

A Global Study of Debate Extension Service Organizations (DESOs): Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Debating is often seen as an extra-curricular activity, with debate clubs in secondary and tertiary level institutions being the main organizational unit. However, some organizations operate beyond individual schools and offer broader support to debate activities. This includes organizing tournaments, training coaches and adjudicators, executing debate workshops/camps, managing national debate teams, and promoting debate in non-school environments. These can be called Debate Extension Service Organisations (DESOs), are typically non-governmental organizations that vary in terms of structure, services, staffing, and funding. Generally, they aim to create positive change in the lives of their programme participants and to promote debate as a useful tool for society. Conducted in the Caribbean, this study uses a sequential mixed method approach consisting of a survey and a focus group discussion to explore the challenges confronting such organizations, and examines the extent to which they are similar across places, in addition to considering various solutions to such challenges. From this, it is noted that the strategies to overcome the challenges may be at least somewhat transferable, though contextual nuances remain relevant. It was found that the challenge of greatest concern to the organizations was funding, while participant buy-in was of least concern. Other concerns of staff turnover, public support, and organization capacity were moderate. Despite the concerns, the organizations remained optimistic in achieving their goals and believed that they would remain in existence.

Keywords: debate, extension services, non-governmental organizations, non-profit funding, volunteers

Introduction

Debating is commonly thought of as an extra-curricular activity pursued by a minority of students at different stages in their academic studies (Okebiro, 2018). Debating also takes place in other settings—such as in the lead-up to political elections, where candidates or political commentators express and contest their views on particular issues (Larkin & Were, 2013). Debating in these settings often has specific rules regarding

time limits per speaker; the questions or issues to be asked; and how the candidates engage with each other. Outside of these settings, debates may also take place informally with less precise rules in social settings such as bars and shops, or in other media such as on talk show radio.

It is far less common to think of organizational structures pertaining to debating which transcend these types of contexts. As an organizational

unit, debate clubs within schools may be the most familiar type of structure. While there are particular events (such as various regional or world championships), organizational structures which provide continuous support for debating at levels beyond a particular institution or activity are often overlooked in research. The organizations being referred to in this study are those which transcend a single educational institution and include those offering debate outreach or social intervention programmes; umbrella organizations which support multiple debate societies; debate in non-school settings; or those which provide national support or coordination of debate activities. This study frames these organizations as being Debate Extension Service Organizations (DESOs). While the concept of extension services is most commonly associated with agriculture, it is a quite useful description here as it refers to the extension of support services for a particular activity across several locations.

Several such organizations exist, typically as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These are also, by extension, non-profit organizations. This study assumes that productive debating at the institutional level or in societies generally, where the influence of these organizations permeate, benefit in some way from the work these organizations do. As an activity, it is important to note that the benefits of debate are widely documented in research. This is particularly established in school settings, but research also exists in non-school settings. It is considered that through debating, students can develop strong communication skills, become more confident, learn to collaborate with peers, and become creative thinkers (Venkovits, 2018). While these skills are also enhanced when members of the broader society participate in debate; at that level, meaningful debate can help to foster constructive dialogue and enhance civic discourse in society.

Several DESOs exist around the world: they share similar challenges and coping strategies. While DESOs provide support to debating activities in the classroom and beyond; as non-profits and NGOs they are vulnerable to multiple challenges. According to Okine (2022), non-profits and

NGOs supporting education in Ghana often suffer from disjointed relationships with the Ministry of Education and education policy more broadly, despite their support of social change. There are similar findings in South Africa, where it was found that NGOs which offer social services often suffer from not being properly integrated in the institutional framework of development planning (Nwauche & Flanigan, 2022). This research, conducted in the Caribbean, aims to bring an understanding of the challenges facing these particular NGOs and also seeks to examine the possible solutions they have attempted and the extent to which those solutions may be transferable to organizations worldwide.

Research Aims and Significance

This study explored the challenges confronting DESOs globally across a range of organizations, to better understand them, and to determine the extent to which the challenges faced were similar or dissimilar across place and organizational structure. The strategies employed by DESOs to address their challenges and the extent to which these strategies may be transferable were also investigated.

Overall, this study looked at the organizations which provide support services for debate at a level of analysis which may be generally unseen, despite being very important.

