



Original Article

Developing Speaking Skills of the Eighth Grade Students of SMP Negeri 1 Sigi through Small Group Discussion

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Abstract:

This research examines the impact of the Small Group Discussion (SGD) technique on improving the speaking skills of the eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Sigi, with particular emphasis on vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Employing a quasi-experimental design, the study compared an experimental group taught using SGD with a control group receiving conventional instruction. Both groups completed pre-tests and post-tests to assess their progress. The data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, Mann-Whitney U Test, and descriptive statistics. Results showed that the experimental group experienced a significant improvement in all targeted speaking sub-skills, with average scores increasing from 15.14 to 21.14, while the control group showed only a slight improvement from 15.49 to 16.07. Statistical analysis confirmed a highly significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the two groups, demonstrating the greater effectiveness of SGD compared to the conventional method in enhancing speaking skills. The study concludes that SGD fosters active engagement and self-confidence, providing a positive and supportive environment for language learning. These findings offer practical insights for English language teaching, endorsing SGD as an effective strategy to boost students' communicative competence.

Keywords: Small Group Discussion, speaking skills, quasi-experimental design.

Introduction

Language plays an important role in communication and education. It enables people to share ideas, express feelings, and interact effectively with others. Among the four basic language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is considered the most essential in helping learners to use the language for real communication. Through speaking, learners can express their opinions and participate actively in social and academic situations. However, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, especially in Indonesia, many students still face challenges in mastering this skill due to limited opportunities to practice and lack of confidence when speaking English.

In the classroom setting, speaking skill development among junior high school



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students is often hindered by several factors. At SMP Negeri 1 Sigi, many eighth-grade students still find it difficult to speak English fluently. They tend to have a limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and poor fluency, which make communication less effective. Furthermore, psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence also prevent them from engaging in speaking activities. These challenges indicate the need for teachers to apply teaching methods that can encourage students to be more active and confident in expressing their ideas in English.

One effective approach to overcoming these problems is the Small Group Discussion (SGD) technique. This method emphasizes student-centered learning, where learners work in small groups to discuss topics, share ideas, and solve problems collaboratively. According to [Harmer \(1998\)](#) and [Orlich \(2004\)](#), discussion activities give students more opportunities to practice the target language meaningfully and develop communicative competence. SGD also allows students to learn from peers, build teamwork, and increase their confidence in speaking English. Moreover, this method supports the principles of active learning and cooperative interaction as proposed by [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) sociocultural theory.

Several studies have shown that Small Group Discussion can improve students' speaking skills. Research conducted by [La'Biran \(2017\)](#) and [Matondang et al. \(2023\)](#) found that students who were taught using SGD showed significant improvement in their speaking performance. However, most previous studies only focused on general speaking achievement without analyzing specific sub-skills such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. In addition, there is still limited research on the use of this method in lower secondary schools, particularly among eighth-grade students. Therefore, further investigation is needed to explore how Small Group Discussion can contribute to improving these specific aspects of speaking ability.

Based on the background above, this research aims to determine whether the implementation of Small Group Discussion can develop the speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Sigi. The study focuses on three components of speaking: vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. The results are expected to provide valuable information for English teachers in selecting appropriate teaching techniques and contribute to improving the quality of English language learning at the junior high school level.

Small Group Discussion

Small group discussions are included in student-centered active learning. Several educational strategies that encourage student participation include small group discussions. In addition to being a discussion method, this approach also involves problem management (problem-solving). Students split into groups and participated in discussions in small groups. According to Kindsvatter (1996:242), "A small-group discussion defines the large classroom into small groups of students to achieve specific objectives, permits students to assume more responsibility for their learning, develop social and leadership skills, and become involved in an alternative instructional approach." This means small groups can facilitate meaningful communication between pupils.

Speaking Skills

Speaking is one of the English language skills that play an important role in human beings because it is one of the processes to convey our message to other people. Basic knowledge of words is needed for everyone to practice speaking. Consequently, we need to pay attention to the English language itself by improving our knowledge through practice for a long time. We can say that speaking is the process which two people transform a message by using language. Fiske (1990:1),

argues, "Communication is one of the human activities that everyone recognizes it". From the opinion above, we know that everyone needs language for communicating and sharing. In summary, we know that conversation can be done at any time and it could not happen if only one person takes part whether in a formal or non-formal setting.

Methods

This research employed a quasi-experimental design to determine the effect of Small Group Discussion (SGD) on the speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Sigi. Two groups were involved in this study: the experimental group, which received treatment through the implementation of SGD, and the control group, which was taught using conventional teaching methods. Both groups were given a pre-test and a post-test to measure their speaking performance before and after the treatment.

