

GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted at SMAN 2 Sigli to improve speaking skills in English through group work activities with the third year students of XII-IPA1 through a Classroom Action Research project. Before this study was conducted, only 25% of the students met the speaking target test or Minimal Grade Criteria (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal* or KKM) which was 75. The researcher and the collaborator worked together in designing a new lesson plan, implementing the actions and making conclusions and reflections. The study was done in three cycles by following action research procedures: planning an action, implementing the plan, observing the action, and reflecting. To collect the data, observation sheets, tests and a questionnaire were used as instruments. The findings showed that group work activities were effective for improving the students' ability in speaking and the teacher's performance in teaching speaking as well. From the pre-test the highest score was 80 and the lowest 60 while from the post-test after the third cycle the highest score was 95 and the lowest was 70. This means that most of the students improved a lot in speaking. Also the results from the observations of the teacher, started from 58% and increased to 75% and 86% and for the students from 56% increased to 68% and 84% from the first cycle to the second and then the third cycle. The result of this research also indicates that the students responded very well towards the implementation of the group work activities. Based on these findings, it is suggested that other English teachers should use group work activities for the teaching of speaking English at schools. since they are get better results

Key Words: *Speaking Skills, Group Work Activities.*

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INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Speaking is very important in the wider world of work. Speaking skills are measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in a language especially EFL. The aim of teaching speaking is to train the students to be able to express meaningful and contextual communications as in real life. As it is stated in the new competency based curriculum, “senior high school students are expected to be able to express transactional and interpersonal meaning or spoken monologues and communicate in such genre (ways) as narratives, procedures, recounts, spoofs, reports, news items, expositions, reviews, descriptions, explanations and discussions” (Depdiknas, 2004: 65).

The Board of National Standards for Education (*Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan* or BSNP, 2006) states that the aim of teaching speaking is to train the students to be able to express their ideas meaningfully in real life, it also directed students to apply the language in daily communications even outside of the school. This reality makes teachers and parents think that ability in speaking must be mastered by their students and their children.

However, the reality shows that the students of SMAN 2 Sigli were not able to communicate meaningfully. Their low ability was indicated by their low achievement in their English lessons. Their average score was 68, while the Minimal Grade Criteria (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal* or KKM) for the school was 75 and only 25 percent of these students could reach that score.

The students' achievements in speaking were influenced by the methods used by the teacher and the motivation and the interest in learning of the students. Hammer (1998: 4) has stated that getting students to speak to use the language they are learning is a vital part of a teacher's job. Students are the people who need the practice in using words, not the teacher.

Speaking as a skill needs much exercise and practice, otherwise speaking cannot be improved. Brown (1994: 225) has stated that “one of the obstacles in learning speaking is the anxiety generated over the risks of blurting things out that are wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible”. So, it can be concluded that some students do not want to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes in speaking.

Based on the researcher's experience during his many years teaching, he identified many problems in the teaching of speaking to

the third year students at SMAN 2 Sigli. The first problem was that the researcher still implemented the conventional method of teaching (speaking) in which he directly asked students to create and memorize dialogues without giving them enough time to practice together. Besides, there was no discussion on the topic and also there was hardly any interaction between the teacher and the students. Second, the students had many difficulties in performing speaking, most of the students were not confident to use English in their speaking class. Third, only 25% of the students' English proficiency achievement results or scores met the speaking target test or KKM. Fourth, the students had low motivation to improve their speaking skills because the teacher only gave them monotonous topics so most of them were bored and lost interest in speaking EFL. The problems with aspects of speaking such as accuracy, fluency and comprehensibility were caused by both the teacher and the students. The students had poor mastery of vocabulary and grammar while the English teacher was lacking in training in better methods for teaching speaking EFL.

The methods and techniques that were used by the teacher at SMAN 2 Sigli were out of date. The teaching-learning process was still monotonous in the sense that the class was dominated by the teacher. The teacher used a lecture method and he was very comfortable with using it. The English teacher did not make any reflections over his teaching-learning process. Thus he did not use any more interesting and effective methods in the teaching-learning processes. Furthermore, the students were rarely organized into groups when they were doing their speaking tasks. They were not trained to cooperate with their friends; instead, they were expected to work individually. So, the class needed some new techniques or methods to attract the students' interest in studying speaking.

