

**IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL
USING GROUP DISCUSSION
(Experimental study on the First Grade Students of Senior High School)**

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ABSTRACT

This article is written based on the research done by the writer as an English teacher at Wijaya Kusuma Senior High School Surakarta. There are two aims on this research. They are : (1) to test the hypothesis that group discussion can improve the students' speaking skill of the first students of Wijaya Kusuma Senior High School, and (2) to describe how group discussion improves students' speaking skill. The writer used classroom action research as the method in conducting this research. And the technique used is group discussion. Action research occurs through a dynamic and complementary process, which consists of four essential moments; of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The data are obtained from the observation and research. There are two cycles on the research done by the writer. Each cycle consisted of three meetings. Every meeting covered greeting, main activity and closing. The research shows improvements of their scoring and performance. On pre-test, the mean of their score was 3.7, but in the post-test 1, their mean improved to be 5,6667. And its improvement was continued on the post-test 2, where their mean become 7,6667. The result shows that there are some improvements on the students' speaking skill quantitatively and qualitatively.

Keywords: *action research, speaking skill, group discussion*

A. Introduction

According to the 2006 English Curriculum and its supplement, the importance of the curriculum is that the students are able to communicate in English by mastering the whole skills. However, it is not easy to master all skills. There are so many difficulties in mastering each skill. And English as a foreign language, the most difficult thing for the students to expand is speaking.

Speaking is an activity used by someone to communicate with other(s). It takes place everywhere and has become part of our daily activities. When someone speaks, he or she interacts and uses the language to express his or her ideas, feeling and thought. He or she also shares information with other(s) through communication.

Speaking skill is partly a reflection of someone whether he/she masters this language or not. Speaking is one of the main purposes of language learning in that it is an ability to transfer some ideas to other people clearly and correctly. In other words, in other word he or she can communicate his or her ideas well to other people.

Through pre-observation it is known that many students, especially in Wijaya Kusuma vocational high school said that speaking is the most difficult skill to master. It requires not only knowledge, in terms of mastering vocabulary and grammar, but also a desire and confidence in speaking English because it has to be practiced not only learnt.

The problem appears in the desire of the students in practicing to speak in English. Most of them do not have any willingness to speak. If they are asked by the teacher to speak up, they just keep quiet and say nothing. And when the writer asked them during the interview,

the reasons are various. Some students said that they can't speak because they lack of vocabularies and they also do not have any confidents to speak up. Sherly, one of the 1st grade students of Wijaya Kusuma, stated, "*Karena saya gak punya banyak vocab atau kosa kata, trus saya juga gak pede*". This implies that the difficulty of mastering speaking is due to her lack of vocabularies and confidence.

The writer also found the same information when she interviewed the English teacher about the reasons why the students in this classroom do not want to speak up. The English teacher stated, "*Penguasaan vocab anak-anak itu sangat kurang, jadi kalo vocab mereka kurang, otomatis speaking mereka juga kurang*". This statement shows that their teacher knows that their students' vocabulary mastery is very limited, so if they have limited vocabulary, they will have limited competence in speaking.

It is supported by the data from their teacher about their score of English lesson during the first semester. It shows that their score is still low though there are some students who have got a good score. From 35 students, there are just two students who got 8, seven students who got 7, and the others got 6. This result is far from satisfaction for their score in language learning. Therefore, it needs a treatment to increase their result.

From the information founded through observation, interview, and questioner, there is a method that students like most and it is often applied by the teacher. It is group discussion. Group discussion is one of the best methods of learning speaking in foreign language. It helps the students to improve their speaking skill. In group, the students will have opportunity to use English among themselves and practice each other with their friends. Practicing speaking with their friends will increase their confidence in saying some words without any worry whether they say some words incorrect or not. Besides that, learning in group will improve their vocabularies mastery.

Based on the problem mentioned above, the problem of the research can be formulated as follows; (1) Can group discussion improve the students' speaking skill of the first grade students of Wijaya Kusuma Vocational High School?, (2) How does the group discussion improve the students' speaking skill?

The aims of the study are as follows; (1) To prove that group discussion can improve the students' speaking skill of the first students of Wijaya Kusuma Vocational High School, (2) To describe how group discussion improves students' speaking skill.

