IMPROVING THE STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY BY USING SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS AT THE EIGHTH GRADE OF SMP SWASTA IDANOI

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A B S T R A C T S

This study seeks to enhance students' speaking abilities through small group discussions. Many students face challenges in speaking English due to a lack of confidence and practice, while teachers often overlook engaging strategies that motivate students to participate. To address this, the researcher employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), which consisted of two cycles, each comprising two meetings focused on planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observations, field notes, and evaluation sheets. The findings revealed significant improvement in each cycle. In the first cycle, the average student score was 51, with many students not meeting the Minimum Completeness Criteria (*KKM*). By the second cycle, however, all students successfully passed, achieving an average score of 79. The researcher concluded that small group discussions is an effective way to boost students' speaking ability. It is recommended that both students and teachers adopt this method to further improve their speaking abilities.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental means of communication, allowing people to share their ideas, emotions, and thoughts. It serves to express and convey information to others. According to Henry Sweet (1995), as cited in Henry and David (2024), language is the expression of ideas using speech sounds that are combined into words. These words are then arranged into sentences, reflecting how ideas are transformed into thoughts. Among the skills of listening, reading, and writing, speaking holds particular importance as it enables direct verbal communication with others. Brown and Yuke (1983) as cited in Parupali (2019) assert that speaking is the skill by which students are most often judged in real-life situations. Additionally, Rifa'at (2018) as cited in Malia Anjani (2020) argues that of all four complex skills—listening, reading, speaking, and writing—speaking is the most crucial, as those who know a language is commonly referred to as its speakers, suggesting that speaking encompasses all other language skills. This highlights the significance of mastering speaking for students to communicate with those around them effectively.

To communicate and share information effectively, students must develop oral skills in each language they learn. According to Arghawati and Lalu Bohari (2019), speaking involves engaging with others through communication, while Bohari further defines speech as the ability to articulate thoughts and exchange ideas using spoken words. In the 2013 curriculum for eighth grade at Idanoi Private High School, oral skills are integrated into every learning module. The 2023 lesson plan at SMP Swasta Idanoi includes speech as a key component, emphasizing activities such as discussions and creating concise descriptions of people, animals, and objects, focusing on their social roles, text organization, and linguistic features. Although speaking is not the primary focus, assessments in this area measure student success in language accuracy. To evaluate learners' capabilities, the school has established a Minimum Completeness Criteria (*KKM*) of 65 for the eighth-grade English program.

The expectations outlined earlier are often unattainable for students, as evidenced by the findings from a researcher studying Class VII at SMP Swasta Idanoi. The researcher identified several challenges, including inconsistencies in English learning, reluctance to practice the language, anxiety about making pronunciation errors, and the negative impact of their environment on the development of their oral skills in English. To address these issues, it is essential for teachers to employ creative and effective teaching methods, considering the challenges students face.

Experts assert that small group discussions are a highly effective method for enhancing students' verbal communication skills, primarily because they increase the amount of time students spend speaking. Small group discussions provide students with increased opportunities to practice verbal communication, leading to improved speaking and listening skills (Kagan, 1994). Moreover, Ur and Marhaeni (2022) noted that such discussions provide learners with valuable opportunities to gain insights from their peers. However, this study uncovered several challenges, including inconsistent engagement levels among students in learning English, a general lack of enthusiasm for language practice, and students' fear of mispronouncing words and facing ridicule. Additionally, environmental factors were found to impact their speaking abilities. This research specifically focuses on improving speaking ability through small group discussions among second-year students at SMP Swasta Idanoi during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Based on what has been explained above, the researcher formulated the problem, "How do small group discussions enhance the speaking ability of eighth-grade students at SMP Swasta Idanoi in the 2022/2023 academic year?"

RESEARCH METHOD

To address the question, the speaking abilities of eighth-grade students at SMP Swasta Idanoi during the 2022/2023 academic year were assessed using a method known as classroom action research. The researcher will discuss the outcomes of implementing small group discussions to enhance students' speaking proficiency. In this context, observation and assessment sheets served as vital tools for the researcher.

Research Design

In conducting the classroom action research presented here, the researcher employed a mixed method. The main focus of this study is the implementation of small group discussions to enhance students' proficiency in speaking within the classroom setting. This research consists of four phases: resources to achieve specific goals, strategies, processes for gathering information, and actions to gain insights and improve future practices. Some of these steps were repeated to ensure effectiveness (Kusuma & Rahayu, 2024).