To overcome the problems stated above, many kinds of strategies, methods and approaches could be applied in teaching speaking. Accordingly, the researcher decided to choose Group Work activities as an alternative solution for teaching speaking at the school because many research findings say that this type of activity is effective to use in teaching speaking.

Moreover, with Group Work activities, the students sit together, face one another, and talk freely about some problem. This situation creates free communications in which the students use the language freely in the classroom without feeling shy. Furthermore, it can be concluded that Group Work activities are usually discussions in groups

with the number of students in each group around four in order to give every students maximum opportunity to participate in all activities. Blair (1996) has stated that group work (including pair work) has at least five pedagogic benefits. Group work (1) increases the quantity of language practice opportunities, (2) improves the quality of the students talk in several ways. They can engage in what is called “exploratory” talk and practice a functionally wider speech repertoire. (3) Helps individualize instructions, potentially allowing students to work at their own pace, perhaps using different materials. (4) Could help improve the effective climate in the classroom, the intimacy of the small group settings being especially valuable to shy or linguistically insecure students. Finally, group work can help motivate students because of the advantages referred to from (1) through (4) and because of the pedagogic variety it brings to a lesson.

When the students work in groups, there are two quite separate issues involved. The first is the task and the problems involved in getting the job done. Frequently this is the only issue which the group considers. The second is the process of the Group Work itself, the mechanism by which the group acts as the unit.

To support this research, there are some previous studies consulted by the researcher. First, the research conducted by Meng (2009) found that the teacher’s role will change from a lecturer to a guide leading learners. Learners also assume new roles in the group work. They are collaborators and active participants rather than only passive knowledge receivers. The class mode changes from teacher-centered to learner-centered.

Second, the research conducted by Hamzah and Ting (2010) showed the students’ positive responses towards the group work activities in class. This contributed to a significant increase in students’ participation in their groups. Hence, group work activities could have significant pedagogical implications and could be a practical technique if they are carefully planned to teach speaking skills amongst the students.

With reference to the above, the researcher decided to conduct a classroom action research project in order to improve the quality of his own teaching performance and consequently the students’ speaking skills can be improved as well.

The Research Problems

1. How effective is the teacher's performance in implementing Group Work Activities for teaching speaking EFL to students of class XII – IPA-1 at SMAN 2 Sigli?
2. How effective is Group Work Activities in improving the speaking skills of the students in the class?
3. How do the students in the class respond to the implementation of Group Work Activities in their speaking class?

Research Objectives

1. To improve the teacher's performance in teaching speaking by implementing Group Work Activities with the students in class XII–IPA-1 at SMAN 2 Sigli.
2. To find out the effectiveness of Group Work Activities for improving the speaking skills of the students in the class.
3. To find out the responses of the students in the class towards the implementation of Group Work Activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking

Speaking is the one of the four language skills that has the most important role in human life so that the mastery of speaking is very vital in teaching a language. Campbell (1989:39) has stated that speaking is an activity on the part of one individual to make oneself understood by another, and an activity on the part of the other to understand what is in the mind of the first. This definition has the meaning that the person who becomes the speaker must use tools of communication in order to be understood by the listener.

Group Work

Definition of Group Work

Harmer (2007: 166) has observed that group work is a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self initiated language. Not only that, what we commonly call pair work is simply group work in groups of two. Group work usually implies “small” group work, that is, students in groups of perhaps six or fewer. Large grouping defeats one of the major purposes for doing group work viz: giving students more opportunities to speak.

Why Use Groups?

A clear rationale for using group work is to be found in Webb (1994), who provides a scholarly review of the wide range of educational theories drawn on by proponents of group work. In merely concrete terms, regardless of the content area and as compared with other instructional formats, research has shown that well-designed and conducted group work leads to greater retention and understanding of what is taught (Millis and Cottrell, 1998).

