



Improving Students' Speaking Skills by Conducting Small Group Discussions in Grade 8 Smpn 14 Bintan

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Abstract

This study aimed to describe how small group discussions can be used to improve students' speaking skills in class VIII of SMPN 14 Bintan. The method used in this research is classroom action research (CAR). The population in this study were all class VIII C of SMPN 14 Bintan students in the 2021/2022 academic year, consisting of 28 students. The data was collected through speaking test. In the preliminary study, the number of students who met the minimum completeness criteria of 75 was 5 out of 28 students (17,85%). In the speaking test of cycle 1, students who scored above 75 or met the minimum completeness criteria were 15 out of 28 students (53,57%). However, in this study, the criteria of success set was 60% students met the minimum completeness criteria. It means that the cycle 1, the criteria of success were not achieved. In the speaking test of cycle 2, 23 of 28 students (82,14%) met the minimum completeness criteria of 75. The result shows that there were some improvements in the students' speaking skills quantitatively. Moreover, students were more active and participated in the teaching and learning process of speaking. To conclude, the Small group Discussion (SGD) worked excellently and efficiently in helping students speak English in the eighth grade of SMPN 14 Bintan.

Keywords : *Small Group Discussions, Students' Speaking Skill, Classroom Action Research (CAR).*

I INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, the English language is important to our lives. Not only is it the second most spoken language in the world but also every institution requires their workers to be able to speak and write English properly as a benchmark. English was taught as a foreign language in Indonesia from elementary school to higher education. Argawati (2014) emphasized that speaking is an activity that someone uses to communicate with other people. It was everywhere and had become part of our everyday activities. Mart (2012: p.91) defined oral language as speaking ability, revealing or sharing ideas through language use. He also shares information with other people through communication. According to Gani (2015), speaking skills are the ability to verbally express opinions, thoughts, facts, and feelings to others.

During the teaching and learning process in class VIII students of SMP 14 Bintan. Some students said that speaking was the most challenging skill to master because it required four aspects of speaking in terms of vocabulary mastery, fluency, comprehension, and pronunciation. Therefore, the researcher tried to research by developing speaking skills using Small Group Discussion (SGD) in grade 8. Some factors can cause the problem, such as motivation, interests, intelligence, or learning material. However, the teaching strategy seemed to be an important reason why the issue of oral language remained. The researcher identified several contingent factors relating to class strategies that affected student speaking skills. First, students were bored and not active during teaching because of the same technique. Second was the dominant teacher in the classroom (Teacher-Centered), it meant that students were less motivated in the learning process. Finally, students still experienced difficulties in some essential aspects of speaking, such as students feeling less fluent in pronunciation, understanding, and student vocabulary abilities.

Another method that can be used to learn to speak is in group discussions. SGD was a technique for learning to speak foreign languages. This can help students improve their speaking skills. In small groups, students could use English with each other and practice with their friends. There were some studies there have investigated SGD. First, Fauzi (2017) on exploring how to improve Students' Speaking Ability through Small-Group discussions. It was found that small group discussions could effectively improve students' speaking skills. It was done by actively involving the students in group work discussions, giving them the freedom to expose themselves to learning activities, making them feel more relaxed in learning, and providing them with more opportunities to improve their speaking skills. Second, La'biran's (2017) study showed that the SGD strategy effectively increases student activity and learning outcomes in speaking subjects, especially in learning English. Students' post-test proved higher than students' pre-test after involving SGD in teaching and learning communication research.

II METHOD

The type of research used by the researcher was Classroom Action Research (CAR). In addition, this action research was carried out considering the problems in learning in or outside the classroom to improve the quality of the learning process or learning achievement Rifai (2016). Classroom action research was a collaborative activity in which practitioners worked together to help each other design and conduct investigations in their classrooms. According to Mills (2000), classroom action research was reflective research carried out by teachers to improve the rational ability of their actions and improving classroom learning practices' conditions. Classroom action research was research in the form of actions taken by teachers in the classroom. This study aimed to improve the quality of learning practices that focused on the teaching and learning process in the classroom. In this Classroom Action Research (CAR), the researcher used the CAR design from Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1990), They were as follows: 1. Planning, 2. Action, 3. Observation, 4. Reflection. This research was conducted at SMP N 14 Bintan, located in Kukup Village, Tambelan District, Bintan Regency. This research was conducted in the eighth grade of SMP N 14 Bintan. This research was conducted in May 2022. This research was conducted in May 2022. The researcher Implemented it on students with the aim that students can improve their learning abilities, especially speaking skills. In this study, the researcher conducted a minimum of two meetings to truly analyze the research on SMP N 14 Bintan schools. There were several cycles in the research. The first was planning, then Action and the last was Observation, and these two cycles were repeated until the researcher gets the criteria of success. The subject of this research was class VIII semester 2. The researcher took one class from 3 existing classes. The class was VIIC. Class C consisted of

