The Benefits of English-Speaking Group for Speaking Fluency: Acehnese EFL Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

As speaking is essential to be mastered, various strategies are applied, one of them is through English-speaking group. The objective of this study is to explore more about the students' point of view regarding the beneficial impact of English-speaking group for speaking fluency. Interview was selected as the data collection procedure in this study, in which five female students from Intermediate Language Skill class were participated in this study as the respondents. They were the second semester students at English Language Education Department of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The results of this study revealed that the participants showed positive responses toward forming English-speaking group as it gave great effects on their speaking fluency. They stated that this speaking group provided supportive environment for speaking activity, increased their confidence, improved self-evaluation, and strengthened the relationship among the members of the group.

KEYWORDS: *Beneficial Impact, English-Speaking Group, Speaking Fluency.*

Introduction

In Indonesia, English is spoken as foreign language (EFL) and it is taught from the lower level of education up to the tertiary one. Among the four English skills, speaking is the most essential one to be mastered (Fitria, 2020; Tathahira & Nahrisya, 2020). Since speaking is one of the skills used as a means of communication, its fluency is required to transmit an obvious message between speakers and listeners (Biantoro et al., 2023; Boonkit, 2010; Nisa et al., 2022). However, many agree that speaking is a complex skill that entails various components to be mastered such as, vocabulary mastery, grammatical rules, well-pronunciation, fluency, and many others (Aneski, 2022). Therefore, the students need to practice speaking more often to train themselves to be familiar with the language used (Akhter et al., 2020; Sarair et al., 2023). This is because it is believed that more practices, the more the students better in speaking (Yuliandasari & Kusriandi, 2015).

Teachers, at this point, play an important role to stimulate students in learning speaking (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022). The modification of approaches used by the teachers in teaching in order to encourages the students to be able to speak well. Many strategies, moreover, can be applied to optimize the students' achievement in this skill; one of those is the use of English-speaking group. Through this activity, the students may explore their ability freely. The topics of discussion vary, depending on the group's agreement. In this case, the teacher can also provide special topic and assist the students in the discussion. In addition, the students easily set the time and place to prepare and demonstrate their group-speaking (Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022).

Many studies have been done related to the strategies used in the improvement of speaking skill. Hamouda (2020) conducted the research with the topic of the effect of virtual classes on the development of speaking skills. He collected the data through speaking test, distributing questionnaire and having interview. The results showed that the students significantly improved their speaking specifically in terms of their pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, grammar and vocabulary. Kholid et al. (2022) also researched another study entitled "Collaborative Learning: A Strategy for Improving Students' Speaking Skill". In this study, the researchers applied action research with some stages, and they discovered that collaborative learning improved the students' speaking skill in terms of their engagement, confidence, and critical thinking to convey their ideas in classroom activities. This study, therefore, also showed the improvement of students' speaking skill by using English-speaking group, in which the focus was on their speaking fluency.

LITERATURE REVIEW
SPEAKING SKILL

As a tool of communication, speaking should be mastered by students to ease them in interacting with other people, and expressing feelings and ideas as well. For EFL students, speaking English is considered as the most difficult skill to be learned since it requires more complex element to be developed such as, vocabulary, grammar and its fluency (Aneski, 2022). Abda (2017) describes that speaking is a productive skill, playing a great role in everyday activities, and it is related to the students' background experiences. Therefore, it does not guarantee that the students may speak and communicate well in English after taking long duration of time for learning English speaking. This is because speaking skill is an interactive process involving producing, receiving and processing information among speakers and listeners to construct the meaning of their interaction (Brown, 2001). To achieve this goal, consequently, many strategies can be applied to help the students to be at advance level for their speaking

skill. According to Biantoro et al. (2023), speaking skill progress can be obtained through a variety of methods, such as storytelling, role-play and game. They also add that if teachers are able to modify the teaching strategies, the students can easily engage and enjoy the process of speaking activities in class. As a result, the students can easily expand their fluency in speaking.

In addition, Yuliandasari and Kusriandi (2015) emphasize that speaking is a skill that requires practices, by providing the opportunities and allowing the students to speak more often, so they are able to broaden their thinking ability as well as to extend their communication skill. For this reason, practicing more speaking leads the students to have more fluency in speaking skill. Mokodompit and Amelia (2020), similarly, reported that they trained the students to practice speaking through conversation in groups. Each member of the group was asked to write a word on the book and then they had to practice its pronunciation correctly. Consequently, the more the students practiced to share ideas and express their feelings, the better speakers they became.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used interview in collecting the data. According to Wragg (2005), interviewer may develop the details of the questions while running interview in order to obtain the information required. In this study, 5 (five) students (hereafter P1-P5) were involved as the samples to be interviewed and all of them were females. They were from Intermediate Language Skill class where the researcher taught them during the even semester of the year 2022/2023. The participants were the students at English Language Education Department of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Aceh Province.