According to a survey by VUW's Career Development and Development Service (2004), carefully planned group work provides opportunities and social benefits for students. These include the development of co-operation and planning skills, opportunities for leadership and shared leadership, increases in active participation and involvement in the course, improved student performance, opportunities for students to work on large and/or complex projects, and the promotion of student autonomy by transferring some of the responsibility for teaching-learning to students.

Group Work in Teaching Speaking Skills

Group Work can be used for the application of brainstorming, a task which is often too difficult for individuals to do, but is easy to do successfully in groups. An example is a speaking group task where three or four students discuss together to find the ideas in a text where the results are superior to what anyone of the group could do alone. Cottrell (1999: 12) declares that work where groups of students are working in the same room and even on a common problem does not necessarily ensure a Group Work process. If the group is managed in a totally autocratic manner, there may be little opportunity for interaction relating to the work. If there is functioning within the group, the process may be evolving.

Even if the problem can be decided by a single person, there are two main benefits in involving the students who will carry out the decision. First, the motivational aspect of participating in the decision will clearly enhance its implementation. Second, there may well be factors which implementers understand better than the single person who can supposedly have decided alone. Connery (1988: 35) states that the best way to ensure comparable effort amongst all the group members is to design activities in which there is a clear division of labor and each student must contribute if the group is to reach its goal.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Group Work

The Advantages of Group Work

Harmer (2007: 166) has stated that there are some advantages of Group Work. 1) Like pair work, it dramatically increases the number of talking opportunities for individual students. 2) Unlike pair work, because there are more than two people in the group, personal relationships are usually less problematic; there is also a greater chance of different opinions and varied contributions than in pair work. 3) It encourages broader skills of co-operation and negotiation than pair work, and yet is more private than work in front of the whole class. 4) It promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decisions in the group without being told what to do by the teacher. 5) Although we do not wish any individuals in groups to be completely passive, nevertheless, some students can choose their level of participation more readily than in a whole-class or pair work situation.

Furthermore Brown (2001: 177) has also declared that the advantages of Group Work are as follows:

1. Group work generates interactive language.
2. Group work offers an embracing affective climate.
3. Group work promotes learners' responsibility and autonomy.
4. Group work is a step toward individualized instructions.

The Disadvantages of Group Work

Harmer (2007: 166) has also explained some disadvantages of Group Work as follows:

- 1) It is likely to be noisy (though not necessarily as loud as pair work can be). Some teachers' feel that they may lose control, and the whole-class feeling which has been built up may dissipate when the class is split into smaller entities.
- 2) Not all students enjoy it since they would prefer to be the focus of the teacher's attention rather than working with their peers. Sometimes students find themselves in uncongenial groups and wish they could be somewhere else.
- 3) Individuals may fall into group roles that become fossilized, so that some are passive whereas others may dominate.
- 4) Groups can take longer to organize than pairs, beginning and ending group work activities, especially where people move around the class, can take time and be chaotic (but only very briefly).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The design of this research is a Classroom Action Research (CAR) study. This design was chosen since it has similar characteristics with the problems and objectives of this study. The research is intended to solve the problems found by the teacher in the teaching of speaking. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1998: 14), action research is a reflective form of research conducted by doing certain actions to try to improve and increase the quality of teaching practices in the classrooms in order that those practices could become more professional.

Research Setting and the Subject of the Research

This study was conducted at High School, SMAN 2 Sigli which is located on Jln. Lingkar Keuniree in the City of Sigli sub-district. The subject of this study was class XII-IPA1 at that school. There were 22 classes in the school, 7 classes in-year X, 7 classes in-year XI, and 8 classes in-year XII. The researcher who conducted this research was one of the teachers teaching English at that school, he has been teaching English for many years.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Results from the Observation Checklist

Based on the results from the observation checklist, the researcher as the teacher improved his methods of teaching. In cycle 1, he got a fair score of 58% when he started to apply the group work activities in the teaching-learning processes while the students were not yet improved. Nevertheless, he still had many weaknesses in the methods of teaching. After cycle 2, he got a better score of 75% because he had prepared his material and improved his teaching. One improvement was that he had tried to overcome some problems students had concerning vocabulary. After cycle 3, the teacher got a very good score of 86% because the teaching-learning process became much better and had resulted in a very good impact in the improvement of the results of the students.

