

Research Article

## The Impact of Using Small Group Discussion Technique on Enhancing Students' Performance in Speaking Skill: A Case Study of Benghazi University

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the impact of using small group discussion technique on enhancing students' speaking skill in English language department at Faculty of Arts and Science Kufrah –Benghazi University. The review of relevant literature revealed that previous researchers presented the advantages of small group discussion technique in teaching English around the world. So, the researcher believed that the use of small group discussion technique might promote students' performance in speaking skill. The review of literature undeniably revealed that large group discussion technique mostly used by EFL lecturers to teach speaking skill were not solid enough. The advantage of the small group discussion technique over the large group discussion technique was investigated by testing the hypotheses and research questions set after conducting the literature review. The quasi-experimental research design as used in this study. English language department at Faculty of Arts and Science Kufrah was chosen for experimental study with 30 students. A teacher- made task was used as an instrument of the study. The results proved that, the mean performance of the students exposed to small group discussion technique is higher than that of those exposed to the large group discussion. Based on the results, recommendations were made on the need to adopt small group discussion to ameliorate students' performance in speaking skill in Libyan universities.

### Introduction

Language is social bond as well as medium of communication. International cooperation relies on real understanding in the background of shared knowledge and calls for habits of tolerance and patience. These attitudes and habits can cultivate most effectively in speech.

We learn our languages through speech. Anyone who learns second/foreign language through speech finds that he/she has much of experience and skills and same quality of mind to help him/her. Learning a second language is considered one of difficult tasks faced by the EFL teacher to help his students reach the level of free communication. "This problem is especially acute in countries where English is not the native language and the student's opportunity is to practice speaking the language in classroom". What does the teacher do to encourage his student to speak fluently? After the learners have been taught the basic skills of target language and have been exposed to language for a reasonable period of time, one of the best approaches to this problem is to have our students work in small groups. The writers find themselves in agreement with Arnonold springer (1973) who claims that "group work could provide, student who have hardly any contact with native speakers of the new language they are studying a setting which it becomes almost natural to use the new language ....to practice the new language creatively ...that is to use it for true communication".

## **The Statement of the Problem**

When students are asked to answer, they are reluctant to use speak in English. Many of them become embarrassed if they make mistakes when they are speaking in front of a class. We want to prepare our students to be self-confident, successful and cooperative to speak as much as possible. This means encouraging group participation. What can the teacher do to ensure that all the students have a chance to practise using the language actively during the class lesson or even outside the classroom? To solve such a problem, the writers suggested that teachers should be encouraged to use group work techniques as a solution to the problem. Although previous studies (Darnis, 2020; Namaziandost & Imani, 2020; ElNaggar, 2020; Hamouda, 2020; ElNaggar, 2019, Maulina, Hikmah & Pahamzah, 2019; DerKhachadourian, 2019; Shamsi, Alaha & Gilanlioglu, 2019; Elnadeef & Abdala, 2019; Qadhi, 2018) conducted on Students' Performance in Speaking Skill have revealed interesting findings, little attention so far has been paid to to study the impact of using small group discussion technique on enhancing students' speaking skill in Libye. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of using small group discussion technique to boost students' performance in speaking skill. EFL teachers are able to use such a method of classroom interaction as they are well trained, skillful developers, good team builders, class controllers.

## **Questions of the Study**

The questions of this study are as follows:

1. Will students who are taught according to the small group discussion technique score higher on the post-test than on the pre-test?
2. Will students who are taught according to the large group discussion technique score higher on the post-test than on the pre-test?

## **The Aim of the Study**

The aim of this paper is to to investigate the impact of using small group discussion technique on enhancing students' speaking skill in English language department at Faculty of Arts and Science- Kufrah – Benghazi university.

## **Hypothesis of The Study**

There is no impact of small group discussion technique on enhancing students' speaking skill in English language department at Faculty of Arts and Science- Kufrah – Benghazi university.

## **The Importance of the Study**

The results of this study will be useful for both EFL teachers and learners. It will provide new information on the various methods used in teaching and learning process and will hopefully be applied in the teaching process. Also, it will give new information about how to learn English language through a small group discussion technique.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited to using small group discussion technique in enhancing students' speaking skill in English language department at Faculty of Arts and Science- Kufrah – Benghazi university.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Definition of Small Group Discussion**

According to Kidsvatter as quoted by Argawati (2014) "a small-group discussion dividing the large classroom into small groups of students to achieve specific objectives permits students to assume more responsibility for their own learning, develop social and leadership skills and become involved in an alternative instructional approach".

