and targeted activities to refine non-verbal communication.
- Phase 2: Instruction on the academic debate format, including the distribution of roles, time management, and turn structure.

- Phase 3: Instruction and training in the AREI model (Assertion, Reasoning, Evidence, Impact), based on Toulmin's argumentative structure and widely promoted in debate training guides (Quinn, 2021; Sonnreich, 2010; Meany & Shuster, 2003).

- Phase 4: Documentary research, drafting, and rehearsal of speeches for both sides of the motion, with ongoing teacher feedback.

The assessment of the intervention was based on several instruments. To measure objective progress, oral performance rubrics were applied at two points (pretest and posttest), focusing on four main dimensions: verbal fluency, lexical precision, persuasive ability, and argumentative structure. These rubrics, adapted from Elmiyati's (2019) model and theoretically grounded in Hughes (2003), made it possible to systematically track students' development in communicative competence. The evaluations were conducted by the teacher-researcher, ensuring observational consistency and judgement coherence.

Additionally, self-perception surveys were administered, inspired by the work of Flanagan (2021). These gathered students' opinions on their confidence in public speaking, argumentative capacity, persuasive competence, and attitudes toward cooperative work. The survey was designed ad hoc, consisted of four Likert-type items, and was anonymous, voluntary, and distributed via Google Forms. Although it was not statistically validated, its design followed internal consistency and thematic relevance criteria.

Data analysis was conducted by the researcher. Basic descriptive statistics were used to compare pretest and posttest results obtained through the rubric, which were then triangulated with the self-perception survey data. Results were recorded in an internal database created from digital forms and were interpreted using complementary qualitative and quantitative criteria. At the qualitative level,

field notes, anecdotal observations during sessions, and spontaneous student testimonies were collected.

As an external indicator of progress, the team's performance in the regional phase of the "Liga Debate" organized by the Regional Ministry of Education was also considered. The team won the provincial round held in Salamanca and qualified for the regional final at the Cortes of Castilla y León. This result is interpreted as an objective indicator of competency development, as it was assessed by an external jury based on criteria established in Order EDU/1074/2022, including the opening statement, rebuttals, and closing arguments.

Finally, a summary graph was produced to visually display the percentage improvement between the pretest and posttest scores in the areas of fluency, vocabulary, and persuasion. These data serve as the foundation for the analysis and discussion presented in the next section.

To facilitate a clearer understanding of the process and its potential replicability, two complementary annexes are included: the first offers a detailed guide to the phases, activities, and implementation guidelines of the project; the second presents a bank of applied classroom dynamics, aligned with the competencies developed and designed for direct use in educational settings.

4. RESULTS

The results obtained following the implementation of the proposal show a positive progression in the development of communicative competences among the participating students. The evaluation was based on three primary sources: quantitative data from assessment rubrics (pretest and posttest), self-perception surveys, and qualitative observations recorded during the training sessions.

From an objective standpoint, the results of the experimental group indicate an increase in average scores across all evaluated dimensions (verbal fluency, lexical precision, persuasive ability, and argumentative structure). In some cases, the differences between initial and final scores exceeded 50%, suggesting a significant improvement in performance.

Criterion	Pretest (Mean)	Posttest (Mean)
Fluency	2.5	4.3
Vocabulary	2.0	4.0
Persuasion	2.3	4.3

Table 1 - Pretest/posttest Objective Evaluation

Regarding the results of the self-perception survey, students reported feeling more confident when speaking in public (mean increase from 3.5 to 4.5), demonstrating greater control of vocabulary (from 3.0 to 4.0), increased persuasive ability (from 2.0 to 4.5), and improved understanding of argumentative structure. Although these data are subjective in nature, they reflect a trend consistent with the results obtained through the rubric, thereby reinforcing the validity of the conclusions.

Criterion	Pretest (Mean)	Posttest (Mean)
Fluency	3.5	4.5
Vocabulary	3.0	4.0
Persuasion	2.0	4.5

Table 2 – Pretest/Posttest Self-Perception

As a visual summary, the following graph presents the average percentage improvement of students in each of the evaluated dimensions. This representation clearly illustrates the impact of the training process.

