

Nurturing Soft Skills Through High School Debate Club

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Abstract

The development of soft skills such as critical thinking, communication, and leadership is crucial for high school students, particularly in Kazakhstani schools, where the importance of debate clubs has not been widely recognized or researched. This presents a gap in understanding how debate activities can enhance these skills. This action research aims to address this gap by investigating the impact of participation in a Debate Club, based on the WSDC format, on students' teamwork, adaptability, critical thinking, and leadership over two academic years.

Data were collected using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data, tracked on a weekly basis through journaling, were used to measure students' communication, critical thinking, and leadership skills. The changes in these skills were analyzed through line graph. Qualitative data were gathered through face-to-face interview with 10 students.

Debate Club significantly enhanced students' soft skills by providing a dynamic environment where critical thinking, active listening, and persuasive communication were regularly practiced. Through preparing arguments, engaging in rebuttals, and collaborating with teammates, students improved their ability to articulate ideas, think under pressure, and work cooperatively. Feedback sessions, peer interaction, and post-debate reflections created a cycle of continuous growth. Furthermore, the Debate Club fostered leadership, with senior students mentoring younger peers (Grades 7–9). This aligns with Bellon's (2000) argument that debate enhances not only argumentative and critical thinking skills but also social and leadership abilities. Study highlights the potential of debate clubs in Kazakhstani schools for cultivating 21st-century skills and calls for further research into debate's developmental impact.

Keywords: debate club, critical thinking, leadership, Kazakhstani schools, high school students.