The research questions were:

1. What are the challenges faced by DESOs globally and how similar are they across organizations?
2. What are the strategies employed by DESOs to overcome the challenges they face and in what ways are they transferable across organizations?

The significance of this study is derived from the unique role that DESOs play. According to the OECD (2018), in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it was suggested that three vital competency areas for young people were: (1) creating new value; (2) reconciling tensions and dilemmas; and (3) taking responsibility. The benefits derived from debating are congruent with these areas. It has

been highlighted that the integration of these elements into school curricula is often a slow process, despite the urgency of the need. DESOs work predominantly (though not exclusively) with young people and help to fill the gaps in the competencies highlighted. If institutionalized, DESOs may ultimately play a crucial role in achieving sustainable and inclusive education by encouraging the integration of debate and discussion activities in the classroom. Other similar NGOs providing extension services in sectors such as healthcare, may also find the ideas discussed herein to be valuable and transferable.

Literature Review

This section reviews existing literature on the benefits of debate both in and out of the classroom setting and then explains the concept of extension service organizations. This allows for a justification as to why the organizations being studied fit that type of organizational description. The review closes with a discussion of the challenges which generally affect these organizations.

Benefits of Debating

Research examining the benefits of debate is perhaps the most widely documented area in debating. The benefits of debate as a co-curricular activity as well as directly in the classroom setting are well established.

Ali et al. (2020) suggest that debate as a co-curricular activity increases the confidence of participants and also leads to better social adjustment in society at large. They note that teachers have an important role in motivating students and parents, encouraging students to take on co-curricular activities such as debate which emphasizes the expression of ideas. This idea is congruent with Okebiro (2018) who suggests that parents and teachers should encourage students to join debate clubs, particularly for the psychological benefit of personality development—which can benefit career prospects. Beyond this, Ali et al. (2020) also recommend that

governments support environments in all schools which facilitate debate and other literary co-curricular activities.

Snider and Schnurer (2002) have long advocated for the use of debate, not just as an extra-curricular activity but rather to be widely applied across the curriculum. They establish that a variety of debate methods can be used across a wide range of subject areas to enhance teaching and learning. Najafi et al. (2016), through qualitative and conceptual exploration, outline a number of benefits that students derive from debating in the classroom, such as increasing the speed of learning; enhancing evaluation ability; fostering entrepreneurial skills; promoting good mental health; and developing verbal skills. Venkovits (2018) agrees with the benefits of debate in the classroom, particularly noting the benefits of oral communication, research, collaboration, and critical thinking. Importantly, Venkovits (2018) noted that to properly use debate in the classroom, teachers must be trained in debating as a teaching method so that they can properly apply and effectively assess its use in the classroom.

Ramlan et al. (2016) conducted empirical work on the benefits of using debate in the classroom, particularly in the teaching of medicine. The self-reported perceptions from students noted that they considered debating to have a positive impact on confidence, critical thinking, and knowledge—with the strength of the impact being in that order.

Fallahi and Haney (2007) used debate as a teaching method for psychology students to discuss controversial topics, particularly affirmative action and sexual diversity. While the majority of the students had not debated previously, the vast majority indicated by survey that they understood the debate process and found it easier to discuss the topics in a debate, rather than in an open discussion. The benefit here was that students did not have to reveal their personal opinions; which the majority of those surveyed said could have caused fear, anger, or frustration. Of the students surveyed, 80% indicated that debating the issues had shifted their viewpoint.

As a student-centred approach, debating empowers students by giving them agency to engage in constructivist learning. It is argued that in post-colonial contexts such as in the Caribbean, teachers should urgently employ critical pedagogy as an alternative to hegemonic instructional practices which often limit student participation. It is observed that Caribbean classrooms are still heavily teacher-centred and often limit students' self-efficacy (Bailey, 2019). When students are encouraged to participate in debates, they get the opportunity to engage in challenging ideas and become more active participants in their learning. Moreover, using Jamaica as a case study, it was found that class participation reduces the risk of school dropout and that collaborative learning in the classroom increases overall academic achievement (Martin et al., 2017). These practices of participation and collaboration are established as being inherent to debates (Snider & Schnurer, 2002; Venkovits, 2018).

