

# IMPROVING SPEAKING USING SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

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**Abstract:** This research is aimed at identifying how the use of small group discussion can improve the speaking skill of the tenth-grade students of a state senior high school in Surakarta and the classroom situations when small group discussion is implemented in speaking class. A classroom research was carried out from March until June 2013 in the X-4 class of a state senior high school in Surakarta. The data were collected through observation, interview, questionnaire, and tests (pre-test and post-test). The qualitative data were analyzed by assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretation, and reporting the outcomes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings show that small group discussion improved students' speaking skill and classroom situation. Considering the research finding, it is suggested that other teachers use small group discussion to overcome the students' problem in learning speaking.

**Keywords:** speaking skill, small group discussion

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the way people communicate with other people by oral expression. It is in line with Bygate's opinion (1997:5), that speaking is oral expression in the right order to convey the right meaning. They share about idea, thought, feeling, opinion, and sympathy. People communicate on purpose, they want to get something to be done or get something in their daily need.

Based on Competence Standard (Standard Kompetensi) in curriculum KTSP of speaking in the syllabus for SMA/MA, students of senior high school are expected be able to express their idea through spoken language by using correct word order, correct pronunciation, right grammatical form, and meaningful context, fluency, and choosing the choice of word (vocabulary) in the process of interpreting and negotiating meaning in conveying messages to establish

and maintain social relationship. They must be able to express transactional, interpersonal, and functional texts in daily life.

In contrast, based on the pre-research to the tenth-grade students of a state senior high school in Surakarta, they showed that the difficulty of their speaking. The students got 52.44 pre-research. The difficulty of students' speaking skill can be indicated as follows: 1) the students did not pronounce some words correctly; 2) the students did not make some sentences in correct grammatical form; 3) the students had limited vocabulary; 4) the students did not speak fluently; 5) some students had nothing to say. The problems came from the classroom situation during teaching learning process, because 1) the students had low motivation in speaking; 2) the students had low involvement in teaching learning process; 3) the students had low confidence.

The other factors were students' enrollment, their speaking practice, and the English teacher's role. They made students' speaking skill low.

The researcher intended to improve students' speaking skill through the implementation of small group discussion. There are some reasons for the research to use small group discussion. According to Kelly and Stafford (1993: 1), small group is a more personal situation. It provides opportunities for interaction between tutor or lecturer and students and among students.

Harmer (2004: 272) says that one of the reasons that discussion fail is the students reluctant to give an opinion in front of whole class, they cannot think of anything to say. Many students feel extremely exposed in discussion situations. It means that students have a chance for quick discussions in small group before any of them are asked to speak in public.

According to Hoover (1970: 381), small group discussion provides ideal setting for process of problem solving, its demands active involvement in situations where the learner feels free to express himself openly. In small group discussion, face to face groups, students have an opportunity to integrate facts to test their ability to apply them. It provides the learner with an opportunity to sort, combine, and adjust his information into meaningful ideas or concepts.

Every student can share their ideas in a group freely, because small group discussion provides interaction. Interaction in this research is interaction among the students in a group and other groups. It can help students for their own learning with teacher's guide. It builds upon each other's contributions, sift out meanings, ask and answer questions.

Therefore, to solve the problems above by using small group discussion, a

classroom action research was conducted with the following objectives: 1) to investigate how small group discussion improved the speaking skill of tenth grade students of SMA N 8 Surakarta and 2) to describe the classroom situation when small group discussion was implemented.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The setting of this research is class X-4 of a state senior high school in Surakarta and the subject is the students of X-4 class. The research occurred from February to June 2013.

The method used in this research is classroom action research. The explanation about the procedure of action research is stated by Ferrance (2000: 9). He says that in conducting action research, there are five phases of inquiry: 1) identification of problem area, 2) collection and organization of data, 3) interpretation of data, 4) action based on data, and 5) reflection.

In identifying the problem, the researcher did an observation. In collecting and interpreting the data, the researcher decided what actions to be taken and the data that are collected are interview, questionnaire, and field notes of observation. In planning the action, the researcher did a planning by preparing the lesson plan and some material to teach speaking. The schedule of the research is as follows: a) implementing the action, b) observing the action, c) reflecting the result of the observation, and d) revising the plan for the following step.

