

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Role of Co-Curricular Activities in Developing Critical Thinking: A Case Study of a University-Based Debating Club in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of co-curricular activities on the development of critical thinking skills among students, which is critical for their academic and professional success. Despite the increasing emphasis on developing critical thinking in education, research has not fully explored how specific co-curricular activities, such as structured debate, contribute to this development. Focusing on the Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS), the research aims to examine the influence of co-curricular activities on the development of critical thinking skills among students, focusing on the DUDS policy provisions and practices. Employing a qualitative case study approach, triangulation methods were used to collect data, including content analysis of the DUDS constitution and semi-structured interviews with general members, executive members, representatives, and mentors. Participants were selected through purposive and quota sampling. Data analysis was conducted using Deductive Content Analysis for policy documents and Inductive Thematic Analysis for interview data, guided by a conceptual framework identifying six critical thinking indicators: accuracy of observation, use of evidence, reliability of sources, generalization, reasoning, and prediction. Findings reveal that DUDS significantly enhances critical thinking through structured policy provisions, argumentation practices, and a strong focus on diverse perspectives, rational thinking, decision-making, and communication skills. The study also highlights how DUDS fosters collaboration and the ability to challenge personal beliefs, contributing to a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives. These findings emphasize the crucial role of oratory-based co-curricular activities in cultivating critical thinking and suggest the importance of integrating such practices more widely into educational curricula. Future studies should explore how different debate formats and interdisciplinary integration can further enhance critical thinking in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: co-curricular activities, critical thinking, oratory activities, debate, Dhaka University Debating Society

1. Introduction

Educators and experts alike emphasize the importance of activities that extend beyond the traditional curriculum, focusing on personal development crucial in today's fast-paced and complex world. Critical thinking stands out as particularly vital among the myriad skills that oratory activity-based CCAs aim to develop. Mancha and Ahmad [1] highlight that co-curricular activities (CCAs) offer lessons in spirituality, decision-making, collaboration, and self-confidence—areas often unaddressed within the confines of standard classroom instruction. In addition, critical thinking, a skill paramount for navigating the challenges of the 21st century, is increasingly recognized for its importance in educational settings. Thinking critically enables students to analyze information effectively, make reasoned decisions, and solve problems efficiently [2]. Othman et al. [3] provide empirical evidence supporting the beneficial impact of CCAs, specifically debating, on enhancing students' critical thinking capabilities. Their findings revealed that a

significant majority of students reported notable improvements in their thinking abilities due to engaging in debate activities. Multiple types of research have shown the relationship between CCAs and skill development; some of them have focused on specific skills, too, such as networking, leadership, initiatives, communication, and many more. Siddiky [4] shows that undergraduate students from Bangladesh build an all-round development by participating in CCAs. Critical thinking, as a specific learning skill, has not been discussed well in any previous study.

The government's encouragement of CCAs reflects an understanding of the need for a holistic educational approach that fosters academic excellence and the development of essential life skills. Ahmad [2] notes that such initiatives are crucial for ensuring that students achieve a balanced development of their academic abilities and personal traits. Furthermore, Laraib et al. [5] argue that CCAs foster personal passions, develop strengths, promote self-improvement, and enhance team cohesion. Through these activities, students are provided with diverse opportunities to refine their cognitive and social skills while experiencing moral and esthetic growth.

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This study investigates how organizations focused on CCAs, specifically the Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS), contribute to developing critical thinking abilities among university students. CCAs in higher education contexts play a vital role in supplementing academic learning by providing practical experiences that enhance students' cognitive and personal growth. This study sets itself apart by explicitly focusing on how a co-curricular activity-based club, namely the DUDS, which has been working on oratory activity-based CCAs for the last 4 decades, implements policies to foster critical thinking among its members and examines the benefits that participants derive from engaging in such activities in terms of their critical thinking development including cognitive and personal development. This approach aims to enrich the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the specific impacts of CCAs, as practiced by this organization, on students' cognitive and personal development.

The study aims to uncover the unique mechanisms and interactions that facilitate critical thinking skills, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the potential of CCAs in enhancing cognitive and personal growth.

The research formulated the following research questions:

- 1) What types of policy provisions does the DUDS have to promote critical thinking?
- 2) How do the oratory practices of the DUDS help to develop critical thinking?

2. Literature Review

The literature review explores the role of CCAs in developing students' critical thinking skills. CCAs are a crucial component of a student's overall education. Any program, activity, or educational experience taught outside of the regular classroom and supplements the needs of the standard academic curriculum is referred to as co-curricular [6]. Through CCAs, students discover and grow in their areas of interest and aptitude and acquire the soft skills and competencies necessary to succeed in a demanding environment. The significance of CCAs in educational settings has increasingly been recognized for their contribution to the holistic development of students [7]. CCAs offer a broad spectrum of benefits beyond the traditional academic curriculum, enhancing soft skills crucial for thriving in the 21st century [8]. These activities, encompassing debate, public speaking, and more, are vital for skill development in various social, cognitive, and ethical domains [9–11]. The educational landscape acknowledges the profound impact of CCAs in fostering an environment conducive to developing critical thinking abilities. It is well-documented that engaging in CCAs, especially oratory practices like debate, significantly enhances critical analytical skills, problem-solving capabilities, and intellectual flexibility [3, 12].

