

Improving Secondary School Students' Speaking Skills through Forum Group Discussion: An Action Research Study

Kamaruzzaman¹, Zihori Maulida²

¹English Language Education, Sunan Doe Institute of Islamic Studies, Indonesia

²English Language Education, Nusantara Global Education Institute, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study explored the effectiveness of the Forum Group Discussion (FGD) method in enhancing speaking skills among tenth-grade students at MTs NW Montong Mas. The research was motivated by persistent challenges in EFL contexts, including students' low confidence and limited vocabulary, which often hinder oral communication. The study aimed to fill a gap in existing research by providing empirical evidence of FGD's impact in this specific educational setting.

Design/methods/approach – A qualitative classroom action research design was employed, involving oral speaking tests, classroom observations, and questionnaires. Data were collected across three phases: pre-action, Cycle I, and Cycle II, focusing on improvements in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and clarity.

Findings – Results showed a substantial increase in students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criterion, from 36% in the pre-action stage to 80% in Cycle II. Class average scores improved from 69.46 to 76.66, and observations noted enhanced classroom engagement and reduced speaking anxiety.

Research implications/limitations – While FGD proved effective, limitations include varying student confidence levels and challenges in managing balanced discussions. Future studies are recommended to integrate digital tools and examine FGD's effectiveness across diverse educational contexts

 OPEN ACCESS

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 10-06-2025

Revised: 20-07-2025

Accepted: 29-07-2025

KEYWORDS

speaking skills, forum group discussion, EFL, classroom research

Corresponding Author:

Kamaruzzaman

English Language Education, Sunan Doe Institute of Islamic Studies, East Lombok, Indonesia

Soekarno Hatta Street, Rumbuk, Sakra District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara.83671

Email: kamaru817@gmail.com

Introduction

English occupies a strategic position as a global language, connecting people across nations in education, technology, economy, and social interaction (Malik et al., 2025; Sharma, 2024). In Indonesia, English has been taught from elementary school through university, reflecting the urgency of mastering this language in facing global challenges (Ahmed, 2022; Syarifuddin, 2017). Nevertheless, many students continue to struggle with speaking skills due to factors such as lack of self-confidence, limited vocabulary, anxiety about making mistakes, and learning environments that are not always supportive (Guebba, 2020; Malik et al., 2025). This gap between theoretical language knowledge and real communicative competence remains a significant challenge in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesia (Sharma, 2024).

Speaking is a crucial aspect of language learning, involving not merely the articulation of words but also the ability to construct, process, and convey meaning both verbally and non-verbally within social contexts (Magfira et al., 2024; Prayudha.S, 2023). It is an interactive process requiring critical thinking, courage to express opinions, and sensitivity to communicative contexts (Aflah et al., 2023; Barungi et al., 2024). Therefore, teaching speaking skills demands interactive and collaborative approaches that motivate students to participate actively. One method proven effective is the Forum Group Discussion (FGD), which creates a safe environment for students to exchange ideas, reduce anxiety, and boost confidence in speaking (Murray et al., 2024; Prayudha.S, 2023).

Recent studies strongly support the effectiveness of group discussions, both face-to-face and online, in improving EFL students' speaking abilities. For instance, Aflah et al. (2023) and Magfira et al. (Magfira et al., 2024) revealed that small group discussions not only enhance engagement and critical thinking but also foster students' confidence and motivation. Moreover, blended learning approaches offer broader opportunities for social interaction and deepen understanding of learning materials (Miyashita, 2021). However, the implementation of FGD faces challenges, such as limited facilities, institutional constraints, difficulties in selecting relevant discussion topics, and variations in students' participation levels (Butarbutar & Karnine, 2024; Murray et al., 2024). This situation necessitates teachers' strong pedagogical skills and creativity to ensure structured discussions that achieve learning goals.

Studies in diverse educational contexts demonstrate the positive outcomes of group discussions in enhancing students' speaking skills. Telaumbanua et al. (2024) reported significant improvements in average speaking scores following students' involvement in structured group discussions. Similarly, Haslinda et al. (2023) found that group discussions significantly improve fluency, accuracy, and students' confidence in using English. A supportive discussion environment helps students feel more comfortable expressing their ideas without fear of judgment, especially those who tend to be shy or

lack confidence (Barungi et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2024). These findings align with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes real-life interaction and meaningful communication as the core of language learning (Ahmed, 2022; Syarifuddin, 2017).

