

Implementing Small Group Discussion in Speaking Classes

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the essential skills in English language learning, yet many students experience difficulties in expressing their ideas confidently during classroom interaction. Therefore, effective teaching methods are needed to encourage active participation and improve students' speaking performance. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of their learning experiences during the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in a speaking class. The research employed a qualitative approach using interviews as the primary data collection technique. The participants of this study were six fourth-semester students from the English Education Department at Universitas Muslim Maros, selected from a population of eighteen students. The findings reveal that students perceived the Small Group Discussion method as an effective strategy for enhancing their speaking skills. Through small group interactions, students felt more comfortable expressing their ideas without fear or embarrassment. In addition to improving speaking ability, the method also contributed to the development of other learning aspects, including listening skills, collaboration with peers, self-confidence, critical thinking, vocabulary acquisition, and motivation to speak English. These findings indicate that the Small Group Discussion method provides a supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and facilitates the development of communicative competence in speaking classes.

Kemampuan berbicara merupakan salah satu keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, namun banyak mahasiswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam menyampaikan ide secara percaya diri di dalam kelas. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan metode pembelajaran yang dapat mendorong partisipasi aktif mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi mahasiswa mengenai pengalaman mereka selama penerapan metode Small Group Discussion dalam pembelajaran berbicara. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara. Populasi penelitian terdiri atas 18 mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Muslim Maros, dengan sampel sebanyak 6 mahasiswa semester empat yang dipilih sebagai partisipan penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memandang metode Small Group Discussion sebagai metode yang efektif dalam meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris. Melalui diskusi kelompok kecil, mahasiswa merasa lebih nyaman untuk menyampaikan pendapat tanpa rasa takut atau malu. Selain meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara, metode ini juga membantu mahasiswa dalam mengembangkan kemampuan mendengarkan, meningkatkan kerja sama dengan teman, menumbuhkan rasa percaya diri, mengasah kemampuan berpikir kritis, memperkaya kosakata, serta meningkatkan motivasi untuk berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penerapan metode Small Group Discussion dapat menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih interaktif dan mendukung pengembangan kompetensi komunikasi mahasiswa dalam pembelajaran berbicara.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in human life because it contributes significantly to personal development and social progress. Through education, individuals acquire knowledge, develop skills, and cultivate critical thinking abilities that enable them to participate effectively in society. Education also shapes individuals' perspectives, lifestyles, and opportunities for personal advancement. As emphasized by Ab Marisyah and Firman (2019), education provides individuals with broader insights into life and encourages a more structured and organized way of living. Therefore, education is considered an essential foundation for improving both individual welfare and national development.

In the context of national development, education plays an important role in improving the quality of human resources. Countries with strong education systems tend to have better human capital that supports economic growth and social welfare. Education not only helps reduce poverty and ignorance but also equips individuals with the competencies needed to compete in the global era. For this reason, governments continue to pay serious attention to the development of education systems at various levels, from basic education to higher education (Pristiwanti et al., 2022). However, despite these efforts, challenges in achieving optimal learning outcomes remain evident in many educational contexts.

In Indonesia, educational development has become an important issue in relation to students' learning achievements and competencies. Several studies indicate that students' cognitive development often remains limited to lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, such as remembering, understanding, and applying knowledge. These levels represent foundational stages of learning but do not fully support the development of higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, evaluation, and creativity. Therefore, educational institutions are encouraged to implement innovative learning methods that promote active engagement and critical thinking among students.

One important aspect of modern education is foreign language learning, particularly English. Language functions as a primary tool for communication that allows individuals to express ideas, share information, and interact with others. In the era of globalization, English has become an international language widely used in various sectors such as education, business, technology, and tourism. Although English is still categorized as a foreign language in Indonesia, its importance continues to increase due to the growing need for global communication. According to Isnaini and Aminatun (2021), English proficiency has become an essential competence for individuals who aim to participate in global communication and compete in international environments.

Learning English requires the mastery of four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are commonly categorized into receptive skills and productive skills. Listening and reading are considered receptive skills because learners receive and interpret information, while speaking and writing are productive skills because learners actively produce language. Among these four skills, speaking is often regarded as one of the most challenging skills for language learners. Speaking requires not only linguistic competence but also confidence, fluency, and the ability to communicate ideas effectively in real-time interactions.

Speaking ability is widely recognized as a key indicator of language proficiency because it reflects a learner's ability to use language in practical communication. Nadia and Yansyah (2018) emphasize that speaking plays a crucial role in social interaction as it allows individuals to express thoughts, opinions, and feelings to others. Similarly, Jaya et al. (2022) state that speaking often becomes the primary indicator of whether someone has successfully acquired a language. However, many students experience difficulties in speaking English due to several factors such as limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and anxiety when communicating in front of others.