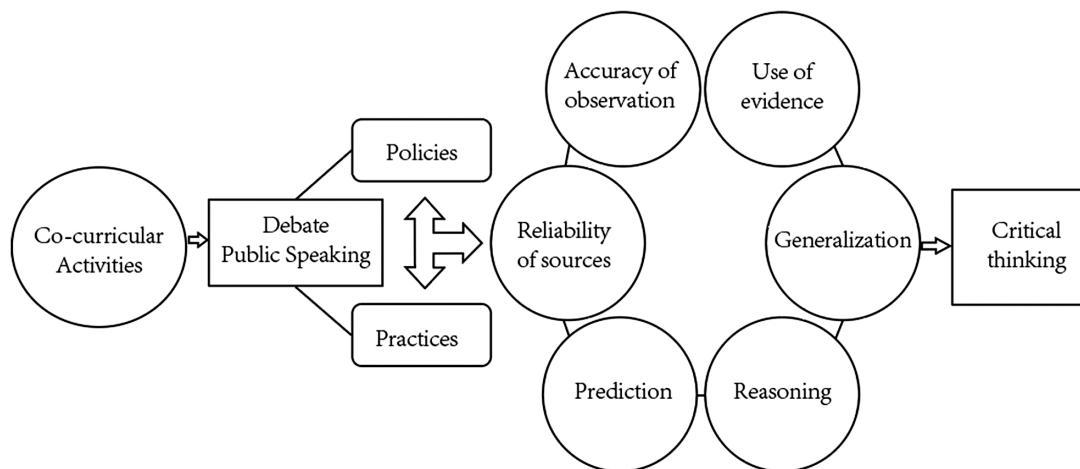
CCAs have increasingly been recognized for their role in fostering critical thinking and holistic development in students. The National Youth Policy 2017 of Bangladesh further underscores the importance of such activities, particularly debate, as a tool for developing leadership and critical thinking skills among youth [13]. Through these initiatives, the Bangladesh government encourages educational institutions to integrate structured debates and public speaking into their curricula to nurture informed and analytical citizens, aligning with the broader goals of national progress. The existing literature on the role of CCAs, such as debating clubs, in developing critical thinking highlights the significant impact of structured activities on both cognitive and personal development. Recent research emphasizes that structured extracurricular activities, including debate clubs,

enhance students' cognitive performance by improving concentration and reducing stress, thus fostering critical thinking [14]. Similarly, another study highlights those structured activities, such as academic clubs, foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, supporting the notion that extracurricular activities like debating can provide environments conducive to developing higher-order cognitive skills [15]. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of policy provisions and structured frameworks within extracurricular activities to ensure that students achieve both cognitive and personal growth, aligning with the focus on the policy provisions of DUDS. Similar research also explores how structured extracurricular tutoring positively impacts cognitive abilities, such as reasoning and analytical thinking, which are central to critical thinking, and emphasizes how factors like family income and gender moderate the benefits of such activities [16]. Another study examines how policy provisions and structured practices in educational settings, particularly through speaking and listening tasks, support critical thinking development, paralleling the oratory practices in debating clubs like the DUDS [17]. In line with this, another study [18] links structured activities to the enhancement of self-esteem, communication, and academic performance—skills integral to critical reasoning in debates. Moreover, structured activities like hackathons promote teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership, all of which contribute to critical thinking in structured debate settings [19]. Collectively, these studies support the idea that structured activities not only enhance cognitive abilities but also prepare students for real-world challenges by fostering critical thinking through engagement, policy, and structured interaction.

Apart from the above findings, prior research underscores the role of debate and argumentation in cultivating critical thinking. Studies by Brown [20] and Colbert [21] have demonstrated that debate activities facilitate the development of essential critical thinking skills, such as analyzing the reliability of sources, recognizing inconsistencies, and prioritizing relevant arguments. Furthermore, Andrews [22] and Greenstreet [23] highlight debate as a platform that prompts learners to engage with diverse perspectives and rigorously evaluate evidence. In addition, Alsaleh [10], Mancha and Ahmad [1] as well as Singh [8] found that participation in discussions and debating enhances cognitive and ethical skills. The importance of debate as a critical thinking exercise is further emphasized by Othman et al. [3] who highlight its role in fostering logical explanation and problem-solving capabilities. Moreover, the conceptual framework by Baxter and Jack [24] serves as a foundation for understanding the relationship between debate and critical thinking, as cited (see Figure 1) by McGregor [25] and further analyzed in the works of Butt [26] and Van Eemeren [27]. This comprehensive analysis, supported by empirical evidence and theoretical models, underscores the vital role of CCAs in shaping students' critical thinking abilities, thereby addressing the gap identified in the existing literature on the subject.

Although studies on the impact of CCAs on student development have examined the benefits these activities offer in terms of personal growth and academic achievement [8], these studies have not delved deeply into the specific mechanisms through which structured debate, as a co-curricular activity, enhances critical thinking skills among [3]. Further, while the importance of developing critical thinking skills through educational practices is widely recognized [28, 29], the literature has seldom explored in detail how the unique environment and practices of debate clubs like DUDS specifically contribute to this development [26, 30].