males 11 and females 17, with 28 students. This research aimed to improve students' speaking skills by using the SGD technique for class VIIC students at SMP N 14 Bintan. In addition, the researcher conducted a preliminary study before entering the classroom action research cycle. It aimed to obtain data about teachers' and students' problems in teaching and learning activities that need to be solved (Dewi, 2020). According to Mills (2003:26), initial information gathering was taking time to reflect on your beliefs and understand the nature and context of your general ideas.

a. Planning

In this step, the researcher made a lesson plan for speaking skills on Expression of Congratulations and Expression of Like and Dislikes. They were learning material, media, time, schedule, and instruments for Observation.

b. Implementing

In which SGD technique designed was applied in learning and teaching activities.

c. Observing

At the observing stage, the researcher approached each group, in turn, to observe students' work activities during the teaching and learning process. While applying SGD, the researcher also recorded important events during the teaching-learning process.

d. Reflecting

After carrying out the learning process using SGD, the researcher recited the events in the class as a reflection of Action. The researcher evaluated the process and results of implementing SGD in teaching English. The data from each step analyze, and the data was used to determine the next step in the following cycle to achieve the previously set goals. The researcher must make further planning (re-planning) to get good results.

III RESULT

3.1 Cycle I

a. Planning

In the first step of Cycle I, a series of plans were carried out. The researcher designed a lesson plan based on a predetermined topic: "Expression of Congratulations. The activity schedule was for 12th-13th May 2022. The time allocation for the meeting was 120 minutes (2x60 minutes). The researcher also prepared a speaking test to collect data to determine if the strategy used could improve the speaking skills.

b. Acting

At the first meeting of the first cycle, the class started with the students' enthusiasm to look at the researcher, assuming that there was a new teacher. Class conditions were noisy but conducive; they are eager to learn but difficult to understand the lesson. First, the researcher opened the class by greeting, taking the students' attendance, and getting to know each student. Then researcher gave a brief explanation about SGD to students and applied the strategy designed. Next, the researcher asked the students to do the dialogue in front of the class. After they performed, the researcher gave feedback to the students on their performance.

At the second meeting, the researcher apply the similar strategy with the first meeting but using different lesson materials. The researcher opened the class by greeting, taking the students' attendance. Then researcher gave a brief explanation about SGD to students and applied the strategy designed. Next, the researcher asked the students to do the different dialogue in front of the class. After they performed, the researcher gave feedback to the students on their performance.

c. Observing

In this Observation, the researcher gave the speaking test and observed every action, comment, and certain behaviour of students. In this phase, the student's behaviour and responses during the teaching-learning process were recorded using documentation, namely photos and field notes. There were many things which had been observed as follows:

- 1) The researcher observed the students' activities and participation during the teaching-learning process.
- 2) The researcher took notes on students' participation in the activity and on the language used during the learning activity
- 3) Many students were still confused about the best way to learn to speak English.
- 4) Many students were not active in the class, and some were still noisy.

d. Reflecting

After implementing the SGD, the researcher discussed the process of Cycle I and the result of first speaking test with the teacher. Based on the speaking test I result, only 15 students, or 53,57% of students, passed the criteria of success. The researcher and teacher were impressed because their efforts to improve students' speaking skills had increased compared to preliminary study.

