Debaters & Creators: How Debate Experience Relates to Creativity

Kacholia, Aadith (School: American School of Bombay)

Indian educational reforms under the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) aim to shift from rote memorisation toward creative thinking, a move that, alongside rising AI automation, demands scalable approaches to developing creativity. This study hypothesised that debate experience would be positively associated with both convergent and divergent creative thinking among adolescents in India. Assessed over two phases (N = 154) with secondary school debaters (aged 12-18) using four standardised creativity measures, alongside the newly developed Debate Argument Creation Creativity Task (DACCT). Examining creativity in debate specific contexts, the DACCT was scored on originality, appropriateness, fluency, and flexibility by four human graders. Through both phases, standardised tools yielded limited results: a significant positive association emerged between debate training and convergent thinking (RAT, $p = 0.048$), while divergent thinking scores were non-significant. The DACCT proved more sensitive. Students with over seven months of debate experience scored significantly higher on originality and appropriateness, with small to medium effect sizes ranging from 0.256 to 0.383, suggesting debate experience has a meaningful, if modest, impact on creative thinking. A topic-relevance effect was also observed: personally invested topics produced meaningfully higher originality scores, suggesting motivation moderates creative output. As a correlational study, causal claims remain limited, and longitudinal designs are needed. Regardless, these findings position the DACCT as a promising domain-specific creativity instrument and lay the groundwork for debate's formal integration into Indian school curricula with significant implications for millions of students.

Awards Won:

American Psychological Association: Complimentary student affiliate memberships

American Psychological Association: Second Award of $1,000