Figure 1
Conceptual framework of critical thinking



In addition, although numerous studies in education and psychology have identified the general benefits of co-curricular participation for student engagement and skill acquisition [8], little analytic attention has been paid to the specific cognitive processes involved in debate that facilitate critical thinking. This oversight in the literature suggests a gap in understanding how debate, as a structured form of co-curricular activity, uniquely contributes to cognitive development by emphasizing argumentation, evidence evaluation, and fostering analytical skills. Further examination into how these aspects of debate practice enhance critical thinking can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms at play, which could inform educational strategies and policy development to maximize the benefits of co-curricular engagement.

As a case study, this study aims to bridge the identified gap by examining how the DUDS operationalizes CCAs to foster critical thinking among university students. Through an analysis grounded in the conceptual framework proposed and supported by McGregor [25], this study seeks to unravel the intricacies of argumentation, reasoning, and evidence evaluation within the context of DUDS’s activities.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing a case study approach to explore how the DUDS fosters critical thinking in its participants. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of CCAs on critical thinking development by utilizing semi-structured interviews and analysis of relevant documents, including the organization’s constitution, history, policies, and competition outcomes.

3.1. Research approach

The selection of a qualitative research methodology is particularly well-suited for exploring the DUDS due to its emphasis on capturing individuals’ nuanced experiences, perceptions, and behaviors within social phenomena. Qualitative research’s flexible design, reliance on open-ended questions, and employment of diverse data sources such as interviews and observations enable a deep understanding of the intricate dynamics within educational settings [31–33]. This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of DUDS’s complex social processes, experiences, and organizational culture, highlighting how CCAs contribute to the development of critical thinking skills [34].

Moreover, as elucidated by Baxter and Jack [24], the case study methodology complements the qualitative approach by offering a framework for examining phenomena within their real-life contexts using multiple data sources. This integration ensures a comprehensive analysis of DUDS, capturing the organization’s multifaceted nature and its impact on participants’ critical thinking development from multiple perspectives. Using a case study approach allows investigating DUDS’s policy provisions, oratory practices, and their effectiveness in promoting critical thinking among its members, providing valuable insights into the specific mechanisms through which these educational experiences foster such skills.

3.2. Participants and sampling

The University of Dhaka, celebrating its centenary, is a prestigious institution in Bangladesh with a low acceptance rate. The DUDS, established in 1982, has led the university’s debate community for 40 years. It organizes debates, public speaking events, workshops, seminars, and study circles, boasting a constitution, updated policies, a 33-member executive committee, and over 1,000 general members. DUDS’s structured and comprehensive approach makes it ideal for a case study on CCAs and critical thinking. The study adopts a purposive sampling strategy, focusing on the DUDS to explore its policies’ role in promoting critical thinking. As explained by Bhardwaj [35], this non-probability sampling technique was chosen for its effectiveness in targeting a specific participant group that could offer insights into the research questions despite potential risks of selection bias. The research involved collecting DUDS’s constitution from their yearly magazine “*Protibaa*k” with the office secretary’s consent, emphasizing ethical considerations and the importance of confidentiality in participant interactions. A total of 16 participants were interviewed, including executive committee members, general members, representatives with recent competition experience, and advisors, selected via quota sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives. Quota sampling was employed to ensure balanced representation from key participant categories within the DUDS, including general members, executive members, representatives with recent competition experience, and mentors. The sample breakdown includes 4 participants from each group, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives and experiences are captured. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of how various

roles of the students within DUDS contribute to the development of critical thinking skills, offering insights that are reflective of the society’s entire membership structure. Data collection focuses on an in-depth examination of DUDS’s policies and their impact on fostering critical thinking among members.

3.2.1. Participants’ selection criteria

The study employed purposive and quota sampling to ensure a balanced and diverse set of participants, which was necessary to achieve the research goals of understanding how CCAs like debate contribute to critical thinking. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select individuals who are involved in debate activities and could offer rich insights, while quota sampling was utilized to ensure that each participant category (general members, executive members, representatives with recent competition experience, and mentors) was evenly represented. This helped mitigate bias and ensured diverse perspectives across different roles within the DUDS.

The rationale of selecting 16 participants, with 4 participants from each group, was designed by the need to strike a balance between depth and diversity in qualitative research. With four participants from each group, the study ensures representation from different levels of students’ involvement within the debate club—general members who are less engaged, executive members who are more involved in decision-making, representatives with competition experience who bring practical insights, and mentors who guide others. This equal distribution helps capture the range of experiences and insights into how debate activities foster students’ critical thinking, making the data both manageable and comprehensive.

3.3. Data collection

To ensure the replicability of this study, the data collection process implemented several methods. Data were collected through triangulation methods, which included document analysis and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1). The first step involved an explicit analysis of the DUDS’s constitution to gain a comprehensive understanding of the organization’s policies, practices, and structural framework. This document analysis provided the foundational

knowledge necessary to assess how DUDS promotes critical thinking among its members through its established policies. In parallel, semi-structured interviews were conducted both face-to-face and over the phone. This method was chosen for its flexibility, allowing participants to provide nuanced and detailed responses regarding their experiences with DUDS. Interviews focused on exploring participants’ perceptions of how DUDS’s oratory practices—such as debate sessions, workshops, and public speaking—contributed to the development of their critical thinking skills. The interview format ensured depth and richness in the data by giving participants room to discuss the specific mechanisms through which they believe debate activities foster critical thinking.

