



Evaluating the Teaching of Academic Debate and Critical Thinking Course at Iraqi Kurdistan Universities

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ABSTRACT

The study is based on the assumption that the current curricula in the Iraqi Kurdistan Universities (henceforth IKU) were not satisfactorily compatible with the scientific, technological and industrial needs of the Region's markets. These curricula neither help students to develop their skills nor assist them in thinking creatively. Therefore, the new curricula are supposed to educate undergraduates to increase their capabilities in research, information dissemination and learning a second/foreign language. The Academic Debate and Critical Thinking (ADCT) course was added to all freshmen programs in order to prepare them for university life and make them proficient cadre for their future occupation. This course helps students to be critical thinkers and effective communicators. Since the new version of this course has been implemented for four years, this study attempts to evaluate the course and find out how it is taught, how effective it is, what topics are studied, what activities are used, what types of assessment are employed and what are the main challenges that teachers and students face in dealing with this course. The sample of the study are the teachers of ADCT and the first year students in the English departments in both Colleges of Basic Education at Salahaddin University-Erbil and the University of Sulaimani in the academic year 2017-2018. Two questionnaires were prepared using Google Form. The students' responses revealed that debating is focused on, general social problems are debated, academic posters are used more, and group work is dominating class activities. As for teachers' responses, they think that the objectives of the course are clear and achievable, discussion and debating are mostly used, and the assessment system suggested by the textbook is used accurately except for poster design which some teachers do not teach.

KEY WORDS: Evaluation, Academic Debate, Critical Thinking, Challenges, Skills Development

1. Introduction

In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), students from preparatory school right through university preparation are taught merely to memorize materials and feed them back. Critical thinking skills and activities are neither taught nor encouraged. Academic Debate and Critical Thinking (ADCT) course has been added to the first-year curricula in all IKR's universities since the academic year 2010-2011, as part of the curriculum development process to train undergraduates to seek information, produce knowledge, think critically and be leaders and decision makers. In this course, four activities are

required: general discussion and class activities, seminar presentation, report writing, and debate and argumentation, where 20% of the total marks are allotted to each of the first three activities and 40% for debate and argumentation. A rubric for each activity is prepared; tasks and activities are done in groups.

According to Goodlad (1984, cited in Henson, 2015: 224), instruction focuses on the possession of information rather than understanding its implications or arousing students' curiosity to involve them in seeking solutions to some problems. Eggen and Kauchak (2006) claim that

many students lack the ability of deep learning and/or the ability to apply the content knowledge they have acquired in solving real-world problems. Moreover, Moore and Parker (2003, p. 72) state that instruction in schools focuses on knowledge and how to recall the acquired knowledge, and “the ability of students to think is a matter of ongoing concern”. Many schools with a test-centered curriculum do not always encourage critical thinking skills and self-expression but instead rely on rote learning. So, a prerequisite to improve any educational system is to encourage the teaching of critical thinking skills. The reason behind this could be attributed to the fact that educational systems, all over the world, are being reorganized to emphasize active learning, critical thinking and creativity (cf. Snider, 2011). In her study on the effect of critical thinking skills on improving writing skill, Mihimdi (2010, p. 118) concludes that “teaching critical thinking is most effective if the instructor models critical thinking dispositions and the proper use of critical thinking skills in the process of instruction”. She, further, highlights the importance of encouraging students to be curious, raise objections, ask questions, and point out difficulties in the teacher’s position and that they request reasons for being told to do things in a certain way. Bellon (2000, p. 161) points out that “those of us who have witnessed the power of debate to enhance learning and motivate students are becoming advocates of instituting debate across the entire college curriculum.”

In IKR, the students are not encouraged to seek information, think critically and contribute to academic debate inside and/or outside the classroom. So, to produce the best administrative and professional staff for IKR’s markets, curriculum development is required. Taking into consideration the IKR context, should a university lecturer wish to make changes s/he faces challenges such as the traditional relationship between

students and teachers in which there is a lack of communication and in which the teachers have an authoritative role. Therefore, the Academic Debate course is added to the first year curriculum to help undergraduates develop abilities and skills in academic communication and debate, to train them to accept others’ points of view, direct academic arguments, analyze scientific texts logically and critically as well as view the community problems academically to offer appropriate suggestions and solve problems, i.e., they are guided to conduct a critical analysis of what they read. They are also provided with opportunities to practise and develop their skills by writing their reflections on the material studied and on their own learning.

Since the new version of this course has been implemented for four years, this study attempts to evaluate the course and find out how it is taught, how effective it is, what topics are studied, what activities are used, what types of assessment are employed and what are the main challenges that teachers and students face in dealing with this course. The study aims at:

- evaluating the teaching of ADCT course by the teachers who have taught the course since 2011 regarding its aims, methods of teaching, use of CLA, obstacles of using CLA, the topics they taught and students’ assessment in addition to effectiveness of the training workshops they have participated.
- finding out the obstacles of in teaching ADCT, and
- evaluating ADCT course by (first year) students who studied it in 2017-2018 regarding its aims, methods of teaching, students’ assessment, outside class activities, and the timing to study academic debate (henceforth AD).

