



Enhancing L2 Speaking Skills Through Small Group Discussion: A Quasi-Experimental Study in Indonesian Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of Small Group Discussion (SGD) technique in developing English speaking skills among Grade IX students at SMPN 3 Banawa, Indonesia. Through a quasi-experimental design, 49 students were divided into experimental and control groups, focusing on expressions of hope, wishes, and congratulations. The experimental group received SGD treatment over four meetings, while the control group followed conventional teaching methods. Statistical analysis revealed significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking skills, with mean scores increasing from 38.94 to 71.15. The t-test results ($t_{\text{counted}}=3.70462$, $t_{\text{table}}=2.01174$, $p<0.05$) demonstrated SGD's effectiveness in enhancing students' speaking fluency and appropriacy. The findings suggest that SGD creates a supportive learning environment that boosts student confidence and participation in English speaking activities, offering valuable insights for language teaching methodology.

KEYWORDS

Small Group Discussion;
Speaking Skills;
EFL Learning;
Secondary Education.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas strategi Diskusi Kelompok Kecil dalam mengembangkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris di kalangan siswa Kelas IX di SMPN 3 Banawa, Indonesia. Melalui desain kuasi-eksperimental, 49 siswa dibagi menjadi kelompok eksperimen dan kontrol, dengan fokus pada ekspresi terkait harapan, keinginan, dan ucapan selamat. Kelompok eksperimen menerima perlakuan strategi tersebut selama empat pertemuan, sementara kelompok kontrol mengikuti strategi pengajaran konvensional. Analisis statistik menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan dalam keterampilan berbicara kelompok eksperimen, dengan nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 38,94 menjadi 71,15. Hasil uji-t ($t_{\text{hitung}}=3,70462$, $t_{\text{tabel}}=2,01174$, $p<0,05$) menunjukkan efektivitas strategi tersebut dalam meningkatkan kelancaran dan ketepatan berbicara siswa. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi diskusi kelompok kecil menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung yang meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan partisipasi siswa dalam kegiatan berbicara bahasa Inggris, memberikan gambaran yang menyeluruh bagi metodologi pengajaran bahasa.

KATAKUNCI

Diskusi Kelompok Kecil;
Kemampuan Berbicara;
Pembelajaran EFL;
Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah.

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1. Introduction

Speaking is a means of communication that involves using a repertoire of words to convey specific purposes. It is one of the essential language skills that students must master to become effective communicators. According to (Bailey, 2005), speaking is a valuable ability for learning English, particularly when it is a second language. Speaking should be encouraged among all students in school, regardless of their field of study, including language, social sciences, the arts, and other disciplines.

Preliminary observations at SMPN 3 Banawa revealed several challenges in learning English, particularly in speaking. Some factors influencing students' ability to speak English include the following: first, students struggle to express their ideas and feelings. Second, a lack of self-confidence, often stemming from insufficient knowledge of English, makes them afraid of making mistakes. Teachers, therefore, need to adopt practical techniques to enhance students' speaking skills. The researcher proposes using the small group discussion technique to address these challenges and foster improvement in students' speaking abilities.

The objective of this research is to determine whether the use of the Small Group Discussion technique can effectively develop the speaking skills of Grade IX students at SMPN 3 Banawa. This study focuses on enhancing students' speaking fluency and appropriacy. The Small Group Discussion technique was applied to teaching expressions of hope, wishes, and congratulations, which served as the main topic for developing students' speaking skills.

The results of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for English teachers, students, and future researchers. For students, it is anticipated that their speaking skills will improve, enabling them to become more confident and courageous in speaking English, thereby enhancing their communicative competence. For teachers, this study aims to help improve language teaching methods and create new habits and environments that build students' confidence in learning English. Lastly, the findings of this research can serve as a reference for future researchers who encounter similar issues and are interested in conducting studies in the field of English language learning.