During the teaching-learning process, the researcher implemented the English-Speaking Group to encourage the students' speaking skills. At this point, the students were free to choose their own speaking group members as long as they were convenient with the one they chose. Each group consisted of 4-5 students. In addition, every meeting, the researcher as the lecturer asked the students randomly to speak up in front of the class based on the topics they discussed in their own group for about two to five minutes.

Moreover, six questions were used in this interview as the way to obtain the information required regarding the topic of this research. The respondents were interviewed one by one at different times as well. This setting was conducted to avoid the bias of the answers among the respondents, and to obtain reliable information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After having the interview with the participants, the researcher analyzed the information obtained through the answers of the question in the interview sessions. The results can be seen as in the following:

1. *How do you improve your speaking fluency?*

From this question, it is identified that almost all participants applied similar ways in improving their speaking skill. Respondents of P1, P2 and P5 reported that they usually listened to English songs and watched English movies to improve their pronunciation. They also provided their spare times with listening to native speakers via TV shows that helped them to be more familiar with the English sounds and its intonation.

In addition, P5 stated that she also used the English language-learning app, which easily could be found on the internet. On the other hand, P3 and P4 had different techniques in developing their speaking skills. They described that they generally spoke up in front of the mirror to familiarize themselves with the English words. P3 even said that in order to enrich her English vocabulary, she frequently asked her aunty to communicate in English only.

2. *What do you think about English-speaking group in the speaking class?*

The respondents provided good responses for this question. They agreed that joining the English-speaking group improved their English speaking skills. The reason was the topics used for speaking varied, and were very essential to elaborate their knowledge and understanding about the topics. Each member of the group might also accept and provide the feedback from the other members, which was very decisive as well for self-evaluation as P4 claimed. Apart from building their confidences, this speaking group also developed their fluency in speaking since they often practiced and accepted any comments given. P3 explained:

> "*I think by having speaking group in English class can be beneficial for students to practice. It supports students to speak with their friends and receive a good feedback from them and also improve their confidence to speak in front of many people*".

3. *Does it have a good impact for your speaking fluency?*

All participants provided similar answers toward this issue. They stated that by engaging in regular conversation with their peers, they could enhance the fluency in speaking, develop better pronunciation, gain confidence in expressing ideas orally, and improve their ability in constructing accurate grammatical rules. According to P1, participating in an English-speaking group was very helpful in terms of speaking

fluency. This speaking group could be a supportive environment to increase positive vibes to learn English speaking. P3 also added:

> "*It has a good impact for me and my friends, because when I make mistake in speaking, such as in pronouncing or using vocabulary, they will directly correct it. Because of that I know how to speak well and surely this has a good effect on my speaking fluency.*"

4. *Do you often practice speaking with your group?*

In terms of speaking practice, some participants acknowledged that they rarely practiced speaking outside of the class. They only sat in a group when the lecturer asked them to do so. Some others, however, confidently said that they often practiced and participated in the speaking group even outside of the class. They believed that speaking skill could only be improved by regular practice; the more practice, the more fluent their speaking would be. Therefore, they already set the specific time for English-speaking group outside of the class properly, and all members of the other groups could take part in it. They expected that by having the setting time, they could prepare themselves well before performing their speaking.

5. *How do you select the topic for the speaking practice?*

Based on P5's experience, familiarity and interest were two components that should be considered when choosing a topic for speaking in the group. They were essential for the speakers to convey their ideas easily. They could speak fluently and confidently with the topics related to their daily lives. This is similar to what P4 explained, in which she tended to select the up-date issues that were commonly known among people, so that she could prepare for speaking thoroughly.

6. *Do you enjoy having English-speaking group?*

All respondents agreed that joining English-speaking group was enjoyable. On one side, they could improve and develop their English speaking fluently. By sharing ideas more often, the students stated that their speaking fluency experienced advancement. On the other side, they could strengthen their relationship with their peers, which was very essential for their academic lives.

The findings of this study reveal that small-group talks when carried out effectively may help EFL students become fluent speakers, as also found in the studies by Al Jawad and Abosnan (2020) and Bohari (2020). One reason is because speaking in English in their groups can give them the confidence to express their ideas without fear of being criticized, as supported by the study of Crisianita and Mandasari (2022). The findings also suggest that the presence of English-speaking group also helps create a strong

bond among the members of the groups since they have worked collaboratively during the learning process (Jacobs, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

It cannot be denied that English speaking skill is pivotal to be mastered by the EFL students in order to enable them to convey and express the ideas in English properly. To achieve this goal, the students should prepare and practice extra speaking activities to support their needs. Concerning this, forming the English-speaking group is one solution that can be applied to support the EFL students in developing their fluency in speaking English. After interviewing five students as the respondents in this study, the study concludes that English-speaking group is very helpful in improving the students' English speaking fluency. These students obtained a number of beneficial impacts from joining this speaking group, such as upgrading their confidence in speaking, having supportive environment for learning speaking, improving self-evaluation, and strengthening the relationship among members of the group itself.

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