The Results from the Tests

The results from the post-tests after cycle 1, cycle 2 and cycle 3 and the overall progress improvement are shown in Figure 1.

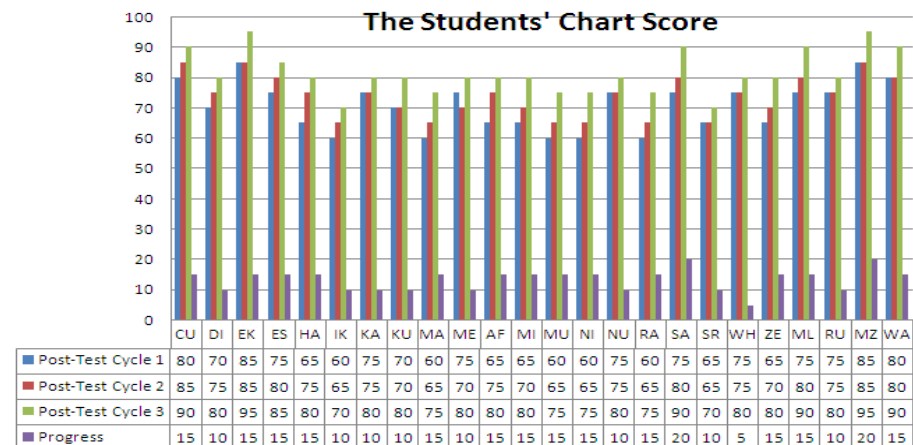


Figure 1. The Results from the Post-tests after Cycle 1, Cycle 2 and Cycle 3.

The researcher made analysis of the students' average score. The score could be seen in the following description (Sudjana, 2005: 67):

1. Students' average score in the test result of cycle 1:

$$X = \frac{X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + \dots}{N}$$

$$X = \frac{1690}{24}$$

$$X = 70$$

2. Students' average score in the test result of cycle 2:

$$X = \frac{X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + \dots}{N}$$

$$X = \frac{1770}{24}$$

$$X = 74$$

3. Students' average score in the test result of cycle 3:

$$X = \frac{X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + \dots}{N}$$

$$X = \frac{1955}{24}$$

$$X = 81$$

These scores indicate that the students had improved their speaking skills and had achieved or surpassed the criteria of the success

indicator. So, the researcher and his collaborator did not need to continue to another cycle and could stop the action research.

The Results from the Questionnaire

The results from the questionnaire in Cycle 1, Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 are shown in Figure 2.

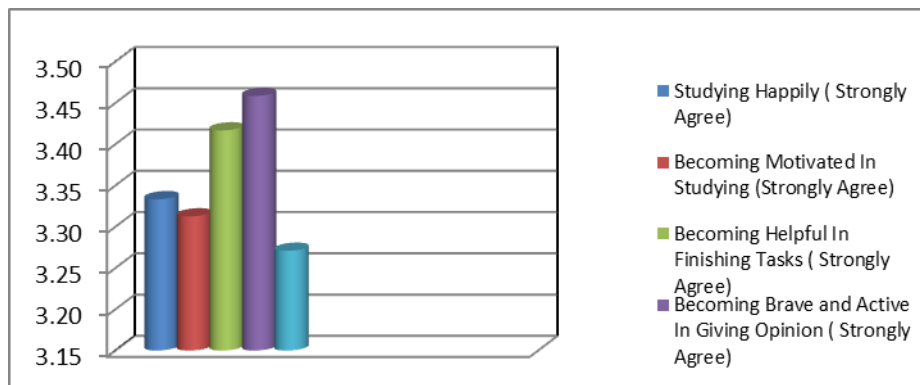


Figure 2. Result from the Questionnaire for the Students.