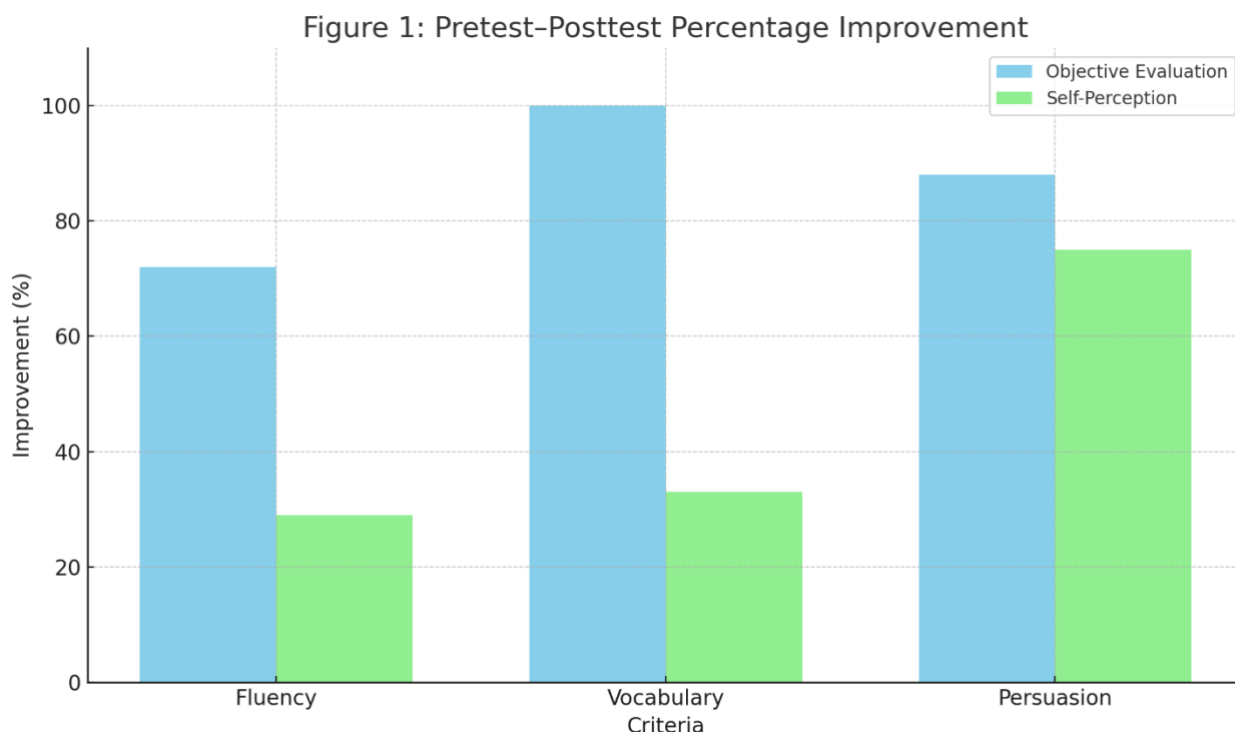


Figure 1 – Pretest-Posttest Percentage Improvement

Beyond the numerical data, the qualitative observations gathered throughout the process offer deeper insight into the impact of the intervention. One of the most significant changes was the improvement in the clarity and pacing of students' oral delivery. They learned to use pauses to emphasize ideas, to employ gestural enumeration with their hands, and to modulate intonation to capture the audience's attention. However, the most notable shift was the increased confidence in public speaking—an aspect that grew progressively through repeated practice and exposure experiences (Flanagan, 2021).

In terms of argumentation, the adoption of the AREI model (Assertion, Reasoning, Evidence, Impact)—based on Toulmin's logical structure (Quinn, 2021; Meany & Shuster, 2003)—led to a remarkable improvement in the organization of speeches. Students learned to develop solid assertions supported by logical reasoning and well-documented evidence, which enhanced the depth and coherence of their interventions. Furthermore, preparing both sides of the debate (in favor and against) fostered cognitive flexibility and rebuttal skills, two core components of critical thinking (Allen et al., 1999).

Teamwork was another central pillar of the project. Students worked collaboratively to conduct research, cross-check sources, and distribute responsibilities related to the different debate roles. On several occasions, they rehearsed their interventions in front of teachers and upper-secondary students, who provided constructive feedback that contributed to the progressive improvement of their speeches. This process not only enriched the experience but also introduced an intergenerational dimension that promoted peer learning (Texas Debate Collective, 2023).

External validation of these advances came through participation in the School Debate League organized by the Regional Ministry of Education of Castilla y León. The team was declared winner of the provincial phase held in Salamanca and qualified for the regional final. The jury especially praised the group's fluency and persuasive ability, while also suggesting potential improvements in the use of certain information and the depth of specific points. This recognition reinforces the hypothesis that the work carried out, both pedagogically and in terms of competency development, followed well-defined lines of quality and effectiveness.

During the tournament, several speeches stood out for their argumentative strength and impact. The second rebuttals from both teams were highlighted as particularly outstanding for their responsiveness, clarity of thought, and ability to adapt in real time to opponents' arguments. For example, in the rebuttal supporting the value of science, it was argued that "without science, the world as we know it could not be sustained," citing evidence such as the role of biotechnology during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the opposing team emphasized that "science provides the knowledge, but the humanities guide us in its responsible use"—a statement that perfectly captures the complementary value of both fields of knowledge.