The benefits expected from the study include the following; (1) To make additional contribution to other education research dealing with four basic English skills, especially speaking skill, (2) To give additional information to students to find the most suitable strategy to improve their speaking skill, (3) To contribute additional information to students and teachers on the effectiveness of group discussion to improve students' speaking skill.

B. Literature Review

1. Speaking

Speaking is one of the skills that should be mastered by the students in learning English. Bygate (1997:vii) believes that speaking is in many ways an undervalued skill. Perhaps this is because we can almost all speak, and so take the skill too much for granted. Speaking is often thought of as a 'popular' form of an expression which uses the unprestigious 'colloquial' register: literacy skills are on the whole more prized. This relative neglect many perhaps also be due to the fact that speaking is transient and improvised, and can therefore be viewed as facile, superficial, or glib.

Lewis and Hill (1993:54) state that speaking is a process that covers many things in addition to the pronunciation of individual sounds. Widdowson (1996:54) believes that speaking is simply the physical embodiment of abstract system or of the grammatical system of language or both.

Burkart (1998:11) says that speaking is an activity which involves the areas of knowledge, they are the mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary); it is the use of the right words in the right order with the right pronunciation. The functions (transaction and interaction); it is knowing the clarity of message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/relationship building). And the social and cultural rules and norms (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pause between speakers, relative roles of participant); it is understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason.

Mackey (2001:79) defines that speaking is an oral expression that involves not only the use of right patterns of rhythm and intonation but also right order to convey the right meaning. While Thornbury (2005: IV) says that speaking is an interactive and requires the ability to cooperate in the management of speaking turn. Clark and Clark (1997: 223) state that in speaking, a speaker expresses his thought and feeling in words, phrases, and sentences following a certain structure which regulates the meaningful units and meaning of sentences.

It can be concluded that speaking is an oral expression of an interactive process of constructing meaning which involves phonological and grammatical system and requires the ability to cooperate in the management of speaking turn in order to give information and ideas.

2. Group Discussion

Kidsvatter (1996:242) states that a small-group discussion dividing the large classroom into small groups of students to achieve specific objectives permits students to assume more responsibility for their own learning, develop social and leadership skills and become involved in an alternative instructional approach.

According to Hoover (1997:13), discussion is the process of talking things over among two or more persons, preferably face to face. He adds that the total discussion process ideally is a cooperative effort on the part of a number of individuals to work together as a group, through the exchange of thought orally, toward some group objectives. Risk states that discussion means thoughtful consideration of the relationship involved in the topic or problem under study. Ur (1997:2) says that thinking out some problems and situations together through verbal interchange of ideas is simply called as to discuss. From those definitions, it can be concluded that discussion is the exchange of information, opinion, and ideas.

The positive effect of group discussion is explained by Ornstein. He states that dividing students into small group seems to provide an opportunity for students to become more actively engaged in learning and for teacher to monitor students' progress better. It can also enhance students' cooperation and social skills (2000).

Penny Ur (1998: 3) states that a discussion that works is primarily one in which as many students as possible say as much as possible. A further characteristic of a successful discussion is the apparent motivation of the participants: their attention to the speaker(s),

their expression- that they are reacting to the humor, seriousness, or difficulty of the ideas being expressed.

C. Research Method

The research was carried out to the 1st grade students of Wijaya Kusuma Senior High School, class 1A. It consists of 35 students. They are 2 boys and 33 girls. The research chooses the 1st grade students because the age level of these students is supposed to be able to speak out the language as means of communication.

The method used in this research is classroom action research. Gregory, Kemmis and McTaggart (in Richard, 2000:12) says that action research is used to refer to teacher-initiated classroom investigation which seek to increase the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching and learning, and to bring about change in classroom practices. While Bogdan and Biklen (in Burns, 1999:30) states that action research is the systematic collection of information that is designed to bring about social change.

There are two kinds of data which the researcher collected. The first one was quantitative data, and the second one was the qualitative data. Quantitative data refers to students' speaking scores that she took both in pre-test and in post-test. Qualitative data deals with any occurrences and changes happen during classroom activities. Students' behaviour, classroom situation, the process of classroom activity are the examples of qualitative data. The researcher collected qualitative data by using observation, field notes, recording and interview. Observation is closely watching and noting classroom events, happening or interaction, either as a participant in the classroom (participant observation) or as an observer of another teacher classroom (non-participant observation). Observation can be combined with field notes, recording and logs or journals. Field notes are descriptions and accounts of observed events, including non-verbal information, physical settings, group structures, interaction between participants.