Table 4.4 Students' Speaking test I Result On The Topic Expression Of Like and Dislikes

No	Initial Name	Score of Post-test I	Successful criteria (>69)
1	AS	62	Unsuccessful
2	A	62	Unsuccessful
3	A	68	Unsuccessful
4	AKN	72	Unsuccessful
5	DP	65	Successful
6	DA	65	Unsuccessful
7	DA	63	Unsuccessful
8	EP	70	Successful
9	FRK	75	Successful
10	GE	68	Unsuccessful
11	HG	76	Successful
12	HK	72	Successful
13	K	63	Unsuccessful
14	LA	68	Unsuccessful
15	MNH	70	Successful
16	MRP	70	Successful
17	NS	72	Successful
18	NNR	77	Successful
19	NRA	79	Successful
20	NRH	70	Successful
21	RAM	77	Successful
22	RR	65	Unsuccessful
23	RKP	72	Successful
24	RNM	55	Unsuccessful
25	SES	75	Successful
26	SA	75	Successful

27	TS	62	Unsuccessful
28	XZ	55	Unsuccessful
Total		1,923	
Average		68,67	

Based on the table above, the total student score was 1,923, and the number of students who took the test was 28 students. Based the analysis, the students' speaking skills in English lessons got increasing. The average value was 68,67. Based the calculations, 53,57% (15 students) of all eighth-grade students who took the test passed the competency. Meanwhile, the remaining 46,42% (13 students) failed to meet the minimum competency criteria. The calculation could be concluded that the cycle I was categorized as unsuccessful.

But still, many students got insufficient marks. So, to increase the number of students who can exceed the minimum completeness criteria, the researcher and teacher try to modify the Plan. Plan modifications are carried out in the next lesson plan cycle II.

3.2 Cycle II

a. Planning

In the previous cycle, some students improved their speaking skills. However, many students still have difficulties learning to speak, as evidenced by their speaking test I scores, which only 15 students completed. The lesson plan used in the previous cycle underwent several modifications. Researcher modified the lesson plan by adding the reward in the strategy and used different materials, namely "Expression of Congratulations" to "Expression of Like and Dislike." This material difference avoided material repetition so that students did not learn the same thing to get the specified value. To support students' enthusiasm for learning, researcher prepared prizes for students who had high learning enthusiasm and were eager to perform. In addition, the researcher facilitated more practice and prepared different speaking test for cycle II. This cycle was carried out in two meetings on 19th-20th May 2022. The time allocation for this meeting was 120 minutes (2x60 minutes).

b. Acting

After this cycle was conducted, the result was expected to be better than the first cycle. The procedure of this strategy was almost similar with the first cycle with a little modification. The actions were:

- 1) At first, the researcher started by questioning and answering the topic in the previous meeting. The researcher also tried highlighting some aspects that have not been done yet in the first cycle.
- 2) The researcher promised to give them rewards if they got a good mark which is good to motivate them to speak English.
- 3) The researcher facilitated more practice activities.

c. Observing

At this stage, the Observation was done to find out the students' activities during the teaching-learning process; they are:

- 1) The researcher found that the students were more active and serious than in the previous cycle.
- 2) Most of them became more confident after being told that making mistakes was common in the learning process.
- 3) They were also highly motivated to perform in front of the class first.
- 4) The researcher saw they did not have any problem doing their test.

d. Reflecting

After implementing actions in Cycle II, the students' participation in responding to the teacher improved to be more active. Also, the students' speaking ability has been improved. Moreover, the teaching-learning process could be considered very well. Firstly, the student's pronunciation was improved, and they rarely mispronounced the words. Secondly, the students had better vocabulary mastery by exercising and memorizing dialogues. They became more confident in speaking activities.

Table 4.5 Students' Speaking test II Result On The Topic Expression Like and Dislikes

No	Initial Name	A score of Post-test II	Successful criteria (>69)
1	AS	62	Unsuccessful
2	A	65	Unsuccessful
3	A	70	Successful
4	AKN	75	Successful
5	DP	70	Successful
6	DA	75	Successful
7	DA	70	Successful
8	EP	70	Successful
9	FRK	75	Successful
10	GE	70	Successful
11	HG	80	Successful
12	HK	75	Successful
13	K	70	Successful
14	LA	75	Successful
15	MNH	75	Successful
16	MRP	75	Successful
17	NS	80	Successful
18	NNR	85	Successful
19	NRA	85	Successful
20	NRH	72	Successful
21	RAM	86	Successful
22	RR	80	Successful
23	RKP	75	Successful
24	RNM	60	Unsuccessful
25	SES	80	Successful
26	SA	80	Successful
27	TS	65	Unsuccessful
28	XZ	60	Unsuccessful
Total		2.060	
Average		73,57	