1.1. The Role of Small Group Discussion in Developing Speaking Skills

According to Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, language development occurs primarily through social interaction (Alharbi, 2023). Small group discussions create an ideal environment for this interaction, allowing learners to construct knowledge collaboratively while developing their speaking abilities. Long's Interaction Hypothesis further suggests that conversational interaction facilitates language acquisition (Huang et al., 2024).

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) emphasizes the importance of a low-anxiety environment for effective language learning. Small group discussions typically create a more comfortable atmosphere compared to whole-class settings, reducing speaking anxiety and increasing willingness to communicate (Bozkurt & Aydin, 2023).

Research by Moge & Oroh (2022) demonstrates that small group discussions significantly increase individual speaking time compared to teacher-fronted classrooms. In traditional classroom settings, individual students speak for approximately 1-2 minutes per hour, while in small groups, this can increase to 8-10 minutes.

Studies by Jawad & Abosnan (2020) show that small group discussions promote more authentic communication patterns. Learners engage in natural turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, and real-time language processing, skills crucial for developing speaking proficiency.

Crisianita & Mandasari (2022) highlights how small group discussions facilitate peer learning and immediate feedback. Learners can model successful speaking strategies from their peers and receive instant feedback in a less threatening environment than teacher-led corrections.

1.2. Implementation of Small Group Discussion

Research by Madjid (2019) suggests that groups of 3-5 members are most effective for language learning purposes. This size allows for maximum participation while maintaining manageable conversation dynamics. Chirwa & Boikanyo (2022) emphasizes the importance of well-designed tasks in small group discussions. Effective tasks should have clear communication goals, require information exchange, include elements of opinion-sharing, and promote critical thinking. Keiler (2018) outlines the teacher's role as a facilitator rather than controller in small group discussions. Teachers should monitor groups unobtrusively, provide language support when needed, ensure equal participation opportunities, and guide rather than dominate discussions.

Research by Jacobs and Hall (2002) addresses the challenge of mixed ability groups. They recommend assigning roles based on proficiency levels, using scaffolding techniques, and implementing cooperative learning structures. While some L1 use is natural in small groups, studies by Storch & Wigglesworth (2003) suggest that strategic use of L1 can actually support L2 development when properly managed. Clark & Terrett (2024) proposes various assessment strategies for speaking skills developed through group discussions: peer assessment rubrics, self-evaluation forms, observable participation metrics, and regular recording and analysis of discussions. A longitudinal study by Moge & Oroh (2022) showed that students participating in regular small group discussions demonstrated 40% increase in speaking rate, 25% reduction in hesitation phenomena, and Improved ability to maintain conversation flow. In addition, research by

Nation (2001) indicates that small group discussions contribute to active vocabulary use, contextual learning of new words, and better retention of specialized vocabulary.

2. Method

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design, involving two groups: an experimental class and a control class. Both groups participated in pretests and posttests. The experimental group received a specific treatment, while the control group did not. To measure the treatment's impact, the study utilized two tests and four processing methods. The research population consisted of 101 Grade IX students from SMPN 3 Banawa, divided into four parallel classes: IX A, IX B, IX C, and IX D. The researcher used purposive sampling to select two classes as samples, chosen by the teacher. Class IX B served as the experimental group, and Class IX A was the control group.

The study included two variables: the dependent variable (students' speaking skills) and the independent variable (the use of small group discussion). Data collection involved pretests and posttests to evaluate students' speaking proficiency before and after treatment. A pretest was administered to assess baseline speaking skills, and a posttest measured improvement following the treatment, which included small group discussions focusing on key speaking topics. The speaking tests served as the primary research instrument. The results of the tests were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the treatment. The hypothesis was tested using statistical analysis: if the t-count exceeded the t-table value, the hypothesis was accepted, indicating successful improvement in speaking skills. Conversely, if the t-table value exceeded the t-count, the hypothesis was rejected, showing no significant impact of the treatment on students' speaking skills.