The population of this study consisted of all eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Sigi in the academic year 2024/2025, totaling 191 students. From this population, two classes were randomly selected as samples: Class VIII A as the experimental group and Class VIII E as the control group, with a total of 54 students. The random sampling technique ensured that every student had an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing sampling bias.

The instrument used in this study was a speaking test consisting of a pre-test and a post-test. The test assessed students' speaking skills based on three indicators: vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, following [Brown's \(2001\)](#) assessment criteria.

The study consisted of six meetings for each group. The experimental group received treatment using Small Group Discussion, while the control group received conventional teaching. Each group discussion involved 4–5 students who discussed assigned topics such as family, animals, hobbies, food, and musical instruments. Students worked collaboratively, and one student from each group presented the discussion results. The teacher acted as a facilitator and provided feedback.

Data were collected from pre-test and post-test scores. Non-parametric statistical tests were used since the data were not normally distributed. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was applied to measure within-group improvement, and the Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare differences between groups. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, and results were interpreted based on a significance level of 0.05.

Results

The researchers gathered data from July 14 to August 7, primarily using tests as the research instrument. The study took place in classes VIII A and VIII E at SMP Negeri 1 Sigi. At the start of the sessions, the researchers administered a pretest to both the control and experimental groups to assess the students' initial speaking abilities. The control group did not receive any treatment, which allowed the researcher to establish a baseline for comparison. Afterwards a post-test was conducted to evaluate and compare the final speaking abilities of both groups, highlighting the difference between the untreated control group and the experimental group that received the intervention.

The researcher administered a pre-test to the students to check the students initial speaking skills before starting the treatment. The experimental class's pre-test was held on July 14th, 2025, and the control class's pre-test was held on July 16th, 2025. Standard deviation, mean, lowest, and highest values are examples of descriptive statistical data that the researcher calculated using SPSS version 30. The table that follows displays all of the analysis's findings:

Table 1 Pre-Test of Experimental Class

No	Initials	Vocabulary	Student Score Pronunciation	Fluency	Obtain score	Max Score	Standard Score
1	AR	1	1	1	3	9	15
2	AK	1	1	1	3	9	15
3	AAD	1	1	1	3	9	15
4	AS	1	1	1	3	9	15
5	A TR	1	1	1	3	9	15
6	ADF	1	1	1	3	9	15
7	DM	1	1	1	3	9	15
8	DF	1	1	1	3	9	15
9	FO	1	1	1	3	9	15
10	FDA	1	1	1	3	9	15
11	GGT	1	1	1	3	9	15
12	HA	1	1	1	3	9	15
13	IPP	1	1	1	3	9	15
14	M	1	1	1	3	9	15
15	MFA	1	1	1	3	9	15
16	MRM	1	1	1	3	9	15
17	MR	1	1	1	3	9	15
18	N	1	1	1	3	9	15
19	NB	1	1	1	3	9	15
20	NH	1	1	1	3	9	15
21	NAR	1	1	1	3	9	15
22	PQP	1	1	1	3	9	15
23	RK	1	1	1	3	9	15
24	S	2	1	1	4	9	15
25	SN	1	1	1	3	9	17
26	YA	1	1	2	4	9	17
27	Z	1	1	1	3	9	15
28	NRRD	1	1	1	3	9	15
						Total	374
						Mean	15.14

Table 1 shows that the total score of the students in the experimental group was 374, with the highest score being 17 and the lowest being 15

Table 2 Post-Test of Experimental Class

No.	Initials	Vocabulary	Students' Scores Pronunciation	Fluency	Obtain Score	Max Score	Standard Score
1	AR	2	2	2	6	9	21
2	AK	2	2	2	6	9	21
3	AAD	2	2	2	6	9	21
4	AS	2	2	2	6	9	21
5	ATR	2	3	2	7	9	23
6	ADF	2	2	2	6	9	21
7	DM	2	2	2	6	9	21
8	DF	2	2	2	6	9	21
9	FO	2	2	2	6	9	21
10	FA	2	2	2	6	9	21
11	GGT	2	2	2	6	9	21
12	HA	2	2	2	6	9	21
13	IPP	2	1	2	5	9	19
14	M	2	2	2	5	9	20
15	MFA	2	2	2	5	9	20
16	MRM	2	2	2	5	9	20
17	MR	2	2	2	6	9	21
18	N	2	2	2	6	9	21
19	NB	2	2	2	6	9	21
20	NH	2	2	2	6	9	21
21	NAR	2	2	2	6	9	21
22	PQP	2	3	2	7	9	23
23	RK	2	2	2	6	9	21
24	S	2	3	2	7	9	23
25	SN	2	2	2	6	9	21
26	YA	3	3	3	9	9	27
27	Z	2	1	2	5	9	19
28	NRRD	2	2	2	5	9	20
						Total	592
						Mean	21.14

Table 2 shows that the total score of the students in the experimental group was 592, with the highest score being 27 and the lowest being 19.