Although numerous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of FGD in enhancing speaking skills, specific research investigating this method at MTs NW Montong Mas remains scarce. This represents an important research gap to be addressed. Therefore, this study aims to examine whether the application of the FGD method can significantly improve the speaking skills of tenth-grade students at MTs NW Montong Mas. It is expected that this research will contribute new insights not only within the local context but also enrich the broader literature on English language teaching in Indonesia, particularly in EFL settings. This article follows the IMRAD structure—comprising introduction, methods, results and discussion, and conclusion—with the hope of producing findings that can be practically implemented by English teachers to improve students' speaking skills.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the speaking learning process through Forum Group Discussion (FGD) and to observe changes in students' speaking abilities in a contextual and natural setting (Creswell, 2014; Mills, 2017). CAR was considered appropriate as it enables researchers to continuously improve teaching practices through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Burns, 1999; Cohen et al., 2017). Moreover, CAR empowers teachers as practitioners to directly identify problems, implement interventions, and evaluate outcomes in real classroom contexts (Mills, 2017).

The participants of this research were 25 tenth-grade students at MTs NW Montong Mas in the 2023/2024 academic year. Data were collected using several techniques: (1) oral speaking tests to measure students' speaking skills before and after implementing FGD; (2) observation sheets to record students' engagement, confidence, and responses during lessons; and (3) written questionnaires to capture students' perceptions of FGD. The speaking test instruments were designed using a rubric covering fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and clarity of delivery (Haslinda et al., 2023; Prayudha, 2023). Employing multiple data collection techniques aimed to enhance the validity of the data through method triangulation, which is crucial in action research (Burns, 1999; Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative data from the speaking tests were analyzed using the percentage of students meeting the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 70, alongside calculating mean scores to examine improvements from pre-action to Cycle II. Qualitative data from

observations and questionnaires were analyzed descriptively to depict the dynamics of the learning process and factors influencing the success or challenges in implementing FGD. This method was selected for its advantage in providing a comprehensive understanding of both learning outcomes and the learning process, which purely quantitative methods might fail to capture (Burns, 1999; Mills, 2017). In terms of ethics, this research was conducted while maintaining students' confidentiality, and all participants were informed about the study's purpose and benefits and voluntarily agreed to participate (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014).

Result

This study was conducted to investigate the extent to which the implementation of the Forum Group Discussion (FGD) method could enhance the speaking skills of tenth-grade students at MTs NW Montong Mas, with a focus on both the improvement of students' academic performance and the dynamics of the classroom learning process. Data were collected through three stages of assessment, namely the pre-action phase, Cycle I, and Cycle II, utilizing an oral speaking test instrument that evaluated five key aspects: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and clarity of expression. The Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) used as the benchmark in this study was set at 70, in line with the standards applied at the school. In addition to collecting quantitative data through tests, the researcher conducted in-depth observations to capture students' behaviors and responses during the learning process and distributed written questionnaires to gain insights into students' perceptions of the implementation of FGD in English language learning. Initial results from the pre-action phase indicated a rather concerning situation, where only 9 out of 25 students, equivalent to approximately 36%, managed to achieve scores above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM), while the class average score stood at 69.46. When asked to speak in English, most students appeared hesitant, spoke with prolonged pauses, and often stopped because they struggled to find the right words. The classroom atmosphere seemed tense, with many students lowering their heads or avoiding eye contact when asked to speak, reflecting high levels of anxiety and a lack of self-confidence in using spoken English.

The implementation of FGD in Cycle I began to produce positive changes, although still limited. In this cycle, the number of students who successfully achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) increased to 13 students, equivalent to 52%, with the class average rising to 72.38. Observation results indicated that some students started to show more courage in expressing their opinions, although they still often spoke haltingly, particularly when speaking spontaneously without prepared texts. The dynamics of group discussions began to emerge, as evidenced by simple interactions such as agreeing with a peer, responding to others' opinions, or expressing brief statements to convey thoughts.