Finally, student testimonials revealed a profound emotional and educational impact. They expressed clear satisfaction with having taken part in the experience, highlighting aspects such as personal growth, open-mindedness, and pride in their achievements. Some representative comments collected after the activity included: "We want to keep debating even after the regional phase"; "It helped me put myself in the shoes of people who think differently from me"; "I've realized the importance of researching in order to support my opinions"; and "I'm proud to have achieved this result through my own effort."

This evidence supports the conclusion that participation in the Debate League not only enhanced students' communication and critical thinking skills but also fostered a rich, motivating, and highly transformative learning environment—aligned with what has been described by scholars such as Reid-Brinkley (2008) and Mezuk & Anderson (2012).

5. DISCUSSION

The results obtained from this experience, in both their quantitative and qualitative dimensions, confirm that participation in a structured academic debate project had a positive impact on the development of students' communicative competence and critical thinking. This improvement, supported by rubric-based assessments and self-perception surveys, was further reinforced by consistent qualitative observations, evaluations by external experts during the tournament, and feedback from the students themselves. However, beyond acknowledging this progression, it is essential to interpret its scope in depth, compare it with similar experiences, analyze its limitations, and assess its potential for replication and transformation in other educational contexts.

Unlike many common school debate practices, this proposal offers an innovative intervention model that integrates four key components in a balanced way: a hybrid structure (curricular + extracurricular), interdisciplinary collaboration, competency-based assessment, and a progressive methodological approach to teaching argumentation. Many existing debate programs in schools are limited to voluntary oratory clubs or sporadic classroom activities, lacking methodological continuity and curricular alignment. In contrast, the present model proposes an experience embedded within the school's institutional plan, involving multiple departments and aligned with stage objectives established in current legislation (Jefatura del Estado, 2020; Junta de Castilla y León, 2022a).

The hybrid approach, in particular, has made it possible to harness the strengths of both environments. In-class work enabled connections with curricular content, the cross-cutting development of key competences, and the active involvement of the teaching staff. Extracurricular sessions, meanwhile, offered a safe and flexible space to practice, rehearse, and reflect without the constraints of the formal curriculum. This combination has proven highly effective in previous research (Anderson & Mezuk, 2012; Goodson, 2023) and was one of the most valued aspects among students, according to their testimonies.

Another distinctive feature was the adoption of the AREI model as a tool for teaching argumentation. This framework, based on Toulmin's logical structure (Quinn, 2021), enabled students to construct solid arguments with clear assertions, logical reasoning, well-supported evidence, and relevant impact. The progressive internalization of this model was reflected in the quality of final speeches and the students' ability to deliver agile, well-structured rebuttals. Unlike less systematized approaches, AREI offers accessible, step-by-step scaffolding and is easy to evaluate, making it a useful tool for both teachers and learners (Meany & Shuster, 2003; Elmiyati, 2019).

The intergenerational dimension introduced through rehearsals with upper-secondary students added valuable depth to the project. This practice fostered peer learning, self-demand, and mutual respect, aligning with collaborative and community-based approaches recommended by current participatory pedagogies. The combination of reflective practice, model analysis, peer feedback, and continuous assessment created a highly motivating learning ecosystem where mistakes were understood as an integral part of the learning process.

In terms of comparison with other research, the results align with those described by Flanagan (2021) in the U.S. context, where participation in structured

debate programs has been shown to improve verbal fluency, self-confidence, and critical thinking. They are also consistent with findings by Elmiyati (2019) in Asian contexts, which demonstrated that well-designed rubrics can objectively measure significant progress in communicative competence. Nevertheless, this work also contributes a replicable pedagogical model that combines technical training, curricular integration, institutional involvement, and emotional engagement.

However, the study is not without limitations. The sample size ($n = 14$) was small, limiting the generalizability of the results. While a control group with similar characteristics was used, it was not an active control group, making it difficult to isolate the specific effects of the intervention. Additionally, evaluation was conducted by the teacher-researcher, which, while ensuring consistency and close monitoring, may introduce confirmation bias. It is also worth noting that the experimental group showed high motivation from the outset, which could have amplified the intervention's effects (Flanagan, 2021; Reid-Brinkley, 2008).

Despite this, the experience is replicable in other educational centers—public, semi-private, or private. It does not require extraordinary resources but rather careful planning, willingness to collaborate across departments, and basic training in public speaking. The methodological structure is flexible and adaptable to the number of available sessions, student levels, or subject areas. It could be implemented as a pilot project within a teaching innovation plan, aligned with the school's improvement strategies, or even serve as the backbone of a cross-curricular approach. Additionally, it could be extended to other educational levels (1st–2nd year of ESO or Baccalaureate) and other formats (ethical, scientific, or legal debates), thereby increasing its reach.