Owing to the empowerment and increased self-efficacy promoted by debate in the classroom, it is believed that the skills fostered by debating are transferable. For the individual who participates in debates (which is not limited to students) the skills learned can be of benefit personally, educationally, and professionally (Gardiner, 2017).

Extension Service Organizations

DESOs are generally non-governmental organizations. They provide outreach service through debate activities both in school and non-school environments. Extension service is most frequently associated with the agricultural sector (Davis & Place, 2003). In the context of semiarid East Africa (e.g. the Sahel), Davis & Place (2003) note that funding for agricultural extension by the governments across the region had been reduced. The alternative approach to extension services which emerged was the creation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Davis & Place (2003) cautioned that NGOs were not to be considered a magic bullet or a complete replacement for state involvement in extension services, but that they should work

together in coalition. Anderson (2003) also examined the provision of extension services to farmers and noted that there were numerous challenges with accountability, political commitment, tracing impact, and the broader policy environment. In summary, extension services seek to fill a gap and encourage sustainability and development of the agricultural sector and rural development. Recommendation is made for a more decentralized approach with private involvement (Anderson, 2003). Zivkovic et al. (2009) also point to models where state support for extension services is supplemented by private actors.

Outside of agriculture and rural development, the concept of extension services is almost non-existent. Stoecker (2014) speaks to extension educators in a fairly expansive manner—to include those who work with businesses, governments, farmers, and non-profits. It is suggested that, for universities who support community development, it is important for faculty members to develop relationships with extension educators. This is because the extension educators are intermediaries between the needs of the community and the research of the university. Borrowing this concept of extension services and applying it to debate is quite apt, as debate activities (in schools and in the broader society) often lack the organizational skills and training required for them to be optimized. For example, debate coaches are often teachers in secondary schools who volunteer their time to facilitate debate clubs, but they may not have professional training in debate formats or the organization of debate activities and their role may often not be a permanent responsibility. DESOs are able to provide support services in these spaces in a consistent manner, even when there are personnel changes.

The idea of DESOs as extension service organizations is also congruent with, and adds to, the suggestion of Davis (2009) that the modern concept of extension has evolved from a focus on providing farmers with technology and training to a concern with facilitation, learning and helping with the formation of groups, and collaborating with partners. In the context of

debate activities, DESOs provide avenues to facilitate debate by supporting the learning of persons engaged in debating, the formation of groups for debate, and wider collaboration with partners in the support of promoting debating. In this regard, the organizations referred to herein as DESOs are indeed providing extension services. Specifically, these are organizations that are extending support to numerous debate clubs in schools and debate activities in wider society. They also provide these services where there is generally a lack of centralized state funding for debate activities. However, they often work collaboratively with governmental and non-state institutions. They maintain close relationships with the schools and communities within which they work and therefore serve as an intermediary between the needs of the communities and policymakers.

Challenges Faced by Debate Extension Service Organizations

Most non-profit organizations operate within a space referred to as the social or third sector, which is neither public nor private. This comes with its own challenges and perhaps some are even more pronounced in the case of the DESOs.

Wright (2015) explored the challenges facing non-profit organizations in Canada and identified issues with legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, infrastructure, and public image as areas of concern.

Whereas matters regarding the legal environment may not be of immediate importance to DESOs since they would not typically require special regulatory licences or infrastructure, and given that they are more service oriented than production based, some of the other core issues noted are indeed relevant.

On the matter of financial viability, Wright (2015) speaks to this being influenced by the extent of philanthropic and volunteer culture, in addition to the financial management skills within the organization. Helmig et al. (2004) also suggest that since non-profit organizations do

not raise equity in the way private businesses would, they end up competing for whatever amount of charitable funds have been set aside elsewhere in the economy.

The organizational capacity issues involve staffing and the ability to engage in strategic planning (Wright, 2015). For service-oriented organizations, these capacity matters are congruent with service provision. The matter of staffing, while somewhat related to organizational capacity, often has unique challenges for the debate organizations concerned as they are heavily dependent on volunteers who are generally young, and often assist the organization after university, as they transition to professional life. Crockwell (2015) found similar challenges with non-profit organizations and suggests that especially within rural areas matters with training staff, volunteer dependence, and boards are even more pronounced. It is often the case, therefore, that staff turnover is high.