Quota sampling was used to ensure diverse perspectives were included from different participant groups. The participants ($n = 16$) were purposefully selected to represent a range of roles within the DUDS community, including executive committee members, advisors, general members, and debaters. This diversity allowed for a balanced understanding of how involvement at various levels influences critical thinking development. Participant demographics were recorded to enhance transparency and replicability, collecting key information such as age range, gender, prior experience with debate, years in their current position within DUDS, and their overall experience with debating.

This triangulated approach allowed for a systematic examination of both the formal policies and the individual experiences of those involved in DUDS. It facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how society fosters critical thinking skills among its members, with demographic information ensuring a broader perspective on how different roles and experiences contribute to this development (see Table 1).

3.4. Confounding variables and biases

In this study, potential confounding variables and biases include participant selection bias, variations in debate formats, and the prior experiences of participants. The use of purposive and quota sampling methods to select 16 participants (including general members, executive members, representatives with recent competition experience, and mentors) may introduce selection bias, as those

Table 1
Demographic data of the participants

Category	Name	Age	Gender	Duration of the affiliation with the club	Participation in oratory activities (following the club member’s attendance sheet)	Studentship status
General Members	Participant 1	20	Male	0 to 2 years	Often	Undergraduate
	Participant 2	21	Male			Undergraduate
	Participant 3	21	Female			Undergraduate
	Participant 4	20	Female			Undergraduate
Executive Members	Participant 1	23	Male	2 to 4 years	Often	Undergraduate
	Participant 2	23	Male			Undergraduate
	Participant 3	22	Male			Undergraduate
	Participant 4	23	Female			Undergraduate
Debaters	Participant 1	21	Female	0 to 4 years	Regular	Undergraduate
	Participant 2	23	Male			Undergraduate
	Participant 3	23	Male			Undergraduate
	Participant 4	22	Female			Undergraduate
Advisors	Participant 1	24	Female	5 years and above	Regular	Postgraduation
	Participant 2	25	Female			Postgraduation
	Participant 3	24	Male			Postgraduation
	Participant 4	25	Male			Postgraduation

more actively involved in the debating club might already exhibit advanced critical thinking skills, which could skew the findings. Furthermore, differences in debate formats (e.g., parliamentary vs. policy debates) and the specific topics debated could influence the development of critical thinking in different contexts. Participants' prior exposure to debating or similar activities may also act as a confounding variable, as those with more experience may naturally demonstrate higher levels of critical thinking.

3.5. Mitigating bias

To mitigate the potential for selection bias, the researchers included participants from various roles within the debating club, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives from individuals with different levels of involvement, such as general members, executive members, and mentors. This approach allowed for a broader view of how debate activities contribute to critical thinking development, while acknowledging that those with higher involvement may already possess enhanced critical thinking abilities. To address the impact of varying debate formats, interviews and data collection were standardized across participants. Additionally, a horizontal approach to data analysis was applied to identify similarities and differences in responses, further mitigating bias by ensuring a comprehensive understanding of participant perspectives. However, future studies should consider a larger, more diverse sample that includes individuals with varying levels of debate experience and explore how different debate formats uniquely influence the development of critical thinking skills.

3.6. Ensuring transparency and applicability

To ensure transparency and applicability in how critical thinking was assessed, the study utilized a conceptual framework consisting of six indicators: accuracy of observation, use of evidence, reliability of sources, generalization, reasoning, and prediction. These indicators were used to guide both the Deductive Content Analysis of the DUDS's policy documents and the Inductive Thematic Analysis of interview data. For instance, students' ability to critically assess the accuracy of observations during debates and their use of evidence in forming arguments were key measures. Additionally, the study examined how students could generalize arguments beyond specific topics and reason logically through different debate formats. By using these specific indicators of critical thinking, the study ensured that the data collection and analysis process could systematically capture the development of these skills across different participant roles and debate activities.

Expanding on this, the inclusion of both document analysis and semi-structured interviews allowed for a robust triangulation approach, which further validated the reliability of the findings by cross-referencing participants' perceptions with documented policies and practices. Additionally, a horizontal data analysis approach was applied to identify similarities and differences across students' responses from different categories (i.e., general members, executive members, representatives, and mentors) further mitigating bias and ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of how critical thinking skills were developed.

3.7. Data analysis

In this study, qualitative data from the DUDS's constitution and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Barun and Clark's [36] thematic analysis and deductive content analysis to uncover how the society's policies and practices foster critical thinking among its members. Through the examination of the document and

in-depth interviews, key themes related to argumentation, inspection, and deduction were identified and analyzed, guided by a conceptual framework of critical thinking that included indicators like accuracy of observation and use of evidence [9, 28, 43]. This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the intricate ways in which DUDS contributes to the cognitive development of its participants.

3.7.1. Deductive content analysis

This study's qualitative data analysis process involved a detailed deductive content analysis approach, guided by a pre-existing theoretical framework to identify themes directly relevant to critical thinking within the DUDS constitution [37]. Following the conceptual framework, potential themes such as argumentation, inspection, and deduction were identified and refined [36, 38, 39]. The researcher organized codes under these themes to analyze how DUDS policies foster critical thinking, emphasizing a structured and targeted examination of the document to understand the topic comprehensively.