Subject

The participants in this study were eighth-grade students at SMP Swasta Idanoi. The eighth-grade population consisted of 71 students, divided into 3 classes. In this research, the researcher examined a total of 23 students from class 8A.

Instruments

In this study, the researcher collected data using several research tools, including an observation sheet that recorded the activities conducted by the researcher and students during the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Additionally, an evaluation sheet was used to gather data through worksheets completed by students to assess their speaking abilities. The researcher also employed oral tests and voice recordings to evaluate students' progress in speaking, with the oral exam serving as a method to assess students' knowledge of a specific topic or subject.

Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher analyzes data using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The researcher examines observational data qualitatively, while the speaking test results are analyzed and evaluated using Arikunto's formula, as cited in Asrori (2020).

Table 1. Classification for Speaking Score

Score	Classification
96-100	Excellent
86-95	Very Good
76-85	Good
66-75	Fairly Good
56-65	Fair
36-55	Poor
0-35	Very Poor

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings
The Observation Result

The observation data reveals a striking improvement in student performance across two cycles, highlighting the effectiveness of small group discussion methods. In Cycle I, a significant 86% of students were classified as "Less," reflecting low achievement, while only 14% fell into the "Enough" category, with none reaching "Good" or "Very Good." However, by Cycle II, a remarkable transformation occurred: all students (100%) were rated as "Good," with no one remaining in the lower performance categories.

This impressive shift can be attributed to the myriad advantages of small group discussions. These discussions foster active engagement by encouraging all students to participate, which not only enhances their speaking ability but also boosts their confidence. Collaborative learning in small groups allows students to learn from one another, benefiting from diverse perspectives and approaches to problem-solving. Additionally, the supportive atmosphere of these discussions facilitates constructive peer feedback, enabling students to refine their abilities in real time. Overall, this combination of active participation, collaboration, and immediate feedback likely contributed to the significant enhancement in students' speaking abilities, demonstrating the ultimate potential of this teaching method.

The result of Cycle I

In the first cycle, the researcher examined the speaking ability of the students using small group discussions. After checking the student evaluation results, table 2 can be explained:

Table 2. The Result of The Student's Speaking Ability in Cycle I

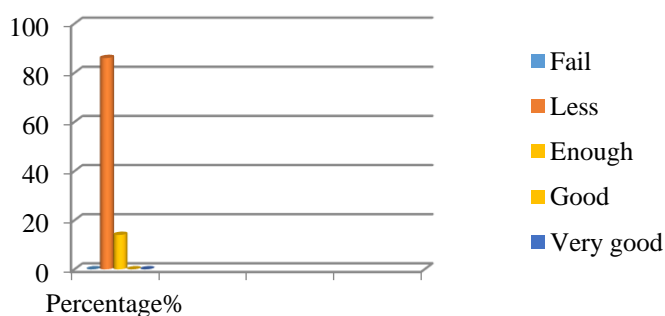| No	Score	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
1	85 -100	Very good	-	-
2	75 – 84	Good	-	**-**
3	63 – 74	Enough	3 students	14 %
4	35 – 62	Less	20 students	86%
5	0 – 34	Fail	-	-
Total			**23 students**	**100 %**

Figure 1. The percentage Result of The Student's Speaking Ability in Cycle I

The data in table 2 and figure 1 clearly show that the student's speaking ability is still low after the small group completed the conversion process, small, did not reach the *KKM*. 20 students were classified as "less" (86%), and the students could speak English even with limited words and sentences. Examples are often vague or poorly defined. Out of the three students assessed, all received a "fair" rating (14%). The student demonstrated a range of vocabulary and phrases during their verbal communication. However, the clarity of their speech was somewhat ambiguous, which posed challenges in effective communication. Additionally, the grammatical structures employed varied among the different students. Despite some errors, this example is clearly articulated and almost always correct. Only 3 students have a "sufficient" level (14%).

This indicates that during the first cycle, the students were still not able to speak well. The root of this problem stems from particular actions that were overlooked by both students and researcher during the first cycle. Several aspects related to small group discussions were disregarded, including instances where students failed to engage with the material presented by the researcher. Additionally, many students exhibited reluctance in articulating their thoughts in spoken English, and there was a noticeable lack of serious expression of opinions among them. Consequently, the researcher are motivated to pursue further investigation.