For DESOs, participant buy-in regarding the services being provided is also important. Supplying services without generating sufficient demand would be ineffective. Many NGOs provide services for which the buy-in from participants exists and is overwhelming, such as those offering assistance with the provision of food or housing. Debate, however, while quite beneficial, may not readily have willing participants, whether for lack of participants' understanding of the potential benefits or stereotypes around debating. Therefore, it is important that stakeholders such as parents and teachers help to encourage debating (Ali et al., 2020; Okebiro, 2018). The stakeholders that can encourage debate and get buy-in can also be extrapolated to include the state or DESOs which can provide support to teachers and parents.

Public image or public support is also very important and is congruent with the ideas of advocacy suggested by Wright (2015), though the public support received and the advocacy offered could have some divergence. More specifically, given the nature of debate organizations, communication and advocacy is

often innate in their operations, however, this does not necessarily translate into public support. This aspect has to do with public receptiveness. In that regard, Helmig et al. (2004) points to marketing as a key challenge for non-profit organizations. Here, marketing is more than just advocacy, but is targeted at meeting the needs of the audience so as to gain support.

Methodology

Conceptually, the literature establishes that debate-type activities support the development of crucial skills among participants. These skills are congruent with enhancing educational outcomes and are also useful outside of the classroom in fostering good civic discourse and democracy. However, despite the potential benefits, debate is not often central to curriculums and may not always be promoted in society at large. This represents a gap between support for debate and the need for the development of those skills. Therefore, it can be conceptualized that given that the aforementioned outcomes are desirable but that support for debate as a vehicle for attaining these outcomes is lacking, the overall attainment of those outcomes will also be lacking. DESOs serve as an intervening factor which support the debate activities that can lead to those desirable outcomes. These outcomes will be enhanced if DESOs are well functioning.

Therefore, DESOs aim to fill a critical gap, but the challenges faced by these organizations and the strategies to overcome their challenges are not well studied. Having operationalized the concept of DESOs and conceptually established the role they play in improving education outcomes, collecting and analysing data on these organizations becomes important. Through understanding the challenges faced by these organizations and the opportunities which exist to overcome their challenges, knowledge is produced about how to improve them. By improving DESOs, they may more effectively support debate activities which will enhance the educational and wider societal outcomes outlined in the literature.

Understanding support for debate activities is an area not widely studied that is also fairly exploratory in nature, so primary data collection was considered necessary. The research design used was sequential mixed methods. As such, two instruments were used to collect data, with the second being informed by the first.

The researchers began by conducting an extensive search of organizations that fit the criteria of DESOs—primarily that they offer support services to debate activities which transcend a single institution, whether in school or non-school settings.

Through thorough web searches and snowballing from known DESOs, 48 such organizations around the world were identified. This constituted the sample frame. All organizations were contacted, primarily by email; introducing the study and inviting participants to complete a survey, informing them of a follow-up focus group discussion which would occur afterwards. This research design was deliberate as the survey allowed for individual responses. While one of the aims of the study was to explore the extent to which the challenges faced by these organizations were similar, opening with a collaborative data collection method could be biased towards encouraging group think. Therefore, the focus group was used only after the individual survey responses were received.

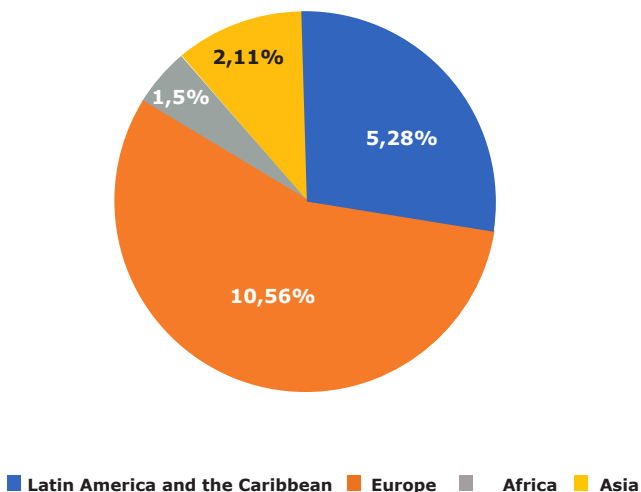
All participants were presented with an explanation of the purpose of the study and informed consent was sought. All participants were asked to explicitly indicate consent on the surveys and consent was further sought at the start of the focus group session regarding participation and permission to record the session. All participants consented. It was noted that the personal identifying information of the individual who participated in the data collection process would be kept anonymous, but that the name of the organization may be used in the study. It was not considered reasonable to promise to keep the organization anonymous since there was often only one organization that fit the criteria for a DESO in several countries.