3.7.2. Thematic content analysis

A thematic content analysis approach was employed in analyzing the interview data from 16 participants, as outlined by Braun and Clarke [36]. The process began with thoroughly familiarizing the data through multiple readings and transcriptions, allowing for immersion in the dataset and the identification of key themes and patterns [40]. Initial codes were generated through open coding and inductive analysis without pre-set codes, enabling the discovery of emergent themes and hidden meanings within the data. This process facilitated a deep understanding of the participants' insights related to the research questions, effectively employing Braun and Clarke's [36] method for qualitative analysis.

4. Result

This study examines the impact of CCAs on the development of critical thinking skills among students. In this study, deductive content analysis illuminated the DUDS's policy framework, focusing on themes like argumentation, inspection, and deduction to explore its role in fostering critical thinking. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed insights into DUDS's practices and their impact on members' critical thinking skills, covering diverse perspectives, rational thinking, decision-making, communication, and collaboration.

4.1. Policy provisions of Dhaka University Debating Society

In this regard, the study's final themes, Argumentation, Inspection, and Deduction, directly respond to this question by illustrating the policies and frameworks DUDS has in place to foster critical thinking among its members. These themes were developed through deductive content analysis of the DUDS constitution, emphasizing activities that enhance logical reasoning, scrutinize arguments, and practice deductive reasoning. For instance, the focus on argumentation aligns with policies designed to engage students in debate and discussion, promoting critical analytical skills. Inspection and deduction themes reveal society's emphasis on evaluating arguments and applying logical frameworks, which are crucial for critical thinking.

4.1.1. Argumentation

The DUDS promotes critical thinking through its policy provisions emphasizing argumentation, cognitive development,

and research work. By engaging students in debate and discussions, DUDS provides a platform for developing critical analytical skills, as reflected in the policies stating (see Appendix 2), “DUDS teaches to enhance logical sense through its activities and helps become a rational human being”. “To make debate a creative and informative co-curricular activity, it is important to conduct or help in such research works that can be fruitful for the debaters”. These policies underline DUDS’s commitment to enhancing students’ logical reasoning and research capabilities, addressing the research question on the types of policy provisions DUDS must foster critical thinking.

4.1.2. Inspection

The DUDS enhances critical thinking through policies focusing on inspection, including debate workshops, study circles, and research on debate topics. These provisions allow students to critically evaluate their argumentation skills and deepen their understanding of various subjects. Specifically, DUDS constitution highlights the importance of structured debate workshops and study groups, stating, “To create expert debaters, it is important to arrange regular workshops on theories and other knowledgeable sources”. This approach directly addresses the research question concerning the types of policy provisions DUDS employs to promote critical thinking among its members.

4.1.3. Deduction

DUDS promotes critical thinking through policies focused on the deduction, fostering community building among debate clubs and connectivity among debaters. DUDS Constitution states, “To improve the caliber of debate conducted at DUDS, it is imperative to maintain open lines of contact and cooperate with other debate organizations around the nation as well as international level”, highlighting the importance of collaboration and interaction. This policy provision directly addresses the first research question by showcasing how DUDS implements structures to enhance critical thinking among students through community engagement and fostering a supportive debate environment.

The DUDS policy provisions show promise in fostering critical thinking through organized events including workshops, research, and debate, which improve analytical and logical reasoning abilities. The focus on reasoning, analysis, and inference encourages the full growth of critical thinking. There are still areas where these policies need to be practically implemented, such as the need for more varied and inclusive participation and a stronger emphasis on multidisciplinary integration to extend the reach of critical thinking beyond conventional debate subjects. The addition of feedback mechanisms to help these policies get better all the time could make them even more effective.

4.2. Practices to address critical thinking

The themes of *Diverse Perspectives*, *Rational Thinking*, *Decision-making*, *Communication & Collaboration* derived from thematic analysis of interviews with DUDS members elucidate how oratory practices contribute to the development of critical thinking. These themes highlight the practical aspects of DUDS’s activities that encourage members to engage with different viewpoints (*Diverse Perspectives*), apply logic and reason in discussions (*Rational Thinking*), make informed decisions based on debate outcomes (*Decision-Making*), and effectively communicate and work together (*Communication & Collaboration*). Each theme illustrates a facet of how participation in DUDS’s oratory activities cultivates the essential skills associated with critical thinking, such

as the ability to analyze complex issues from various angles, reason logically, make sound judgments, and articulate ideas clearly.

4.2.1. Diverse perspectives

DUDS enhances critical thinking through oratory practices that emphasize diverse perspectives and the evaluation of varied ideologies. Participants like Rajib and Asif (pseudo names) note that debates at DUDS encourage engagement with different backgrounds and perspectives, fostering the ability to think outside the box. Taher (pseudo name) highlights the importance of challenging one’s beliefs and considering alternative viewpoints, echoed by others who emphasize that debates improve the ability to articulate ideas coherently and think critically about multiple perspectives. The themes address Research Question 2 by illustrating how DUDS’s focus on multidimensional thinking, challenging personal beliefs, and fostering creativity through debate and public speaking significantly contribute to developing critical thinking skills.

4.2.2. Rational thinking

The oratory practices of DUDS are pivotal in fostering rational thinking, a crucial aspect of critical thinking. Hasib and Ahmed (pseudo names) express concerns about DUDS’s effectiveness in providing learning opportunities, stating, “DUDS is more of a political club than a debating society” and “DUDS doesn’t do much to improve the skills of its members, it’s up to the individual to take the initiative and learn”. Other participants like Asif and Nur (pseudo names) offer a contrasting perspective. They highlight society’s role in encouraging a culture of inquiry and critical evaluation, with Asif (pseudo name) emphasizing, “Debate helps you to learn the art of asking WHY, including your ideologies”, and others underscoring the importance of questioning and challenging the status quo. This dichotomy addresses Research Question 2 by illustrating the debate’s capacity to cultivate critical thinking through rational thinking and encourage questioning and analytical evaluation of complex issues.