The Result Of Cycle II

In the second cycle, the researcher assessed the students' ability to speak in English for small group discussions. After seeing the outcomes of the students' evaluations, Table 3 can be explained below:

Table 3. The Result of The Student's Speaking Ability in Cycle II

No	Score	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
1	85 -100	Very good	-	-
2	75 – 84	Good	23 students	**100%**

3	63 – 74	Enough	-	-
4	35 – 62	Less	-	-
5	0 – 34	Fail	-	-
Total			**23 students**	**100 %**

According to Table 3, it shows that students' speaking ability is good after small group discussions and increases their speaking ability, a total of 23 students achieved the "good" proficiency level (100%), indicating that they are capable of communicating in English. Although there are various words and phrases that these students can utilize, they do make some errors in pronunciation. But it rarely interferes with communication when speaking. The student's pronunciation is clear and the language it is good, even if it is difficult. The percentage of the speaking ability of the students in cycle II can be seen in Figure 2.
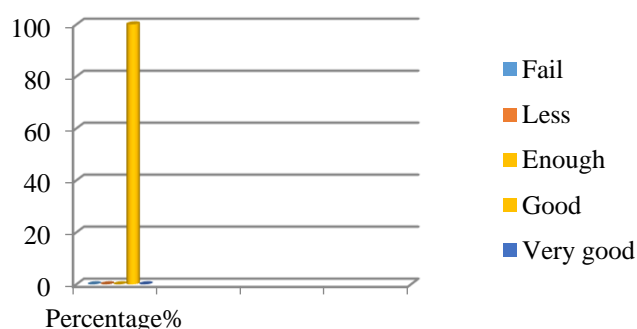

Figure 2. The percentage Result of The Student's Speaking Ability in Cycle II

Figure 2 shows that students' speaking ability have increased after using small group discussions. This indicates that all actions and processes related to the small group discussions during the second cycle were executed cooperatively by both the students and the researcher. All students were classified as having a "good level". Therefore, the researcher concluded that small group discussions will increase students' proficiency in speaking. It is possible to see the average value of the samples that are selected according to the Minimum Completeness Criteria (*KKM*) and the researcher does not persist in the investigation in the next cycle.

The result of all cycle

The result of student's ability to express themselves in small group discussions during high school and graduate can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. The Result of The Student's Speaking Ability in Cycle II

No	Cycle	Classification	Number of Students	Frequency %	The Total Number of Students
1	I	Fail	-	-	23
		Less	20 students	86%	
		Enough	3 students	14%	
		Good	-	-	
		Very Good	-	-	
2	II	Fail	-	-	23

		Less	-	-	
		Enough	-	-	
		Good	23 students	100%	
		Very Good	-	-	

According to Table 4, it was found that the students' speaking ability increased during the second cycle. All students have a "good" level of communication. All the students' problems will be solved in the second phase. This can be achieved by using group discussion method and implementing classroom strategies. The outcome of speaking proficiency of the students in both subjects can be seen in the graph below:
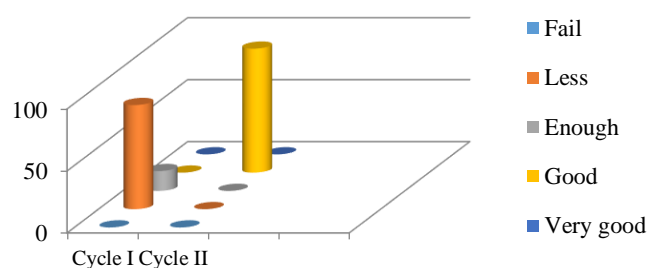

Figure 3. The Outcome of Speaking Proficiency

Upon completing the research, the researcher explained the improvement in the proportion of student engagement during the research in two cycles.
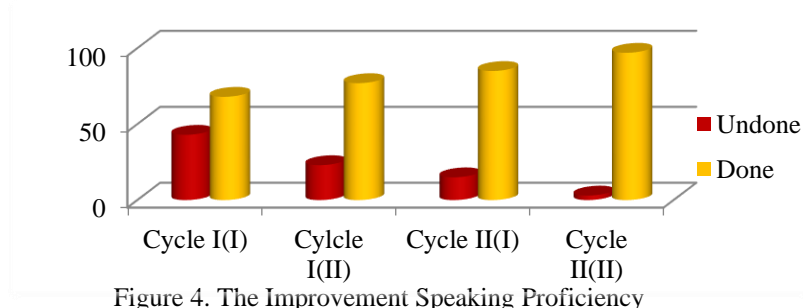

Figure 4. The Improvement Speaking Proficiency

Discussion

In this research, the problem was formulated "How does the small group discussion improve the students' speaking ability at the eighth grade of SMP Swasta Idanoi in 2022/2023?"