As a future action, the design of a teacher training model is proposed to facilitate the transfer of this methodology to interested teams, the development of

shared materials (rubrics, lesson plans, digital resources), and the establishment of a network of schools to share best practices. Longitudinal research could also be developed to monitor student progress over the medium and long term, incorporating standardized indicators to enhance impact analysis.

Ultimately, the experience confirms not only the pedagogical value of academic debate as a strategy for developing competences, but also offers a viable, robust, and transformative organizational and methodological model. Its true value lies not only in the results achieved, but in its potential to become a tool for structural change in how teaching, learning, and assessment are approached in 21st-century schools.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The innovation proposal developed has demonstrated that academic debate, when implemented with methodological rigor, can become an effective tool for fostering communicative, argumentative, and critical thinking skills in students at the level of Compulsory Secondary Education. Over the course of four months, a hybrid and interdisciplinary model was applied that combined public speaking training, documentary research, and deliberate public discourse practice. This model generated a positive impact both on student performance and on their perceived progress.

The results show significant progress in the evaluated dimensions, particularly in verbal fluency, vocabulary usage, persuasive ability, and discourse structure. This improvement was verified through assessment rubrics, self-perception surveys, qualitative observations, and external validation by a panel of expert judges. An additional and highly valuable outcome was the creation of a cooperative, reflective,

and deeply motivating learning environment in which students actively embraced ownership of their learning process.

Beyond competency development, one of the most valuable contributions of this experience lies in its organizational design and replicability. Unlike isolated or extracurricular initiatives disconnected from the curriculum, this project demonstrated that debate can be integrated into a school's educational plan, coordinated across departments, and implemented sustainably without requiring extraordinary resources. The keys to its feasibility were detailed planning, a clear methodological structure (with progressive phases), alignment with the official curriculum, and committed teacher involvement. Therefore, this proposal is not limited to a specific context but can be adapted and transferred to other schools with an interest in educational innovation.

To ensure effective replicability, three basic conditions are recommended: 1) a coordinated teaching team willing to collaborate beyond their individual subjects; 2) a stable space for extracurricular training, or the integration of the proposal into an elective course; and 3) basic training in public speaking and debate for participating teachers, particularly regarding competency-based assessment, learning situation design, and group dynamic management.

To support the transferability of this experience to other educational contexts, two annexes have been included: one detailing the implementation guide and the other offering a comprehensive bank of applied dynamics, with clear guidelines for adaptation and classroom use.

As future lines of action, it is proposed to extend the experience to other educational levels (including Baccalaureate and the lower years of ESO), diversify

debate topics (ethics, current affairs, science, law), and create shared materials to facilitate implementation in new schools. Establishing a network of teachers and institutions working with this methodology would also be desirable, allowing the exchange of best practices, the improvement of evaluation tools, and the design of longitudinal research to assess the medium- and long-term impact.

Ultimately, this experience has shown that debating is not merely about speaking well: it is about learning to think, to listen, to collaborate, and to build knowledge through dialogue. Teaching students to debate is not only teaching them to win a tournament; it equips them with a powerful tool to live and coexist in a plural, complex, and ever-changing society. This, perhaps, is its greatest transformative value.

7. REFERENCES

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ANNEX 1. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR THE DEBATE PROJECT

The following guide offers a concise methodological framework for integrating academic debate as an instructional strategy in Secondary Education. It is based on a real educational experience implemented over thirteen weeks and structured into six progressive phases. What follows is an indicative timeline, accompanied by a detailed description of each phase, recommended classroom dynamics, and practical guidelines for teachers.

1. Intervention Timeline

The timeline below summarizes the temporal distribution of the proposal. While it can be adapted to different school calendars and educational contexts, it is advisable to maintain the gradual progression in complexity. Sessions may be held exclusively outside regular class hours, integrated into an elective subject, or combined with interdisciplinary work during school time.

Phase	Weeks	Content Focus	Type of Session
1	Weeks 1-2	Introduction to public speaking; non-verbal communication	Extracurricular
2	Weeks 3-4	Structure of academic debate; turn-taking and role distribution	Extracurricular
3	Weeks 5-6	AREI model; argument structure; documentary research	Mixed (curricular + extracurricular)
4	Weeks 7-10	Full rehearsals; persuasive techniques; body language; peer feedback	Mixed
5	Week	Intensive preparation for the tournament	Intensive

Fase	Weeks	Content Focus	Type of Session
ks 11–12			extracurricular
Week 13	Participation in the official school debate tournament		External (formal competition)

•Phase 1: Introduction to Public Speaking

The initial phase focuses on oral expression from a practical and uninhibited approach. The first sessions are devoted to non-verbal communication—such as posture, eye contact, and gestures—and to vocal control in terms of volume, pace, and intonation. Activities are proposed to foster stage presence, expressive awareness, and confidence when speaking in front of others. The goal is to create a safe training space in which students feel encouraged to speak, make mistakes, correct themselves, and enjoy the process.