Table 3 Pre-Test of Control Group

No	Initials	Vocabulary	Students Score Pronunciation	Fluency	Obtain Score	Max Score	Standard Score
1	AZ	1	1	1	3	9	15
2	ARR	1	1	1	3	9	15
3	AGP	1	1	1	3	9	15
4	DA	1	1	1	3	9	15
5	DMP	1	1	1	3	9	15

6	DA	1	1	1	3	9	15
7	DAA	1	1	1	3	9	15
8	FR	1	1	1	3	9	15
9	I	1	1	1	3	9	15
10	KA	1	1	1	3	9	15
11	MS	1	1	1	3	9	15
12	MGJAK	1	1	1	3	9	15
13	MAD	1	1	1	3	9	15
14	MDP	1	1	1	3	9	15
15	PCL	1	1	1	3	9	15
16	QMP	1	1	1	3	9	15
17	RI	1	1	1	3	9	15
18	RAL	3	3	3	9	9	27
19	RAS	1	1	1	3	9	15
20	SSA	1	1	1	3	9	15
21	TNF	1	1	1	3	9	15
22	YM	1	1	1	3	9	15
23	YK	1	1	1	3	9	15
24	JVL	1	1	1	3	9	15
25	N	1	1	1	3	9	15
26	RA	1	1	1	3	9	15
						Total	402
						Mean	15.46

Table 3 shows that the total score of the students in the control group was 402, with the highest score being 27 and the lowest being 15.

Table 4 Post-Test of Control Class

No.	Initials	Students' Scores			Obtain Score	Max Score	Standard Score
		Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Fluency			
1	AZ	1	1	1	3	9	15
2	ARR	1	1	2	4	9	17
3	AGP	1	1	1	3	9	15
4	DA	1	1	1	3	9	15
5	DMP	1	1	1	3	9	15
6	DA	2	2	2	6	9	21
7	DAA	1	1	1	3	9	15
8	FR	1	1	1	3	9	15
9	I	1	1	1	3	9	15
10	KA	1	1	1	3	9	15
11	MS	1	1	2	4	9	17
12	MGJAK	1	1	1	3	9	15
13	MFAD	1	1	1	3	9	15
14	MDP	1	1	1	3	9	15
15	PCL	1	1	1	3	9	15
16	QMP	1	1	1	3	9	15
17	RI	1	1	1	3	9	15

18	RAL	3	3	3	9	9	27
19	RAS	1	1	1	3	9	15
20	SSA	1	1	1	3	9	15
21	TNF	1	1	1	3	9	15
22	YM	1	1	1	3	9	15
23	YK	1	1	1	3	9	15
24	JVL	1	1	2	4	9	17
25	N	1	1	2	4	9	17
26	RA	1	1	2	4	9	17
						Total	418
						Mean	16.07

Table 4 shows that the total score of the control group was 418, with the highest score being 27 and the lowest being 15. After the calculations, it was found.

Result Descriptive Statistics Description

Table 5 Statistics Description

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Pre_Test_Experiment_Class	28	15.00	17.00	424.00	15.1429	.09913	.52453
Post_Test_Experiment_Class	28	19.00	27.00	592.00	21.1429	.28037	1.48360
Pre_Test_Control_Class	26	15.00	27.00	402.00	15.4615	.46154	2.35339
Post_Test_Control_Class	26	15.00	27.00	418.00	16.0769	.51118	2.60650
Valid N (listwise)	26						

According to the table, the experimental class had a pre-test mean score of 15.14, with the scores ranging from a minimum of 15.00 to a maximum of 17.00. Meanwhile, the post-test mean score for the experimental class rose to 21.14, with the lowest score at 19.00 and the highest reaching 27.00. In comparison, the control class had a pre-test mean score of 15.49, with scores spanning from 15.00 to 27.00. The control group's post-test mean score increased slightly to 16.07, while the minimum and maximum scores remained at 15.00 and 27.00, respectively.

Result of Test Normality Homogeneity

Table 6 Test of Normality

Ranks				
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post_Test_Experiment_Class - Pre_Test_Experiment_Class	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	28 ^b	14.50	406.00
	Ties	0 ^c		
	Total	28		
Post_Test_Control_Class - Pre_Test_Control_Class	Negative Ranks	0 ^d	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	6 ^e	3.50	21.00
	Ties	20 ^f		
	Total	26		

a. Post_Test_Experiment_Class < Pre_Test_Experiment_Class
 b. Post_Test_Experiment_Class > Pre_Test_Experiment_Class
 c. Post_Test_Experiment_Class = Pre_Test_Experiment_Class
 d. Post_Test_Control_Class < Pre_Test_Control_Class
 e. Post_Test_Control_Class > Pre_Test_Control_Class
 f. Post_Test_Control_Class = Pre_Test_Control_Class

Test Statistics^a

	Post_Test_Exp eriment - Pre_Test_Exp eriment	Post_Test_Cont rol - Pre_Test_Cont rol
Z	-4.777 ^b	-2.333 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.020

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on negative ranks.

