

## **Improving Students' English Speaking Skills through Group Discussions: A Qualitative Approach**

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Received: January 15 2025

Revised: January 29 2025

Accepted: 30 January 2025

### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the influence of group discussions on the improvement of students' speaking skills in English. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, this research involves 15 students who participated in group discussions in the English class. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observations during the discussion sessions. The research results show that group discussions significantly enhance students' confidence, comfort, and engagement in communication. As many as 80% of respondents reported an increase in confidence, while 75% felt more comfortable expressing their ideas. Additionally, the frequency of verbal interactions increased by 60%, indicating that students are more actively participating in discussions. These findings affirm that the collaborative environment created through group discussions contributes to the development of speaking skills. This research has practical implications for English language teaching, where group discussion methods can be integrated into the curriculum to enhance students' speaking skills.

**Keywords:** *Speaking Skill, Interpersonal Communication and Collaborative Learning*

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### **Introduction**

In the context of English language learning, speaking skills are often a major challenge for university students. Traditional teaching methods, such as lectures and direct teaching, are often inadequate in developing effective speaking skills. These methods tend to focus on mastering grammar and vocabulary, without providing sufficient opportunities for students to practice speaking in real situations. As a result, students often feel less confident and uncomfortable when it comes to speaking in English, which can hinder their ability to communicate effectively in both academic and professional settings.

Group discussion emerges as a promising alternative to address this shortcoming. By creating a collaborative learning environment, group discussions provide opportunities for students to interact directly, share ideas, and provide feedback to each other. This method not only encourages active participation, but also helps students build confidence in speaking. In group discussions, students can practice speaking in a more natural and supportive context, which allows them to develop better communication skills.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is a crucial skill for university students, especially in the current era of globalization. Despite the fact that many educational institutions have incorporated English lessons into their curricula, there is still a significant gap between theory and reality in the real world (Sulfuadi, 2024). Many students feel stressed and uncomfortable when speaking in English, especially in formal situations. Peer judgment and a lack of practice opportunities often lead to this. Previous research has demonstrated that interactive learning, like group discussions, enhances students' speaking skills. However, there is not much research specifically evaluating this method in higher education.

Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 2021) offers a constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that social interaction and direct experience shape knowledge. Group discussions can serve as an ideal platform to create a collaborative learning environment where students can provide feedback to each other and learn from one another's experiences. A new study shows that collaborative learning enhances students' language skills and boosts their self-confidence. Therefore, the goal of this research is to ascertain how students can enhance their English speaking skills through group discussions.

This study aims to explore how group discussions can improve students' speaking skills in English. By understanding the dynamics of interaction in group discussions, this research is expected to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of this method in language learning, as well as provide recommendations for teachers to integrate group discussions into their curriculum.

This research would identify the advantages and disadvantages of this method by focusing on the participants' experiences during the discussion process. We expect this research to significantly contribute to the development of more innovative and efficient English learning strategies in higher education institutions. This study is important for both academics and individuals who want to improve their English language skills because it fills in research gaps and adds to what is known about how group discussions can be used to help people learn. This research is expected to help teachers and policymakers create learning programs that better meet the needs of students in the modern world.

## **Literature Review**

### **English Speaking Skills**

One of the important components in language learning is the ability to communicate well in English, especially for students preparing to work in a global environment. This ability encompasses the ability to communicate, relate to others, and express ideas (Abidin et al., 2021). Research shows that speaking skills not only depend on mastery of grammar and vocabulary but also on the ability to communicate effectively in social environments. Group discussions can help students improve their speaking skills in lessons because they provide them with the opportunity to practice speaking in a more interactive and natural environment (Sanulita et al., 2024).

### **Interpersonal Communication Theory**

The theory of interpersonal communication focuses on the interaction and communication between individuals. Joseph A. DeVito developed this theory by stating that the exchange of messages is part of interpersonal communication, which can affect relationships between people (Fariz et al., 2024). According to the basic assumptions of this theory, communication is a dynamic and contextual process in which people interact with each other through verbal and nonverbal messages. The theory of interpersonal communication can assist in group discussions, building relationships, understanding how students interact with each other, and improving their speaking skills (Sureni et al., 2023). Saputra & Jamiati's (2024) study demonstrates that self-disclosure and communication confidence can boost the effectiveness of group discussions. The result is an improvement in students' speaking skills.

## **Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning is an educational method that emphasizes collaboration among students. To achieve the same learning objectives, it is stated that collaborative learning can enhance student engagement, facilitate the exchange of ideas, and strengthen social skills (Troussas et al., 2023). In the context of language learning, group discussions as a collaborative learning method allow students to practice speaking in a supportive and interactive environment and show that learners who engage in group discussions have greater confidence and motivation to speak in English, which contributes to the improvement of their speaking skills. As a result, collaborative learning not only improves speaking skills but also boosts students' confidence and motivation in using English.