3. Results and Discussion

In presenting the data, the researcher analyzed the results from the pretest and posttest to determine whether the use of small group discussions contributed positively to teaching English to students. The tests were conducted with Class IX A and IX B at SMPN 3 Banawa. The researcher designated these classes as the control and experimental groups, respectively. Class IX B served as the experimental group, while Class IX A was the control group, with the selection made through purposive sampling. A pretest was administered to assess the students' prior knowledge before implementing the small group discussion technique as the treatment. The pretest for Class IX A (control group) and Class IX B (experimental group) was conducted on October 21, 2023. The posttest for both groups was administered on November 25, 2023.

Table 1. Students' pre-test scores for experimental class

No	Initial	Analyzed Aspect		Obtained Score	Total Score= $\frac{\text{Obtain Score}}{\text{Max Score}} \times 100$	Category	Qualification
		Fluency	Appropriacy				
1	A	3	3	3	37.5	Very poor	Failed
2	AAR	2	4	8	50	Poor	Failed
3	AL	1	3	4	25	Very poor	Failed
4	AR	2	5	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
5	AS	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
6	AW	2	4	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
7	ES	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
8	FN	2	5	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
9	GR	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
10	IA	1	5	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
11	IAAP	1	5	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
12	LP	3	3	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
13	M	2	4	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
14	MA	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
15	MAL	1	5	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
16	MAZ	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
17	MM	1	5	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
18	MR	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
19	NA	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
20	RP	1	4	5	31.25	Very poor	Failed
21	RR	1	4	5	31.25	Very poor	Failed
22	RRT	1	6	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
23	SS	1	4	5	31.25	Very poor	Failed
24	SSF	1	4	5	31.25	Very poor	Failed
25	TR	1	5	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
26	ZMR	1	5	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
Total		35	125	162	1,012.5		
Mean		1.35	4.81	6.12	38.94	Very poor	Failed

After presenting the pretest results of the experimental class, it was found that almost all students fell into the very poor category, receiving a failing qualification. The researcher calculated the students' mean score using the following formula:

$$M = \frac{\Sigma x}{N} = \frac{1012,5}{26} = 38.94$$

Table 2. Students' pre-test scores for control class

No	Initial	Analyzed Aspect		Obtained Score	Total Score= $\frac{\text{Obtain Score}}{\text{Max Score}} \times 100$	Category	Qualification
		Fluency	Appropriacy				
1	A	1	1	2	12,5	Very poor	Failed
2	AA	1	5	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
3	AN	1	5	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
4	AR	2	3	5	31,25	Very poor	Failed
5	AS	2	4	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
6	ASS	2	4	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
7	AVR	1	5	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
8	B	5	2	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed
9	D	1	1	2	12,5	Very poor	Failed
10	FAR	2	5	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed
11	FNS	2	4	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
12	IS	2	5	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed
13	MA	1	6	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed

No	Initial	Analyzed Aspect		Obtained Score	Total Score= $\frac{\text{Obtain Score}}{\text{Max Score}} \times 100$	Category	Qualification
		Fluency	Appropriacy				
14	MAZ	1	6	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed
15	MDN	2	3	5	31,25	Very poor	Failed
16	MK	3	3	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
17	MR	1	6	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed
18	MS	1	1	2	12,5	Very poor	Failed
19	NA	2	5	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed
20	S	2	4	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
21	SZ	2	4	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
22	YF	1	5	6	37,5	Very poor	Failed
23	ZR	2	5	7	43,75	Very poor	Failed
Total		40	92	132	825		
Mean		1.74	4	5.74	35,87	Very poor	Failed

After presenting the pretest results of the control class, it was also found that all students fell into the very poor category, receiving a failing qualification. The researcher calculated the students' mean score using the following formula:

$$M = \frac{\Sigma Y}{N} = \frac{825}{23} = 35,87$$

Table 3. Students' post-test scores for experimental class

No	Initial	Analyzed Aspect		Obtained Score	Total Score= $\frac{\text{Obtain Score}}{\text{Max Score}} \times 100$	Category	Qualification
		Fluency	Appropriacy				
1	A	3	5	8	50	Poor	Failed
2	AAR	5	6	11	68.75	Average	Successful
3	AL	3	5	8	50	Average	Successful
4	AR	4	8	12	75	Good	Successful
5	AS	5	7	12	75	Good	Successful
6	AW	3	6	9	56.25	Average	Successful
7	ES	4	8	12	75	Good	Successful
8	FN	5	7	12	75	Good	Successful
9	GR	4	8	12	75	Good	Successful
10	IA	5	7	12	75	Average	Successful
11	IAAP	4	7	11	68.75	Average	Successful
12	LP	6	5	11	68.75	Average	Successful
13	M	5	6	11	68.75	Average	Successful
14	MA	6	8	14	87.5	Very good	Successful
15	MAL	5	7	12	75	Average	Successful
16	MAZ	6	8	14	87.5	Very good	Successful
17	MM	5	7	12	75	Average	Successful
18	MR	5	8	13	81.25	Good	Successful
19	NA	6	8	14	87.5	Good	Successful
20	RP	3	6	9	56.25	Average	Successful
21	RR	5	6	11	68.75	Average	Successful
22	RRT	4	8	12	75	Good	Successful
23	SS	4	6	10	62.5	Average	Successful
24	SSF	4	6	10	62.5	Average	Successful
25	TR	5	7	12	75	Average	Successful
26	ZMR	5	7	12	75	Average	Successful
Total		119	170	296	1,850		
Mean		4.58	6.54	11.38	71.15	Average	Successful

After presenting the posttest results of the experimental class, it was found that all students remained in the very poor category, receiving a failing qualification. The researcher calculated the students' mean score using the following formula:

$$M = \frac{\Sigma x}{N} = \frac{1850}{26} = 71.15$$

Table 4. Students' post-test scores for control class

No	Initial	Analyzed Aspect		Obtained Score	Total Score= $\frac{\text{Obtain Score}}{\text{Max Score}} \times 100$	Category	Qualification
		Fluency	Appropriacy				
1	A	3	3	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
2	AA	3	6	9	56.25	Average	Successful
3	AN	3	6	9	56.25	Average	Successful
4	AR	2	5	7	43.75	Very poor	Failed
5	AS	4	6	10	62.5	Average	Successful
6	ASS	4	6	10	62.5	Average	Successful
7	AVR	3	5	8	50	Poor	Failed
8	B	6	8	14	87.5	Average	Successful
9	D	3	3	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
10	FAR	4	7	11	68.75	Average	Successful
11	FNS	4	6	10	62.5	Average	Successful
12	IS	4	7	11	68.75	Average	Successful
13	MA	3	8	11	68.75	Average	Successful
14	MAZ	3	8	11	68.75	Average	Successful
15	MDN	4	5	9	56.25	Poor	Failed
16	MK	5	5	10	62.5	Average	Successful
17	MR	5	8	13	81.25	Average	Successful
18	MS	3	3	6	37.5	Very poor	Failed
19	NA	4	7	11	68.75	Average	Successful
20	S	4	6	10	62.5	Average	Successful
21	SZ	4	6	10	62.5	Average	Successful
22	YF	3	7	10	62.5	Average	Successful
23	ZR	4	7	11	68.75	Average	Successful
Total		85	138	223	1,393.75		
Mean		3,74	6	9,74	60.68	Average	Successful

After presenting the posttest results of the control class, it was found that all students remained in the very poor category, receiving a failing qualification. The researcher calculated the students' mean score using the following formula:

$$M = \frac{\Sigma Y}{N} = \frac{1393.75}{23} = 60.68$$

To determine whether the research hypothesis was accepted or rejected, the researcher conducted a hypothesis test based on the results of the data analysis. If the t-value (t-counted) was higher than the critical value (t-table), the alternative hypothesis (H_A) was accepted, and the null hypothesis (H₀) was rejected. This indicated that the treatment employed by the researcher was significantly effective in improving students' speaking skills. Conversely, if the t-value was lower than the critical value, the alternative

hypothesis was rejected, and the null hypothesis was accepted, suggesting that the treatment was not significantly effective in improving students' speaking skills.