The qualitative data were collected through interview, observation, and questionnaire. The quantitative data namely students' score, were collected through tests (pre-test and post-test).

The qualitative data are analyzed by assembling the data, coding the data,

comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting outcomes.

Meanwhile, the quantitative data were analyzed by comparing the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test to identify the difference before and after the treatment.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

How small group discussion was implemented in class, after analyzing the research result from the interview,

observation (field-note), questionnaire, and test (pre-test and post-test), the researcher got several findings that answered the research problems. The research findings include the improvement of students' speaking skill and classroom situation.

Based on the result of post test score of cycle 1, the researcher could report that there was improvement on students' speaking skill although it is not significant improvement. The improvement from students' speaking skill indicators can be shown in table 1.

*Table 1. Improvements of the Students' Achievement*

Score of	Pronunciation	Grammar	Vocabulary	Fluency	Content	Average
Pre-test	10.37	10.14	10.96	9.62	11.33	52.44
Post-test cycle 1	12.44	13.40	13.48	10.81	13.25	63.40
Post-test cycle 2	14	15.11	14.88	13.25	15.25	72.51

The result of posttest in cycle 1 shows that there are improvements in students' speaking skill, in terms of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and content. It shows that students get 14 in pronunciation score, 15.11 in grammar score, 14.88 in vocabulary score, 13.25 in fluency, 15.25 in content based on post-test cycle 2.

There are improvements in students' speaking skill, but the result of post test in cycle 1 did not pass the passing grade. This fact indicated that the research needed the next cycle with better planning and

implementation. Finally, the researcher decided to arrange the next cycle.

Based on the result of post test score of cycle 2, the researcher could report that there was improvement on students' speaking skill. The result of post test in cycle 2 shows that there are improvements in students' speaking skill. They are pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and content.

The implementation of small group discussion changed classroom situation in a state senior high school in Surakarta. The improvement in classroom situation can be seen in table 2 as follow.

*Table 2. Improvement in Classroom Situation*

Pre-research	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
The students had low motivation in speaking.	Classroom situation was still noisy. The students paid attention to the material given in the meeting, but some students did not pay attention and did unrelated activity in class.	Classroom situation was calmer, but while the students were discussing, it was a little bit noisy. They paid attention to the material given in class.
The students had low involvement in teaching learning process.	The students did the rules of discussion properly.	The students did the rules of discussion properly. The students started to give a feedback to their friends' presentation.
The students had low confidence.	Some students wanted to be a volunteer.	All of the students wanted to be volunteers.

Based on the table above, the implementation of small group discussion changed classroom situation.

First, small group discussion can improve students' speaking skill. The students' speaking skill consists of five elements: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and content.

Second, the implementation of small group discussion creates good classroom situation in speaking class. The good classroom situation is indicated from: 1) calmer classroom situation, but sometimes a little bit noisy; 2) good attention to the material given in class. The students did the rules of discussion properly; 3) good confidence of the students in classroom teaching learning process in volunteering and giving feedback.

There are improvements in students' speaking skill and classroom situation. The result of posttest in cycle 2 exceeded the passing grade. This fact indicated that small group discussion could solve students' problem in speaking skill. The classroom situation became better. Finally, the researcher decided to finish the research.

Based on the findings above, the researcher concluded that small group discussion is an effective technique to improve the speaking skill of students of class X-4 in SMA N 8 Surakarta.

Ask any adolescent to suggest those situations which give him greatest satisfaction and he will very likely allude to activities of one or more groups. There is ample evidence suggests that man is a social organism; he needs the support and security given by others (Hoover, 1970: 265). That's why the researcher took small group discussion to improve students speaking skill. Since the subject of the research is

social organism, the students need support and security given by others.

The students' speaking skill improved because they could practice their speaking skill freely and regularly. According to Hoover (1970: 381), small group discussion provides ideal setting for process of problem solving, its demands active involvement in situations where the learner feels free to express himself openly. In small group discussion, face to face groups, students have an opportunity to integrate facts to test their ability to apply them. It provides the learner with an opportunity to sort, combine, and adjust his information into meaningful ideas or concepts.

It can be said that in small group, the students will get more idea or information through share their ideas among the member of the group without hesitation. The students will feel free in small group discussion to express themselves.