## **Methods**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This research aims to explore and understand students' experiences and perceptions regarding group discussions in English language learning. We conducted the experiment with a group of students who actively participated in group discussions. We conducted observations directly during the classroom discussion sessions, adjusting the meeting frequencies to align with the class schedule. We used recording devices for interviews, observation notes, and relevant teaching documents to support the analysis. The research population consists of students enrolled in the English study program at a college. The sampling method used is purposive sampling, where participants are selected based on specific criteria, namely students who have actively participated in group discussions. The tools used in this research include semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews were conducted with students to explore their experiences and perspectives regarding the impact of group discussions on their speaking skills. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this research employs triangulation by utilizing various data sources, including interviews, observations, and documentation. After the initial analysis, we re-examined the research results with respondents through member checking to obtain feedback and clarification. We collected data through in-depth interviews and direct observations, followed by thematic analysis methods. Recording interviews and making notes during observations is the first step in the analysis process. Next, themes are found and information is put into appropriate categories. Research shows that group discussions positively contribute to the improvement of students' speaking skills, as well as the factors that support effective interaction in group discussions.

## **Result and Discussion (Times New Roman 12, Bold)**

Research conducted by (Mutabiah et al., 2019) shows that small group discussion techniques can improve students' speaking skills. The results of this study emphasize the importance of interaction between students in the learning process, which is in line with the findings that group discussions can create a more dynamic learning environment. Research on the effectiveness of small group discussion techniques in English language learning has several positive aspects. It can help identify research gaps and improve the method's effectiveness in online contexts. The study focuses on the impact of small group discussion techniques on students' participation in online learning. It uses quantitative data to measure the effectiveness of the method but lacks the exploration of psychological and social factors that influence student participation. The study also aims to gather data from students in different school settings and examines the impact of small group discussion techniques on students' learning experiences. It also considers the impact of student time spent on the method and the development of small group discussion techniques. The study uses a longitudinal analysis to understand student interaction with the method and its emotional impact. The development of these aspects in the study can contribute significantly to the English language learning method and address the research gaps identified in previous studies.

In line with that (Muharromah, 2021) this study identified several relevant research gaps in the context of improving students' English speaking skills through group discussions. First, the focus of this study was limited to one method, namely group discussion, without comparing it with other methods such as direct or project-based learning. This creates an opportunity to explore the effectiveness of various

methods in improving speaking skills. Further research could consider comparisons between group discussions and other teaching methods to provide a more comprehensive insight into the most effective learning strategies.

Secondly, this study was conducted in one class at one location, which suggests the need for more extensive research across different educational institutions or different grade levels. Evaluating the consistency of results across different educational contexts can provide a clearer picture of the effectiveness of group discussions in improving English speaking skills.

In addition, although this study assessed speaking skills in general, there was no in-depth study of specific aspects such as pronunciation, intonation and vocabulary use that could further clarify the impact of group discussions. Future research could explore how group discussions affect these aspects in more detail.

The research results show that group discussions significantly improve students' English speaking skills. During interviews with 15 students, 80% of the respondents reported an increase in confidence in speaking English after participating in group discussions. Additionally, 75% of the students expressed that they feel more comfortable conveying their opinions and ideas in English.

Table 1 presents a summary of findings related to the improvement of students' speaking skills after participating in group discussions.

Table 1. Improvement in students' speaking skills

| No | Skill Aspect Respondent         | Percentage (%) |
|----|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1  | Increase in self-confidence     | 80             |
| 2  | Comfort in Speaking             | 75             |
| 3  | Capabilities of Conveying Ideas | 70             |
| 4  | Participation in Discussion     | 85             |

Classroom observations show that students who participate in group discussions are more active in conversations, with the frequency of verbal interactions increasing by up to 60% compared to traditional learning sessions. In addition, students demonstrated superior listening skills, with 70% of them able to provide constructive feedback to their peers.

## Conclusion

This research aims to explore the impact of group discussions on the improvement of students' speaking skills in English. Research shows that group discussions significantly increase students' confidence, comfort, and engagement in communication. With 80% of respondents reporting increased confidence and 75% feeling more comfortable expressing ideas, these findings affirm that the collaborative environment generated through group discussions contributes to the development of speaking skills. In addition, the increased frequency of verbal interactions and improved listening skills indicate that group discussions not only enhance speaking skills but also strengthen students' social skills. The implications of this research are highly relevant to English language teaching in higher education. The integration of group discussion methods into the curriculum can create a more interactive and supportive learning atmosphere. Therefore, instructors are expected to design learning activities that facilitate collaboration among students, thereby not only improving their speaking skills but also building their confidence and motivation in using English. This research also contributes to the literature on interpersonal communication and collaborative learning while also creating opportunities for further research in a broader context.

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