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Enhancing English Speaking Proficiency through Group Discussions

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KEYWORDS

Group discussions, speaking proficiency, English language learning, communicative competence, quantitative research, language fluency

Abstract

The purpose of the following study to discuss the group discussion and its influence on improving the English speaking skills amongst the university students. Evidence from the study goes on to demonstrate that speaking English is the most difficult yet crucial component of learning the language, particularly in a non-native context. The question at hand in this research pertains to whether structured group discussions effectively improve the spoken English skills among students. The issue is, therefore, relevant; the need for such practice to happen in academic settings amongst students who can speak English effectively. The study used a quantitative pre-test/post-test design for the evaluation of improvement before and after intervention by implementing group discussions. Findings reported significant improvements in students' speaking fluency, accuracy, and confidence. This finding implies that the language learning curricula should be designed and taught complete with the group discussions on topics of relevance to learners. This would be a better vehicle for the development of speaking proficiency in English.

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Introduction

Speaking is one of the basic necessary elements of human communication, and it is the most direct way for making connections. Most of the people live all over the world, and they communicate in English, which has long been a subject full of interest. This is mainly because English is highly indispensable in everyday life. When communicating in any language, there are always four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Four language skills are very important for day-to-day conversation. Learning these skills, as a matter of fact, is very difficult since this is the first time in which they speak English here in Indonesia; speaking becomes the most difficult aspect by the pupils. Therefore, a teacher has to look at the very best method and strategy of teaching English. Speaking is an important talent that requires lots of experience. By speaking, kids can express and share their ideas, feelings, and knowledge with one another. Speaking is a production skill that is directly and objectively observable, though such observations are always mediated through the correctness and effectiveness of the test-taker's listening ability, so the reliability and the validity of an oral production test are reduced. To improve students' motivation in class speaking, the teacher has to give equal chances for all pupils to speak up, using various methods like solo presentations and group work. Many students face the challenge of trouble in

locating speaking skills. For example, there is no interest in mastering the second language in ordinary everyday conversation. They are too reluctant and frightened to take part in it. Thus, small group discussions can enhance the speaking skills of the students. There are three reasons for which we may use small-group discussion to improve our speaking skills. First, discussion is used to enhance teacher-student contact and student-student conversations in the class. Second, debate encourages real personal engagement and learning. First, help the learners understand and establish a more positive approach to learning, learning may be on materials, skills, attitudes, or procedures; thirdly, it helps in assisting the students in developing more responsible and self-governing study habits. In the second part of the course, this fact is highlighted through lectures and small group discussions, with the students cast as the main players in their learning. The students might be more flexible and be actively asking questions and describing ideas, giving a point of view to carry on the problem question under consideration. Teachers help children become more self-focused and open about asking questions, sharing ideas, or expressing themselves to the maximum, so children remain self-focused and open the issue or the problem they are dealing with to the maximum. They noted a problem, developed a solution based on it, and with their creative problem-solving skills, were able to come up with a conclusion, proving that indeed, if children are just given a chance to express themselves, then they are going to be more confident. Three are the small group talks to help us enhance our ability to speak in public. The first discussion is louder speaking with the teacher and the students. The second discussion is purposed to bring deep social conversations and learn, where the social learning will be achieved in the process. This approach helps: Procedures, attitudes, and skills can be learned. Third, it helps bring students into a new higher range of autonomous and responsible maturity. Therefore, a group discussion aims to provide and exchange information on some issue, together with analysis and evaluation in search of agreement on general findings. The purpose of this research is to show if a group discussion can increase the speaking activity in English and how we can increase the same.

Literature Review

In this way, the acquisition of spoken second language requires a complex interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic skills, whereby learners have to be able to effectively manage a situation of free-flowing conversation. Other determinants of oral performance include maturation, aural skills, socio-cultural knowledge, affective aspects (e.g., anxiety), and motivation (Dincer, 2017; Richards, 2008; Shumin, 2002; Tarone, 2005; Zhang & Head,. Therefore, the difficulty to gain fluency in spoken English becomes something very big that one may spend a lot of time and effort on (Dincer, 2017; Kawai, 2008).

