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## SILENCE IS NOT GOLDEN

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### *Abstract*

*In order to improve students' language skill various teaching methods need to be introduced in the language classroom. The aim of this paper was to investigate the effect of small group discussion on students' achievement in grammar. This was a pre-experimental research, in which there was only an experiment group that was taught through small group discussion. The subjects consisted of the second semester Accountancy students at Dehasen University. The data were obtained from the students' test scores. Data analysis showed that there was a significant difference between pre-test mean and post-test mean. Thus, it could be concluded that small group discussion technique could improve students' grammar. This improvement could be contributed to more active students' participation through small group discussion. Further study using quasi experiment is recommended.*

**Keywords:** *Small group discussion*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are four basic skills that have to be mastered by language learners. In addition, there is also one important thing which students need to master, namely, grammar. Harmer (2001) says that grammar is the description of word forms and the rules to combine them into sentences. In other words, grammar refers to the rules of language that regulate the combination of correct and appropriate forms for meaningful language. Meanwhile, Brindley (1994) defines grammar as a set of rules for determining correct or incorrect forms and for maintaining standards. It can be concluded that grammar refers to the principles of language rules to form meaningful and correct language. Grammar includes parts of speech, such as noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, preposition, conjunction and interjection.

Mastering grammar is very important because it may affect the meanings and messages that speakers want to convey. William (2005) emphasizes the fact that grammar is essential for good communication. Furthermore, Widodo, in Brindley (1994), argues that grammar is related to language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is crucial that language speakers acquire the capability of producing grammatically acceptable utterances in a language.

There are many grammatical aspects that the learners should master to have good competence in English language. Learners often find it difficult to understand the rules of the language. The reason is that there are many rules to remember and understand, and thus they often make mistakes in using rules or composing sentences. Such a situation also happens in the Business English course, Economic Faculty, Dehasen University, a private university in Bengkulu City. Here, parts of speech belong to the core materials to be taught. There are three departments in the Economy faculty, namely, management, accountancy, and banking finance. In this paper the writer focuses on the accountancy class as the subject of her research.

In Indonesia, students learn grammar since the junior secondary school level but their ability is still unsatisfactory. Apparently, the situation goes on the university. An informal observation in the mentioned department revealed that students' grammar command was still unsatisfactory.

Therefore, in order to help students, the teacher should find appropriate methods in teaching. There are a lot of language teaching methods that can be selected; one of which is small group discussion.

There are some previous studies that investigated small group discussion method. For example, Ahmad (2013) found that small group discussion method effectively improved students' reading skill, increase students' participation in class, and developed their responsibility to finish the task.

Meanwhile, some studies in speaking class provided similar results. In a domestic study in Riau, Indonesia, Rive (2016) found that small group discussion improved students' speaking skill. The improvement occurred on general speaking scores as well as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension scores.

By comparison, in an overseas study in Gaza, Palestine, Alhabbash (2014) found that class group discussion method and online group discussion method were more effective than traditional method, and that online discussion method was more effective than other methods, in improving student's speaking skill. The improvement occurred on general speaking scores as well as grammar, vocabulary, and fluency scores.

The findings of these studies revealed that small group discussion could improve students' language skill. More specifically, it could also improve students' grammar skill

Based on this background, the writer decided to investigate the effect of small group discussion method on students' grammar ability. Student's grammar ability was defined as the score that the student got after he/she took a grammar test that was provided by the researcher.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

In order to lay out the theoretical foundation for this study, several concepts will be exposed, namely, nature of group discussion as well as its benefit and drawback.

### **The nature of group discussion**

Steward (2004: 157) states that a group refers to more than two people who interact with one another, with or without an assigned leader, in such way that each person influences, and is influenced by, other persons in the group. Small group, according to Barker (1987), consists of three or more people interacting face to face, with or without assigned leader, in such a way that each person influences another person. Fowler (1980: 310) maintains that groups should be arranged so that each student can see all other members and communicate with them. Small group discussion is the process by which three or more members of a group exchange verbal and nonverbal messages in attempt to influence one another.