2. ACADEMIC DEBATE

No one can deny that the concept of debate is referred to as the systematic processes of querying, searching,

exploration, argument, cross-examination, and justification; it is considered as a method of reaching a particular conclusion on an opinion, idea, concept, plan, theory, project, or program. This can be done after having good reasoned judgment. So, going through this process may lead someone to reach a certain point at which a decision is made. Moreover, it might be used to persuade others to agree with one's thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and even the way that this person thinks. All the previous mentioned ideas could be practised via a systematic presentation of arguments which could be oral and/or written communication on a certain issue. So, debate occurs between two individuals or groups while arguing against/for an issue (Ericson et al, 2003; Snider and Schnurer, 2006; Freeley and Steinberg, 2009; Fedrizzi and Ellis, 2011).

Regarding the definition of academic debate, as it is claimed by Omelicheva (2007), one can easily state that AD takes place under the supervision and guidance of any educator, academic, teachers and/or any university and other educational institutions. The purpose behind this activity should be for the sake of the students in order to teach them fundamental skills of making a decision reasonably and to effectively participate in the different group discussion on issues related to their own life and that of others. For Vo and Morris (2006), AD can be considered as an instrument of teaching that restores the harmony between the aims, goals, and objectives of both short-term of knowledge acquisition and long-term of mind training to make someone thinks in an analytical and critical way. Furthermore, Freeley and Steinberg (2009) draw attention to the idea that AD can be called educational debate and it is done in an academic context, i.e., debaters should have academic interests. In its normal shape, AD is conducted by the debaters (or students) while supervised by teachers, judge, and/or sometimes audience since they can form different

opinions about the debated issue.

3. BENEFITS OF ACADEMIC DEBATE

Krieger (2005) states that debate can be considered as a perfect activity to learn a target language since it makes almost all the students participate and practise the target language. This means that debate is very important and is effective in engaging students in a number of cognitive and linguistic ways. One group of students supports the positive points and the other highlights the negative points. Nisbett (2003, p. 210) clarifies that "debate is an important educational tool for learning analytic thinking skills and for forcing self-conscious reflection on the validity of one's ideas".

Whenever the concept of Academic Debate (AD) is mentioned, individuals may think of devoting a number of hours to searching, research, analysis, discussion, and participation. This consequently means having a number of academic and educational benefits and goals. Snider and Schnurer (2006, p. 34) draw attention to a number academic and educational advantages of AD; it is important to "engage students in the subject matter, operationalize the issues of the subject matter, create advocacy-oriented education, teach persuasion skills, teach critical thinking, create positive classroom atmosphere, create new patterns of knowledge, and have fun". So, the benefits of AD for students are obvious because of the cognitive and personal merits they obtain. The studying process will go from mere memorizing process to a very rapid and efficient activity. The general knowledge that has been gathered by reading magazines, books and articles dedicated to politics, various facts, education or psychology will be beneficial for the class-related activities.

4. DIFFERENT DEBATE FORMATS

No matter what kind of debate is applied; the most important point in explaining different formats of the debate is the fact that there are rules for each type,

though the process of debating itself is the same. In other words, in each debate, a number of elements can be found, namely topic, time, place, debaters, and audience. To support this claim, one may refer to what has been mentioned by Snider and Schnurer (2006, p. 6) that “every debate has a topic, allowing the debate process to be more directed than a normal conversation. The topic itself should be of some importance and interest to the participants and any audience that may observe the debate”. Debate has many different types at the school level and the university as well. Rybold (2006), Snider and Schnurer, (2006), Freeley and Steinberg (2009), among many others, point out a number of different debate formats: Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, Parliamentary (British and American), Public Forum, Karl Popper, and Mock Trial.

5. CRITICAL THINKING

Eggen and Kauchak (2006) state that critical thinking (henceforth CT) can be introduced as the ability to make and defend conclusions based on evidence. Building on this, one may claim that CT includes an attitude of open-mindedness, tolerance of ambiguity, respect for others opinions, and the ability to separate relevant from irrelevant information and other positive attitudes and dispositions. Moreover, it also includes different other abilities such as confirming conclusions with facts, identifying unusual assumptions, recognizing overgeneralizations and undergeneralizations, identifying relevant and irrelevant information, identifying bias, stereotypes, clichés, and propaganda. Besides, Halpern (2014, p. 8) refers to CT as “the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome”.

According to McKeachie (1999), the important components of CT can be divided into setting goals to achieve, choosing suitable strategies to tackle an assignment, accessing relevant previous knowledge, and

monitoring their progress. So, teachers need to give opportunities to their students in order to talk, write, do field projects, and practise problem-solving. Additionally, the strategies of teaching CT can be shown as teaching students to describe problem elements, to bring order out of chaos, and verbalize the reasons for taking a step before taking it leading to improved thinking (cf. Butterworth and Thwaites, 2013). To Moore and Parker (2003), CT includes a variety of deliberative processes aimed at making wise decisions about what to believe and do and about evaluating arguments. To teach CT, teachers need to integrate both formal and informal logic, with a variety of useful skills and topics in making sound decisions about claims, actions, and practices and present them in real life situations.

Educationally speaking, McKeachie (1999) believes that teachers can improve students’ thinking by frequent use of “why” and by continued emphasis on the importance of evidence. Teaching thinking needs training, and students therefore are in need of developing habits of reflection-thinking about their experience, success and failures, plans and purposes, choices and consequences. In addition, Brookfield (2012, p. 55) shows the importance of students’ participation in small group activities as “the most engaging moments in learning to think critically.”