However, significant challenges remained. Several students continued to exhibit passive behavior, mostly remaining silent and contributing minimally, while dominant students tended to monopolize the discussions. Another notable obstacle was limited vocabulary, which frequently made it difficult for students to explain their ideas in greater detail. This was reflected in the observation notes, where the researcher recorded that moments of silence often occurred during discussions because students were confused about choosing the right words or afraid of mispronouncing them. Moreover, some students felt that the discussion topics in Cycle I were insufficiently engaging and too general, failing to spark their enthusiasm for active participation.

Improvements were made in Cycle II through several strategic adjustments, such as selecting discussion topics more relevant to students' daily lives, forming more balanced discussion groups to ensure equal opportunities for each member to speak, and allowing longer preparation time so that students could better organize their ideas before speaking. As a result, there was a significant increase in students' academic performance. In Cycle II, 20 students, or approximately 80%, achieved scores above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM), with the class average score rising to 76.66. The classroom atmosphere changed remarkably, with students appearing more enthusiastic, laughing, and responding actively during group discussions. Vocabulary usage became more varied, and students appeared more fluent in articulating their ideas, although minor errors in pronunciation or sentence structure were still present. Observations revealed a far more vibrant classroom environment than before. Interactions were no longer limited to one-way communication from the teacher to the students but evolved into more intensive student-to-student dialogues, where they began to ask questions, engage in light debates, or respond to each other's opinions with simple but increasingly structured arguments. The warmth and engagement of the discussions also encouraged previously quiet students to start speaking, even if only uttering a sentence or two, which was a positive indication of their progress in developing speaking skills.

An overall picture of students' speaking test outcomes at each stage of the research is presented in Table 1 below, illustrating a gradual improvement in both the number of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) and the class average score.

Research Stage	Number of Students Reaching KKM	Percentage (%)	Average Score
Pre-Action	9 students	36%	69.46.00
Cycle I	13 students	52%	72.38.00
Cycle II	20 students	80%	76.66

Beyond the quantitative findings from the tests, qualitative data from the questionnaires provided deeper insights into students' perceptions of the FGD method. The majority of students, approximately 84%, reported feeling more confident in speaking

after participating in group discussions, as they perceived the learning atmosphere to be more relaxed and supportive. Furthermore, 88% of students stated that they found it easier to understand English materials when learning collaboratively with peers, as they could exchange ideas and help each other when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary. However, around 16% of students admitted that they still felt awkward speaking in front of groups, primarily due to fear of making mistakes or lacking sufficient vocabulary. Nonetheless, overall, both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the implementation of FGD had a significant positive impact on improving the speaking skills of tenth-grade students at MTs NW Montong Mas and successfully created a more active, participatory, and supportive learning environment for developing communication skills in English.

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that the implementation of the Forum Group Discussion (FGD) method has a significant positive effect on improving the speaking skills of tenth-grade students at MTs NW Montong Mas. The increase in the percentage of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) from only 36% in the pre-action phase to 80% in Cycle II indicates considerable progress in speaking skills following the intervention. This aligns with the results of Telaumbanua et al. (2024), who reported that structured group discussions significantly enhance students' average speaking scores, and supports the findings of Haslinda et al. (2023), who emphasized the role of group discussions in boosting students' confidence and willingness to speak English. Such improvements also resonate with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which positions meaningful communication at the core of language teaching, where students learn to use language in real contexts rather than merely memorizing sentence structures (Ahmed, 2022; Syarifuddin, 2017).

Beyond academic achievement, the implementation of FGD brought about positive changes in classroom atmosphere and student engagement. Observations indicated a transition from an initially passive and apprehensive learning environment to one that was more interactive, participatory, and lively, where students felt encouraged to express their opinions, engage in discussions, and even participate in mild debates with their peers. These findings reinforce the studies of Barungi et al. (2024) and Prayudha (2023), who asserted that group discussions are effective in creating safe spaces for students, alleviating their fear of making mistakes. This is particularly relevant in the context of EFL learning in Indonesia, where fear of errors often serves as a significant barrier to speaking (Guebba, 2020; Malik et al., 2025). A supportive discussion environment can substantially reduce anxiety and provide opportunities for all students—including those who are typically shy—to participate, even if initially limited to brief utterances, indicating that FGD is effective as an inclusive strategy catering to diverse learner profiles.