Quantitative data, in this case students' score of speaking is analyzed by searching for its average score of each aspect of speaking competence. Then, she calculated the average score of students' speaking for the whole performance. At the end, she compared the result of students' pre-test score and post-test score. Therefore, chances in students' quantitative achievement could be monitored.

Qualitative data were analyzed by using Constant Comparative Method as suggested by Strauss and Glesser in Moleong (2004: 288-289). They say in general, the data analysis includes data reduction, data classification, data synthesis, and ended with action hypothesis.

D. Research Findings and Discussion

Based on the problem found out, the researcher decided to use group discussion method to improve the students' speaking skill. There are two cycles done in this research. Each cycle consists of three meetings. In each cycle there must be planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Before the writer applied the group discussion method to teach, she conducted pre-test to figure out the students' ability in speaking.

In the first treatment, when the researcher told them that they had to stay in group to have a discussion, they were really happy. In group, they could help each other, and could practice about what they were going to speak. There was a positive change. In group, they wanted to

speak. It implied that their willingness to speak was increased. It was because they had more opportunities to speak in their each group.

In the second treatment, they were much better. If in the first treatment they still copied the vocabulary in their article, in second treatment they could produce their own words related to the topic. It is proven that in group, the students can get more opportunities to speak.

As stated by Ornstein (2000), dividing students into small group seems to provide an opportunity for students to become more actively engaged in learning and for teacher to monitor students' progress better. It can also enhance students' cooperation and social skills.

Before the researcher conducted the treatment, their active involvement in the lesson was very low. They just kept quiet and only listened to what the teacher said, because they did not know what to bespeak. But in group, they had responsibility for their task and had to do it together with their friends. In the first treatment, it seemed that they could cooperate with their friend in their own group and it made them more active. They also shared with one another the vocabularies whose meaning they did not know.

In second treatment, the sharing of vocabularies was increased because they had to find their own words to build sentences representing their idea. They also could cooperate better and be more creative in creating their own statements.

From what the researcher has discussed above, it is true that group discussion can improve the students' speaking skill. Through the pre-test, the writer obtained the students' mean of score. It was only 3.7 since they did not have any willingness to speak. Then it increased by 5.6667 in the post test 1 and continued to increase up to 7.6667 in post test 2. It was an adequate positive change, given that there was only a limit time in conducting the treatments. But even though it is not a great result, referring to its criteria of assessment, time of research, and the students' level, it is not a failure.

The improvements of the students' speaking score is not the only thing showing the success of the research. Moreover, the improvement of the students' enthusiasm and their cheerfulness shown during the research was the best thing that the researcher got as her own satisfaction. Their happiness and spirit increased by this method also become the evidence of the success which could not be numerically measured. Besides, being closer to the students is also an important thing for the teacher since she could understand them and respect them as well.

From the treatment conducted, it is true that group discussion provides the students more opportunities to speak.

E. Conclusions, Implementation and Suggestions

Students' achievement in speaking which was measured quantitatively increased. It was known through pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2. Before the treatment, the researcher conducted pre-test, and the mean of pre-test was 3.7. After the first treatment, she conducted post-test 1 and the mean was 5.6667. The last meeting of second treatment, she conducted post-test 2, and the mean was 7.6667. It showed that there improvements in their result. Besides, it was also qualitatively increased. It could be seen from their improvement of vocabulary and active involvement during the speaking class.

Group discussion is one of the best methods of learning speaking in foreign language. It helps the students improve their speaking skill. In group, the students have opportunity to

use English among themselves and practice each other with their friends. Practicing speaking with their friends increases their confidence in saying some words without any worry whether they say some wrong words or not. Besides that, learning in group improves their vocabulary mastery.

Some suggestions are addressed to the students, particularly senior high school students who learn English. They should learn how to use the language in real life. One of the ways to easily practice it is to experience group discussion. The keys are to pick up interesting topics which are genuine reason for them to speak and not to be afraid of making mistakes. Indeed, they can use group discussion in everyday life, such as discussing their problems and finding the solutions with their friends. If those are accompanied by communicative English, speaking will flow as a river reaches ocean.

