

Students' Perceptions of the Use of Group Discussions Method in Teaching Basic Oral Communication at SMAN 1 Gerung

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Received : March 16, 2025
Revised : March 21, 2025
Accepted : March 21, 2025
Published: March 30, 2025

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DOI: [10.29303/jeef.v5i1.833](https://doi.org/10.29303/jeef.v5i1.833)

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Abstract: This research examines the effects of group discussions as a teaching method on improving students' basic oral communication skills, focusing on their perceptions, challenges, and outcomes. Conducted with 36 eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Gerung, this study utilized a mixed methods research design. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to provide comprehensive insights. The findings reveal that group discussions have a significant positive effect on students' speaking skills, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension. In addition, group discussions encouraged active participation and engagement. However, challenges such as limited discussion time, nervousness, and unequal participation among students were also identified. Based on these findings, it is recommended that group discussions be integrated more frequently into speaking lessons. Deeper insights may be obtained for future studies by increasing the sample size and incorporating different teaching strategies, like project-based learning or digital tools. In general, this study highlights how group discussions enhance students' oral communication abilities in English classes.

Keywords: teaching method, group discussions, oral communication, speaking skills

INTRODUCTION

Learning in the 21st century requires the younger generation to think creatively. They need to be able to communicate well and solve problems so that they can make smart decisions. These skills help them to think effectively and present their ideas systematically and organizationally. Therefore, developing ideas as a key component in communication is a crucial skill in this technological and modern information era. According to Trilling & Fadel (2009) education in the twenty-first century must give individuals the capacity for critical thought, digital literacy, and environmental adaptation.

Although 21st century education emphasizes the importance of strong communication skills, many Senior High School students are still not reaching the expected level in speaking. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has reported that many high school students perform below the proficiency level in speaking, where Eslit (2019) stated that there is a real need for speaking skills in students today. They should be able to speak clearly, use strong words or rich vocabulary, show confidence, and be active in conversations during English class. Despite the efforts by schools to teach these skills, students often lack confidence when speaking, struggle with fluency, and frequently use incorrect vocabulary or grammar. Additionally, limited practice opportunities, fear of making mistakes, and a lack of real-life language exposure outside the classroom makes it harder for students to gain confidence and improve their English speaking skills.

To ensure the learning process is effective and optimal, students' communication skills must be developed and supported. The teacher must provide interesting learning strategies. According to Hammer (1998) an effective group discussion where students have a lot of opportunities to share ideas or express their opinions with their peers without necessarily realizing the materials could be carried out in small group. In this approach, students are expected not only to listen

and take notes but also to actively express their ideas and opinions. As a result, students feel more confident when asking questions or sharing ideas with their classmates.

According to Celce-Murcia (2001) discussion is one of the activities that can be implemented to increase students' speaking skills. In Senior High School, the teaching of speaking skills often aims to help students develop their ability to communicate effectively in English. One commonly used method is group discussions, which provide students with opportunities to practice speaking in a supportive environment. Letting students be creative when expressing themselves, asking questions, discuss, debate, and working together needs to be done in small group. Through group discussions, students can interact with peers, share ideas, and build their confidence in expressing themselves orally. This method also encourages active participation and collaborative learning, which are essential for improving basic oral communication. By engaging in structured group discussions, students not only enhance their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency but also develop critical thinking skills and the ability to listen actively to others. As a result, group discussions are considered an effective approach for fostering students' speaking proficiency and preparing them for real-life communication scenarios.

Speaking proficiency among Senior High School students actually presents a number of difficulties. Many students struggle with speaking English, which frequently causes them to hesitate and participate little in class activities. Limited practice opportunities and a fear of making mistakes in front of their peers are the main causes of this lack of confidence. Furthermore, students don't seem very interested in learning English because they think it's a challenging and uninteresting subject. Their motivation to get better at speaking is further hampered by this lack of enthusiasm. As a result, these elements get down the students' difficulties in mastering effective oral communication techniques,

underscoring the necessity of creative teaching strategies like group discussions to solve these problems.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research used a mixed-methods approach to examine how group discussion affected students' basic oral communication skills. According to Martens (2010), mixed methods referred to research in which the investigator gathered and analyzed data, combined the results, and drew conclusions using both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study or program. In addition, Creswell (2014) stated that using both quantitative and qualitative methods in research was helpful because one method alone might not fully explain the research problem. Combining both provided a clearer and more complete understanding.