In addition to technical work on voice and body, it is especially useful to include dynamics that activate expressiveness, imagination, and body awareness through a playful and formative approach. The following three instructional activities were specifically designed for this initial phase.

The first, titled "Una emoción ajena" (An Unfamiliar Emotion), invites students to explore the disconnection between facial expression and spoken content. Each student prepares a short oral presentation on a positive or neutral topic—such as a favorite food, a pleasant activity, or a happy memory—but must deliver it while intentionally maintaining an angry facial expression. This exercise strengthens body language control, expressive awareness, and modulation, all of which are key to effective and coherent communication.

The second activity, "Historia al revés" (Backwards Storytelling), develops narrative creativity by working with an inverted chronological structure. Starting from an unexpected or absurd ending (for example: "And that's why he never ate cucumbers again"), students must reconstruct the events that led up to that conclusion, speaking aloud step by step in reverse order. This dynamic encourages internal coherence, logical reasoning in reverse, and improvisation skills.

Lastly, "El juicio del arte" (The Trial of Creativity) is a free-form argumentative exercise based on random prompts. Each student receives three stimuli—a character, an object, and a setting—and must construct a third-person speech accusing the character of having "eliminated creativity." The student must integrate the object and the setting as symbolic evidence in a persuasive manner. The speech may take on various narrative registers (omniscient narrator, lawyer, witness...), allowing students to explore rhetorical strategies, figurative language, and stage presence in highly creative contexts.

These dynamics help students train their expressiveness, verbal agility, and originality in a relaxed and supportive environment. They also serve as a natural bridge to the next phase, where the formal structure of academic debate will be introduced..

•Phase 2: Academic Debate Format

This phase introduces students to the basic structure of formal academic debate, consisting of four main turns: introduction, first rebuttal, second rebuttal, and conclusion. Each turn fulfills a specific communicative function within the team's overall argumentative strategy. It is essential to explain clearly the role of each speaker (introducer, rebutters, and closer), and to dedicate time to the individualized practice of each turn, so that students understand the technical and expressive

demands of their interventions. From the beginning, it is recommended to work with the real-time formats used in school debate tournaments: three minutes for the introduction and conclusion, and four minutes for each rebuttal. The use of stopwatches and time cards helps students internalize the structure and develop discourse management strategies.

The *introduction* (3 minutes) is intended to present the debate topic, clearly state the team's position, and lay out the argumentative line to be developed. A strong introduction typically begins with an engaging opening—such as a rhetorical question, striking data, an anecdote, or a direct appeal to the jury—followed by a precise definition of key terms, the team's thesis, and a preview of the main arguments. The conclusion of the turn should project confidence and establish a connection with the audience. The overall tone should be clear, direct, and firm, avoiding generic phrases or unnecessary technical jargon that may dilute the strength of the message.

The *first rebuttal* (4 minutes) directly responds to the introduction delivered by the opposing team and presents the core arguments of the speaker's own team. This turn typically begins with a reasoned critique of the opposing stance, highlighting inconsistencies, omissions, or weak points. Then, two well-structured arguments are developed, each supported by data, examples, or analogies, maintaining logical progression and clear transitions. The turn concludes with a firm reinforcement of the team's thesis. It is a demanding intervention that requires a strong and argumentative tone, with particular attention to vocal delivery, body language, and discourse connectors.

The *second rebuttal* (4 minutes) serves a more strategic function, allowing the speaker to reinforce their team's arguments while undermining those of the opposition. It often begins by briefly strengthening the points already established,

then moves into a direct refutation of the opponent's key ideas. Introducing counterexamples, nuances, or new evidence is encouraged to add depth to the position. This turn may also highlight the social, educational, or ethical relevance of the debate topic. The closing should synthesize the team's argumentative advantage and restate its central thesis. This turn demands adaptability, active listening, and mental agility.

The *conclusion* (3 minutes) brings the debate to a close without introducing new arguments. Its function is to recall the team's thesis, summarize the key points made, subtly highlight the weaknesses in the opposing stance, and deliver a final persuasive appeal to the jury. The tone should be firm, emotionally measured, and convincing, conveying a sense of closure, control, and authority.

Once students have grasped the function of each turn, it is also important to establish the official order of intervention, which governs the structure of the school debate. The team defending the affirmative side begins with its introduction, while the opposing team has the final word with the conclusion. The full order of intervention is as follows: (1) introduction by the affirmative team, (2) introduction by the opposing team, (3) first rebuttal by the affirmative team, (4) first rebuttal by the opposing team, (5) second rebuttal by the affirmative team, (6) second rebuttal by the opposing team, (7) conclusion by the opposing team, and (8) conclusion by the affirmative team. This structure ensures balance between the teams and helps organize rehearsals effectively. It is advisable to practice this format from the outset so that students internalize both their speaking times and their active listening responsibilities.