Proficiency in spoken English remains a highly sought-after skill since the proficiency in any language often relates to speaking it at a communicative level (Pawlak, 2018). In a modern globalised context, most of the students are aimed at achieving speaking proficiency, which is regarded as the most demanding among the four basic language skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking (Dincer, 2017; Zhang & Head, 2009). Still, with the development of technology, the majority of learners have few opportunities to come into contact with spoken language outside the

classroom, which puts some obstacles in their way towards fluency (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013; Kawai, 2008; Pawlak, 2014, 2018; Ruixue et al., 2012). Besides, the other impending challenge to the EFL teachers and learners is the national examinations' focus on communicative competence skills, rather than written skills by some (Ruixue et al., 2012). Researching what elements make up an effective language learning strategy uncovers features that are common among successful learners. Most of these people are polished speakers who have memorised how to speak, then recite set phrases, and who have attained accuracy rather than fluency (Takeuchi, 2003; Kawai, 2008). Advanced learners also implement the strategies of dictation, read-aloud exercises, and use multimedia resources in developing vocabulary and pronunciation (Takeuchi, 2003).

In an ingenious study, Kawai (2008) researched the role of task-based strategy instruction through electronic chat programs to improve the students' spoken English performance. Their results are such that electronic chats could relieve feelings of intimidation during oral face-to-face interactions and help even the playing field for shy learners to speak more English. The feedback from the experienced English speakers had one thing in common: that is, their importance in various practices like reading out loud, singing, and doing simulated talking to get over stage fright of speaking in public and raising the confidence level for the same.

Marzec-Stawiarska (2015) went ahead to look more closely into the relationship between anxiety and speaking proficiency and found that stress scores and worry were high in the less proficient learner, but also in those who were proficient, fluency and pronunciation in speaking situations. Along this line, Pawlak (2015) further noted other communication strategies like non-verbal cues, negotiation for the correction of one's own errors, and meaning to increase clarity and comprehension in conversation among advanced learners.

Recent studies in this area, such as Lee and Heinz (2016) or Pawlak (2018), assure that memorisation, repetition, and broad exposure of the learner to English in activities remain valuable tools for speaking skills development. Other studies further emphasise the importance of metacognitive and social strategies in various stages of task performance, therefore showing a general need for planning, monitoring, and engaging in interactive practices that will be developed to foster different stages of language development. This stream of research, however, points to very many questions that remain open with regard to the optimal development of speaking skills. It therefore means that prior literature encourages the need to further investigate the experiences of successful language learners to be in an even better position of recommending more precise, experience-based tips for improving speaking proficiency (Dincer, 2017; Kawai, 2008; Lee & Heinz, 2016; Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009; Pawlak, 2018). These successful travels could provide a better insight into language learning than the resources they use and would thus provide additional pedagogical contributions to the field.

Speaking ability is crucial to effective communication. Fluency is necessary not only in our native language but also when utilising a foreign language. Achieving speaking fluency is particularly challenging in vocational high schools. Teachers must discover effective methods to assist students

in mastering these skills. To facilitate learning and maintain focus on each student, even in group settings, teachers should be innovative and employ strategies that allow for individual student supervision. Utilising small groups can encourage students to speak more and provide constructive criticism, helping to prevent boredom as they work on their speaking skills.

Speech is one of the most important channels of effective communication. It is mandatory that one is fluent in the native language, including expression in foreign languages. Vocational High Schools bring out the problem of fluency in speech on a broad day. Teachers should find effective ways through which students understand these skills. The teaching aids that would best facilitate learning and keep the concentration of each student even in groups are skills. Teachers should be creative and use methods that give them control over every student, such as individual supervision. The usage of small groups can encourage speaking and constructive criticism between students, while at the same time they would not be too bored because they are practicing their speaking skills.