The primary tool for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire, created to understand students' perceptions, challenges, and the effect of group discussions on improving their speaking skills. In addition to the questionnaire, an interview with the teacher was conducted to provide further insight into students' actual speaking progress, classroom participation, and challenges observed during group discussions. As stated by Sugiyono (2011), a questionnaire was an efficient way to collect data when the researcher knew exactly what variables they wanted to measure and understood what to expect from the respondents. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, aimed at gathering qualitative information to support the quantitative data.

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of all eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Gerung, with nine classes in total. From these, one class consisting of 36 students was selected as a sample. This research employed purposive sampling. As stated by Etikan (2016), purposive sampling was a non-probability sampling method where the researcher deliberately selected participants based on their relevance to the research objectives.

Data Collection

The researcher used a questionnaire, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing students to share their thoughts and experiences related to group discussions and their speaking skills. Once all students had submitted their responses, the researcher analyzed the collected data to gain information about students' experiences and how effective group discussions were in improving their speaking abilities. Additionally, the researcher conducted an interview with the teacher to gain further understanding of how group discussions impacted students' speaking skills in practice. The interview provided valuable insights into students' actual participation, common challenges they faced, and the teacher's observations on their progress, helping to validate the students' self-reported responses.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire was administered to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The closed-ended questionnaire used a Likert scale (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) to measure students' responses. According

to Creswell (2014), the Likert scale was a common tool used in research to assess attitudes through a range of responses.

Table 1. Likert scale score for close-ended questions

Options	Detail Information
Stongly agree	The students are very positive about the steaments
Agree	The students generally supports the steatmens
Neutral	The students unsure about the stetments or have not enough experiences to decide
Disagree	The students feel the steatments is not for them
Strongly disagree	The students completely opposite from the steatmens

The questionnaire had both open-ended and closed-ended questions that were created based on the indicators shown in Table 2. According to Schmidt et al. (2020), open-ended questions allowed respondents to answer in their own words, providing richer and more detailed insights that might not have been addressed by fixed-response alternatives. Similarly, Patton (2014) stated that open-ended questions encouraged respondents to elaborate on their thoughts, allowing researchers to collect deeper and more complex data. This approach provided a structured way to measure students' experiences related to group discussions.

Table 2. Definition of Operational

Variable	Definition	Indicator
Group discussions	Small group discussions help students achive specific goals. This method allows students to take more control of their learning, build social and leadership skills, and try different ways of learning. (Kidsvatter, 1996)	The indicator outlined by Aggarwal (2024) Listen Actively Be prepared Initiate the discussions Speak clearly and confidence Respect others
Speaking Skills	Speaking is significant for communication because it's the easiest way for people to talk to each other. Quianthy (1997) stated that speaking is the process of expressing ideas and information in different situations, It helps us communicate clearly with others.	According to Brown (1994) Vocabulary Grammar Fluency Pronunciation Comprehension

Based on the operational definitions above, the researcher developed statements and questions for the questionnaire. Here is the questionnaire:

- 1) Table 3: The closed-ended items are written using a 5 point likert scale, which goes from strongly agree to strongly disagree to measure the quantitative data.
- 2) Table 4: Open-ended questions to measure qualitative information. These items allow respondents to provide detailed answers in their own words by filling in the blank spaces, these questions provide a deeper understanding of their thoughts and experiences also support the close-ended questions.