According to Bany and Johnson (1964) in their book, "a group may be said to exist when two or more persons have as one quality of their relationship some interdependence and possess some recognizable unity.<sup>12</sup> Group discussion refers to one or more meetings of all small groups of people who thereby communicate, face-to-face, in order to fulfill a common purpose and achieve a group goal. The key concept in the definition of group discussion is communication. The practice of group discussion requires, therefore, an understanding of communication theory and an ability to communicate".

Tiberious (1999) stated that "there are five different considerations in identifying a small group discussion. They are (1) interaction (do groups members communicate with each other?); (2) structure (how are the members organized into certain roles, such as moderator and note taker?); (3) group cohesion (how strongly do the members feel a sense of unity?); (4) social identity (do the group members share a perception of being members of the group? Is the membership important to their self-identity) and (5) goals (what is it that the group is working to accomplish?)".

From the explanation above, we can conclude that small group discussion is the method which consist of two or more persons in small group to exchange thought orally to achieve a result in team work, and they can take more responsibility for their own learning, developing social and leadership skills and participating in an alternative educational approach. Therefore, this method is better used in the learning process.

### **Importance of Group Work**

Ruffeino J. Richard (1978, p.135) states that perhaps one of the most difficult tasks of the teacher in English is to help his students reach the level of free communication.

Many times at the secondary school level, the teacher finds himself at a loss when he tries to get his students to speak freely in the target language. This problem is particularly acute in countries where English is not the mother tongue and the student is only opportunity is to practice speaking in the classroom. The best approaches to this problem, as the writers think, is to have the student, work in small groups. The writers find themselves in agreement with Arnold Springer who is in his article (Group work in foreign language learning – (report) English teaching forum for November – December (193), expresses these thoughts.

### **Group Work Technique in Language Classes When Teaching Speaking Skills**

The potential uses of classroom grouping are limitless. It can serve as the basis for a complete cycle or can be used between graded in a more traditional system. It can be used in conjunction with textbooks by a teacher who wishes to change his approach at different stages of the lesson: conversation, speaking. Skills, reading, grammar exercises etc.

Many students enjoy this type of classroom a lot. They found it refreshing because it breaks out from the traditional classroom mode. They appreciate the opportunity to speak English with a real purpose. The group work technique enriches and provides ample practice in many areas leading to free communication which is our aim. The imagination of the teacher and students can suggest endless possibilities for group learning that can lead our students towards better speaking knowledge of English (Ruffeino J. Richard, 1978 p, 136).

Activities and communication should be relevant to students in everyday needs. Working in small groups gives the students a basic self-identity and basic communication relationship in English with others and with the social word outside the classroom. In order to increase the students' self-confidence and self-identify as speakers of English. Small group activities can help when they are engaged in such exercises self-introduction, group questions and answers, statements and reactions. At a certain time, the teacher with draws from the class activity. In their small groups the student's discursive English variety of topic freely chosen by themselves and as such they progress in the use of English they have learned previously.

According to the Burt (1975)

*Greater opportunity is provided for the attainment of individual goals and by contributing to group goals. Students who set themselves high standard and have high skill ability or both, not only have the satisfaction or receiving recognition for their efforts. They are also encouraged to work to fullest exeunt of their capacity (1975, p.73)*

### **The Importance of Speaking Skills**

Speaking skill is considered as the most significant skill to acquire in foreign or second language. Of the four main language skills, speaking is the most significant skill in learning a foreign language or a second language. Brown (2004) say, "Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real life situations". Regardless of their importance, the value of speaking teaching skills has been underestimated, and most EFL/ESL teachers have continued to teach them speaking skills just like keeping conversations or repeating exercises. In the current EFL/ESL educational environment, oral skills are completely neglected while employability depends more on communication than technology. As very low priority was given to important elements of language such as phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic aspects, it has become a major obstacle for ELLs to acquire English speaking skills. To date, more emphasis has been given to reading and writing skills. Recognizing the importance of oral communication skills, the focus is now more on developing learners' speaking skills to successfully pursue their studies and excel in their fields once they have finished their education. Moreover, English is one of the most important requirements to get a better job for applicants in all fields.

## **The Advantages and Disadvantages of Small Group Discussion**

There are many advantages of group discussion in the English language classroom. Here are the ones the writers summarized from Brumfit (1984):

### **a) Group work generates interactive language**

A large-number of students in class have some difficulties when they speak. Moreover, traditionally, when the teacher controls the class by lecturing, explaining and drilling, it makes students likely to have less time of interacting and discussing by using the target language. Group work provides the students time to speak up more in the large-number of class.