Data was collected over a period of 1 month, early September to early October 2023. The first 3 weeks were concerned with getting survey responses, with constant reminders and the use of participants who knew debate administrators at other organizations to bring the communications regarding the study to their attention. Ultimately, 18 of the 48 organizations responded to the study. It was very possible that several of the 48 organizations identified were no longer functional. The survey results were analysed (predominantly using descriptive statistics), to examine the distribution and spread of perceptions reported by the DESOs. Congruent with the sequential mixed methods design, these results were used to inform the questions explored in the focus group discussion.

Week 4 involved the second form of data collection, which was a focus group discussion. A survey was circulated to the 18 organizations who participated in the survey with time slots for the discussion, noting that it would not be feasible to get all participants together at once.

Figure 1

Geographic Distribution of Organizations



Five organizations participated in the 1-hour focus group session, which was conducted by Zoom and moderated by the two researchers. Consent was sought for the session to be recorded. The focus group discussion interrogated the areas of consensus and divergence identified from the questionnaire. Content analysis was used for the focus group data, with thematic units largely informed by the questionnaire results.

Findings and Discussion

This section predominantly outlines the findings from the quantitative aspect of the survey and includes possible explanations (based on the survey comments and focus group discussion) for the tendencies noted in the analysis of the survey data.

Description of the Organizations

Of the 48 organizations contacted, 18 completed the survey. The 18 organizations were headquartered in 18 different countries, across 4 regions, as outlined in Figure 1. The organizations predominantly operated by providing services nationally; however, two may be described as multinational in their service provision.

For the focus group discussion, the five organizations that participated consisted of three based in Latin America and the Caribbean, and two based in Europe—one of which was multinational.

The participating organizations have existed for as little as 4 years to a maximum of 28 years, with the average being 15.6 years. All the organizations were formally registered organizations, 17 directly and 1 as a department within a registered foundation.

The remainder of the description below pertains to questions which were asked regarding services provided, funding sources, beneficiaries, staff size, and compensation. Organizations were able to indicate multiple options for each category. For example, an organization could have received funding both from the state as well as from private businesses.

The organizations generally indicated similarities in service provision. This was reflected in 17 of the 18 organizations noting that they organized debate competitions and trained coaches/judges; with 16 also noting that they managed national teams. In terms of offering special projects for profit, 11 organizations noted that they were involved in this activity, and 10 indicated that they conducted outreach projects with other populations such as vulnerable groups. One organization organized political debates and one predominantly provided outreach to national organizations.

The funding sources for the organizations showed a mix of responses. Twelve organizations depended on private individual donors; 11 depended on funding generated from the execution of for-profit projects; and 10 received funding from business sponsorship. Only 8 organizations received government funding, while 2 received funding from European Union projects and from member donations or fees.

The beneficiaries had some areas of convergence. All 18 organizations indicated that they provided support to schools and students, and 11 provided services to the public sector. Unattached youth were beneficiaries from 8 of the organizations; while 7 organizations served the general adult population, 6 served businesses, 3 served the elderly, and 1 predominantly supported national debate organizations.

In terms of staffing, there was a mix of sizes and compensation. Six of the organizations had no more than 20 staff members, while 5 had 21–40 staff members. The other 7 organizations had over 41 staff members. Regarding compensation, the most dominant response indicated by 8 organizations was that a few staff members were paid but the majority were volunteers. Only 3 organizations indicated that the majority of their staff were paid competitive salaries—with 2 claiming that staff members were all volunteers, and 2 claiming that all were volunteers, but may be paid for work on for-profit projects undertaken by the organization. One organization indicated that the core staff were paid competitive salaries and the others received a stipend.

Challenges Faced by the Organizations

From Likert-scale questions, the figures below show the perceptions of organizations around the extent of the challenges they faced, where 1 indicates where an issue was not a problem and 5 indicates where an issue was a major problem. Figures 2–6 show the results of the ranking of the severity of the effect of challenges faced by the organizations. The challenges reflected here are funding, staff turnover, participant buy-in, public support, and internal organizational capacity.