This study also emphasizes that the success of FGD is closely tied to the role of teachers as skilled facilitators in designing and managing discussions. Adjustments made in Cycle II, such as selecting topics relevant to students' daily lives, forming balanced groups to ensure equal speaking opportunities, and allowing longer preparation time for students to organize their ideas, proved crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of FGD. These findings are consistent with the perspectives of Murray et al. (2024) and Butarbutar & Karnine (2024), who highlighted that group discussions can only be effective if teachers possess strong pedagogical competence, can maintain group cohesion, and can develop materials aligned with students' interests and contexts. Poorly managed discussions risk being dominated by certain students or, conversely, becoming stagnant and passive. Thus, teachers' skills in facilitating interaction, posing stimulating questions, and creating a comfortable learning environment are essential for the success of this method, in line with the principles of collaborative learning (Chrismaretta & Abrar, 2024).

Interestingly, while the majority of students expressed enthusiasm and found the FGD method beneficial, questionnaire data revealed that approximately 16% of students still felt uneasy speaking in front of groups, primarily due to anxiety about making mistakes or limited vocabulary. This suggests that while FGD is effective, it is not entirely free of challenges. This observation echoes the view of Rahmat & Jon (2023), who noted that not all students are well-suited to discussion-based learning due to differences in learning styles and individual anxiety levels. Additionally, practical challenges such as limited classroom time, large class sizes, and insufficient supporting facilities pose significant obstacles to implementing this method effectively, as highlighted by Sharma (2024). Nonetheless, the findings of this study reinforce the belief that with appropriate strategic modifications, the FGD method can still be optimized to accommodate diverse student needs, including those who tend to be more reserved.

This research offers significant contributions to the development of English language teaching, particularly in EFL contexts, by demonstrating that FGD not only effectively improves speaking skills but also fosters a more inclusive, collaborative, and communicative learning environment. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a valuable reference for English language teachers seeking to adopt more varied and contextually relevant teaching strategies. However, the researcher acknowledges certain limitations in this study, including its relatively narrow scope, being conducted in a single school with a small sample size, and conditions that may not fully represent other schools with differing characteristics. Therefore, further research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of FGD in broader contexts, involving various school settings, grade levels, and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, it would be highly beneficial to explore the integration of FGD with digital learning technologies, as suggested by Hue (2024) and Magfira et al. (2024), who indicated that online discussions can enrich learning experiences and enhance student engagement. Thus, this study not only answers the

research question regarding the effectiveness of FGD but also opens avenues for further innovation in the development of English teaching strategies in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Forum Group Discussion (FGD) method effectively enhances students' speaking skills by fostering greater confidence, fluency, and active participation in English language classrooms. The observed improvements in student achievement and classroom dynamics indicate that FGD not only supports linguistic development but also promotes a more inclusive and communicative learning environment. By creating structured opportunities for peer interaction and expression, the method proves beneficial in addressing common barriers such as anxiety and limited vocabulary. The findings contribute to the field of English language education, particularly in EFL contexts, by offering a practical strategy that can be adapted to diverse learner needs. However, the success of this approach depends heavily on the teacher's ability to facilitate balanced discussions and respond to individual student characteristics. Future studies are encouraged to explore the integration of FGD with digital platforms and to test its applicability across different educational levels and cultural settings to broaden its potential impact.