### **b) Group work offers an embracing affective climate**

Mostly, the students are comfortable discussing in group, they can express their idea. Though there will be argument among students but it will push them to speak more to preserve their opinions. It will also motivate passive students to speak up.

### **c) Group work promotes learner responsibility and autonomy**

Some students need to be encouraged and being part of a group work will force them to at least contribute discussing in group. It will build students' responsibility of taking part in group.

### **d) Group work is a step toward individualizing instruction**

Every student has different capability in English skill. Some of them may be prominent in reading, or listening, or speaking, or writing. That is the opportunity for the teacher to scan and combine the students with different skill altogether and adjust the assignment for each group.

## **Disadvantages of Small Group Discussion**

Harmer (2001) also states "some of the weaknesses of this technique, they are as follows:

- 1- It is likely to be noisy. Some teachers feel that any control and the whole class feeling which has been painstakingly built up may dissipate when the class is split into smaller entities.
- 2- Some students enjoy it since they would prefer to be the focus of teacher's attention rather than working with their peers.
- 3- Individual may fall into group roles that become fossilized, so that some are passive whereas others may dominate. Last, groups can take longer to organize and can take time and chaotic ".

## **Methodology**

### **Method of the Study**

In this study, the writers used a descriptive analytical method to analyse the collected data. The hypotheses were tested using the F-test and the collected data analysed using the ANOVA.

### **Population of Study**

The population of study were chosen from English lecturers and students of English Language department at Faculty of Arts and Science Kufrah – Benghazi university for the academic year 2014/2015.

### **Sample of Study**

The writers chose a random sample from the population of study composed of (30) students as sample for the experimental study and (3) lecturers for the survey study- were observed in the same study area alongside students.

### **Instruments of Data Collection**

The writers used tasks as instrument for measuring the performance of the participants before and after the treatment. This was the small group discussion technique. According to Al Samawi H. (2000), tasks are used mainly for measuring the performance before and after certain treatments they can be used to evaluate the progress of participants in certain programmes after a period after a period of time (2000, p, 132) .

### **The Tasks**

Data was collected through tasks as an instrument of the study. The tasks were planned by the experimenters.

### **Teacher – made tasks**

According to Al Samawi H. (2000 p. 81), "different objects require different evaluation devises; not all the objectives of instruments can be evaluated.

### The Pre-Task

This task was an oral task was assigned to both group, the experimental observed and control observed. In other words, the subjects made the tasks individually. This was done to be as a standard to be compared with the results of the post-task. Both tasks were the same test – the results were the final results.

### The Post-Task

This task was given to both groups that the end of the programme meanwhile the experimental observe group had finished, performed the same activities in the form of the large group discussion compared with the experimental observed group.

The aim of conducting these tasks per/post tasks, was to investigate the benefits of group work technique over the other methods of teaching. Instruments for means during the practice parts performance before and after the treatment which was given the subjects in the experimental observed was associated with researchers experimental observed research as an essential requirement of observation research (pre-task/post-task).

### Nature of Observed Data

The present study is empirical in nature. The researcher used per-task/post-task as instrument for collecting data after having validated and checked the instruments. The researcher used different sources to collect relevant data. These include relevant books and other classroom-related activities that involve group work.

### Procedure: Nature of Observed Tasks

The aim of conducting these tasks (per-task/post-task) was to investigate the benefits of group work technique over the other teaching techniques in teaching speaking skill. Oral tasks were the appropriate tool to measure subjects' language fluency and accuracy before and after being invaded in certain observed experiments. The tasks took the form of dialogues question and answers, describing something orally as picture describing and reporting self-information.