### **The advantages of small group discussion**

Muijs and Reynolds, (2005: 52) elaborate the benefit of small group, as follows:

- a. Small group provides motivational framework for the group members.
  - b. It permits ease of control, flexible method regulation, personalized attention, and individualized programming.
  - c. It provides a social framework that each child can identify and use as a guide to for his or her action.
  - d. The main of benefit of small group work seems to lie in the co-operative aspect it can help foster.
- Meanwhile, Stewart (2004: 8) states that small group could help students in:
- a. Developing self-awareness
    - b. Managing personal stress
    - c. Solving problem analytically and creatively
    - d. Coaching, counseling and establishing supportive communication
    - e. Gaining power and influence
    - f. Motivating others
    - g. Empowering and delegating
    - h. Managing conflict
    - i. Building effective team and framework

### **The disadvantages of small group discussion**

According to Stewart (2004:56), although small group work can be powerful for teaching and learning strategy, it has some disadvantages, namely:

- a. It unnaturally promotes independent learning and can foster dependency on certain dominant members of group
- b. The complexity of a small group can also make it harder to manage for the teacher
- c. Small group work can result more time spent on lesson.

From the explanation above, while caution needs to be exercised in using small group discussion, small group has many advantages in teaching learning process because it can motivate and develop student's skill. Small group also can develop student's learning outcome. It is an effective technique that a teacher can apply in the classroom.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The exposition of methodology consists of general outline of the study and data analysis.

#### General Outline of the study

This paper is a pre-experimental study, which aimed to find the effect of small group discussion method on students' grammar achievement. The population consisted of the Accountancy Department, the Economy Faculty, Dehasen University, Bengkulu, Indonesia. The sample consisted of 20 students in the second semester. The instrument consisted of a grammar test.

#### Research Procedure

The research procedure included several stages, namely, pre-test, treatment, post test and data analysis. A pre-test was given before the treatment started. Then, treatment was given in the form of small group discussion, which was given in 3 meetings. Subsequently, a post test was administered to the students. Finally, pre-test and post test scores were compared to see whether there was any progress in student's grammar skill

The application of small group discussion was performed in the following steps:

- a. The teacher provided resource material of several kinds.
- b. The teacher assigned individual into groups; then s/he formed a special group to help other groups.
- c. The teacher set some well-defined, accomplishable tasks that provided early reinforcement, to enhance students' satisfaction
- d. The teacher worked with each group in turn. She sat down with them and systematically explored the "state of the project" with each group member, in order to student's motivating in learning.
- e. After the project was finished, the teacher asked the student in each group to report and discuss the result of group discussion; then she offered suggestions.

#### Technique for Data Analysis

For data analysis, students' pre-test and posttest scores were collected and compared. The score were then analyzed to find the average score, standard deviation, and t-count. The paired t-test was used to compare the students' pre-test and post-test scores. The statistical formula was as follows:

$$t = \frac{\bar{d}}{\sqrt{s^2 / n}}$$

Note:  $\bar{d}$  is the mean difference,  $s^2$  is the sample variance,  $n$  is the sample size and  $t$  is a Student  $t$  with  $n-1$  degrees of freedom.

The analysis was performed by using Excel statistical analysis package.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

After post-test was administered, analysis was performed by comparing the pre-test scores and post test scores. Then the result was compared with the theory and the findings from other studies.

#### Data Analysis

A table containing the pre-test and post test scores was attached in the appendix.

The descriptive summary, the correlation, and t-test calculation were shown in the table below. Using Excell, the analysis of the data revealed that the mean score of pre-test was 66.80 and the mean score of post-test was 77.45. The descriptive statistics showed that there was an improvement in score from pre-test to post-test by as much as 10.65.

Table 1. T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	<i>Pre test</i>	<i>Post test</i>
Mean	66.80	77.45
Variance	40.06	31.63
Observations	20.00	20.00
Pearson Correlation	0.18	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0.00	
df	19.00	
t Stat	-6.21	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00	
t Critical one-tail	1.73	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00	
t Critical two-tail	2.09	

Note: the minus (-) sign occurs as in the counting of the t-count, the post test mean (with bigger value) was subtracted from the pre-test mean.