During this phase, it is particularly enriching to have students watch a complete academic debate, either through a video provided by the teacher or by accessing publicly available resources online. This activity, ideally scheduled between the first

and second weeks of the phase, can be supported by a simple observation guide that prompts reflection on the function of each turn, role distribution, verbal and non-verbal expressiveness, and the overall organization of the team's discourse. This shared model helps students understand the format before engaging in their own rehearsals.

The assignment of roles within each team may be facilitated through a participatory and reflective activity called "Choose Your Voice." Students begin by completing a short written self-assessment, identifying which turn they feel most confident in, which they would take on as a personal challenge, and which communicative aspects they wish to improve. Based on this, teams are formed, and internal negotiations take place to distribute roles, with the teacher acting as mediator when needed. To reinforce these decisions, mini-practice sessions can be held, and each team member is encouraged to commit to a personal goal for improvement. This dynamic fosters self-awareness, team engagement, and a sense of shared responsibility.

•Phase 3: AREI Model and Documentary Research

Once students have understood the structure of academic debate, this phase focuses on equipping them with a solid and functional argumentative tool: the AREI model, an acronym for Assertion, Reasoning, Evidence, and Impact. This is a simple yet effective structure, based on Toulmin's model of argumentation, that allows students to construct interventions with internal coherence and logical progression.

Work with the AREI model is introduced inductively, starting with the analysis of real or teacher-designed speeches. Students examine different interventions, identifying in each case the central assertion, the reasoning that supports it, the evidence that substantiates it, and the impact that justifies its relevance. Based on

this analysis, guided construction exercises are proposed, in which students first apply the framework individually and then collaboratively to a variety of ideas or positions.

To consolidate this learning, a specific classroom dynamic titled "Build Your AREI" is introduced. The goal is for each student to apply the structure to everyday or personally relevant topics. The teacher presents general prompts—such as "Mobile phones should be banned in class" or "Social media negatively affects self-esteem"—and students must prepare short oral interventions using the complete AREI model. Over two minutes, they articulate a clear assertion, develop a logical reasoning, introduce supporting evidence (a fact, example, personal experience, or cited source), and conclude with a compelling impact statement. This activity strengthens oral clarity, logical flow, and structural awareness. In a follow-up version, students reinforce their evidence with a reliable source, integrated after conducting guided research.

A key element of this phase is that students not only learn to argue but also become aware of the importance of justifying ideas with data, anticipating counterarguments, and articulating the social, ethical, or practical significance of their claims. Using the model as a working template and speaking outline also helps reduce stage anxiety and increases confidence during rehearsals.

In parallel, students begin the process of documentary research, which is essential for developing content-rich arguments. They learn to identify credible sources, compare information, evaluate contrasting perspectives, and organize documentation according to the position assigned. Additionally, they are introduced to synthesis tools such as summary cards, idea maps, and effective note-taking strategies during preparation. At this stage, it is useful to introduce basic information

quality criteria: relevance, origin, corroboration, rigor, neutrality, and argumentative usefulness.

This phase represents a turning point in the project, marking the transition from technical training to the actual development of content. The combination of the AREI model with systematic documentary research provides students with a solid argumentative foundation, facilitating the construction of complex speeches, interactive rebuttals, and greater autonomy throughout the preparation process.

•Phase 4: Rehearsals and Technical Improvement

After completing the phases focused on argument construction and documentary research, students now enter the stage of full speech preparation. The main goal is to integrate the different components developed thus far—formal structure, the AREI model, sourced documentation, and expressive skills—into coherent, robust, and persuasive interventions. This phase combines individual work, team sessions, and collaborative dynamics.

During the sessions, each student prepares and rehearses their assigned turn within the team, following the official structure of the debate. Emphasis is placed on the use of precise language, appropriate modulation of tone, controlled gestures, and logical progression of ideas. Personal stylistic elements are also encouraged, provided they strengthen the speaker's authenticity without compromising the team's overall coherence.

One of the core aspects of this phase is the implementation of peer review and constructive feedback practices. Through video recordings, mock interventions, or small-group presentations, students gain a more objective perspective on their performance, enhance their analytical skills, and learn to identify areas of improvement both in themselves and in others. Shared rubrics and structured

observation templates help guide these evaluations and offer a common framework for critical judgment.

A particularly effective dynamic at this stage is known as the "Observer Round." This consists of organizing a full rehearsal between two teams while the rest of the class acts as an audience or active jury. Each observer receives a template with specific criteria to evaluate aspects such as speech structure, argumentative clarity, non-verbal communication, or persuasive strength. At the end of the debate, a debriefing is held where feedback is shared constructively. This practice helps identify tangible progress, implement adjustments, and reinforce learning through critical reflection.