Table 3. Close-ended statements

Research Questions	Questionare Statements	The likert score options
What are the effect of group discussions towards students's speaking skills?	Group discussions give me opportunities to practice speaking in English. After participating in discussions, my speaking skills have improved Group discussions help me learn from my classmates. Group discussions are a good way to learn speaking skills. I feel that have more opportunities to participate in group discussions in class greatly enhances my learning experiences.	1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree
What are the students' perceptions of group discussions as a method for teaching speaking skills?	Group discussions help me learn new English vocabulary. I am challenged to speak with more confidence I engage in speaking English more frequently during group discussions. I can speak clearly during discussions. Group discussions help me understand the lessons better.	1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree
What challenges do students face during group discussions?	Feeling nervous when speaking in front of my friends during discussions. I have trouble clearly expressing my thoughts I feel that the time for discussions is often not enough. I feel that some friends talk more than others. I worry about making mistakes when speaking in front of my friends.	1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

Tabel 4. Open-ended questions

1. How do you feel about using group discussions to improve your speaking skills?
2. What are the students' perceptions of group discussions as a method for learning speaking skills?
3. What do you think could group discussions be more helpful for improving your speaking skills?

Data Anlaysia

The researcher analyzed the ordinary data applying a descriptive quantitative technique. The researcher used computer software for statistical analysis, specifically Excel, to calculate the results in the form of frequencies and percentages for each response related to the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire. This approach gives a clear understanding of the effect of groups as a method of teaching students communication skills, students' challenges, and students' perceptions of using group discussions as a method for improving their oral communication skills. In addition, the researcher conducted an interview with the teacher to learn more about how group discussions affected students' speaking abilities in practice. The teacher's replies were analysed

qualitatively to supplement the quantitative data, resulting in a more complete knowledge of students' actual engagement and growth.

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$$

Where :

P : The percentage of the response.

F : The frequency (number of students giving a specific response).

N : The total number of students.

FINDINGS AND DUSCUSSION

The main goal of this research finding is to explore students' predicted of the the effect of group discussions in teaching speaking skills towards students' communicative competence, the perceptions of students about group discussions as a method for learning speaking skills, the challenges the students face during group discussions, the teacher interview about the reality of group discussions and the researcher insight.

Students' Perceptions from Close-Ended Questions
Effect of Group Discussions in Teaching Speaking skills

The results of the questionnaire that have been computed and examined based on the response percentage are displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Questionare response of the pridicted effect of group discussion

No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	Neutral Response (%)
1	Group discussions give me opportunities to practice speaking in English.	7 (19%)	13 (36%)	12 (33%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	56%	11%	33%
2	After participating in discussions, my speaking skills have improved	7 (19%)	14 (39%)	13 (36%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	58%	6%	36%
3	Group discussions help me learn from my classmates.	9 (25%)	15 (42%)	11 (30%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	67%	3%	30%
4	Group discussions are a good way to learn speaking skills.	11 (30%)	16 (44%)	8 (22%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	75.0%	3%	22%

5	I feel that have more opportunities to participate in group discussions in class greatly enhances my learning experiences.	9 (25%)	17 (47%)	10 (28%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	72%	0%	28%
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Based on the questionnaire number one, 19% of students (n=36) strongly agree that group discussions provide opportunities to practice speaking skills. Additionally, 36% of the students agree with this statement, while 33% are neutral. Only 6% of students disagree and 6% strongly disagree. This implies that while some students believe a neutral perspective, the majority of students predict that group discussions as an excellent chance to improve their communication skills.

Statement number two has the highest neutral response at 36%. Based on the statement of improvement of speaking skills, statement number two, it was found that 19% of students (n=36) strongly agree, and 39% agree. Thirteen students or 36%, remain neutral in response on this statement, while only 3% disagree and another 3% strongly disagree. While a significant number of students are unsure about the effect of the discussions on their speaking abilities, the results show that more than half of students feel that their communication skills have improved.

Regard to whether group discussions help students learn from their classmates, statement number three. 25% of students strongly agree, 42% of students agree. Meanwhile, 30% of students are neutral, and 3% disagree. No students strongly disagree with this statement. Depending on the data, most students think that group discussions are beneficial for learning from peers, this finding is related to Beebe and Masterson (2003) group discussions are an effective way to get people talking and learning from each other.