It showed on the students' scores that all the students passed the *KKM*, this research was done in two cycles, each cycle consisted of two meetings. The students' speaking skills improved from meeting to meeting and cycle to cycle. Based on the evaluation result in all cycles it could be seen that the student score was improved from cycle I to cycle II. The average student's mark in cycle I was 51 and the average student's mark in cycle II was 79, from the improvement the researcher found that the students' speaking skills improved if the students always used English in the classroom and practiced speaking in the classroom. So from the result, the researcher concluded that small group discussion could improve the students' speaking ability, by implementing the small group discussion over and over.

In In Cycle I, especially during the second meeting, the researcher administered a test to assess the students' speaking ability. The students' results showed that most of them did not

meet the Minimum Completeness Criteria (*KKM*). Three students (14%) achieved marks classified at the 'Enough' level, while 18 students (86%) were classified at the 'Less' level. The highest score obtained was 63, and the lowest score was 38, with an average score of 51. Based on the students' performance in Cycle I, it could be concluded that the students' speaking skills were still lacking, as they were not yet able to speak effectively in English.

The failure of the students in Cycle I was caused by some students were not active in teaching teaching-learning process, the students' percentage activities in the first meeting of Cycle I only 83%, and in the second meeting was 84%. There were some activities and procedures of small group discussion undone by the students such as the students did not pay attention to the researcher's explanation, the researcher forgetting to improve the student's mistakes in English, some of the students having difficulty pronouncing the correct words and the students did not ask something about the material. So the researcher solved the problems by inviting the students to more focus and comprehend what the researcher explained in the classroom, the researcher also improved the student's mispronunciation in the classroom and gave time for all students to ask the questions that still did not understand by the students.

In Cycle II, the researcher taught the students about the improvements that had been designed in the previous meeting. The improvements had been brought a big influence on the student's achievements in Cycle II. It showed from the result of observation sheet, most of the students had done all the activities or procedures of small group discussion. The students' percentage of activities in the first meeting of Cycle II was 85%, and in the second meeting was 97%. Moreover, the students' scores improved, all of the students passed of Minimum Completeness Criteria (*KKM*) 70 score. All of students were got score that classified in "Good l" level. The higher score of the students was 81 and the lowest value was 75 while the average of the students' value was 79.

Based on the result, it could be concluded that small group discussion could improve the students' speaking ability, and this method could used in teaching speaking to the students. By using the small group discussion the students able to speak in English with fluently and bravely to convey their ideas. With small group discussions, students are also no longer lazy to learn to speak English and have confidence and increased influence on the environment to learn to speak English. According to Imam Fauzi (2017), small group discussion could improve students' speaking skills, engage students in group work discussion actively, encourage students to be independent learners who can expose themselves in learning activities, make students feel more relaxed at learning, give students more opportunities to improve their speaking skills. Bohari (2019), small group discussions affected the students speaking ability. Small group discussions significantly enhance students' speaking abilities by creating a comfortable environment where they can participate more freely. In addition, La'biran (2017) found that small group discussions improved the students' speaking Ability. It provides focused opportunities for practice, ultimately fostering greater confidence and making students more willing to engage in larger settings.

While, the result of the researcher's research, when implementing the small group discussion, it was quite satisfactory because the grades obtained by students were classified as "Good". It was caused; by the students were the students could enthusiasm to convey their ideas by implementing small group discussions in during the teaching-learning process. Therefore, the research findings versus the latest related research had some differentiations qualitatively and quantitatively.

After getting the result of the research, the researcher compared it with the theory written by the experts. Based on Crowin Press 1997, he said that small group discussions allow the presenter to announce a topic or idea for group discussion among participants. A small group discussion follows democratic guidelines and allows everyone to contribute

many ideas for others to discuss and reflect upon. Discussion allows for an interchange of ideas within the context of a group under the direction of a present. Likewise, the current research has found that small group discussions can develop students' proficiency in speaking in SMP Swasta Idanoi, it can be seen in their achievement in speaking by sharing their ideas with others and they can discuss a topic in their group by using small group discussion.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of small group discussions method successfully improved the speaking ability of eighth-grade students at SMP Swasta Idanoi for the 2022/2023 academic year. In the first cycle, although there was an increase in student engagement, some challenges in managing discussions were still encountered. However, after reflection and improvements in the second cycle, observations and assessments indicated a significant increase in students' confidence and speaking abilities. These findings underscore the importance of interactive learning approaches in enhancing speaking ability. Recommendations for the next study include providing further training for teachers in effective discussion method and ensuring that every student has a fair opportunity to participate. This research also suggests further exploration of the impact of group dynamics on student learning outcomes.

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