The researcher found the t-value (t-counted) of this study to be 3.70462. To calculate the critical value, the degree of freedom (df) was determined using the formula $df = N_x + N_y - 2 = 26 + 23 - 2 = 47$, with a significance level of 0.05. The critical value (t-table) was found to be 2.01174. Since the t-value (3.70462) was greater than the critical value (2.01174), it was concluded that the research hypothesis was accepted, indicating that the treatment was significantly effective in improving students' speaking skills.

3.1. The Effectiveness of Small Group Discussion in Improving Students' Speaking Skills

Based on the results of the tests administered, several points need to be discussed. In this study, the researcher taught one class as the experimental group, employing a quasi-experimental research design with a one-group pretest-posttest approach. The pretest was administered on October 21, 2023, to assess the students' initial speaking skills. During the pretest, the researcher asked the students questions related to the topic to evaluate their entry-level proficiency.

After analyzing the pretest scores, the researcher conducted a treatment over four meetings. The treatment involved using the Small Group Discussion method. The researcher explained the topic to the students and instructed them to focus and limit their ideas to those directly related to the topic during their discussions. Following the discussions, the students were asked to present the results of their group discussions.

After the treatment, a posttest was administered on November 25, 2023, to assess the students' progress in speaking skills. The results indicated that the students made noticeable progress in their ability to speak English. The students actively participated in the learning process and demonstrated consistent improvement in their speaking abilities over the course of the treatment. Consequently, their speaking skills showed significant development.

The effectiveness of Small Group Discussion has also been supported by prior research. Kurniawan et al. (2023) found that Small Group Discussion can enhance students' communication skills. Additionally, Antono et al. (2020) suggested that this method improves students' reading comprehension and helps them better understand how to articulate their ideas. In the present study, students' speaking skills improved after the treatment, although some students did not achieve a passing score. Overall, the study was successfully conducted and demonstrated the potential of Small Group Discussion to enhance speaking skills.

The results above highlight that Small Group Discussion was relatively successful in developing students' speaking skills. The structured steps allowed students to engage

more actively in speaking activities, addressing issues identified in advance. Students became increasingly confident in expressing their ideas, thoughts, and feelings, and their fluency improved. Unlike conventional methods, which can be monotonous, Small Group Discussion was perceived as more enjoyable, helping to maintain students' interest in classroom activities. The well-integrated steps in the method created a positive learning environment that facilitated active participation and reduced boredom.

The researcher computed the posttest results, finding a mean score of 71.15 compared to a pretest mean score of 38.94. The improvement in the posttest scores of the experimental class was attributed to the use of Small Group Discussion in teaching speaking skills. Furthermore, the t-test analysis revealed that the t-value (t-counted = 3.70462) exceeded the critical value (t-table = 2.01174) at a 0.05 significance level with a degree of freedom (df) of 49 (calculated as $N_x + N_y - 2$). These findings indicate that applying Small Group Discussion is an effective strategy for improving students' speaking skills.

4. Conclusion

The use of Small Group Discussion can enhance the speaking skills of grade IX students, as evidenced by the mean scores of the pretest and posttest in the experimental class and the results of the treatment. These results show that students were able to practice their speaking skills and effectively retell the outcomes of their group discussions on the topic. This indicates that the speaking skills of grade IX students improved following the treatment. Additionally, the researcher compared the t-value (t-counted) with the critical t-value (t-table). With a degree of freedom (df) calculated as $N_x + N_y - 2 = 47$ and applying a significance level of 0.05, the t-counted value of 3.70462 was greater than the t-table value of 2.01174. Thus, Small Group Discussion was found to be effective in developing students' speaking fluency and appropriacy. Studies should investigate differentiated implementation strategies for various proficiency levels, learning styles, and class sizes. The development of comprehensive assessment tools is crucial to measure speaking skill improvements and evaluate group dynamics. Research should also consider cultural, contextual, and socio-economic factors, teacher training, and the psychological aspects of motivation, anxiety reduction, and self-confidence. Additionally, exploring integration with other teaching methods and specific language skill development is recommended.

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