Statement number four, group discussions are a good way to learn speaking skills. has the highest positive response at 75%. With 45% agree and 30% strongly agree. Just 22% neutral with the statement, and 3% strongly disagree. This suggests that while a small percentage of negative response only 1 students or take a neutral position 8 students (n=36), a large number of students recognize the importance of group discussions in developing speaking abilities.

The last one, the statement number five with no negative response, 25% of the students (n=36) strongly agree, and 47% agree. 28% of students are neutral, and there are no students who disagree or strongly disagree. This indicates that no student does not support the idea, indicating that most students consider that participating more in group discussions would improve their learning experience.

Challenges Faced During Group Discussions

Table 6 examines the difficulties that students encounter when participating in group discussions. The results of the questionnaire that have been computed and examined based on the response percentage.

Table 6. Questionare response of the predicted challenges

No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	Neutral responses (%)
1	I feel nervous when speaking in front of my groups member	0 (0%)	5 (14%)	17 (47%)	13 (36%)	1 (3%)	14%	39%	47%
2	I have trouble clearly expressing my thoughts	2 (6%)	15 (41%)	13 (36%)	5 (14%)	1 (3%)	47%	17%	36%
3	I feel that group discussions time is often not enough	3 (8%)	7 (19%)	15 (42%)	8 (22%)	3 (9%)	27%	31%	42%
4	I feel that some friends talk more than others	6 (16%)	13 (37%)	12 (33%)	4 (11%)	1 (3%)	53%	14%	33%
5	I afraid of making mistakes when speaking in group discussions	4 (11%)	15 (42%)	13 (36%)	3 (9%)	1 (3%)	53%	11%	36%

Statement number one, feeling nervous when speaking. Based on the questionnaire there is no students that strongly agree with this statements, 14% of students (n=36) agree with this statement. 47% of students reported neutral and and 39% response neative, showing that although many students experience neutral or slight anxiety, there is not much agreement about this feeling only 5 students (n=36), and many students do not view it as a major obstacle.

Regarding the challenge of expressing thoughts clearly, statement number two shows 47% of students give a positive response to this statement, which indicates that expressing thoughts clearly is a common challenge. On the other hand, 36% of students (n=36) neutral, and 17% of students had a negative response, with 5 students disagreeing and 1 student strongly disagree. While many students or about 17 students face difficulties with clear expression, others do not struggle as much or are unsure about it.

Statement number three, whether group discussion time was enough. 42% of students expressed no opinion, neutral or indicating confusion. 27% agreed that there was not enough

time. On the negative side, 31% indicate that some students do not mind the time limits or believe there is enough time.

Move to statement number four, some friends talk more than others. The Majority of students or about 53% (n=36) positive agree that some friends talk more than others, with 16% strongly agree and 37% agree. This illustrates an unequal distribution of speaking changes, when certain students speak more than others. On other hand, 33% of students were neutral and only 14% of students give a negative response. This highlights notice to a serious problem where certain students can feel declined or have less chances to engage.

Finally, the statement number five afraid of making mistakes when speaking, there were nineteen students and 53% of students reported a fear of making mistakes, with 11% strongly agreeing and 42% agree. Showing that fear is a major obstacle. Nonetheless, 36% expressed no opinion or neutral, suggesting that some students might be uncertain about performing mistakes. On the negative response or students are not concerned about making mistakes, there are 4 students or 11%.

Students Perceptions of Group Discussions

Table 6 examines the perceptions of the the students. The results of the questionnaire that have been computed and examined based on the response percentage.

Table 6. Questionare response of the students perceptions

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	Neutral responses (%)
1	Group discussions help me learn new English vocabulary	4 (11%)	22 (61%)	7 (19%)	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	72%	8%	9%
2	I am challenged to speak with more confidence	5 (14%)	19 (53%)	12 (33%)	5 (14%)	4 (11%)	42%	25%	33%
3	I engage in speaking English more frequently during group discussions.	1 (3%)	11 (31%)	18 (50%)	4 (11%)	2 (6%)	33%	17%	50%
4	I can speak clearly during discussions.	9 (25%)	16 (44%)	9 (25%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	69%	6%	25%