Small-group discussion is likely a way by which both teachers and students develop speaking ability. At the same time, it makes it easier for the teacher to focus on specific students and, in turn, help them with feedback. The purpose of this study is to reveal how far small group discussion in class increases student speaking proficiency. This research has involved participants who study at a senior high school in Lampung Province. The information was collected using a questionnaire. Research shows that small group discussion enhances speaking skills; this is because the students are able to share their ideas and get critical feedback, which are very necessary qualities for young learners. (Mandasari, B., 2022) This study is aimed to investigate how the discussion activity affects students' fluency in speaking. Data for this research were collected using the tool of classroom observation. This study was done at semester one of the academic year 2019–2020. It consisted of 60 respondents: 20 English language teachers and 40 female First Common Year (FCY) students at Al-Jouf University. Des. The results from the research showed that a good number of conversational activities, especially those eliciting and entailing the speaking skill performance, had been excluded. English teachers should be able to benefit from this study to improve their English teaching. This is through the use of varied conversational activities in a class that can make them urge the student to speak and motivate them to build their level of fluency and confidence. This ultimately improves the speaking proficiency of the pupils. (Mohammed, A. M. K. A., & Ahmed, R. B. A., 2021).

The study carried out by Ghani (2013) observed behaviour using a behaviour observation list around which a counselling program was designed using role play. The program involved encouraging through more interaction, emotional intelligence, and social norm in an attempt to reduce even the signs of non-consensual social behaviour among young children. The results would provide evidence for the strategies effectively applied in even encouraging healthier social behaviours among the kindergarteners.

This research aimed at helping in improving the conversational skills of students in ANU. The sample was made up of twenty students who were taking English language classes—eight male and twelve female students. At the same time, the sample was mostly composed of senior and junior students, and freshmen mostly consisted of black students. In line with this view, researchers applied the technique of random sampling, while semi-structured interviews were the principal data collection tool in this study aimed at arriving at its purposes. Major findings of this study provided that ANU students are facing several problems related to speaking, which included bewilderment, embarrassment, and mispronunciation of words. The study also identified that students do not develop good pronunciation in their speaking classes back in school. Moreover, the study found out that common problems were identified and practical recommendations were given to find ways of improving speaking proficiency. These include motivating students to be active in speaking the English language in and out of the classroom and the use of modern social media to do communication in the English language (Al-Eiadeh & Al-Khasawneh, 2016).

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative research approach with elements of pre-test/post-test research design type in trying to establish the effectiveness of group discussion in enhancing the speaking proficiency among students. This design allowed me to collect numerical data before and after the intervention; in this way, it assured clear measures of changes in speaking skills because of group discussions. The design allowed the study to exercise control to a level that any improvement observed in speaking skills could be directly attributed to the intervention and not influenced to a great extent by outside variables.

Participants

It will be a random sample of 50 university students chosen from a larger population, with the aim of making sure that diversity, not only in language proficiency levels, is represented well but also in academic fields. The sampling technique of random sampling was sure to admit each individual making up the student body, hence achieving an all-round representation, which is key to the generalisability of study findings. Ethical consideration was that the participants were appropriately informed of the purpose of the study and procedures of the research, and a drawn consent for partaking in the study was done.

Materials

The standardised pre-test and post-test materials used in this study are the assessments that were developed for quantifying the speaking proficiency of the participants. The main fluency test criteria included fluency and pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and the use of vocabulary. Furthermore, great attention was given to the quality of the sound recording equipment used during

the recording of all test sessions and the group discussions. These recordings provided a consistent and complete data source against which to evaluate speaking improvements.

Procedures

The study commenced by giving all the participants a pre-test as the baseline measure of their speaking skills. Afterwards, for a period of 8 weeks, the participants were involved in structured group discussions that were conducted once every week. Each of these discussions was guided by a list of predetermined topics and subtopics aimed at encouraging active, balanced participation from all group members. Once all the group discussions were concluded, the same assessment tool administered in the pre-test was also administered as a post-test. The test was administered for pre- and post-test measures of changes in speaking ability following intervention.

Formation of group discussions

Group formation process

The group discussions had to be structured in a way that effectual dissemination of information and learning was taking place. The participants were divided into small groups of about five students. The number was chosen in such a way that both diversity in interaction and opportunity for meaningful contributions could be provided for all the participants.

Criteria for group formation

Care was taken in structuring the groups based on the diversity and balance of participation. The students were assigned to groups with mixed language proficiency levels, discipline or content background, and even personal background. The other strategy was to present the students in a situation reminiscent of the actual communicative context in which the speaker had a diverse audience with which to communicate. It actually encouraged students from other schools to share with us their perspectives, hence making our discussions rich.