According to the table above, the students' speaking skill in the English lesson was increased on the topic "Expression of Like and Dislike" through SGD. The standard of maximum criteria was accomplished with a total score of students was 2.060 divided by the number of students who did the test was 28 students. Based on the above analysis, the students' speaking skills in English lessons had increased. The average value was 73,57. Based the calculations, 82,14% (23 students) of all eighth-grade students who took the test passed the competency. Meanwhile, the remaining 17,86% (5 students) failed to meet the minimum competency criteria. It could be concluded that the speaking test of cycle II was categorized as a success because the students' skills in speaking met the criteria of success.

IV DISCUSSION

The researcher research indicated that the SGD was effective in the classroom. The SGD helped the students to understand the subject easily because they could hear and pronounce it clearly. It was supported by the opinion of Harmer (2001), research regarding small group discussion as an effective teaching strategy in language activities showed that there were some class assignments where pair work was insufficient and may not be effective. Small group activities helped students create a more interactional environment. At the end of the session, reflection was done to discuss what students had learned and the difficulties they found in the teaching-learning process. The researcher also gave the students some feedback related to the students' performance in front of the class.

In the first cycle, the students were given new vocabulary and expressions related to the "Expression of Congratulations" topic. The students were excited to discuss the meaning and pronunciation with the teacher, their friends, and the researcher. However, when it came to speaking practices, the students indicated they did not want to speak English. They refused to go in front of the class because they were afraid to make mistakes, and their friends would make fun of them. Some students even wrote sentences of the dialogue in their hands. Nevertheless, most of the students did not manage to surpass the minimum mastery criterion in this cycle.

In the second cycle, the researcher revised the lesson plan by giving reward and gave the topic of "Like and Dislike Expressions." The researcher revised the strategy and changed the topic from cycle I because the researcher aimed to improve students' abilities. Therefore this modification and change were needed to give solution to the problems faced by the students. In this cycle, the researcher also aimed for the students to practice more. Students work in pairs and groups in making dialogues. They became more serious and enthusiastic because they had practiced before. Neither of them wrote sentences in their books or papers. They were also more confident when doing the speaking test and rarely made mistakes in pronunciation.

Based on the students' Interviews about their perception of using the SGD of English Lesson to improve their speaking ability, they felt that SGD was very interactive for them. They could pronounce many new vocabularies without fear of being laughed at by other friends. Before the implementation, they felt insecure about their speaking ability. Nevertheless, after the second cycle, all students confidently told the researcher they could speak English fluently.

The following is a summary of the percentage improvement in student scores from pre-test to post-test speaking cycle II :

Table 4.7 Students' Score Improvement Percentage Summary

Test	Students' Score > 69	Percentage
Preliminary study	5	17,85%
Cycle I	15	53,57%
Cycle II	28	82,14%

From the above result, only 17,85% (5 students) scored >69 in preliminary study. In the speaking test in cycle I, 53,57% (15 students) got a score >69. It means that there was an increasing 35,72%. In speaking test II, 82,14% (28 students) got a score >69. The increase was about 28,57%, and the total increase in students' scores from cycle I to cycle II was 64,29%. To conclude, the SGD worked excellently and efficiently in helping students speak English in the eighth grade of SMPN 14 Bintan. SGD successfully applied and was able to increase students' skills in speaking.

V CONCLUSION

The research was conducted to improve the students' speaking ability through SGD. As stated in the discussion in the previous chapter, the researcher can conclude that the SGD successfully improved the students' speaking skills. Summarise could be as follows:

- a. SGD activities can improve students' speaking English ability, which can see from their scores and responses to CAR's teaching activities. It can conclude that SGD can improve students' participation in classroom conversations, discussions, class performances, pronunciation, fluency, and confidence in spoken English.
- b. In the SGD, the students were more active and participated in the teaching and learning activities. For that reason, the SGD can be used as an alternative strategy for teachers in improving and maintaining students' speaking English ability.

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