To determine whether the improvement in the post-test was significant, the formulation of hypotheses was needed. The first hypothesis was null hypothesis (H0) and the second hypothesis was (H1). The formulation of both hypotheses is as follows:

H0: There is no significant difference between pre-tees mean and post test mean on student's grammar achievement

H1: There is a significant difference between pre-test mean and post test mean on student's grammar achievement.

Using Excel, the analysis of data using paired sample t-test revealed that t-count (t- stat) was -6.21. The absolute value of t-count was 6.21. With  $\alpha=0.05$ , the value of t-critical (t-table), for two-tailed test, was 2.09.

T-count was bigger than t-table. Therefore, H0 was rejected while H1 was accepted. In other words, there was as significant effect of small group discussion on student' grammar achievement. Thus, more speaking led to better student's grammar achievement; this implied that less speaking was not beneficial to students' grammar achievement. In other words, silence is not golden.

## Discussion

The finding of this study showed that small group discussion could improve students' ability in grammar. The improvement was proved to be statistically significant. In this respect, the finding supports the theory that small group discussion is beneficial for teaching as it provides better motivation, provides greater enjoyment of learning experience, and promote cooperation, and these all may lead to improvement in students' skill, including grammar.

The finding was also in line with a number of studies, both domestic and overseas. One domestic study that dealt with the use of small group discussion was one by Rivi (2014), an action research in which small group discussion was used to improve students' speaking skill at Pasir Pengairan University, Riau, Indonesia. His data showed that after cycle 1 there was improvements only in grammar and vocabulary. However, after cycle 2, there was improvements in all aspects, namely, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

In this respect his finding on grammar was similar to the finding of this study, in which small group discussion improved student's grammar skill. Rivi (2014) attributed the success of his study to the fact that small group discussion enabled students to be more actively involved in speaking activities. This supports the benefits of small group discussion as outlined in the previous exposition on theory.

Another study that gave similar finding to this study was an overseas study by Alhabbash (2014). He used a true experiment to investigate the comparative effect of classroom group discussion and online group discussion on student's speaking skill among year-12 students in a Palestinian secondary school. As the subjects of his study sat in the last class of a secondary school,

they were considered close in ability with the subjects in this study and thus a comparison could be made with this study.

Alhabbash (2014) found that both class group discussion method and online group discussion method were more effective than traditional method, and that online discussion method was more effective than other methods, in improving student's speaking skill. As online method was beyond the scope of this study, only classroom group discussion method is discussed.

Alhabbash (2014) found that there was a significant difference in average score between the experimental group the control group. Moreover, the average score for the experimental group was almost twice of the average score for the control group, in the total score as well as the scores for vocabulary, grammar, and fluency.

Alhabbash (2014) attributed the success of this study to the fact that in the group discussion students were encouraged to be more active participants in the teaching and learning process and this led to greater development of their skill. His result provided another evidence of the benefit of small group discussion for improving the speaking skill.

These studies supported the theory that group work is beneficial for language instruction, including grammar. However, the theory also mentions the disadvantage of group discussion, in that it may lead to dependency and that it may require more classroom management skill and more time to implement. In addition, Changko (2016) showed that while students perceived group discussion positively, they faced some challenges, including differing proficiency levels among members of groups, difficulty in decision making process, and relationship with peers. It is also to be noted that this study was a pre-experiment and thus its finding was not so robust as the finding of true and quasi experiments.

In general, group work seems to offer more benefit than drawback. As a result, it is recommended that teachers use it for his/her language teaching. However, considering the drawback, Changko (2016) suggested that teachers need to consider students' differing proficiency levels, students' relations with each other, and the individual differences among the students. Teachers may also need to consistently observe students' needs and wants regarding group work, e.g., by conducting surveys or interviews. Lastly, in order to arrive at a stronger finding, further researchers need to conduct a stronger form of investigation, such as quasi and true experiments.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on finding it can be concluded that small group discussion is an effective method to enhance students' grammar ability. In addition, students also get more active in classroom by interacting between one another. Therefore, further study is recommended to find out more about small group discussion method by using quasi experiment or true experiment.

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