References

- Aflah, M. N., Nurhidayh, R., & Kuncoro, H. (2023). Learning through discussion: a study to foster students' engagement in efl class. *Jurnal Ilmiah Spectral*. <https://doi.org/10.47255/t0vs1t10>
- Ahmed, S. T. S. (2022). Investigating yemeni efl learners' involvement in classroom oral activities and its correlation to their speaking proficiency development. *Indonesian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.25134/ijli.v5i2.6840>
- Barungi, C., Ndayisaba, V., Ntibanyurwa, S., Irankunda, A., & Nyirahabineza, P. (2024). Empowering Learners to Improve English Language Performance through Group Discussion Strategy in Selected Secondary Schools in Rwanda. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, 5(3), 84–93. <https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.5.3.8>
- Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge University Press. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=E39dms4JOOgC>
- Butarbutar, R., & Karnine, S. M. B. B. V. K. S. V. (2024). Blended Snowballing Discussion Technique and Collaborative Learning Pedagogy in EFL Speaking. *Global English Insights Journal*, 1(2), 42–54. <https://doi.org/10.61220/glens.v1i2.338>
- Chismaretta, C., & Abrar, M. (2024). The Implementation of Collaborative Strategy in Teaching Students' Speaking Skill. *EduInovasi*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.47467/edu.v4i2.2415>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research Methods in Education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Guebba, B. (2020). *The Correlation between Moroccan EFL Learners' Attitudes towards Speaking in the Classroom and their Speaking Proficiency*. 1(3), 58–80. <https://doi.org/10.36892/IJLTS.V1I3.40>
- Haslinda, H., Nurlia, N., & Nurhikma, N. (2023). Peningkatan Kemampuan Berbicara Pada Siswa Melalui Media Pembelajaran Berbasis Diskusi Kelompok Kelas I UPTD SDN 145 Inpres Pampangan. *Semantik: Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.61132/semantik.v1i4.129>
- Hue, B. T. H. (2024). Utilizing Communicative Activities to Teach Oral English Skills to Students at Tuyen Quang School for Excellence (TSE). *European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 2(4), 222–236. [https://doi.org/10.59324/ejtas.2024.2\(4\).19](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejtas.2024.2(4).19)
- Magfira, A., Weda, S., & Muhayyang, M. (2024). EFL Students' Perceptions to the Benefits of Online Group Discussion. *Celebes Journal of Language Studies*, 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.51629/cjls.v4i1.189>
- Malik, E., Rohmatillah, R., & Rahmawati, I. N. (2025). An Analysis of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners' Problems in Speaking Skills Based on Their Perception at Senior High School. *Edunesia*, 6(1), 190–206. <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v6i1.1106>
- Mills, G. E. (2017). *Action Research: A Guide for the Teacher Researcher* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Miyashita, H. (2021). *Successive Action Research to Develop the Higher Order Thinking of EFL Learners Through Discussion Forums*. 12(5), 77–99.
- Murray, N., Liddicoat, A. J., & Zhen, F. (2024). Teachers' cognition in changing practice: Implementing group discussion in EFL classes in universities in South-Western China. *American Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(2), 177–190. <https://doi.org/10.55284/ajel.v9i2.1172>
- Prayudha, S. J. (2023). Perspectives of English Teachers in Improving Students' Speaking Skills Through Group Discussions. *Deleted Journal*, 2(02), 126–134. <https://doi.org/10.30599/enjel.v2i02.474>
- Rahmat, H., & Jon, R. B. (2023). Benefits and Challenges of Group Discussion as Creative Learning Strategies in Speaking Class. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, 6(1), 72. <https://doi.org/10.31764/ijeca.v6i1.13804>
- Setiawan, D., Putra, I., Hafidz, Moh., Wijaya, Moh. K., & Bangkalan, S. (2024). *The Use of Small Group Discussion on Students' Speaking Skill at MA Al-Hidayah Bangkalan*. <https://doi.org/10.31597/sl.v9i1.1014>
- Sharma, L. R. (2024). *Exploring the Landscape of Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Speaking Skills*. <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049x.2024.4.3.2745>
- Syarifuddin, S. (2017). *Improving of efl learners' speaking proficiency through speaking activities inside and outside the classroom: a theoretical review*. 2(2), 73–83. <https://doi.org/10.18592/LET.V2I2.1375>
- Telaumbanua, M., Laoli, A., Waruwu, Y., & Harefa, A. T. (2024). Improving The Students' Speaking Ability by Using Small Group Discussions at The Eighth Grade of SMP Swasta Idanoi. *Journal of English Language Teaching Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Seni Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IKIP Mataram*, 11(2), 258. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jo-elt.v11i2.12712>