Role of facilitators

Each group was assigned a facilitator, typically a teaching assistant or a trained peer leader, who was responsible for guiding the discussions. Facilitators were provided with a framework that included discussion topics, prompts, and strategies to encourage shy participants to speak. Their role was crucial in managing the flow of conversation, ensuring that no single participant dominated the discussions, and that all members had equal opportunities to express their views.

Discussion topics

All topics, which have been considered, were disclosed in a very interesting and relevant way to academic and personal interest of the listener. The topics ranged from current affairs and cultural disputes to hypothetical situations and problem-solving tasks. The variety was meant to maintain the interest of the students and encourage them to use various language structures and vocabulary.

Monitoring and feedback

Over the course of the eight weeks, group discussions were monitored weekly by the research team. Both facilitators and participants were given feedback on ways to finesse the discussion approach and make changes to topics when necessary. This monitoring has thus helped keep the involvement high and the discussions on the effective track to contribute to the student's development of the language.

Figure 1

Process flow of group discussion formation in education



Integration with the Broader Study Goals

Such a structured and well-managed approach to forming and conducting group discussions helped achieve the goals of the study. Settling an active and supportive learning environment, the discussions proved successful in raising the speaking proficiency of the participants from the pre-test to the post-test. This is very important to the success of the intervention, wherein valuable inputs have emerged over the process of developing spoken English skills with interaction.

Data Analysis

The scores from pre-tests and post-tests were entered into statistical software for analysis. The paired t-test was the main analytic approach used by the authors in this research paper, and it checks on two related groups' means (in this study, the mean of the scores for the same participants before and after intervention). The analysis underlined that there was a statistical difference at the level of improvement in the speaking skills of the participants; therefore, the method of group discussion is effective. Summaries of the responses in the questionnaires were made in observation data, forming an overview of attitudes and group processes among the participants using descriptive statistics.

The applied methodology actually captured well the effect of the group discussions program on the improvement of English-speaking proficiency among university students. It had given a really sturdy ground for the quantitative analysis and interpretation of this intervention's outcomes.

Results

The combination of empirical data with student feedback is essential in developing effective educational strategies that boost English speaking skills within a university set-up. Analysis from the two visual data representations: Graph 1, bar graph, and Graph 2, pie chart, was quite insightful to the preferences and perceptions of students over collective language improvement activities.

Graph 1 clearly shows that students highly prefer teaching methods with interactive and collaborative learning. Approximately 77% prefer study groups, while 37.2% prefer workshops and discussions. English discussion clubs follow at 46.5%. Taken together, these data points suggest a student body more predisposed to peer-oriented, discussion-based learning environments as opposed to lecture-based settings. Activities of speech and presentation also lay much weight on the focus on speaking in public and performance-based learning that aid in language development.

Consistent with this, Graph 2 confirms that most of the students attribute that improvement to the increased confidence they have to speak English. It is this quantitative statement that strengthens the case for activities to be integrated into the curriculum; that is, confidence is an important criterion for language development.

Graph 1

Impact of Group Discussions on English Speaking Confidence



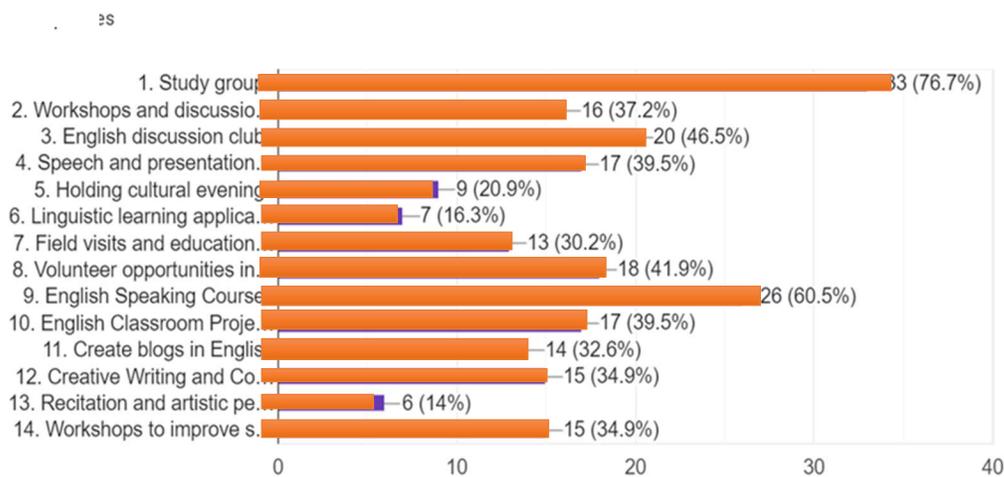
In synthesising these insights, the responsive learning methods clearly discernible among university students are those that are social and collaborative in nature. This is probably because such contexts permit not only the exercise of language skills but also create a sense of community with mutual encouragement among learners. Furthermore, what is more appreciated is not merely the activity of interaction conducted in groups, but the range of formats and contexts of practical