The data herein suggests that on average, funding was the most severe challenge faced by all the organizations, regardless of location and size. Staff turnover and public support were the next greatest challenges with equal mean scores. Importantly, these scores were almost

Figure 2
Severity of Funding as a Challenge

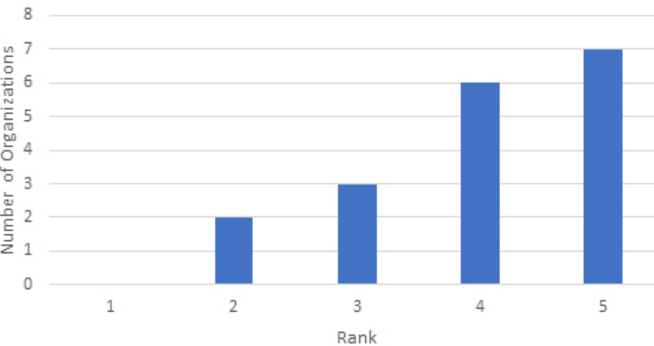


Figure 3
Severity of Staff Turnover as a Challenge

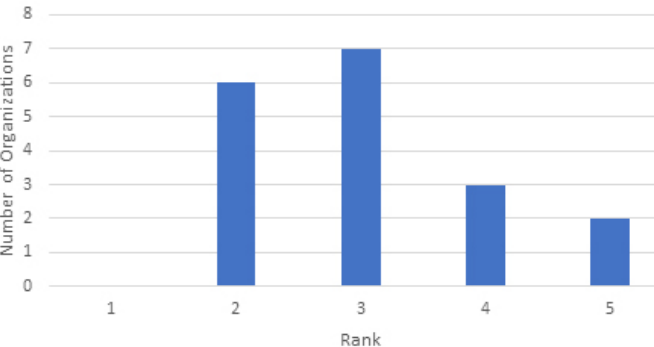
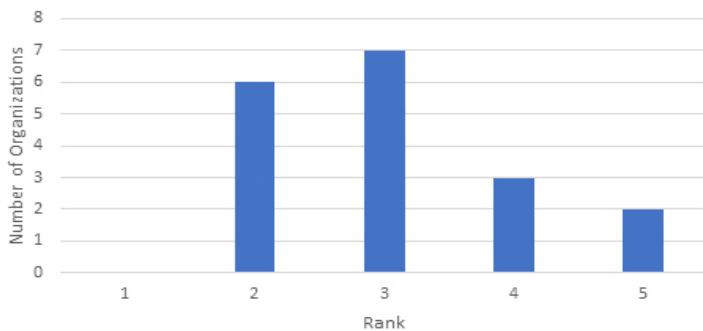
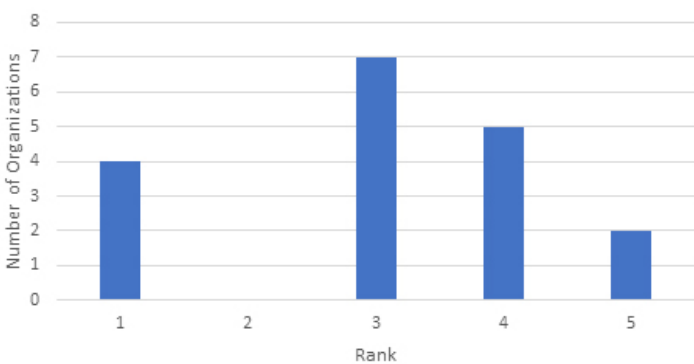
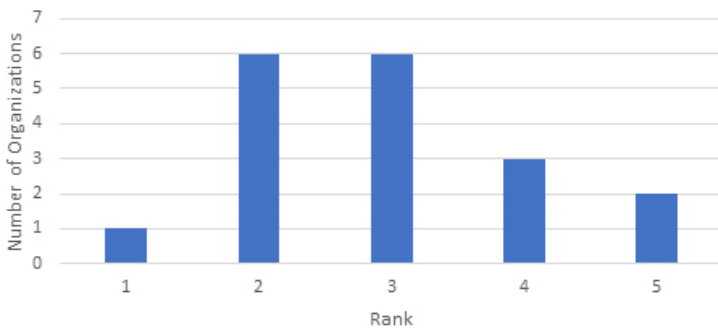