At the same time, full-team rehearsals are carried out to simulate the actual dynamics of a formal debate. These allow students to fine-tune time management, refine transitions between turns, strengthen coordination, and anticipate challenges that may arise during competition. Active listening, note-taking, and the ability to adapt to opposing arguments are encouraged throughout.

This phase also opens space to explore the emotional aspects of public speaking: managing nerves, regulating breathing, channeling enthusiasm, and maintaining firmness in argumentation under pressure. A climate of trust and ongoing improvement is cultivated, where mistakes are embraced as an essential part of the learning process.

In sum, this phase strengthens students' communicative maturity, reinforces their stage presence, and turns the preparation process into a shared experience of growth, rigor, and teamwork.

•Phase 5: Intensive Preparation

This phase marks the final stretch of the process and is characterized by a significant intensification of practical work. In the weeks leading up to the provincial stage of the tournament, the pace of extracurricular sessions increases—from one to three sessions per week. The primary focus is to consolidate speech preparation, refine technical details, and strengthen team cohesion in their collective interventions.

At this point in the project, students have already mastered the formal structure of the debate and have internalized both the AREI model and the criteria for competency-based evaluation. The objective now is to replicate the real conditions of competition as faithfully as possible: timed turns, defined roles, a simulated audience, the presence of a jury, and real-time feedback. The use of stopwatches, timecards, evaluation rubrics, and video recordings becomes essential to ensure objectivity during rehearsal and to facilitate self-assessment.

One of the most effective strategies in this phase is a dynamic known as the intergenerational jury simulation. In this activity, students perform a full debate in front of a jury composed of older students, typically from upper secondary school. These jurors act as external evaluators, applying rubrics provided by the teacher and offering observations on the content, structure, persuasiveness, and oral delivery of each speech. This experience proves especially meaningful for the debate team, as it provides authentic evaluation in a realistic and demanding setting, while also fostering an academic connection across age groups that promotes peer learning and mutual respect.

After each simulation, the debate team receives oral feedback from the student jury, highlighting strengths and suggesting areas for improvement. This is complemented by the teacher's analysis and, where possible, a second round of intervention in which students can apply the recommended adjustments. The format helps to build confidence, validate the effort invested, and raise expectations without generating undue pressure.

This phase also contributes to the development of group identity. Key elements such as mutual trust, alignment of argumentative strategies, organization of shared materials (counter-argument cards, opening and closing scripts, evidence banks), and tone consistency are reinforced. Students are encouraged to rehearse at home, record themselves, take notes for self-assessment, and collaborate in improving overall team performance.

In parallel, targeted sessions may be introduced focusing on improvisation, stress management, anxiety control, and emotional readiness for real competition. The teacher plays a supportive yet demanding role throughout these processes, helping students identify weaknesses, make stylistic adjustments, and recognize significant progress.

This phase is not only the prelude to the tournament, but also a privileged space for personal and collective growth. Students experience the challenge as something meaningful and, above all, feel capable of meeting it successfully. Motivation, pride in the work accomplished, and a desire to improve become powerful pedagogical drivers.

•Phase 6: External Participation

The final phase of the project culminates with the team's participation in an official competition—specifically, the provincial round of the School Debate League

organized by the Department of Education of Castilla y León. This event is not regarded merely as an extracurricular activity, but rather as a genuine validation of the learning process, as it provides an opportunity to contrast the knowledge acquired in a real, regulated, and demanding environment.

During the tournament, students apply everything they have practiced in the preceding phases: time management, argumentative structure, team coordination, rebuttal techniques, persuasion, body language, and emotional regulation. The competition thus becomes an integrated learning experience, simultaneously activating cognitive, social, and emotional competencies, while offering a space for expression, recognition, and formative evaluation.

The presence of an external jury, which evaluates the interventions according to shared and public criteria—such as those established in Order EDU/1074/2022—brings legitimacy to the process and reinforces the seriousness and professionalism with which the team has approached its preparation. Facing teams from other schools with diverse styles and strategies also broadens students' learning perspectives and allows them to view their own successes and shortcomings with greater perspective, understanding that debate is, above all, an exercise in listening, adaptability, and continuous improvement.

Beyond the results achieved in the tournament, what is most significant about this phase is the formative impact it generates. The experience of defending a position before a diverse audience, responding to an unfamiliar jury, and performing under pressure in a formal setting—while doing so with confidence and skill—strengthens students' academic self-esteem and helps consolidate their identity as thoughtful, expressive individuals.

In this way, the competition becomes a pedagogical milestone—not because of its competitive nature, but due to its ability to bring meaningful closure to the process, to project collective effort, and to transform learning into a powerful, emotional, and lasting experience.