To overcome these challenges, educators have applied various teaching strategies and learning methods to encourage students to practice speaking more actively. One approach that has

gained considerable attention in language learning is collaborative learning, which emphasizes interaction among students during the learning process. Collaborative learning allows students to exchange ideas, support each other, and develop communication skills through meaningful interaction. One of the collaborative learning methods commonly used in classroom activities is the Small Group Discussion (SGD) method.

Small Group Discussion refers to a learning strategy in which students are divided into small groups consisting of a limited number of participants who discuss specific topics or problems. According to Fibrina and Ngadiso (2012), small group discussions typically consist of four to five students in each group, allowing more intensive interaction and active participation. This method encourages students to share their ideas, ask questions, and collaborate with peers in solving problems or discussing learning materials.

Previous studies have demonstrated that Small Group Discussion can effectively support the development of students' speaking skills. Puspitasari et al. (2023) explain that the Small Group Discussion method provides opportunities for students to express their opinions and participate actively in classroom communication. In addition, Melodi et al. (2019) argue that small group discussions can increase students' confidence because learners feel more comfortable expressing their ideas within smaller groups compared to speaking in front of the entire class.

Furthermore, Small Group Discussion does not only contribute to speaking development but also enhances other important learning outcomes. Syamlan and Rizal (2024) state that this learning model can stimulate students' critical thinking, challenge their perspectives, and improve interpersonal communication skills. Similarly, Badge et al. (2024) highlight that small group discussions can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and decision-making abilities during the learning process. Through collaborative interaction, students are able to exchange ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and construct knowledge together.

Despite the potential advantages of Small Group Discussion in supporting speaking development, students' perceptions of this learning method remain an important area of investigation. Understanding students' perceptions can provide valuable insights into how learning strategies influence their confidence, participation, and motivation in speaking English. In addition, examining students' experiences can help educators evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies and improve classroom practices in speaking courses.

Based on this background, the present study addresses the following research question: What are the students' perceptions regarding the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in speaking classes? Accordingly, the objective of this study is to explore students' perceptions of the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in speaking classes, particularly in relation to how the method supports their participation, confidence, and speaking development during classroom interaction. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective teaching strategies in English language learning, especially in improving students' speaking competence.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore students' perceptions of the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in speaking classes. The research was conducted at Universitas Muslim Maros from April to June 2024. The population consisted of 18 fourth-semester students from the English Education Department. Using purposive sampling, six students were selected as participants based on specific criteria, including their experience in participating in Small Group Discussion activities and their willingness to share their learning experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to provide detailed explanations of their perceptions and experiences during the learning process.

The data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which involves three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing relevant information obtained from

the interview transcripts. The reduced data were then presented systematically to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and meanings emerging from the data to ensure that the findings accurately represented students' perceptions of the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in speaking classes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted on May 11th, 2024. The participants of this study were six fourth-semester students from the English Education Department at Universitas Muslim Maros who had experience participating in speaking classes using the Small Group Discussion method. To maintain confidentiality, the respondents were coded as SN, PA, MH, FA, SFA, and AB. The results describe students' perceptions regarding the implementation of Small Group Discussion in speaking classes and are discussed in relation to relevant previous studies.

The Role of Small Group Discussion in Improving Speaking Skills

The interview results indicate that Small Group Discussion plays an important role in improving students' speaking skills. Most respondents stated that this method provides opportunities to practice speaking with peers in a more comfortable environment. SN explained that small group discussions allow students to practice speaking directly with their group members. Similarly, AB stated that the method encourages active participation because each student has the opportunity to speak during the discussion. MN also mentioned that discussions in small groups help students become more confident in expressing their ideas.

Other respondents highlighted additional benefits of the method. SFA stated that Small Group Discussion helps students express their ideas more freely, while PA mentioned that students can exchange knowledge and gain new insights during discussions. FA added that this method also contributes to improving vocabulary and listening skills.

These findings support the idea that interactive learning methods create opportunities for students to actively use the target language during classroom activities. In line with Melodi et al. (2019), Small Group Discussion can help students develop communication skills and increase their confidence when expressing opinions. When students interact in smaller groups, they tend to feel less anxious and more willing to participate in speaking activities.

Collaboration and Confidence in Expressing Opinions

Another important finding shows that collaboration during Small Group Discussion helps increase students' confidence in expressing their opinions. Most respondents stated that working with peers creates a more supportive learning atmosphere.

SN explained that collaboration allows students to exchange ideas and receive support from their peers. Similarly, MN mentioned that discussing in small groups makes students feel more confident compared to speaking individually in front of the class. FA also noted that discussions with classmates reduce feelings of awkwardness when expressing opinions.