Figure 4*Severity of Participant Buy-In as a Challenge***Figure 5***Severity of Public Support as a Challenge***Figure 6***Severity of Internal Organizational Capacity as a Challenge*

an entire point below the mean score for funding, depicting the severity of the matter of funding. Public support, however, had the highest standard deviation. This was perhaps due to different societal and cultural contexts regarding responsiveness to debate. Internal organizational capacity was next the highest concern, also with some notable standard deviation, suggesting that there were indeed variations in the perceptions of capacity across the organizations. Participant buy-in was the challenge of least concern and also depicted the lowest deviation. It is therefore generally thought that participants were interested in the services offered by the organizations.

Discussion of the Challenges and Strategies Implemented

The funding situation faced by DESOs varies significantly by the stage of the organizations' development. It was identified that DESOs, in their early stages, generally engage in almost exclusively volunteer work, before they become able to collaborate with other NGOs or attract small grants for project-based work. Even when they are able to secure funding for projects, these tend to not be sufficient to cover the organizations' everyday operational expenses. This therefore leads to most DESOs offering private services (such as training for business executives) to generate funds to cover their charitable work. This means that most DESOs ultimately adopt a social-enterprise type model. Eventually, successful DESOs often seek to get the attention of ministries of education and governments, and seek institutionalization for more consistent sources of funding, such as having their work become part of education policies or laws.

Several of the organizations indicated that it was difficult to get to the point of having consistent state funding, though some noted that the state was slowly becoming more supportive of debate. Only a few states seemed to have fully embraced debating and have created policies around the integration of debating in schools. This means that the majority of the organizations relied on non-state

Table 1 shows the mean severity and standard deviation of each challenge.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation across Severity of Challenges Faced by Organizations

Measure	Challenges Faced				
	Funding	Staff Turnover	Participant Buy-in	Public Support	Internal Organizational Capacity
Mean	4.00	3.06	2.28	3.06	2.94
Std. Deviation	1.03	1.00	0.89	1.30	1.11

funding in the form of doing special projects such as offering corporate training and being part of European Union (EU) projects if eligible. Some organizations have therefore engaged in grant writing activities and have sought collaboration with other NGOs and state agencies. Sponsorship from private donors seems to be effective when organizations can establish a relationship with them for recurring funding. Sponsorship from private businesses can be competitive and it is sometimes difficult to have congruence with their objectives. At least one organization used cloud funding and another created roles in their organizational structure dedicated to areas such as business development.

Staff turnover was mostly managed by ensuring that staff and volunteers appreciated the value in their work. In many cases, staff members were former debaters motivated to help other debaters, but organizations still noted that they tried to screen volunteers to ensure commitment. The organizations often presented themselves as being more than just debate-oriented. Therefore, staff and volunteers engaged in a wide range of skills development, such as project management, financial management, information technology, and so on. In doing so, the organizations offered a wide range of avenues for professional development in addition to opportunities to network. To increase the perceived value of the experience some organizations made their job titles attractive, for

example, by renaming "Public Relations Assistant" to instead be "Public Relations Specialist".

Given that participant buy-in was the challenge of least concern, not many strategies were used. For the most part, the organizations established strong relationships with schools and had a point person within the schools. Some organizations also had membership systems. Through the use of social media, prizes at events, and other such incentives, participant engagement was encouraged. At the university level it seemed to be more difficult, especially in places where a debating culture did not readily exist.

Organizations have relied on traditional media and social media to reach the public. Some have collaborated with other NGOs on projects of public concern, at least one organization has been involved in electoral debates, and undertaken work with government ministries. Through hosting public debates, the organizations get supported by showcasing to the public what meaningful debates look like. Some have also publicized events such as "Debater of the Year", and in one case the organization was able to get the head of state to declare a "National Debaters' Week" as an annual activity. This represents one type of institutionalization of debating but there are other possible forms. Another organization was able to get legislative sanctioning of debating in schools across the country they serve. This may be considered an ideal for some DESOs; however, with regards to work in school environments,

the majority of these organizations seem to be currently seeking support for greater integration into the formal school curriculum.