ANNEX 2. APPLIED DEBATE DYNAMICS

This annex provides a detailed selection of instructional activities used throughout the project. Each dynamic has been designed to foster specific competencies such as oral expression, argumentation, active listening, and critical thinking. The purpose of including them here is to offer teachers transferable tools that can be adapted to different educational levels and contexts and used to support the development of similar debate-based learning experiences.

1. “Una emoción ajena” (*An Unfamiliar Emotion*)

Objective: To work on the disassociation between verbal language and emotional expression.

Suggested Phase: Phase 1 – Introduction to Public Speaking.

Description: Students prepare a brief intervention on a neutral or positive topic (a hobby, an anecdote, or a pleasant memory) but must deliver it while maintaining a fixed facial expression, such as anger or sadness. The contrast between the speech content and the accompanying gesture forces students to become aware of their bodies and how non-verbal language influences communication.

Skills Developed: Body awareness, emotional modulation, gesture control, expressiveness.

2. “Historia al revés” (*Backwards Storytelling*)

Objective: To foster narrative structure and creative discourse.

Suggested Phase: Phase 1 – Introduction to Public Speaking.

Description: Starting from an unexpected or absurd ending, students must orally construct the story that explains it, developing the sequence in reverse chronological order. This technique enhances logical organization, internal coherence, and discourse flexibility.

Skills Developed: Expository coherence, logical sequencing, verbal fluency, creative improvisation.

3. “El juicio del arte” (*The Trial of Creativity*)

Objective: To develop creative argumentation skills and stage presence..

Suggested Phase: Phase 1 – Introduction to Public Speaking.

Description: Each student receives three random elements: a character, an object, and a location. Using these elements, they must construct a third-person speech in which the character is accused of having “eliminated creativity.” The speech may adopt various narrative styles (witness, lawyer, omniscient narrator, etc.) and must incorporate all three elements as part of the argumentation.

Skills Developed: Symbolic argumentation, use of metaphor, discursive versatility, expressive performance.

4. “Elige tu voz” (*Choose your voice*)

Objective: To promote a strategic, reflective, and consensual distribution of debate roles.

Suggested Phase: Phase 2 – Academic Debate Format.

Description: After the different turns of school debate (introduction, rebuttals, and conclusion) have been explained and practiced, students engage in a self-evaluation and team negotiation activity. First, each student reflects in writing on which turn best suits their strengths, which one they would like to take on as a personal challenge, and which aspect of their communication skills they aim to improve. Then, teams are formed, and an internal negotiation process takes place to assign roles, with the teacher intervening if necessary to resolve any imbalances. To reinforce the decision, short intervention practices are held, and each member commits in writing to their assigned role and a personal goal for improvement.

Skills Developed: Self-awareness, decision-making, shared responsibility, functional task distribution.

5. “Construye tu AREI” (*Build Your AREI*)

Objective: To apply the AREI model using everyday statements.

Suggested Phase: Phase 3 – AREI Model and Documentary Research.

Description: The teacher presents a series of general statements, and students must construct a brief (2-minute) oral intervention in which they develop Assertion, Reasoning, Evidence, and Impact. In a second round, students are asked to strengthen their evidence using a real documentary source. The interventions may be recorded or presented to the group for shared evaluation.

Skills Developed: Argumentative structure, critical thinking, evidence-based justification, oral synthesis.

6. “Ronda de observadores” (*Observer Round*)

Objective: To rehearse a complete debate with formative peer feedback.

Suggested Phase: Phase 4 – Rehearsals and Technical Improvement.

Description: Two teams engage in a debate while the rest of the class acts as a jury. Each observer focuses on a specific criterion (structure, content, delivery, body language, etc.) and provides feedback at the end. The jury may also include teachers or students from other grade levels. A second round is recommended after implementing the suggestions received.

Skills Developed: Active listening, critical judgment, oral presentation, discourse analysis.

7. “Simulacro con jurado intergeneracional” (*Intergenerational Jury Simulation*)

Objective: To simulate a real tournament experience with external evaluation.

Suggested Phase: Phase 5 – Intensive Preparation.

Description: The debate team delivers a full intervention in front of a jury composed of older students (preferably from upper secondary levels). These jurors apply an evaluation rubric provided by the teacher and give oral feedback at the end. The dynamic may conclude with written comments or with a second intervention after adjustments have been made.

Skills Developed: Formal communication, stage presence, real-context adaptation, comprehensive argumentative competence.

These dynamics, rooted in real classroom experience, serve not only as scaffolding for debate preparation, but also as versatile tools for developing communicative competence, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. Their

flexible structure allows for adaptation to different educational contexts and levels, empowering teachers to foster meaningful dialogue and active student engagement across disciplines.