It was conducted through interviews between the researchers as examiners and the subjects were taken individually to a nearby office away from the classroom. Each subject was given two minutes to prepare her/himself before starting the task. Each student was asked to describe a picture in a few sentences. The task was scored on the basis of the pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical structures, fluency and accuracy in target language.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

Discussion of the Outputs and Testing Procedure

**Table 1:** - Classification of Hypothesis and Corresponding Instrument Items.

Statistical Hypothesis	Corresponding Item
Null Hypotheses	Post-task
Alternative Hypotheses	Post-task

**Table 2: Summary of Hypotheses, Variables, Modalities, Measurement Scales and Statistical Techniques Used.**

Hypotheses	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Measurement scales	Statistical technique
Statistical Hypothesis	Speaking skill	Discussion Interviewing Opinion Argument Question and Picture- description	Normal Normal	

### Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the direct observation quasi-experiment design was calculated using the F statistics. To calculate the F statistics, we use the formula below. It shows the mean square within groups (MSW) as their denominator.

$$F_A = \frac{MS_A}{MS_{WG}}$$

*Equation for calculating the effect for A*

$$F_B = \frac{MS_B}{MS_{WG}}$$

*Equation for calculating the effect for B*

$$F_{AB} = \frac{MS_{AB}}{MS_{WG}}$$

*Equation for calculating the effect for the interaction*

The purpose of the analysis was to establish the significance test using ANOVA. We used ANOVA to test the null hypothesis to see it was true. In other words, this means that using F-test it should prove that:

$$X_c > X_a \geq B$$

With the significance test in ANOVA, our expectation was that if the null hypothesis stood true, it would mean that both MSB and MSE estimated the same quantity. On the other hand, if the null hypothesis was false, then MSB would be making an estimate of a larger quantity. The significant test used in the 20015 English language department study, as is the case with ANOVA used the F statistics known as the ratio of MSB to MSE:

$$F = MSB / MSE$$

Giving that the null hypothesis was true, the F ratio approximately one given that MSB abs MSE were about the same. In F statistics, if the ratio is much larger than one, the likely indication would be that MSB is estimating a larger quantity than is MSE. This would mean that the null hypothesis is false. To be able to conduct a significance test, the sampling distribution of F had to be known from the fact that our null hypothesis was true. The sampling distribution should give us the one calculated from the data determined. This probability gives the probability value. The F statistics holds that where the probability is lower than the significance level, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Once we have computed an F, it becomes easy to compute the probability value from an F table. In order to use this table, we needed to know the two degrees of freedom parameters, below are the parameters:

Dfn and dfd: dfn = a-1

Dfd = N-a; where,

'a' is the sum of all small groups, and

N is total number of subjects in the groups.

Dfd often represents the degrees of freedom error (or dfe for short). Above said being the F statistics normally therefore,  $F = MSB/MSE$

### Testing Hypothesis Procedure

#### Re-statement of Research Hypotheses

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$$

$H_a$ : They are not all equal.

In above null hypothesis  $H_0$  we imply the large group discussion used on group A and B, and small group discussion used with group C are not significantly different in effecting a higher used in speaking skill in students as measured by the average score of the students in the post-task. The alternative way in stating this idea could be the both groups are equally effective in enhancing the students' performance in EFL skills. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  on the other hand implies that the average score is significantly different. This indicates that the differences among them are a result of how effective the treatment the large group discussion was implemented.

**Level of Significance**

The level of significance for this study was read at alpha= 0.05

**The Task Statistic and Sampling Distribution.****Table 3: Sampling Scores Distribution**

A	44 32 50 60 23 50 44 30 60 50 80 63 73 50 65 45 61 65 50 72 70 40 73 57 64 67 57 72 58 60
B	43 30 51 53 21 43 50 44 63 51 83 73 70 50 60
C	55 68 66 54 74 64 46 82 66 68 68 66 75 64 68

$$\bar{X}_A = 54.16 \bar{X}_B = 52.3 \bar{X}_C = 64.4 \bar{X}_T = 42.71$$

**Two Estimates of Variance**

To have the estimates of variance we use the following formula. Each "X" stands for a sample mean while M represents the mean of the sample means. Recall we are dealing with "a" means and N = a. M then designates the mean of the sample means,

$$s^2 = \frac{\sum(X-M)^2}{N-1}$$

$$\frac{SSR}{k-1} = S_1 \quad SSR = C \sum_{i=1}^r (x_i - \bar{x}_T)^2 =$$

$$S_e = \frac{SSE}{k(n-1)} \quad SSE = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^c \left( y_{ij} - y_{i-} - y_{+j} + y_{..} \right)^2$$

**Analysis of variance (ANOVA)****Table 4: Analysis of variance (ANOVA)**

Source of variation (sov)	Sum of squares (ss)	Degrees of freedom (df)	Mean squares (m-ss)	Computed (f)
Between groups	$SSR = 8719007$	$K - 1 = 2$	$S_1^2 = 40895.135$	123.3
Within groups (errors)	$SSE = 19235.27$	$k(n-1) = 58$	$S_e^2 = 331.639$	
$SST$	10642534	60	$f_{table} = 3.23$	

$$F \text{ value computed/observed } (F_{ov}) = f_{table} = 3.07 =$$

$$\text{Critical F value } (F_{cv}) = 1.23 [CR_{0.05} = 1.23]$$

Alpha = 0.05

Now using scheff's test

**Table 5: Analysis of variance (ANOVA)**

	A(54.16)	B(52.3)
A(54.16)	-	-
B(52.3)	-	-

**Decision Rule**

Reject  $H_0$  (Hypothesis) and retain  $H_a$ , they are not all equal

**Study Conclusion**

From above table, the group C performed best.