experience in English. For instance, other activities that were deemed appropriate were cultural evenings and involvement with language learning applications. These contexts provide learners with various opportunities that help them to negotiate through the different registers of language use, which they need in order to be competent language users. 30.2% of the students opined that field trips and educational tours were useful for experiential learning outside the classroom in language development. Besides, engaging in authentic language use in different contexts further boosts not only linguistic competencies but also enhances cultural understanding.

Graph 2

Student Perceptions of the Most Effective Collective Activities for Enhancing English Speaking Skills

In your opinion which is the best activity that students can participate in to improve their English speaking skills collectively ?



That is indeed effective, where 41.9% agreed on the volunteer opportunity having a link between language learning and community service; it gives the possibility for practicing English in naturalistic settings. This is a practice in the real world and often influenced with immediacy and purpose that can accelerate acquisition and strengthen competence in the use of language. Though English speaking courses are ranked sixth in preference, they account for a good number of learners—60.5% of them with a positive response rate. Such classes tend to provide a counterpart of structured learning in areas such as grammar, vocabulary development, and practice in pronunciation to the far more flowing and dynamic practice found in group discussions. This shows a social nature—the preference rate of English clubs at 32.6%. It points out that the peer interaction in informal learning environments can really be of key and vital role. In this kind of set-up, students are allowed to experiment with language, make errors in a non-threatening environment, and get immediate correction or feedback on their errors. This is very paramount to the development of speaking proficiency.

Approximately 35% of the preference rate of both creative writing and competitions highlights the significance of both expressive and competitive elements in language learning. The creative writing development of the linguistic creativity and ability to express complex ideas, while the

contest can push students towards competitiveness and desire to improvement through the challenge and comparison. Recitation and artistic performance, though less favoured, each with a 14% preference rate, still play a critical role in enhancing language skills through pronunciation, intonation, and the emotive aspects of language.

As many as 34.9% prefer workshops that specifically address speaking skills, indicating focused instruction or practice in speaking. These workshops at times teach learners strategies on how to avoid common language barriers, hence increasing their spoken communication. Synthesising the insights of Graphs 1 and 2, the fact that stands amply clear is that students prefer a multi-pronged strategy toward learning English offered through structured courses, peer interactions, and actual practice of the language in real-world situations. An approach to ascertain student needs, based on data, underlines that the learning environment has to respond to students' preferences to allow maximal potential for language enhancement.

As much as 34.9% would then prefer workshops, specifically on how to address speaking skills, a silent need for focused instructions or practice for speaking. Some of these workshops actually teach learners strategies to avoid common language barriers and thereby increase their spoken communication. Looking at Graphs 1 and 2, one thing becomes amply clear: English learning provided through systematic courses, peer interaction, and actual practice of the language in real-life situations is a preferred multi-pronged strategy for the students. An approach aiming to establish student needs, based on data, underlines that the learning environment has to respond to students' preferences in order to allow maximal potential for language enhancement.

Discussion

These findings demonstrated remarkable improvements in English speaking skills for the university students who were involved in the group discussions conducted. They specifically appeared in three dimensions: fluency, accuracy, and confidence in English speaking. Pre-tests and post-tests quantified these outcomes and provided robust data in support of the efficacy of the intervention. The results showed remarkable improvement among the participants in speaking fluent English. The comparison of the pre-test and post-test data revealed remarkable change. It was seen that there were fewer numbers of hesitations, and the continuity of speech increased. It is evident from the above that consistent practice of discussing varied topics by group discussion made learners think and respond faster in English, which is the prerequisite for achieving fluency in language.