Based on the results of the conducted normality test, the data were found to be not normally distributed. Therefore, to examine the differences between pre-test and post-test scores in both the experimental and control groups, the analysis was performed using the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

According to the Wilcoxon test results, every participant in the experimental group showed improvement in their speaking ability learning outcomes after the treatment. All post-test scores surpassed the pre-test scores, as indicated by 28 positive ranks and no negative ranks or ties. With a significance level of $p < 0.001$ and a test statistic of $Z = -4.777$, the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is highly significant. This indicates that the treatment administered to the experimental group effectively enhanced the students' speaking skills.

In the control group, 6 participants showed an increase in their scores, none showed a decrease, and 20 participants had no change in their scores. The Wilcoxon test results indicated a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores in the control group, with a Z value of -2.333 and a significance level of $p = 0.020$.

Table 7 Test of Homogeneity

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Hasil Belajar	Based on Mean	2.752	1	52	.103
	Based on Median	.428	1	52	.516
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.428	1	37.737	.517
	Based on trimmed mean	1.670	1	52	.202

A homogeneity test was carried out to verify whether the variances among the data groups were similar (homogeneous). The data is considered homogeneous if the significance value exceeds 0.05. According to the data analysis presented in the table, all four values are above 0.05 (0.103, 0.516, 0.517, 0.202), indicating that the variances across the groups are homogeneous. Therefore, there are no significant differences in variance among the groups studied.

Result of Testing Hypothesis

Table 8 Mann-Whitney U Test

Ranks

	Class	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Result	Post Test Experiment Class	28	38.98	1091.50
	Post Test Control Class	26	15.13	393.50
	Total	54		

Test Statistics^a

	Post_Test_Experiment - Pre_Test_Experiment	Post_Test_Control - Pre_Test_Control
Z	-4.777 ^b	-2.333 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.020

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

Test Statistics^a

Hasil Belajar	
Mann-Whitney U	42.500
Wilcoxon W	393.500
Z	-5.829
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001

a. Grouping Variable: Kelas

Test Statistics^a

Hasil Belajar	
Mann-Whitney U	42.500
Wilcoxon W	393.500
Z	-5.829
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001

a. Grouping Variable: Kelas

The study reported a U value of 42.500, a Z score of -5.829, and a two-tailed asymptotic significance level of 0.001 from the Mann-Whitney U test results. Since the significance value is below 0.05 ($0.001 < 0.05$), it indicates a statistically significant difference in the speaking skills outcomes between students in the experimental group using Small Group Discussion (SDG) and those in the control group taught with convent

As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no difference in speaking skills achievement between the experimental and control groups, is rejected. Meanwhile, the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which claims that the two groups show different levels of speaking skills performance, is accepted. The study's results indicate that small group discussions are a more effective method than the conventional teaching method for enhancing students' English-speaking skills.

The findings revealed that the implementation of Small Group Discussion significantly improved the students' speaking performance. The mean score of the experimental group increased from 15.14 in the pre-test to 21.14 in the post-test, while the control group only improved slightly from 15.49 to 16.07. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results indicated a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the experimental group, confirming that SGD enhanced students' speaking abilities.

The improvement was evident across the three assessed components—vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Students became more confident in expressing ideas, used a wider range of vocabulary, and demonstrated better pronunciation accuracy. These results align with previous studies by [La'Biran \(2017\)](#) and [Matondang et al. \(2023\)](#), who also found that SGD promotes active engagement and meaningful communication among students. The collaborative nature of SGD enabled learners to support one another in constructing language, in line with [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction.

This study confirms that Small Group Discussion creates a supportive classroom atmosphere that motivates students to speak more frequently and confidently. It also improves student-teacher interaction, making learning more dynamic and enjoyable. Thus, SGD can be considered an effective technique for enhancing junior high school students' English-speaking competence.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the implementation of Small Group Discussion significantly improves the speaking skills of the eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Sigi, particularly in vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. This method effectively enhances students' confidence and participation in speaking activities and provides a collaborative environment that supports communicative learning.

Suggestion

It is suggested that English teachers apply Small Group Discussion as an interactive teaching technique to foster students' speaking ability and confidence in using English. Future researchers may expand this study by applying SGD in different contexts or skill areas.

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