In conducting classroom activities, especially speaking activities, teacher should have several references of teaching techniques, one of which is group discussion. Conducting group discussion is one of the alternative ways of promoting speaking activities to avoid the students' boredom. It gives students a non-threatening condition. As it is stated before, the key is giving appropriate topics. For teachers, they should encourage students to speak without fear and bring the procedures of leading group discussion in a fun way.

The writer realizes that this research makes a little contribution, so further research is required. The study of improving students' speaking skill by doing group discussion from other point of view is needed to meet the need of this knowledge. Besides, in this study the writer only deals with the first grade students of senior high school with certain characteristics, whereas there are other grades of students with some other characteristics which are not analyzed here.

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Appendix I

Scoring Rubrics for speaking

Aspect for scoring	Score				
	5	4	3	2	1
Flow of thinking					
Sentences production	5	4	3	2	1
Words Production					
Micro skill					
Pronunciation	5	4	3	2	1
Grammar and structures (tense, gender, preposition, kind of words, concord)	5	4	3	2	1
Vocabularies mastery	5	4	3	2	1
Psychological Performance	5	4	3	2	1

Notes:

1. Flow of thinking

It is the way the students organize the knowledge about the topics in discussion in a correct sequence. The lack knowledge and disability of organizing the knowledge may disturb the performance of speaking.

The flow of thinking needs a sufficient knowledge. If they don't know about the topic, they can not say anything. Finally it affects their sentences' production

1. Micro skill

It is the way the students organize the features of the language.

They are:

- a. Pronunciation
- b. Grammar and structures
- c. Vocabularies mastery

2. Psychological performance

It is related to the students attitude and behaviour in performing their speaking, their readiness, confidence, brave, self approval, etc.

Score classified

1. Flow of thinking

Sentences

- a. Score 5 if they know about the topic and can produce more than 20 sentences
- b. Score 4 if they know about the topic and can produce 16-20 sentences
- c. Score 3 if they know about the topic and can produce 11-15 sentences
- d. Score 2 if they know about the topic and can only produce 6-10 sentences
- e. Score 1 if they know about the topic but only produce less than 5 sentences

Words

- a. Score 5 if they can produce more than 120 words
- b. Score 4 if they can produce 91-120 words
- c. Score 3 if they can produce 61-90 words
- d. Score 2 if they can produce 31-60 words
- e. Score 1 if they can produce less than 30 words

2. Micro Skill

Grammar and structures, Pronunciation

- a. Score 5 if they can show the ability in each category fluently and perfectly without any mistakes in a good and correct arrangement
- b. Score 4 if they can show the ability in each category fluently and perfectly within less than 10% mistakes from whole words produced and the arrangements are good enough
- c. Score 3 if they can show the ability in each category well within 10% - 20% mistakes from whole words produced and the arrangements are good enough
- d. Score 2 if they can show the ability in each category within 20% - 30% mistakes from whole words produced and in fair arrangements
- e. Score 1 if they can show their ability in poor arrangements with more than 30% mistakes from whole words produced

Vocabularies

- a. Score 5 if they can mention more than 70 kinds of vocabularies
- b. Score 4 if they can mention 51-70 kinds of vocabularies
- c. Score 3 if they can mention 31-50 kinds of vocabularies
- d. Score 2 if they can mention 11-30 kinds of vocabularies
- e. Score 1 if they can mention less than 10 kinds of vocabularies

3. Psychological Performance

- a. Score 5 if they can speak clearly and fluently, confident with showing eye contact, and good performance (neatness, completeness of the attributes)
- b. Score 4 if they can speak clearly and fluently, confident with showing eye contact and fair performance (neatness, completeness of the attributes)
- c. Score 3 if they can speak clearly and fluently, do not show eye contact and fair performance
- d. Score 2 if they can speak clearly but not fluently (or reverse), nervous and fair performance
- e. Score 1 if they can speak but not clear and fluent, nervous and poor performance

Final Score

$$\text{Final score} = \frac{\text{ex each score}}{3} = 10$$

Which:

- 6 : count of the aspects
- Each score : score for each aspect