In brief, these elements of teaching can make a significant difference in developing students’ thinking, students’ writing and discussion, focusing on problem solving methods using varied examples, verbalization of methods and strategies to encourage the development of metacognition, and their time to think and reflect. It is worth mentioning that the previously mentioned strategies and techniques need a safe environment which develops thinking and increases motivation. To provide such an environment, Moore and Parker (2003) suggest (a) providing students with information and

beginning the lesson in an open-ended and non-threatening way, (b) promoting a spirit of cooperation rather than competition, and (c) focusing on improvement rather than displays of ability.

Finally, it is necessary for teachers, in order to go beyond essential teaching strategies, to promote deep understanding of the topics that they teach, together with thinking. Furthermore, the teaching of thinking increases students' motivation and teaching thinking requires a classroom environment where students feel free to offer their thoughts and ideas without fear of embarrassment.

6. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The current course is designed in accordance with the philosophy that learning is a social process and knowledge is constructed, rather than transferred. Thus, students have a great role and responsibility in the learning process. Building on this, three hours are devoted to the teaching of this course (one theoretical and two practical), i.e., 4 units in the annual system. In some departments, two hours are devoted to teaching this course with the same number of units. By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to collect information, analyze, evaluate, criticize it and choose what fits the cases under study. They, further, are expected to be critical in their reading and writing and respect different points of view. They are also expected to write reports and present seminars, i.e., good writing and presentation skills. So, the class is a helpful and engaging medium for AD rather than a series of lectures presented by the teacher of AD.

Regarding the required activities, it is claimed that the four main activities are prerequisite:

6.1 Class Activities and Critical Thinking

The students and the teacher discuss a chosen topic and exchange ideas and viewpoints. The students summarize the main themes of texts given to them or

movies played; they discuss and argue against/for these themes. Concerning evaluation, the rubric for students' activities during the academic year evaluates four different items: students' participation in discussions, logical questions, critical thinking and group work. This could be done on a 1-5 scale.

6.2 Report Writing

Generally speaking, students brainstorm to choose an interesting topic to write their reports. They summarize, paraphrase and/or quote in writing introduction, main topics, and conclusions. They write in-text-citation and works cited. They also can use internet sources, journals, interviews, and books. Moreover, the rubric for students' reports evaluates five different items, namely the topic, use of reliable sources, use of logical argumentation, organization of sources, and report structure on a scale of 1-5.

In writing reports, students can work in groups. They distribute the tasks and meet regularly after class to discuss the topic and give feedback to each other. They prepare a schedule for task distribution and the time required for the tasks. Enough time will be devoted for peer review and feedback to the reports.

6.3 Poster

Students are required to make an academic poster on the debatable report they wrote. Like other types of academic writing, an academic poster should be well organized, with clear headings and subheadings. The structure students choose depends on the task they have been given. If they are presenting their reports, they include Title, Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusion and References. Moreover, the rubric for students' academic posters evaluates 15 items including presenters' performance, poster structure, content and design on a scale of 0-1. As for the event poster, a rubric of 5 items evaluates the content and design on a scale of 0-1.

6.4 Academic Debate and Argumentation

The groups who chose the same topic but on opposed sides will work together in one large group with a moderator to direct the debate. Students work together to arrange their ideas and prepare evidence to persuade the audience and answer their questions. In this debate, respecting disagreement is encouraged. Students are reminded to attack ideas, not people and respect their fellow classmates.

It is worth to mention the fact that the debatable topics are related to students' specialization and/or local problems. Examples are "Does TV enhance students' level of English?", "All high school graduates should be admitted to universities?" Concerning the teacher's role, s/he guides them in choosing the topics, getting information, and monitoring the academic debate.

The rubric, on a scale of 1-4, is for evaluating 10 items such as selecting topic, understanding it, expressing ideas, using reliable sources and IT, academic behaviour, and self-confidence.

In general, teaching classes start in December of each academic year and the first week is the induction week to make the freshmen be acquainted with different units of the department/ college such as the library, labs and other areas. Then, during the induction week, the students are given the course-book (CB) and asked to read and understand it. Furthermore, the real teaching moment could be started through explaining the ethics of communication and discussion, how to debate and how to respect each other's ideas in the class.

6.5 Aims of ADCT Course

- fostering critical thinking and thoughtful expression,
- appreciating the diversity of social relations in communities, and
- developing intellectualism and confidence of expression

6.6 Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- exercise debating skills and enhance abilities to express thoughtful and informed opinions in public settings,
- use reliable sources to gather evidence in a responsive, critical way,
- demonstrate skills of peaceful negotiation with others,
- prepare and execute an argument that is logically grounded and contributes to the good of the community,
- identify emergent problems in communities and to see oneself as an active agent committed to the resolution of them,
- demonstrate openness to diverse viewpoints and to express a willingness to change as a result, and
- demonstrate knowledge in learning communities using tools of technology for the common good.

6.7 Evaluation and Grading System

The mark of the AD course is distributed as follows:

- 20% of the marks go to different daily activities (group work, critical thinking, problem solving and logical thinking activities),
- 20% to writing reports, using the library, and seeking information),
- 20% poster, and
- 40% to academic debate and argumentation.

The final result will not be announced; instead the results of two of the activities are announced so as not to affect students' psychological aspect; this course is not included in the final exam.

7. QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

Two questionnaires are designed for teachers and students. The teachers' questionnaire entitled "Academic Debate & Critical Thinking (ADCT)

TABLE 1
TEACHERS' COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

Work Position	Frequency	Percent
College of Basic Education-Salahaddin University- Erbil	6	60.0%
College of Basic Education- University of Sulaimani	4	40.0%
Total	10	100.0%

Feedback Form" comprises 13 items of different types.

The students' questionnaire entitled "Students' Academic Debate Evaluation Form" consists of 19 items.

In order to save effort and time and to use technology, Google Form is used; the study subjects are required to answer all items. Further, the study tools reliability is achieved through exposing the questionnaires to a jury of experts (see Appendix 3) in the field of applied linguistics.

The sample of the study is 10 teachers of ADCT who have taught the course since 2011 and 62 first year students in the English Departments in both Colleges of Basic Education at Salahaddin University-Erbil and University of Sulaimani in the academic year 2017-2018.

A test-retest method is adopted and the questionnaires are given to 3 teachers and 10 students and their answers are compared. The reliability of teachers' questionnaire is 89% and the students' questionnaire reliability is 81%.

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

8.1 Teachers' Questionnaire

In order to be adequate and have concrete data regarding evaluating this course, a questionnaire is designed and given to the ADCT teachers so as to provide their feedback about the process of teaching ADCT. 10 teachers of ADCT answered the items; 60% of them are from University of Salahaddin-Erbil and 40% are from the University of Sulaimani. Realizing the years of teaching ADCT at university, the data shows that 50% of the teachers have only 1 year of teaching experience, whereas 20% have only 2 years of experience. Moreover, 20% have 3 years of experience

and the remaining 10% have 4 years. Consider the following tables:

TABLE 2
Years of Teaching ADCT at University

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percent
One Year	5	50.0%
Two Years	2	20.0%
Three Years	2	20.0%
Four Years	1	10.0%
Total	10	100.0%

Items 3 and 4 are designed to focus on the clarity of goals and learning outcomes of the syllabus and the possibility of achieving these goals and learning outcomes. The results show that 60% of the teachers do believe that all the goals and learning outcomes of ADCT are clear, meanwhile, 30% have the opposite idea and only 10% believe that it could be better. Regarding the rate of achieving the ADCT goals, 70% of the teachers have a positive reaction towards it, while 30% believe that the goals cannot be achieved. According to the analyzed data, the aims are clear and achievable.

TABLE 3
Goals and Learning Outcomes

Goals	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Goals and Learning Outcomes are Clear	7	50.0%	87.5%
Goals and Learning Outcomes are Achievable	7	50.0%	87.5%
Total	14	100.0%	175.0%

The fifth item of the teachers' questionnaire investigates the method used in teaching ADCT. The teachers are allowed to choose more than one option while answering this item. The data shows that "group working" is used by 8 teachers; "discussion" is applied by 9 teachers. Only 4 teachers use "task-based, problem-based, project based" and "learning by doing". Furthermore, "lecturing" is used by 6 teachers, while "critical thinking activities" are implemented by 5

teachers. Concerning “debating and argumentation” all the teachers apply it and 9 of them apply “seminar presentation”. Almost all methods are used at different rates.

Item no. 6 is about the success of implementing the Learner-Centered Approach (LCA); as the collected data reveals, only 10% of the teachers do not use LCA during the process of teaching ADCT.

TABLE 4
Teaching Method(s) Followed in Teaching ADCT

Methods	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Group Work	8	14.5%	80.0%
Discussion	9	16.4%	90.0%
Task-based, Problem-based, Project-based	4	7.3%	40.0%
Lecturing	6	10.9%	60.0%
Seminar Presentation	9	16.4%	90.0%
Critical Thinking Activities	5	9.1%	50.0%
Learning by Doing	4	7.3%	40.0%
Debating and Argumentation	10	18.2%	100.0%
Total	55	100.0%	550.0%

TABLE 5
Learner-Centered Approach Implementation

Answers	Frequency	Percent
No	1	10.0%
Yes	9	90.0%
Total	10	100.0%

The seventh item of the teachers’ questionnaire is designed to investigate the main obstacles that hinder LCA implementation. The collected data show that teachers face many challenges and obstacles that may negatively affect teaching ADCT. Statically speaking, 90% of the teachers believe that “students’ poor level of English” and “large classes” can be considered as the main obstacles while applying LCA. The following table shows other obstacles and their percentages:

TABLE 6
Obstacles Identification

Obstacles	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Students’ Poor Level of English Language	9	18.4%	90.0%
Shortage of Time (2-3 Hours a Week)	1	2.0%	10.0%

Too Many Holidays During the Academic Year	7	14.3%	70.0%
Large Classes	9	18.4%	90.0%
Lack of Support and Help from the Department	3	6.1%	30.0%
The Course is Difficult and Contains too Many Topics	3	6.1%	30.0%
Students are Loaded with other Courses	6	12.2%	60.0%
Teachers are Overloaded with Teaching other Courses	4	8.2%	40.0%
Teachers’ lack of enthusiasm	4	8.2%	40.0%
Students’ Lack of Interest in Topics	1	2.0%	10.0%
Lack of Computer Skills by Students	2	4.1%	20.0%
Total	49	100.0%	490.0%

Concerning item no. 8, the teachers have to tick the topics they have taught during the academic year. According to the data, the majority of teachers, i.e. 90%, teach “ethics of communication” and “PowerPoint presentation”. Unfortunately, 70% of the teachers do not focus on teaching “Reference/Bibliography” and “Poster Design and Poster Presentation”. In fact, these topics are very important in teaching ADCT, since the students should write a paper and design/present a poster as “21st century skills”.