The graphic shows that the students had very positive responses toward the implementation of the Group Work activities for improving their speaking skills in the classroom. This was proved by all the mean scores based on the five questions asked. The total mean score for all five factors was 3.36 (84%) which was in the strongly agree criterion.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data presented earlier, it was found that the implementation of the Group Work activities in teaching speaking throughout the research was successful. The students were chosen heterogeneously based on the differences of their ability in English. It was expected that the students were able to share their ideas and work together in doing the task during the teaching-learning processes.

After performing three cycles of implementation, the data analysis of the students' performance in speaking showed that Group Work activities had worked to improve the speaking skills of the third year students at SMAN 2 Sigli since those activities had helped them to improve their ability in speaking and to be more active in joining the

speaking class activities and also to cooperate with their friends in sharing ideas and giving opinions.

In accordance with the students' participation during the teaching-learning process, the result of observation checklist showed that their activeness increased gradually from only 56% in the first cycle to 68% in the second cycle. The improvement increased better in the third cycle to the level very good as the data showed that their results reached 84%. This meant that the Group Work activities applied had successfully improved the students' speaking skills during the teaching-learning processes.

Thus the implementation of Group Work activities is considered effective in improving speaking skills particularly in over coming the students' speaking problems as the data gained showed that some improvements were made by the students. The improvements can be seen from the comparison of the results from the pre-test with the results from the post-tests given at the end of each cycle. The result from the pre-test: the mean of the students' scores was 68; this increased to 70 after the end of the first cycle, to 74 after the end of the second cycle and to 81 after the end of the third cycle.

In order to know the students' opinion or attitude whether or not they felt happy about the implementation of Group Work activities, the researcher gave questionnaire to them which contained of 10 questions. The questionnaire was marked by the students using the evaluation scale as follows:

Table 1. Marks for the Questionnaire.

No	Evaluation	Symbol	Positive	Negative
1	Strongly Agree	SA	4	0
2	Agree	AG	3	2
3	Disagree	DA	2	3
4	Strongly Disagree	SD	0	4

To determine the students' perception, the researcher used the criteria proposed by Sugiyono (2007: 155):

1. 3.3 - 4.0 = Strongly Agree
2. 2.5 - 3.2 = Agree
3. 1.7 - 2.4 = Disagree
4. 0 - 1.6 = Strongly Disagree

After preparing all the criteria, the researcher summarized the perceptions of the students towards the implementation of Group Work activities in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the Students' Perceptions towards the Implementation of Group Work Activities.

No	Variable measured	Question Numbers	Total Score	Mean Score
1	Studying happily	1 & 2	160	3.33
2	Becoming motivated in studying	3 & 4	159	3.31
3	Becoming helpful in finishing tasks	5 & 6	164	3.42
4	Becoming brave and active in giving opinions	7 & 8	166	3.46
5	Respecting friends and the teacher	9 & 10	157	3.27

Based on Table 2, it was found that the mean score for the students' perception toward the implementation of Group Work activities in speaking class was 3.36 which belongs to the criteria strongly agree. This means that the students' responses towards the implementation of Group Work activities were strongly positive.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results and the discussions in the previous sections, the researcher as the teacher involved in the teaching-learning processes of speaking EFL presents the following important points.

First, the teacher successfully implemented Group Work activities in teaching speaking to the third year students at SMAN 2 Sigli.

Second, using Group Work activities in his class, the teacher's performance in teaching speaking skills increased and also in the process the students' performance at learning speaking increased as well.

Third, the results from the speaking test after the third cycle had achieved the success indicator target for the students. The students' mean score in the test result after the first cycle was 71 while the students' mean score in the test result after the third cycle was 81.

Fourth, the responses of the students' toward the implementation of Group Work activities in their speaking classes was very positive and satisfying.

Finally, from all points stated above, it could be concluded that the Group Work activities have changed the speaking class atmosphere to be much better than before. As a result the students felt very happy,

comfortable and enthusiastic during the teaching-learning process of speaking using Group Work activities.

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