During the action that was implemented, the class being studied was divided into some groups in which there are about eight students in each group. It is in line with what is said by Ornstein, when there are fewer than five especially in group discussion, students tend to pair off rather than interact as a group. He also states that dividing students into small group seems to provide an opportunity for students to become more actively engaged in learning and for teachers to monitor students' progress better. It can also enhance students' cooperation and social skills (2000: 311).

Hoover (1970: 264) adds that communication skills are also developed in small groups. Some youngsters tend to talk much; other experience difficulty in contributing at all. The small group discussion tends to make students aware of

these conditions, while providing the necessary security for altering undesirable patterns.

In this research, X-4 students felt free to express themselves openly when discussing with the members of their groups. They could solve the problem together with the other members in their groups.

In small group, the students have more opportunity to participate in small group. Every student intended to talk to other member to solve the problem. It means students have to practice more in their speaking so it would help them to improve their speaking skill. In addition, students would discuss with their member to solve the problem, then they would find another opinion, idea of information, it would enrich their knowledge.

Small group demands students to be involved in process. It also provides freedom feeling in expressing their ideas. It can be said that small group discussion is an appropriate technique to improve speaking skill. In addition, speaking skill is also developed in small group.

The implementation of small group discussion in this research can improve the classroom situation. The classroom situation before small group discussion was implemented as follows: (1) the students had low motivation in speaking, (2) the students had low involvement in teaching learning process, and (3) the students had low confidence.

After small group discussion was implemented, there were significant changes in classroom situation. They are as follows: (1) Classroom situation was calmer, but while the students were discussing, it was a little bit noisy. They paid attention to the material given in class. (2) The students did the rules of discussion properly. The students started to give a feedback to their

friends' presentation. (3) All of the students wanted to be volunteers.

In the last meeting of cycle two, there were changes both in speaking skills or classroom situation compared with previous cycle but the changes could be seen, although the classroom was noisy but students seemed more enthusiastic in teaching learning process.

Based on facts above, it can be said that small group discussion improves classroom situation of class X-4 of a state senior high school in Surakarta.

The implementation of small group discussion in this research improved the students' speaking skill and classroom situation. However, the researcher also found the weaknesses of the implementation of small group discussion as follows based on this research: 1) some students had low vocabulary, 2) some students could not speak fluently, and 3) during discussion, students were noisy, 4) the researcher could not monitor all of the students, and 5) it needed more time in discussion.

Since the students had an opportunity to share their idea freely and feel secure, the classroom situation became better. Based on the research, it was seen that the students were motivated to be active and involved in teaching learning activity.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the action research about the use of small group discussion to improve students' speaking skill, the researcher concludes as follows.

First, the use of small group discussion can improve students' speaking skill. The students' speaking skill consists of four elements: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and content. Those elements can be improved through small group discussion. From the research findings, it could be seen that the

improvement of the students' speaking skill of class X-4 of a state senior high school in Surakarta are as follows; The mean score of speaking skill is 72.51. The following is brief description of these findings: 2) the students were able to state content of speech, 2) the students were able to perform acceptable pronunciation, 3) the students could make utterances using correct grammar, 4) the students were able to use appropriate vocabulary to express ideas, 5) the students could speak fluently.

Second, the implementation of small group discussion creates good classroom situation in speaking class. The good classroom situation is indicated from: 1) calmer classroom situation, in spite of some noise; 2) good attention to the material given in class. The students did the rules of discussion properly; 3) good confidence of the students in classroom teaching learning process in volunteering and giving feedback.

The improvement the students' speaking skill is showed by the result of post- test. There were 40.74% students who passed the passing grade of English lesson

and the mean score of English speaking score increases from 52.44 to 72.51.

After understanding the essence of small group discussion to improve students' speaking skill, the researcher proposes some suggestions to the English teacher, the students of a state senior high school in Surakarta, and other researchers.

First, the teacher should create various activities and involve the students in teaching learning process. Second, the students are expected to have more practice in speaking. Third, it is suggested that school encourages and supports the English teachers to improve the quality of their teaching and learning process, and then provide facilities needed by both teachers and students such as LCD or language laboratory to increase students' interesting in English lesson. The last suggestion is addressed to other researchers. The researcher has positive belief that using small group discussion can be implemented in different skills such as listening, reading, and writing.

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