4.2.3. Decision-making

The oratory practices of the DUDS significantly contribute to developing critical thinking skills through decision-making. As highlighted by participants, decision-making in debates requires judges to evaluate arguments critically; as Hasib (pseudo name) states, “Judges are experts on the topic, so they can easily identify valid arguments and flaws in reasoning”. Furthermore, Naimul (pseudo name) emphasizes the role of theory in debates, “The use of theories and conceptions as evidence is encouraged by DUDS. The application of theories in a debate helps to reach judgments based on solid reasoning”. This approach ensures that debaters enhance their ability to identify and correct misinformation and apply theoretical knowledge to strengthen their arguments and decision-making capabilities. The incorporation of study circles, as mentioned by Ariful (pseudo name), and the observation of facial expressions for cues, as noted by Taher (pseudo name), further refine the debaters’ decision-making skills, showcasing how DUDS’s oratory practices foster a comprehensive development of critical thinking.

4.2.4. Communication and collaboration

The oratory practices of the DUDS play a significant role in enhancing critical thinking through developing communication and collaboration skills. Participants universally acknowledged that the ability to articulate arguments coherently and the collaboration in diverse teams promote critical thinking, as per the

quotations, “DUDS sessions help increase confidence by requiring people to speak in front of others and defend their points”, and “Making eye contact during the session also helps participants connect with their audience and persuade them of their arguments”. These practices necessitate a deep understanding of topics, encourage questioning and analyzing from multiple perspectives, and foster an inclusive environment that challenges existing norms, stimulating critical thinking. The emphasis on public speaking, inclusivity, and cooperative learning environments underlines how DUDS’s oratory practices contribute to developing critical thinking, addressing Research Question 2 by illustrating the multifaceted ways debate and communication activities cultivate critical analytical skills among participants.

DUDS engages its members in debates and public speaking events to enhance their analytical skills and critical thinking. Strengths include promoting logical reasoning, challenging personal beliefs, and encouraging multidimensional thinking. However, gaps exist in practical implementation, with some members noting a lack of structured support for skill development and a need for greater inclusivity and interdisciplinary integration.

5. Discussion

The study’s insights resonate with existing literature, emphasizing the multifaceted benefits of debate, including enhanced logical reasoning, communication skills, and the ability to engage with diverse perspectives [3]. These findings align with the broader academic consensus on the value of debate in fostering critical analytical skills and intellectual flexibility, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of complex [20, 21].

The study emphasizes argumentation as a means to develop critical thinking, which mirrors the literature’s identification of argumentation’s role in refining thought processes and encouraging skepticism [10, 26, 41]. However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating DUDS’s unique approach in utilizing policy provisions and activities to encourage a comprehensive development of critical thinking, addressing gaps in the literature regarding the practical application of debate in educational contexts.

Nevertheless, while some literature raises concerns about the efficacy of debate formats in genuinely promoting critical thought [23, 26] this study presents a more optimistic view. It showcases how DUDS’s structured debates and oratory practices, underpinned by a supportive policy framework, effectively nurture critical thinking skills. The findings address previous skepticism by illustrating the conditions under which debate can indeed foster critical thinking, such as providing feedback and encouraging consideration of opposing viewpoints [20].

Besides these, this study reinforces the essential role of debate and oratory activities in developing critical thinking skills, confirming findings from recent literature on the subject. Structured activities like those organized by the DUDS provide an environment conducive to nurturing higher-order cognitive abilities, such as reasoning, analytical thinking, and decision-making [14, 16]. The study demonstrates that DUDS’s structured debates, supported by specific policy provisions, not only enhance critical analytical skills but also foster a holistic approach to student growth, encompassing both cognitive and personal development, as outlined by other relevant researches [15, 17].

These findings align with structured activities like hackathons, which underscore the importance of teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership—skills integral to structured debate settings [19]. Furthermore, the study supports the view that debate clubs and similar CCAs facilitate logical reasoning and effective

communication skills, as well as an openness to diverse perspectives. This addresses skepticism raised in prior research about debate’s impact on critical thinking by showing the practical benefits of feedback and active engagement with differing viewpoints [20].

The results of this study also bridge gaps in literature by providing empirical support for how structured activities in educational settings contribute uniquely to critical thinking. In particular, the DUDS model, with its emphasis on structured frameworks and feedback, offers educators a concrete example of how policy-backed CCAs can be implemented effectively within academic curricula to achieve cognitive and personal growth in students. This supports the claim made by other researchers [14, 17], who emphasize the role of structured frameworks in enhancing cognitive skills and reducing stress, thus fostering a more comprehensive critical thinking approach. These insights contribute valuable knowledge for educators and institutions aiming to incorporate structured debate as a tool for enhancing students’ critical thinking and holistic development.