Some respondents initially felt hesitant to participate in discussions. However, they reported that their confidence gradually increased as they became more accustomed to the discussion process. SFA mentioned that she initially felt uncomfortable speaking, but over time she became more confident when interacting with her group members.

These findings indicate that collaborative learning environments can positively influence students' confidence and participation in speaking activities. According to Hendra Suryadi (2020), Small Group Discussion provides opportunities for students to share ideas, experiences, and knowledge through active interaction, which contributes to the development of communication skills.

Small Group Discussion as an Engaging Learning Method

The findings also reveal that students perceive Small Group Discussion as an interesting and engaging learning method. Most respondents stated that the interactive nature of discussions encourages active participation during classroom activities.

SN explained that small group discussions allow participants to exchange ideas and arguments with each other. MN also mentioned that dividing students into small groups helps increase participation because lecturers can more easily observe each student's involvement in the discussion process.

Other respondents emphasized the collaborative characteristics of this method. AB stated that group discussions encourage students to discuss interesting topics and interact actively with their peers. Similarly, PA explained that group discussions allow students to share tasks and exchange information during learning activities. SFA also mentioned that discussions provide opportunities to share experiences and gain new insights from classmates.

These findings suggest that Small Group Discussion promotes a more student-centered learning environment, where students are actively involved in constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information from the lecturer. Such interaction can create a more engaging and meaningful learning experience.

Challenges in Implementing Small Group Discussion

Although Small Group Discussion provides many benefits, several respondents also reported some difficulties during its implementation. The most common challenges mentioned were limited vocabulary and lack of confidence when speaking in English.

SFA explained that she initially felt embarrassed and hesitant to speak during discussions. SN also mentioned that fear of making mistakes and limited vocabulary sometimes prevented students from expressing their opinions. Similarly, FA reported that difficulty in finding appropriate English words could hinder students when trying to express their ideas.

However, some respondents stated that these difficulties gradually decreased as they became more accustomed to participating in discussions. PA mentioned that she rarely experienced serious difficulties because she continued to express her opinions even when she was unsure about the correct words.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Cintya Rima Puspitasari et al. (2023), which found that limited vocabulary and lack of confidence are common challenges faced by students in speaking activities. Nevertheless, continuous practice and peer interaction can help students gradually overcome these obstacles.

Additional Learning Benefits of Small Group Discussion

The interview results also revealed that Small Group Discussion provides benefits beyond improving speaking skills. Several respondents mentioned improvements in other learning aspects, such as critical thinking, listening skills, collaboration, and learning motivation.

AB explained that discussions help develop critical thinking skills because students are involved in question-and-answer interactions during the discussion process. Some respondents also mentioned that discussions improve listening skills because students must pay attention to their peers' opinions before responding. SN added that discussions help students understand different perspectives and appreciate the ideas of others.

Furthermore, several respondents stated that this method increases their motivation to participate in classroom activities. The interactive nature of the discussion process encourages students to become more active and engaged in learning.

These findings indicate that Small Group Discussion can function as a comprehensive learning strategy that supports multiple aspects of language learning, including cognitive, social, and communicative development.

Small Group Discussion and Students' Learning Motivation

The final finding shows that Small Group Discussion is perceived as an effective method for increasing students' motivation in speaking activities. Most respondents reported that the interactive nature of discussions encourages them to participate actively in learning.

AB mentioned that discussions allow students to interact frequently and practice speaking while exchanging ideas. Similarly, SN explained that repeated opportunities to speak with peers increase students' motivation to communicate in English. PA also stated that discussions enable students to gain new knowledge and exchange information with classmates.

Other respondents emphasized that the supportive classroom environment created during discussions helps them feel more comfortable expressing their opinions. SFA mentioned that feedback from peers helps improve speaking skills, while FA explained that a supportive discussion atmosphere motivates students to participate more actively in class.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the implementation of Small Group Discussion creates an interactive and collaborative learning environment that supports students' speaking development. The method encourages active participation, builds confidence, and promotes meaningful interaction among students. Therefore, Small Group Discussion can be considered an effective instructional strategy for improving students' speaking skills and enhancing their overall learning experience in English language classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of the implementation of the Small Group Discussion method in speaking classes. The findings indicate that students have positive perceptions toward the use of this method in the learning process. Small Group Discussion provides opportunities for students to actively participate, express their ideas, and practice speaking in a supportive learning environment.

The results also show that this method not only improves speaking skills but also contributes to the development of other learning aspects such as learning motivation, listening skills, vocabulary development, confidence, critical thinking, and collaboration among students. However, some challenges were also identified, including limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence. Overall, these findings suggest that Small Group Discussion can be considered an effective strategy for creating interactive and collaborative speaking activities in the classroom.

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