TABLE 7
Topics Taught by Teachers

Topics	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Ethics of Communication	9	11.8%	90.0%
Class Discussion	7	9.2%	70.0%
Oral Presentation Skills	10	13.2%	100.0%
PowerPoint Presentation	9	11.8%	90.0%
Time Management	6	7.9%	60.0%
Reference/Bibliography	3	3.9%	30.0%
Avoiding plagiarism (Paraphrasing, Summarizing, Quoting, Citation)	8	10.5%	80.0%
Note Taking and Report Writing Skills	7	9.2%	70.0%
Poster Design and Poster Presentation	3	3.9%	30.0%
Argumentation and Persuasion Skills	8	10.5%	80.0%

Debate Theory and Formats	6	7.9%	60.0%
Total	76	100.0%	760.0%

Regarding the students' assessment that a) 20% go to different daily activities, b) 20% to writing reports c) 20% to event and academic poster, and d) 40% to academic debate and argumentation, the teachers have different opinions; only 50% of them agree with this type of assessment and grading system. This means that 5 teachers believe that the students; the level of accuracy cannot be assessed following this and another way might be applied.

TABLE 8
Assessment

Answers	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	5	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Yes	5	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	10	100.0%	100.0%	

Participating in workshop and training courses can be considered as one of the fundamental requirements of teaching any course. As the analyzed data reveal, 30% of ADCT teachers have not participated in any kind of training workshops and 40% of them participated in only one workshop. Based on this, one may claim that the majority of teachers who teach ADCT do not have sufficient information about the different ways of teaching ADCT since they have no participation in any workshop.

TABLE 8
WORKSHOP PARTICIPATION

Number of Workshops	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	3	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%
1	4	40.0%	40.0%	70.0%
2	1	10.0%	10.0%	80.0%
8	1	10.0%	10.0%	90.0%
10	1	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Total	10	100.0%	100.0%	

As mentioned, the majority of ADCT teachers participate in only one training workshop and this consequently affects their teaching performance. Among those who participated in a workshop, 50% believe that the workshops were not very useful and this data confirms the fact that the content, materials, topics, trainers of workshop(s) should be changed or modified.

TABLE 9
USEFULNESS OF WORKSHOP

Answers	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	5	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
No	5	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	10	100.0%	100.0%	

Item no. 12 of the teachers' questionnaire gives an opportunity for the teachers to express the challenges they face during teaching ADCT. Below is a summary of their opinion about the challenges and obstacles that face both teachers and students:

- The two (or three) hours a week is not enough to give the students all the topics assigned in the coursebook (Course outline) of ADCT
- Having large classes does not give the opportunity to all students to receive equal feedback about their learning, reports, group work, and other activities.
- There is not enough time to follow up with the teachers and how they help the low-level students.
- Lack of a fixed assistant to help in some minor issues of students and reviewing the first drafts of students' report, referencing, and PowerPoint.
- The new comers who increase in number day by day until February affect other students since they always ask questions on topics already explained and assignments previously given. This is also problematic for the teachers since they are not able to memorize their names, know who faces problems, and there is not enough time for face to face meeting during office hours.

- Regarding the language of instruction, many students find difficulty debating and discussing topics in English.
- Some students do not prepare daily assignments.
- A large proportion of students believe that they have been accepted in the Department of English to learn English language not to study this language, its history, structure, literature, and culture.
- The inconsistent number of students in groups affects the distribution of tasks and their regular meeting.
- Each group has to comprise different levels and this leads to some low level students depending upon active students to do the work.
- Lack of training courses for ADCT teachers.

The last item is to give enough space to teachers' suggestions and recommendations for developing and improving the teaching & training of the AD course and overcoming the obstacles teachers and students face. In general, the teachers mention some points that could be used to make the process more developed. For example, the teachers believe that ADCT course should be given to the most qualified teachers and there should be continuous training courses and workshops for ADCT teachers by professional trainers since this is one of the requirements of teacher development. The reason behind this could be attributed to the fact that through training courses, teachers become familiar with the various methods of ADCT teaching and this consequently improves the students' English proficiency and their abilities and skills. Moreover, some teachers claim that the ADCT topics must be multi-dimensional, various teaching aids should be used, students should be encouraged to write reports and present them in all classes and teachers should focus on group work and discussions. Finally, some other teachers suggest explaining the rubrics and their criteria for assessing

each type of class activities related to ADCT.

8.2 Students' Questionnaire

To collect accurate data regarding teaching ADCT at the university level, a 19-item questionnaire is given to 62 freshmen at Salahaddin University-Erbil and the University of Sulaimani. The reason behind this is to find out the amount of learning students acquire in the different skills they are expected to develop as the learning outcome of the ADCT course.

The first item of the questionnaire is about explaining aims, and learning outcomes of ADCT. According to the results, only 3 students, i.e., 5.6% of the students, find the aims and learning outcomes not clear and the ADCT teachers do not inform them about such aims. The majority of the students, i.e., 94.4%, state that everything is clear right from the beginning.

TABLE 10
TEACHER'S EXPLANATION OF OBJECTIVES

Answers	Frequency	Percent
Yes	51	94.4%
No	3	5.6%
Total	54	100.0%

Item no. 2 focuses on the students' perspective regarding the teaching methods used by ADCT teachers. The students believe that "discussions" are used by 38.6% of the teachers and "group work" is used by 34.1%. This indicates that the majority of teachers focus on using "discussions" and "group work". Meanwhile, "lecture" and "practical activities" are somehow neglected.