**Statistical Conclusion**

From the above analysis of the data collected in English language department experiment, we reject  $H_0$  since  $F_{ov} = 123.03$  is greater than  $F_{cv} = 3.23$

**Discussion on Research Finding**

Based on the results obtained from the experiment, the solid indication is that the small group discussion technique and large group discussion technique do not have the same effect on Libyan students' performance in speaking skills. The treatment small group discussion technique is far more superior as far as the experiment is concern. The score of the three groups of students indicate that those in group C came first with a mean score of 64.04. This group was seconded by the mean score of group A (54.16) Group B came third with a mean sore of 52.3. Group A had a slight mean score difference of 1.86 with group A. Both groups were taught using the same old method – large group discussion technique. To see how effective our small group discussion technique was, compared to large group discussion technique, we find that group C is a 10.24. Mean score difference with group A and 12.1 with group B. Thus, the mean score between group A and B is .125; very little. They had almost the same mean score. The little difference between the two groups, taught using the same method- large group discussion technique may have resulted from the threat coming from tasking, maturation and history. Whatever the case, the small class teaching stood the superior grounds in this study.

The analysis and presentation findings of data from the quasi-experimental. The data was collected from the field using pre/post task. The data has been analyzed using descriptive statistics. The involved data related addressing the hypothesis of the study.

The quasi-experimental involved a pre-task and post-task. The results of the pre-task and post-task, which concerned the hypotheses, were presented and analyzed using the F-test. To conclude the study, it was found out that the mean performance of students exposed to teaching through the small group discussion technique was higher than those taught using large group discussion technique. The difference of the three groups indicated that the main purpose and objectives for introducing the small group discussion technique was achieved. From above said and from the analysis therefore, we rejected the null hypothesis in the quasi-experimental study. The following findings were obtained

1. The mean performance of the students taught using small group discussion technique is higher than that of those taught using large group discussion technique.



2. The small group discussion technique creates a harmonious and social climate doing learners the opportunities to interaction with each other.
3. Students depended on themselves, so they play an active role in the learning process when practicing speaking skills.
4. It contributes to the remedy of some persistent grammatical error. In effect this technique enhances speech grammar the root of oral practice and communicative competence.
5. Activities are performed through drama, role play, dialogues orating, the discussion, interview encourage the students to make use of spoken language which is relevant for real communication in real life, from the practical pieces of the texts and oral communication.
6. Organization of a class in small groups is one of the main solutions to the problem of large group discussion technique, especially in Faculty of Arts and Science -Kufrah-Benghazi University.
7. Small group teaching is advantage to the teacher for it reduces they workload on him .it gives students the constructivist ability to discuss and use Knowledge to build their intellectual skills.

### Recommendations

The recommendations of this paper are as follows:

1. Lecturers should try to train their students to be competent in speaking skill and in pronouncing the words accurately using intonation, stress and body language.
2. Lecturers should replace their old methods with the group work that can solve students' learning difficulties to meet the challenges of oral practice and communication.
3. Lecturers and students should create a friendly relationship around students as strategy that affects positive performance in statement English language learning activity.
4. Students should know how the uses of group work as fruitful and successful teaching technique within the English language.
5. EFL students should know that learning language needs practice and work (practice makes perfect).

### Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of using small group discussion technique to boost students' performance in speaking skill. The study helped the students gain self-confidence, free chance to express themselves and co-operate with each other. The writers were convinced and satisfied with the performance of the students when using the direct instruction in the proper way to do the activities the findings confirm the writers believe in the benefits and values of group work technique specially in teaching speaking skills.

Using a small group discussion technique is beneficial for teaching and it significantly improves students' speaking skill. The statistical analyses show that the small group discussion technique improves students' speaking skill. It is a better approach compared to large group discussion technique as such, it should be used or applied within all Libyan universities particularly in Benghazi university.

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