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	Neutral responses (%)
5	Group discussions help me understand the lesson better.	7 (19%)	19 (53%)	10 (28%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	72%	0%	28%

Based on statement number one, group discussions help students learn new vocabulary. 72% of the students reported a positive response, among them, 61% agree, and 11% strongly agree. This indicates that group discussions are beneficial for improving students' vocabulary skills. 9% (n=36) of students responded negatively and 8% had a neutral position. This implies that although the majority of students agree that group discussions are beneficial for learning vocabulary, a tiny minority are uncertain to share this opinion, maybe as a result of individual preferences or limited exposure to the terms during discussions.

Statement number two, about being challenged to speak with more confidence, 42% give a positive response with 5 students strongly agree and 19 students agree. However, 25% of the students (n=36) give a negative response, and 33 were neutral. It indicates that a sizable percentage of learners either feel uncertain or do not feel challenged enough to acquire confidence, even though many students are encouraged to do this by participating in group discussions. This suggests that the way group discussions are organized to boost students' confidence may need some work. Related to Henry (2020) said that several types of activities that are collaborative and simple to implement using small groups, like brainstorming, project, jigsaw etc.

Next, statement number three, whether they speak English more often in group discussions, just 33% of students gave a positive response. In contrast, 50% of students were neutral and 17% disagree or strongly disagree. The large number of neutral answers raises the possibility that many students are unable to participate actively in class discussions, maybe as a result of a lack of confidence or opportunities for group speaking.

Statement number four, about the perceptions of students whether they can speak clearly during group discussions. 69% of students give positive responses, with 9 students strongly agree and 16 students agree. Only 6 students responded negative or disagree, while 25% were unsure or neutral. This finding indicates that the majority of students perceptions they can articulate their ideas clearly during group discussions. The neutral answers, however, imply that some students could still require direction or more practice to improve their speech comprehension.

The last statement, number five of the questionnaire about group discussions in helping students understand the lesson better. 72% of students gave the statement a positive response, with 53% agreeing and 19% strongly agreeing. Interestingly, 28% of answers were neutral, and there were no negative ones. While the neutral replies suggest that some students may still need extra assistance to fully benefit from these talks, the absence of negative responses suggests that group discussions generally prove successful in enhancing students' understanding of discussions.

Students' Perceptions from Open-Ended Questions

In this section, we will examine the questionnaire's open-ended questions and look for common themes in the responses. We can better understand students' perceptions and feelings regarding group discussions by using thematic analysis. We can see the key points, viewpoints, and any issues that students have during the discussions by combining similar responses into one group. Our understanding of how group discussions aid students in developing their speaking abilities, their opinions of the approach, and the difficulties they encounter during participation will all be aided by this analysis.

How do you feel about using group discussions to improve your speaking skills?

Most students respond "happy" and "very happy" after participating in group discussions. They valued how conversations improved their learning and gave them the chance to exchange thoughts and viewpoints with others. Many students also mentioned that "group discussions made it easier for them to complete tasks" and "made learning more enjoyable". Some students mentioned they "felt more comfortable speaking in the group". This highlighted that discussions gave them more freedom to express themselves.

However, one student mentioned that group discussions could sometimes be "Noisy", suggesting that while the overall experience was positive for most, there were some mixed opinions regarding the environment of the discussions. One student said "a little nervous" which shows that not all students feel confident in these discussions.. This shows that although most students enjoy group discussions, some may find them uncomfortable or distracted, which could make the experience less pleasurable for them.

What challenges do you face during group discussions in learning speaking skills?

According to their responses, students encountered a number of difficulties during group discussions. Among these difficulties were participation problems, diversions, anxiety, and trouble expressing oneself.

First, lack of participation: some students mentioned that not everyone in the group helps out during discussions. For example, one student said "he likes to talk but doesn't help with the discussion" and another mentioned they "dont not help their friends".

Next, Unfair Task Sharing: A few students felt that tasks were not divided fairly. One student said, "unfair in doing the tasks" while another noted, "not fair". In addition, Noise and Distractions: Some students found that group discussions can be noisy. One student wrote "noise", and another mentioned "the friends are noisy" making it hard to focus.