In terms of internal organizational capacity, several organizations have been engaged in business-type training, such as in the area of project management. At least one organization had established relationships with a business school. Many of these organizations actively train debate coaches and facilitators, thereby building a pool of persons who can assist with the work being done. As the organizations tend to be heavily dependent on volunteers, there are challenges with regards to ensuring reliability and accountability when tasks are delegated to these unpaid individuals. There appears to be benefit to organizations offering support to debate activities across a wide range of forms, and not just traditional debate formats; for example, including model United Nations debates. With a wide approach, a broad perception of capacity is created, which increases the possibility of collaboration with other organizations and widens the range of private projects which may be accessible. Ensuring that even one or a few core personnel are paid, even part-time, is also important to task completion, as bottlenecks can reduce the capacity to engage in more activities.

Perceptions of Success

The organizations generally believed that they were being successful in carrying out their functions, despite the challenges faced. None of the organizations considered themselves to be unsuccessful. Similarly, none of the organizations believe that they will not survive the next five years.

Overall, while several of the organizations have had setbacks (especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected service delivery and funding), there was a high level of optimism. The organizations genuinely believed in the value of their work and were motivated to find creative solutions to overcome their challenges.

Conclusion

The organizations researched provided extension services, often with little funding from the government, but operated in support of an activity with the potential to enhance educational outcomes in the classroom and foster civil discourse in the wider society. This research established that such organizations can be considered Debate Extension Service Organizations (DESOs), serving as intermediaries between debaters and debate clubs, and the wider grouping of educational and societal policymakers. Some of the DESOs also provide support services for debating at higher multinational levels.

The DESOs involved in this study were confident in the success of their work and its longevity. They seem to have little issue with the demand and support from the public and the beneficiaries of their work. The support and recognition of the work done by DESOs as well as their eagerness to continue to provide support for debate activities suggests that there is value in the work that they do. In some contexts where educational practices have not been significantly reformed to encourage active student participation and empowerment, DESOs promote pedagogical innovation which enhances teaching and learning.

The Caribbean region presents a clear case of need in this regard, as evidence suggests that the region's colonial history still has lingering effects in terms of the dominance of hegemonic educational practices, and that moving towards a more student-centred approach presents an opportunity to empower students (Bailey, 2019). Moreover, given that evidence from Jamaica suggests that class participation reduces dropout rates and that collaboration increases academic achievement (Martin et al., 2017), the work of DESOs should be promoted. In the same Jamaican context, a National Standards Curriculum (NSC) was implemented in 2017 which is anchored by attainment of four competencies: critical thinking; creativity; collaboration; and communication (Mayne & Dixon, 2020). Skills development across these domains are inherent to debating (Snider & Schnurer, 2002; Venkovits,

2018). However, it was found that while teachers understood the new curriculum, even teachers in training were not currently being taught how to use it. Therefore there is a gap between the competences the curriculum ought to promote and actual classroom practices (Mayne & Dixon, 2020). DESOs, though faced with several challenges, can seek to bridge this gap.

Funding is the issue of greatest severity and a number of strategies have been employed by the organizations. One popular strategy is operating a social enterprise-type model where for-profit services are used to finance charitable work. While this has worked for several DESOs, the offerings must be tailored to the demands of the local environment. DESOs can ultimately benefit from becoming recognized by the states in which they operate, leading to institutionalization in the education framework. Gradual efforts to increase state support and funding are being made, often by first working with particular ministries, agencies, or other NGOs and then getting the attention of the wider public and state. Dependence on project funding only generally leaves gaps in covering operational expenses.

It is recommended that DESOs be cognizant of their stage of development and the resulting opportunities which are available to them. In the earlier stages, DESOs should seek to establish strong relationships with stakeholders such as schools and other NGOs. If DESOs are unable to get official state recognition in the early stages, the social enterprise model can serve as a guide. Partnerships with more established and widely recognized NGOs are also recommended, to get the attention of the public and the state. Since DESOs tend to be more sustainable when they get official endorsement and funding from government ministries (such as those responsible for education), this should be an important pursuit for DESOs and can be attained by inviting representatives to events to showcase the work they are doing and the skills being developed by the students. Furthermore, it is recommended that DESOs ensure that volunteers value their work, both in terms of professional development as well as potential earnings from working on funded projects. Sustainable DESOs can support sustained enhancement in critical skill areas.

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