In addition, this study bridges the gap in the literature regarding the influence of oratory practices on critical thinking development. By detailed examination of themes like diverse perspectives and rational thinking, it elucidates how DUDS’s practices cultivate critical analytical skills, decision-making capabilities, and effective communication [10, 12]. Also, a critical thinker formulates essential questions accurately and collects and evaluates pertinent information to make informed decisions [2, 42, 43], which aligns with the finding that denotes decision-making through debate practices. Besides, when there is inadequate information or logic to support a conclusion, a critical thinker abstains from making a judgment [44, 45]. Students who participate in CCAs have the chance to acquire soft skills that are needed in the workforce, such as problem-solving, leadership, communication, and teamwork [6]. These findings extend the literature by offering empirical evidence of how debate and oratory activities can be structured to advance critical thinking among participants, moving beyond theoretical discussions to provide actionable insights for educational practitioners.

Overall, this study addresses existing gaps in literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of how DUDS’s policies and practices in debate and oratory activities contribute to critical thinking development. It affirms the value of argumentation, skepticism, and diverse perspectives as essential to critical thinking while also presenting a framework for effective debate education that can be replicated in similar educational settings.

Future research could explore the longitudinal impact of debate and oratory practices on critical thinking skills across different educational levels and disciplines, incorporating a broader demographic to understand cultural and contextual variations. Additionally, investigating the role of digital platforms in debate education and their effectiveness in promoting critical thinking in virtual learning environments could offer valuable insights for adapting to contemporary educational challenges. Additionally, integrating some forms of co-curricular activity such as debate in the national curriculum might help to robust the students’ practice-based learning.

5.1. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into how CCAs, particularly debate, foster critical thinking skills, there are several limitations to consider. First, the sample size of 16 participants, though representative of various roles within the DUDS, may not fully capture the broader student population’s experiences. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other debate clubs or

educational contexts. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, lacking quantitative measures that could more objectively assess improvements in critical thinking skills.

5.2. Conclusion

This study concludes that the DUDS plays a significant role in fostering critical thinking among its members through both its policy provisions and oratory practices. The findings directly address the research questions: first, by demonstrating that DUDS's structured policies actively promote critical thinking through activities such as debate workshops, study circles, and collaborative events; and second, by revealing that the society's oratory practices, such as debates and public speaking, encourage members to engage with diverse perspectives, apply logical reasoning, and improve decision-making skills. To further enhance this impact, it is recommended that DUDS focuses on encouraging collaboration and teamwork, promoting organized and rational thinking, stimulating creativity in public speaking, developing skepticism and open-mindedness, and integrating theories and concepts in debates. Implementing these recommendations will refine the debating experiences and equip participants with the critical thinking skills necessary for academic and professional success, addressing both the identified literature gaps and practical educational needs.

5.3. Implications

This study elucidates the significant implications of DUDS's CCAs in bolstering critical thinking among students, highlighting the potent blend of policy provisions and oratory practices in nurturing diverse perspectives, rational thinking, decision-making, and collaborative skills. By delving into the thematic cores of argumentation, inspection, and deduction, it bridges existing gaps in the literature, presenting a nuanced understanding of debate's multifaceted role in enhancing critical analytical capabilities and intellectual agility. Furthermore, it substantiates the practical efficacy of debate and oratory practices in an educational context, offering insights and frameworks that could be instrumental for educators and institutions aiming to foster critical thinking skills through co-curricular engagement.

While this case study provides valuable insights into the role of CCAs, specifically the DUDS, in fostering critical thinking, the findings have broader applicability beyond this specific context. The structured policies and oratory practices highlighted in this study can serve as a model for similar student organizations in other educational institutions across the country. Additionally, the study's focus on debate-based activities suggests that other CCAs, such as public speaking or group discussions, may also enhance critical thinking skills in students. Further research could be done in comparative analysis with similar initiatives in universities across different cultural and institutional contexts would add depth and provide further validation, potentially informing educational policies aimed at integrating CCAs more broadly to promote critical thinking across diverse learning environments.

5.4. Further research

Further research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size and incorporating a quantitative assessment such as pre-tests and post-tests of critical thinking skills. Longitudinal

studies could also be valuable in examining how sustained participation in debate influences critical thinking over time. Moreover, future studies should explore how these findings can be applied across different educational institutions and cultural contexts, to determine whether the observed benefits of debate extend beyond the specific context of DUDS. Lastly, investigating the role of digital debate platforms and their potential in fostering critical thinking in virtual environments could provide valuable insights for modern educational practices.

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Ethical Statement

This study does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by any of the authors.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

Data Availability Statement

All interview recordings have been retained for potential future use, if necessary. The analyzed documents have also been preserved for verification purposes.

Author Contribution Statement

A.S.M. Kamrul Islam: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration. **Mohammad Mahboob Morshed:** Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Laila Noor:** Validation, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision.

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Appendix 1:

Qualitative data collection form (16 Respondents)

(Question No: 1–8 have been developed focusing on RQ 2)

Name:

Department:

Session:

Position in DUDS: General Member/Executive Member/Debater/Mentor

Questions:

1. How do you believe that the co-curricular activity of “debate” or “speech” has helped you develop certain skills?
2. Is it possible to develop critical thinking skills through DUDS’s debate practice?

If the answer to the above question is yes:

3. How can DUDS’s debate practice facilitate the development of critical thinking skills?
4. How can DUDS help enhance the ability to “infer” or “hypothesize”?
5. How can DUDS’s debate practice impact an individual’s ability to reason and apply logic?
6. In what ways do you believe DUDS assists in mastering the skill of generalization?
7. How can DUDS’s debate practice help develop observation skills?
8. How do DUDS’s co-curricular activities assist in verifying the reliability or credibility of a source?