Then, Difficulty Speaking: Some students had difficulty expressing themselves. For example, one student said, "when I speak, i forget what I want to say. In addition, another student mentioned being "nervous" and "unsure to ask questions".

Lastly, Shyness: a few students said they were shy or introverted, making it harder for them to speak up. One student said "quiet", while another mentioned "introvert", which makes it difficult to participate in discussions.

What do you think could group discussions be more helpful for improving your speaking skills?

36 students responded to the open-ended questions. Most students believe that group conversations help them improve their speaking skills because they provide additional practice, peer support, and a fun environment for discussing views.

Support from Friends: Many students mentioned that group discussions are helpful because their friends support them when speaking. For example, one student said, "very helpful because we can speak more freely when discussing and working in a group". Another student said, "very helpful, because when I make a mistake, my friends help me correct it. This shows that students feel more confident knowing their friends are helping them.

More Opportunities to Speak: Several students noted that group discussions give them more chances to speak. For example, one student said, "very helpful, I speak more often". Another mentioned, "very helpful. This shows that students feel group discussions provide a good chance to practice their speaking skills.

Positive Learning Experience: Many students agree that group discussions are helpful for learning. One student shared, "very helpful, I can speak English a bit better". Another said, "I strongly agree. These responses show that students see group discussions as an important part of improving their English.

Teacher's Perceptions of Group Discussions

The interview with the teacher provided useful information about the effectiveness and challenges of group discussions for teaching speaking skills. These findings are consistent with current research.

Improvement in social skills and Personal skills

The teacher emphasised that group discusses improve students' social abilities, such as teamwork and collaboration, while also encouraging personal development in critical thinking and confidence. Group discussions provide a relevant framework for students to develop not only language abilities but also important life skills, supporting Brown (2001) argument that speaking activities should encourage interaction and cooperation.

Interview transcript: Group Discussions Can improve social skills (cooperation) and personal skills (independence) in critical thinking and be more confident in expressing opinions.

The reality

The teacher's interview shows a different perspective compared to the students' predicted responses. While many students in the open and close ended questions reported that group discussions helped them feel more comfortable speaking, the teacher state that confidence levels were still low. Some students actively participated, but others stayed quiet and relied on their more skilled classmates. This means that while students may feel more at ease in group discussions, it does not always lead to equal participation.

Additionally, the teacher pointed out that stronger students tend to dominate discussions, making it harder for less confident students to contribute. This counter the students' positive responses, as it suggests that not everyone benefits equally from group discussions. If participation is not

balanced, some students may improve their speaking skills while others remain passive. To address this issue, teachers should give clear roles and encourage all students to speak, ensuring that group discussions truly help everyone improve.

Interview transcript: In reality, many students still struggle to show their confidence individually. Within a group, there are always students who are more skilled, some who are average, and others who find it difficult to participate. As a result, the more skilled students tend to take control of most activities, while the less confident ones stay quiet. To address this, it is important to continuously remind each group that every member has the right to share their thoughts and contribute equally to the discussion. In addition, The students' confidence levels are still far from what is expected.

Teacher's Suggestions

Therefore, fostering a high level of motivation among students is critical to increasing their excitement for studying. This should be boosted by the use of interesting and diverse teaching strategies that will keep their attention and contribute to their language development."

Interview transcript: Therefore, it is essential to provide strong motivation for the students to enhance their enthusiasm for learning. Additionally, using engaging and varied teaching methods can help improve their learning experience and encourage better participation.

Researcher's Observations on Classroom Implementation

In reality, the researcher observed that students often became noisy during group discussions, depended significantly on their more skilled classmates., and some were still hesitant to speak. These challenges are consistent with findings by Corrége & Michinov (2021), who noted that smaller groups tend to have higher participation rates, suggesting that larger groups may lead to unequal participation and increased noise levels. Similarly, a study by An & Hien (2024) highlighted that students often depend on more capable peers during collaborative activities, which can hinder the development of less confident students' speaking skills. This situation underscores the need for teachers to provide clear guidance and ensure balanced participation among all students.