TABLE 11
TEACHING METHODS USED IN ADCT

Methods	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Lecture	11	12.5%	20.4%
Discussions	34	38.6%	63.0%
Group Work	30	34.1%	55.6%
Practical Activities	13	14.8%	24.1%
Total	88	100.0%	163.0%

The third and fourth items check the activities used by students inside the classroom and the students' awareness of scoring and mark distribution. As the data shows, 46.3% which means 38 students have selected "AD and argumentation" as the most common activity that the students do inside the class. Regarding the rate of awareness of mark distribution of the in-class activities, the results show that only 15.4% selected "posters"; 21.2% "report", 46.2% "class activities and CT thinking". 63.5% and "AD and argumentation". Unfortunately, "posters" and "reports" are not taught frequently. This indicates that the majority of ADCT teachers ignore posters and reports.

TABLE 12
ACTIVITIES USED BY STUDENTS

Activities	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Class Activities and CT	23	28.0%	42.6%
Report	12	14.6%	22.2%
Posters	9	11.0%	16.7%
AD and Argumentation	38	46.3%	70.4%
Total	82	100.0%	151.9%

Another item of the students' questionnaire is explaining the rubrics by the ADCT teachers. In fact, the students need sufficient information about the grading system and scoring. According to the analyzed data, 20.8% of the students are aware of assessment forms for each activity. While for the majority, i.e., 79.2%, the rubric is not explained nor given to them.

Debate and argumentation and critical thinking can be considered as two main activities used by ADCT teachers so as to make students think differently and see life from another perspective. The result indicates that almost all ADCT teachers ask students to argue and think critically. Statistically speaking, 20.4% of the students "always" do class argumentation and critical

thinking, whereas only 1.9% of them "never" do these activities. Consider the following table:

TABLE 13
THE FREQUENCY OF DOING CLASS ARGUMENTATION AND CT

Options	Frequency	Percent
Always	11	20.4%
Usually	23	42.6%
Sometimes	19	35.2%
Never	1	1.9%
Total	54	100.0%

The seventh item of students' questionnaire is designed to check students' learning and practising of AD and CT. According to the study data, 48 students, i.e., 87.3% learn how to debate academically and think critically and they are able to practise them. Meanwhile only 7 students, i.e., 12.7%, do believe that they have not learned nor practiced the academic methods of argumentation and critical thinking. Moreover, as responses of item no. 8 reveal, 65.5% of the students believe that they have learned and practised the steps of report writing; meanwhile 34.5% state the opposite.

In addition, the majority of (first year) students choose a certain topic which is related to general and/or cultural issues rather than discipline related issues when they write reports. See table 14:

TABLE 14
TOPIC SELECTION

Topics	Frequency	Percent
General Social or Cultural Issues	40	74.1%
Discipline Related Issues	14	25.9%
Total	54	100.0%

Plagiarism is considered as one of the problems of which sometimes the students are not aware. ADCT teachers should inform students about plagiarism and explain every single dimension of it. At the same time, it is the teachers' task to guide students to avoid plagiarism while writing an academic piece of work. According to the study sample, about 61.1% of the students plagiarize their academic reports and papers since they are not

informed about this phenomenon, while only 33.9% of the students claim that they are aware of plagiarism and how to avoid it. Regarding students' avoidance of plagiarism while writing reports, the data shows that 57.7% of the students avoid plagiarism. 22 students, i.e., 42.3%, plagiarize their reports from different sources. This percentage is too high; the teachers of ADCT course should pay more attention to the teaching of plagiarism and citation. Academically speaking, teachers should help students while writing reports; this could be through providing books, visiting college/university libraries, and showing them the mechanics of avoiding plagiarism.

Writing reports is one of the main requirements of the ADCT course; the students should submit a report. Since they have no previous experience, the students need to learn how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote from different sources. The eleventh item of the students' questionnaire is written to detect whether the students learn to paraphrase, summarize, and quote. The following table shows students' answer in this regard.

TABLE 15
LEARNING TO PARAPHRASE, SUMMARIZE, QUOTE

Answers	Frequency	Percent
Yes	43	76.8%
No	13	23.2%
Total	56	100.0%

Regarding types of posters that should be explained by the ADCT teachers, item no. 13 checks another task of the teacher which is closely related to teaching posters. According to the collected data, teachers focus on teaching academic posters rather than event posters. One reason for this could be lack of time to cover all the requirements of this course.

TABLE 16
Types of Posters

Types	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	

Event Poster	12	21.4%	23.5%
Academic Posters	44	78.6%	86.3%
Total	56	100.0%	109.8%

According to the requirements of ADCT course, teachers should encourage students while conducting group debate. The data show a positive aspect of teaching ADCT that all students, i.e., 100%, state that they debate in groups. Concerning the debate formats used inside the classroom, only three options are given to the students: Lincoln-Douglas, Policy Debate (Cross-examination), and Karl Popper. Policy Debate is the most common debate format used by the teachers and students while Karl Popper is infrequently followed by the students.