Appendix 2:

Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS): Constitution

Formation and Evolution

The tradition of debating at Dhaka University gained significant success during the late 1960s. After Bangladesh's independence, there were no formal debating teams at the university. However, some enthusiastic individuals initiated steps to promote debating culture, and this effort laid the foundation for organized debating. The success of debates during that time was largely due to the exceptional skills of the participants. However, there was no structured institution to sustain and nurture debating at the university level.

In the 1970s, an organization called "Debate Club" was formed, which later evolved into a broader society. On October 17, 1982, the Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS) was officially established. In 1988, its name was officially changed to Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS) in English.

The society emphasizes critical thinking, peaceful argumentation, and intellectual rigor to foster a culture of rational discourse. Through innovative reasoning and logical debates, it nurtures participants' mental development, instilling a sense of awareness that transcends conventional understanding.

Dhaka University has historically played a pivotal role in advancing intellectual discourse and democratic practices in Bangladesh. Debating has been a significant activity for students since the university's inception, inspiring other educational institutions in the country to organize regular debates.

In 1948, a debate team from Aligarh University visited Dhaka University and participated in a friendly debate with the students of Salmullah Muslim Hall. The then-Governor presided over this event. The 1950s and 1960s saw further growth in Dhaka University's debating activities, with many debaters achieving remarkable success in politics and leadership.

Since its formal establishment, the Dhaka University Debating Society has served as the university's central organization for debate-related activities, providing a platform for students to engage in debates and other intellectual competitions. The university allocates an annual budget to support the society's activities, enabling it to organize workshops, competitions, and events both on and off-campus.

Over time, the Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS) has evolved into a vibrant and dynamic organization, leading the way in promoting a culture of debate in Bangladesh. It continues to play an influential role as a pioneer in fostering intellectual discourse and critical thinking.

Article 1

The official name of the organization will be Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS), abbreviated as DUDS.

Article 2

Name: The official name of the Dhaka University Debating Society is "Dhaka University Debating Society," abbreviated as DUDS in English.

Article 3

Goals and Objectives

- a. To organize and unite the debaters and debate enthusiasts of Dhaka University.
- b. To arrange debate competitions at inter-hall, national, and international levels.
- c. To regularly organize debate sessions, workshops, and seminars to promote debating culture and encourage the publication of debate-related materials.
- d. Alongside debates, to inspire discussions on various social, cultural, and literary issues.
- e. To facilitate research and other academic activities aimed at refining debating skills and utilizing time effectively.
- f. To maintain communication and cooperation with other debating communities across the country to exchange ideas and improve debating standards.

Article 4

Activities

- a. To organize regular debate sessions in both Bengali and English.
- b. To host debate festivals and inter-departmental debate tournaments.
- c. To regularly publish debate-related newsletters. The annual magazine of the society will be called 'Protibak'.
- d. To organize competitive debate events each year, such as the Nafi Gazz Debate, inter-departmental, inter-hall, inter-club, inter-university competitions, etc.
- e. To arrange friendly debates regularly to enhance debating skills and maintain quality.

Article 4(1): Conditions for Conducting Debates and Competitions

- a. Debates, competitions, or any related events must receive approval from the executive committee.
- b. Since DUDS is the only officially recognized debating organization of Dhaka University, it will have the primary responsibility and authority over all internal, national, and international debate-related activities, including team selection, judge appointments, and other related matters.

- It is emphasized that decisions regarding the selection of teams for national-level debates, team tasks, and judging responsibilities will be carried out under the direct supervision of DUDS.
- To maintain Dhaka University's reputation and integrity, all students, along with other associated organizations, must seek approval and cooperation from DUDS before participating in or organizing any debate-related activity at the university, national, or international level.
- c. Departmental and hall debate committees will be considered as supporting organizations of DUDS. The committees will be formed and supervised by the inter-departmental or hall-level debate activities within their jurisdiction.
- d. For international debates, team selection and moderation will be conducted under the guidance and recommendations of the executive committee of DUDS.

Article 4(2): Collaboration with Other Debate Organizations

DUDS will cooperate with other national, regional, and international debating organizations. However, if any organization disrupts this cooperation and tarnishes the reputation and prestige of DUDS, the executive committee of DUDS will take necessary action against that organization. Such decisions must be approved in a general meeting by a two-thirds majority of attending members.

b. As an autonomous debate-promoting organization, DUDS will solely focus on the development of debating. No organization will be considered a partner or subordinate organization to DUDS.

Article 5: Membership

- a. Any current (undergraduate) or former student of Dhaka University, who is not a member of any other debating organization, may apply for DUDS membership by filling out the official membership application form.
 - b. To approve membership applications, the executive committee will form a five-member sub-committee. The moderator or flooderator will serve as the chairperson of this committee by virtue of their position.
 - c. The sub-committee will create and announce a policy for member selection.
 - d. Based on the announced policy, the sub-committee will evaluate applications, ensuring that applicants meet the required criteria, including their debating proficiency, respect for the society's traditions, and personal integrity. Recommendations for membership will then be submitted to the executive committee for final approval.
- The executive committee will grant membership only to the applicants recommended by the sub-committee.