Despite these challenges, group discussions offer significant benefits. Collaborative learning has been shown to enhance students' speaking skills by providing opportunities for peer support and interaction. Additionally, collaborative learning fosters teamwork and helps students build closer relationships, creating a supportive learning environment that encourages active participation. Thus, while some difficulties exist, group discussions remain a valuable method for improving students' speaking skills and social connections.

Discussions

This section presents the findings related to the research questions, focusing on the students' perceptions of group discussions as a learning method, and the challenges they face during the process. The analysis combines responses from both closed-ended and open-ended questions to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and perspectives.

What are the students' perceptions of group discussions as a method for learning speaking skills?

According to the results of the closed-ended questions, most students have a positive view of group discussions as a way to get better at speaking. In particular, 72% of students think group discussions help them expand their vocabulary, and 69% of students (n=36) feel they can speak more clearly and confidently during these discussions. Additionally, 72% of students agree that group discussions enhance their comprehension of the material. These findings imply that group discussions help students better express their thoughts, increase their vocabulary, and understand the material presented in class.

However, the findings also indicate some variation in the experiences of the students. For instance, 25% of students disagreed with the statement that they felt challenged to speak more confidently, while 41% of students said they felt challenged. This suggests that although some students become more comfortable speaking, others might not experience the same level of support. Only 33% of respondents agreed that they use English more often when speaking in groups, while 17% disagreed and 50% were undecided. According to these responses, some students still struggle to use English consistently in group settings, which may indicate that they need more support and practice.

Some students are unsure of their speaking skills or the way to which they use English in group discussions, as demonstrated by their neutral responses to statements like "I am challenged to speak with more confidence" 33% and "I engage in speaking English more frequently during group discussions" 50%. These results suggest that although group discussions are a useful teaching tool, additional assistance might be required to make students feel more comfortable and interested in speaking English.

The findings show that students' perceptions generally see group discussions as good for vocabulary development and course understanding, which is consistent with previous studies. Similar to Henry (2020), who proposed that collaborative activities such as brainstorming and projects increase engagement, this study discovered that 72% of students believe group conversations help them learn new vocabulary, confirming the theory that interactive learning promotes language growth. Furthermore, Hanh & Van Duc (2022) discovered that group discussions increased students' motivation and speaking confidence

However, this study provided mixed results only 42% felt challenged to speak confidently, while 33% remained neutral, indicating that discussion structures may need to be adjusted to maximise student engagement. Furthermore, the low percentage (33%) of students who reported speaking more English in discussions implies that passive participation or a lack of confidence may limit effectiveness, echoing Crisianita & Mandasari's (2022) observation that structured discussion techniques are critical for increasing student involvement. However, the high level of agreement (72%) that conversations promote course comprehension emphasises their function in reinforcing learning, which supports Christianti et al. (2023) finding that interactive discussions improve academic performance. While overall perceptions are positive, improving discussion methods to encourage active involvement and confidence-building could increase their influence.

What challenges do students face during group discussions?

The quantitative data indicates that there is a problem with unequal participation, as 53% of students strongly agreed that some group members speak more than others. Similarly, 47% of students said they were having trouble expressing their ideas, and 53% of students recognized that they were afraid of speaking incorrectly. These findings imply that a lot of students have trouble participating completely in group discussions, perhaps as a result of nervousness or a lack of speaking practice.

These challenges are further supported by the open-ended responses. One student said, "Not everyone in the group helps out during discussions." Other students also mentioned that "group members often do not contribute equally". Students also mentioned noise and distractions as major obstacles, making it hard to concentrate. Furthermore, a number of students reported difficulties with confidence when speaking, including feeling anxious or forgetting what they wanted to say. One student said, "*The challenge I face is when I speak, but I forget what I want to say*".

Interestingly, the quantitative data realize that students are unsure about their level of anxiety. Regarding the statement "feeling nervous speaking in front of their peers," nearly half 47% gave a neutral response, and 36% did the same for the statement regarding difficulties expressing their opinions. This suggests that certain students feel a range of emotions, including anxiety and confidence.