TABLE 17

Debates Format Used by ADCT teachers and Students

Debate Formats	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Lincoln-Douglas	17	36.2%	38.6%
Policy Debate (Cross-examination)	25	53.2%	56.8%
Karl Popper	5	10.6%	11.4%
Total	47	100.0%	106.8%

Item no. 16 investigates the possibility of learning to debate in an academic way. This type of debating is an important concern in the ADCT course. As the data show, 91.1% of the students claim that they have learned how to debate in an academic way. This indicates good aspects of teaching ADCT by the teachers.

Annual competitions are very necessary to be done by universities so as to increase students' language proficiency, self-confidence, motivation, etc. Two items of the questionnaire, 17 and 18, are designed to check students' awareness of annual competitions and their necessity for the freshmen. The data reveals that 55.6% of the students are informed by the teachers about the annual competitions of poster and debate; meanwhile

44.4% state the opposite. In fact, this percentage is too high since about half of the students have an idea about the competitions. Regarding their importance and necessity for (first year) students, 92.9% of the students believe that the competitions are very useful and necessary for (first year) students, whereas the others state the opposite.

TABLE 18
ANNUAL COMPETITIONS

Competitions	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Annual Competitions	29	36.7%	55.8%
Competitions Necessity for Freshmen	50	63.3%	96.2%
Total	79	100.0%	151.9%

The last item of the student's questionnaire explores the students' viewpoints about teaching ADCT in different academic years. 25 students, i.e., 46.3%, believe that a subject like ADCT is useful for all academic years of university and 35.2%. From this point, the university stakeholders may think of reforming the curriculum and applying ADCT to all academic years as a method of teaching rather than an independent course.

TABLE 19
STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS ADCT IN ACADEMIC YEARS

Academic Years	Frequency	Percent
Only First Year	10	18.5
All the Years of Study in University	25	46.3
All the Life Stages	19	35.2
Total	54	100.0

8.3 Correlation between Teachers' and Students' Responses

In order to have more accurate data regarding the relationship between the responses of teachers and students in some certain aspects, Chi-Square Test is used. Additionally, using Chi-Square Test indicates the fact that the students' responses in the two activities like "discussion" and "group work" are similar to what has been stated by the teachers. This means that these

activities are used by the teachers and the students inside the classroom while having ADCT and the results are not statistically significant, i.e., $p > 0.05$. Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is the only difference in "lecturing" from the teachers' and students' perspective. Statistically speaking, the P value of this activity is 0.017 and this makes it significant. Concerning this activity, the data show that 91% of the students choose "no", while 9% of the teachers choose the same option. The reason behind this gap in selecting the option could be related to differences in understanding "lecturing" by the teachers and the students.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The current study has arrived at the following conclusions:

- ADCT can be considered as a good opportunity for almost all IKR university teachers to guide, help, encourage, and recommend students to work as a team and use their critical thinking strategies to solve different related problems to their academic and ordinary life. This, of course, makes the teachers face a number of challenges and problems inside the classroom and also while having extra-curricular activities.
- The majority of teachers use "debating and argumentation" while "Task-based, Problem-based, Project-based" are rarely used.
- Most of the teachers apply learner-cornered approach.
- ADCT teachers' pay more attention to "discussions" and "group work".
- According to teachers' perspective, students' poor level of English language, large classes and too many holidays during the academic year are the most prominent obstacles in teaching ADCT.
- Half of the sample agrees with the grading system.
- Half of the sample participated in ADCT workshop

and found it effective.

- The teachers always teach oral presentation skills, PowerPoint presentation, and ethics of communication.
- Teaching poster design and poster presentation is so much needed, though the focus is on academic poster ones.
- The majority of the ADCT students learnt how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote.
- The ADCT course objectives are clear and achievable.
- Students debate general and social problems.
- The majority of students agree that debate competition is effective.
- More than half of the students believe that ADCT should be taught in the 4 years of BA study.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the results and conclusions, the present study highlights many significant and practical recommendations:

- It is prerequisite to provide more exercises on poster design and poster presentation, i.e., teachers should pay more attention to posters and reports and their roles in developing students' language and debating skills.
- ADCT teachers should pay more attention some teaching methods used in ADCT such as "learning by doing", and "Task-based, Problem-based, Project-based" because this achieves ADCT goals.
- Teachers should teach different related issued to ADCT such as plagiarism, time management, note taking, debate theory and formats to make students good debaters and writers.
- In order to develop students' communicative skills, the study recommends having extensive language training course for the freshmen before joining

ADCT course.

- The university stakeholders should seriously work on reducing the students' number in ADCT classes since large classes create problems for teachers and students.
- The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research should re-schedule the university calendar so as to organize the holidays.
- Having more than one teacher to teach ADCT as one of the fundamental solutions to overcome most of the problems facing students and teachers as they will assign each teacher with a small number of students, 20 for example, rather than one teacher with a large number of students.
- Introducing some teaching techniques such as argumentation and debating into the list of school subjects to be studied in high school is very necessary since this step encourages practicing AD on a large scale in schools, because at present learning by heart is encouraged more than critical thinking.
- Having certain collaboration between Computer Science and ADCT teachers. Those teachers should work together in arranging their course books to know the exact time for teaching some common topics, e.g., power point and poster. The same collaboration is needed with teachers of writing course to teach them report writing and note taking.
- Creating AD community which is helpful for the first year students. They can work together and have the debate with the students of other departments, colleges, or even universities. This would be useful to create an AD network for all the IKR university students, especially first year students as this helps a lot in developing debate and poster competition activities at college and university levels.
- ADCT can be considered as a good topic for EFL

undergraduates to practise the target language. IKR University teachers should work on creating an atmosphere inside the classroom in which the students can easily debate different topics in different courses in the four years of their study.