Another significant finding of this study showed the improvements in grammatical accuracy. While comparing the pre-test and post-test scores, it was seen that the participants made comparatively fewer grammatical mistakes in their spoken English, going on to show that the same improved further after undertaking group discussions. This improvement can be attributed to the fact that the discussions had an element of peer learning, seeing that students would learn from the corrections of each other and consciously apply more grammatical rules in their speech. Perhaps the most profound impact observed was on the participants' confidence levels. The results obtained

from the post-test reveal that they are more confident in speaking English. This increment in confidence is very important in that it does not only boost the readiness for speaking but also builds the effectiveness in speech delivery by reducing nervousness and promoting assertiveness in the expression of ideas. The findings of this research, therefore, support other literatures in language acquisition that argue it is through interactive practice that proficiency in a language is gained. The development in fluency, accuracy, and confidence suggests that getting learners involved in communicative activities within a supportive group environment has huge potential for great language development. This goes hand in hand with the findings of Dincer (2017) and Kawai (2008), who note that practical engagement in speaking tasks underlines the mastery of language skills.

The interlink between language proficiency and confidence is paramount. From the observation of Marzec-Stawiarska (2015), anxiety can largely impede performance in a particular language. The overall increase in both fluency and accuracy, likely brought about in our subjects, established that indeed emotional and psychological factors are imperative in language learning. This aspect of language education calls for further exploration, particularly how such confidence-building measures can be systematically integrated into language programs to make it an outcome-oriented program. Practically speaking, this means designing the language learning curricula. Instructors are able to design much more lively and interactive learning experiences that mirror real-life language use by the incorporation of structured group discussions. This builds not only on language skills but also on soft skills involving learning to work in a group, ability for critical thinking, and developing public speaking skills.

Future studies might consider different formats and frequencies of carrying out group discussions in order to maximise language learning strategies. Most studies are expected to use measures of these discussions in different linguistic and cultural settings to enhance generalisation. Further exploration of the combination of technologies to include the use of Virtual Reality and online discussion forums can also aid in identifying the applicability and flexibility of this approach in digital environments.

This paper is valuable in that it contributes insights into pedagogical strategies that can effectively aid learners in enhancing their English-speaking proficiency. The positive results emanating are of great importance and largely contribute to the lively and interactive communicative practices in language education, which are gearing up for new frontiers in approaches to teaching.

Conclusion

This study undoubtedly proved that the sensational development of the English-speaking skill of university students through regular, structured small group discussions. In this way, after regular, small group discussions, participants experienced improvements in various spoken English features, such as fluency, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. These results were consistent with the prediction that interactive and collaborative learning environments are important to effective language. Conclusion is drawn based on the robust data analysis with pre- and post-test

scores, which revealed statistically significant improvements that are directly attributable to the intervention of group discussions.

This particular point supports the idea that practical, conversation-based activities can serve as a strong instrument in language education to develop students' communicative competencies within a non-native English speaking context. What this study brings out is how important it is to set up a supportive learning environment that may help the students be in a position to participate in meaningfully, context-rich discussions without fear of being judged. Such an environment enhances not only the linguistic ability but also builds the confidence of the student, which, in fact, is very important for language learning. The role of the facilitators was also underscored in guiding discussions, ensuring equal participation, and managing group dynamics, which cumulatively contribute to the overall effectiveness of the sessions. Implications of this research go further than just the classroom setting. Educators and curriculum designers may opt to incorporate structured group discussions in their language programs to assist in developing students' speaking skills and prepare them for real-world communication in English. Additionally, the results could influence policy decisions on teaching methodologies in language education, advocating for more interactive and learner-centred approaches. The success of this study has thus opened up further areas of research, especially concerning the long-term effects on language retention and its implications for other language learning contexts. Future research may further investigate the influence of virtual group discussions, considering the fast rate of technological integration in a hybrid or fully online educational setting.

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