The findings highlight various problems that students encounter in group discussions, including fear of making mistakes and unequal involvement, which are consistent with previous studies. Crisianita & Mandasari (2022) found that while group discussions improve speaking skills, some students struggle with confidence and active involvement. Similarly, this study indicated that 53% of students are afraid of making mistakes, which can limit their willingness to speak. Furthermore, Hanh & Van Duc (2022) emphasised that while group discussions promote students, unequal participation remains an issue. This study supports up that the claim, with 53% of students agreeing that some classmates speak more than others, potentially limiting speaking possibilities. Meanwhile, confusion about discussion time and expressing opinions clearly were significant problems, implying that formal guidance may be required to maximise the effectiveness of group talks. Overall, while talks are useful, resolving these issues, such as encouraging equal participation and minimising nervousness, may increase their impact on speaking growth.

In conclusion, group discussions offer specific challenges even though they are beneficial for learning. Many students experience anxiety, have trouble expressing their ideas clearly, and struggle with unequal participation. These conclusions are further supported by the qualitative data, which highlights how problems like noise and uneven task distribution also impair productive conversations.

Teachers should concentrate on establishing a more structured environment, ensuring fair participation, and offering assistance to boost their confidence in order to address these issues. A more inclusive and effective learning environment can be created, for instance, by designating different roles during discussions, creating turn-taking procedures, or encouraging more reserved students to speak up. While group discussions offer excellent opportunities for language acquisition, they also provide unique problems.

Many students are anxious, fail to explain their ideas clearly, and have difficulty with unequal involvement. The qualitative findings indicate other concerns, such as noise and an imbalance in work distribution, which might hinder effective discussions. The teacher also noticed that skilled students tend to dominate talks, making poorer students unwilling to participate. Furthermore, many students lack confidence, preventing them from fully participating in group activities.

CONCLUSION

This study explores students' perceptions of using group discussions to improve their speaking skills, based on responses to both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Most students believed that group discussions provided a supportive environment where they felt more comfortable expressing their ideas and learning from their peers. Many students also perceived discussions as a useful method for improving their speaking skills, particularly in fluency, vocabulary, and confidence.

However, some challenges were identified. Many students struggled with anxiety, had difficulty expressing their thoughts clearly, and faced issues with unequal participation. The teacher's interview revealed that more confident and skilled students often dominated discussions, while less confident students hesitated to speak. Additionally, factors such as lack of motivation, noise, and imbalanced workload affected student engagement.

The researcher's observations supported these findings, showing that while some students actively participated, others remained quiet or relied too much on their more skilled peers. This suggests that without proper guidance, group discussions may not fully benefit all students. Therefore, teachers need to implement strategies that encourage equal participation and help students overcome their hesitation to speak.

The teacher emphasized that structured facilitation, continuous motivation, and varied instructional approaches are essential to addressing these challenges. To maximize the benefits of group discussions, teachers should assign clear roles, create a balanced learning environment, and provide support to build students' speaking confidence. Overall, while group discussions have the potential to enhance students' oral communication skills, their effectiveness depends on proper implementation and active support from teachers.

It is recommended that teachers ensure every student contributes equally during group discussions by closely monitoring their participation and assigning specific roles to promote a fair distribution of tasks and balanced involvement. Teachers should also address students' anxiety by cultivating an environment in which learners feel free to express themselves without fear of making mistakes, thereby encouraging the exchange of ideas. Furthermore, providing clear guidance and concrete examples on how to articulate ideas effectively can help mitigate communication difficulties.

Students are advised to take a proactive role in discussions and collaborate with peers to overcome challenges, as regular practice in group settings can gradually build their confidence. They should consider mistakes as integral to the learning process and use these opportunities to refine and enhance their skills.

For future research, it is suggested that scholars explore additional factors, such as cultural or personality differences, that may further influence the development of speaking skills. Moreover, conducting pre- and post-tests in group discussion

settings is recommended to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how such discussions impact and improve speaking abilities.

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