- Low level students, i.e., they who do not know English well, need to be given two chances in doing the assignment since this helps ascertain their level of thinking and to increase their self-confidence.

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12. Appendix 1

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Teachers of ADCT,

This questionnaire is designed to investigate different aspects of teaching Academic Debate and Critical Thinking (ADCT) course at Iraqi Kurdistan Universities. Kindly read the items and answer them. The researchers would appreciate your time and effort in answering the items of the questionnaire. Thanks for your cooperation.

Please answer the following questions:

1-Your College and University

2-Years of teaching ADCT at university

3-Do you think the goals and Learning outcomes of the approved syllabus of ADCT course version (2015) are clear?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4-Do you think the goals and Learning outcomes of the course are achievable?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5- What specific teaching method(s) do you follow in teaching ADCT? You can choose more than one.

- ☐ Group work
- ☐ Discussion
- ☐ Task-based, problem-based, project-based
- ☐ Lecturing

- ☐ Seminar presentation
- ☐ Critical thinking activities
- ☐ Learning by doing
- ☐ Debating and argumentation

6- Have you been successful in implementing the Learner-Centered Approach (LCA)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7- Identify the obstacles that hinder implementing LCA amongst the followings:

- ☐ Students' poor level of English Language
- ☐ Shortage of time (3 hours a week)
- ☐ Too many holidays during the academic year
- ☐ Large classes
- ☐ Lack of support and help from the department
- ☐ The course is difficult and contains too many topics
- ☐ Students are loaded with other courses
- ☐ Teachers are overloaded with teaching other courses
- ☐ Teachers' lack of enthusiasm
- ☐ Others (please specify)

8- Tick the topics that you have taught in the academic year:

- ☐ Ethics of communication
- ☐ Class discussion
- ☐ Oral presentation skills
- ☐ PowerPoint presentation
- ☐ Time management
- ☐ Reference/Bibliography
- ☐ Avoiding plagiarism (paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting, citation)
- ☐ Note taking and report writing skills
- ☐ Poster design and poster presentation
- ☐ Argumentation and persuasion skills
- ☐ Debate theory and formats

9- Do you think the below approved assessments can assess students' level accurately? a. 20% go to different daily activities, b. 20% to writing reports and public speaking, c. 20% to event and academic poster, d. 40% to academic debate

10- How many workshops did you participate in?

11- Were the workshops useful?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

12- What challenges did you face in teaching ADCT course?

13- Please write below your suggestions and recommendations for developing and improving the teaching & training of the academic debate course and overcoming the obstacles teachers & students face.

13. Appendix 2

Students' Questionnaire

Dear first year students,

We kindly ask you to answer these questions as part of an academic research. The aim is to develop this course. Your answers are used for research purposes only. Thanks for your cooperation.

Please tick the answer(s) that suits you.

1. Did the teacher explain aims, objectives and learning outcomes of "academic debate and critical thinking" course/ subject?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. Which of the below teaching methods were used in the class?

- ☐ Lecture
- ☐ Discussions
- ☐ Group work
- ☐ Practical activities

3. Which of the following activities did you do in this course/subject

- ☐ Class activities and critical thinking.
- ☐ Report
- ☐ Posters (event and academic)
- ☐ Academic debate and argumentation

4. Which of the following mark distribution you are aware of?

- ☐ Class activities and critical thinking (%20)

- ☐ Academic writing (essay) (%20)
- ☐ Posters (event and academic) (%20)
- ☐ Academic debate and argumentation (%40)

5. Did the teacher explain and give you the assessments forms (rubrics) for each activity?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. How often did you do class argumentation and critical thinking?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Never

7. Did you learn and practice the academic methods of argumentation and critical thinking?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. Did you learn and practice the steps of report writing?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. What kind of topic did you choose for your report writing?

- ☐ General social or cultural issues
- ☐ Discipline related issues

10. Did the teacher explain Plagiarism and how to avoid it?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. Did you learn how to Paraphrase, Summarize and Quote from a source and multiple sources?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

12. Did you avoid Plagiarism in your report writing?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. Which type of posters did the teacher explain?

- ☐ Event poster
- ☐ Academic poster

14. Did you do debates in groups of students?

Yes: No:

15. Which of the debate formats were used in your debates?

- ☐ Lincoln-Douglas
- ☐ Policy debate (Cross-examination)
- ☐ Karl Popper

16. Have you learned how to debate in an academic way?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

17. Did the teacher tell you about the annual competitions of poster and debate?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. Do you think that the competitions are useful and necessary for 1st year students?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. Do you think that this subject is useful for?

- ☐ Only first year
- ☐ All the years of study in University
- ☐ All the life stages

14. Appendix 3

Academic Qualification, Name, and
Place of Work of Jury Members

- Prof. Dr. Adil Kamal, College of Education, Salahaddin University-Erbil
- Assist. Prof. Dr. Anjuman Mohammed, College of Education, Salahaddin University-Erbil
- Dr. Basima Mohammed, College of Education, Salahaddin University-Erbil
- Mr. Hardawan Kakshekh, College of Arts, Salahaddin University-Erbil
- Mr. Hiwa Ali, College of Languages, Salahaddin University-Erbil