

The Use of Group Investigation Technique to Enhance the English Speaking Skills of Grade Six Bhutanese Students

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Abstract

The study was conducted to determine the enhancement of English speaking skills and explore the learning satisfaction level of grade six Bhutanese students through the use of group investigation technique. The study employed a quasi-experimental research approach. The sample group comprised 30 grade six Bhutanese students. Data were collected through speaking proficiency test (a pretest posttest design), focus group discussion and classroom behavioral observation. Lesson plans employing group investigation technique were used to teach the students. The data gathered were analyzed using paired sample t test which revealed a significant difference in the posttest ($\bar{x} = 11.13$) compared to the pretest ($\bar{x} = 7.17$). The significance value of 0.01 ($P < 0.05$) indicated that the use of group investigation technique significantly improved the speaking skills of the grade six Bhutanese students. The qualitative data drawn from focus group discussion and students' behavioral observation were analyzed using content analysis technique. The findings confirmed the effectiveness of the interventions. The data in this study were limited to speaking skills with speaking test, FGD and observation, therefore, aspiring researchers can consider different skills employing more instruments.

Keywords: *Group investigation, English speaking skills, Learning satisfaction*

1. Introduction

English is the language of science, internet, technology, business, and aviation (Reddy, 2016). It is logical that people must become proficient in English as it has an immense impact on the culture, media, internet, youth and economy worldwide (Bunce, Phillipdon, Rapatahana, & Tupas, 2016). Speaking is the most fundamental skill for communication, interaction and social relations, yet, it is the most ignored among the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing (Nanthaboot, 2012). Srikaew, Tangdhanakanond, and Kanjanwasee (2015) support that the development of speaking skill is necessary along with other language skills for students while studying and for daily communication. The ability to communicate competently can promote relationship with peers, teachers and parents (Hunt, Wright, & Simonds, 2014; Morreale & Pearson, 2008).

In Bhutan, English is studied as a major subject and function as the medium of instruction for other subjects (Dorji, 2005; LaPrairie, 2013). Regardless of being exposed to English language from an early age, researchers have stated that Bhutanese children have poor speaking skills in English (Dorji, 2005; LaPrairie, 2013; Royal Education Council [REC], 2012). Further, Bhutan is a multilingual nation with more than nineteen

different indigenous languages, out of which sixteen are exclusively oral. These diverse dialects provide opportunity for the students to communicate in the language they are comfortable with (Driem, 2017). The dominating mother tongue obstruct students' English speaking habits which impedes their vocabulary acquisition and hinder fluency as they speak English (Nanthaboot, 2012).

In addition, the absenteeism of English speaking culture both at home and school has potentially led to low aptitude for speaking because children's habit of communicating to their family members at home provides opportunities to build vocabulary, fluency and confidence in expressing their thoughts (Goktepe, 2014). It is also attributed by the effect of fidelity to obsolete teaching techniques and the negligence on the importance of speaking proficiency (Singye, 2018). Besides, the lack of standardized English speaking test in the country and the vast literary text content in the English syllabus create less opportunity for the students to enhance their speaking skills (Tshomo & Sherub, 2017). Reading only the text cannot enhance their speaking skill (Idrissovaa, Smagulova, & Tussupbekova, 2014). Thus, there is slow growth in lexical competency and has a huge implication on the pronunciation.

(Lackman, 2010; Ma, 2015) assert that speaking skills are further divided into sub-skills of speaking; accuracy, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and comprehensibility and the absence of one sub-skill affect the other. Hence, the components of speaking; grammar, fluency, vocabulary and pronunciation are more relevant to upscale the speaking competency of the Bhutanese students. Thus, this study aimed to make English speaking more effective and satisfying for students by determining a technique with appropriate and effectual speaking activities. In the 21st century education, there is a drift towards collaboration including collaborative teaching, learning, thinking and working. Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction in groups where individuals are responsible for their achievement, including learning and respecting the abilities and contributions of their peers (Laal, 2013). Chalermnirundorn (2015) states that students become responsible and take an active role in learning and for the success of their peers through the use of collaborative methods. Use of collaborative strategies such as group investigation technique integrates interaction and communication in the classroom (Baki, Yıldız, Aydin, & Köğce, 2010).

Group investigation involves collaborative group method emphasizing information gathering by students, interpretation of data through group discussion, cooperative inquiry, planning and completing projects (Hosseini, 2014). Students engage in exchange and interpretation of ideas, seek information to solve problems and later present the results of their discussion to the class (Ashanah, 2015; Binnendyk, n.d.; Sharan & Sharan (1992) affirmed six stages of the group investigation technique:

- 1 Identification of the topic by the teacher and sub-topic by the students.
- 2 Students in groups plan on their sub-topic and assign task to members.
- 3 Groups investigate the topic and gather information.
- 4 The groups analyze, evaluate and plan on the presentation.
- 5 Each group presents their sub-topics and teaches the class.
- 6 The teacher solicits feedbacks, supplements and access the groups.

Group investigation is an effective learning approach for promoting and guiding students' speaking with considerable liberty for students (Hosseini, 2014; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). Learning results of the students who were taught using group investigation differed from those students who were taught using conventional learning methods (Akçay & Doymus, 2012; Koc, Doymus, Karacop, & Simsek, 2010; Zingaro, 2008). Group investigation technique develops various skills such as investigation, participation, interaction, critical thinking, logical thinking, problem solving and decision making ultimately improving their speaking skills (Agada, 1998; Siddiqui, 2013; Tsoi, Goh, & Chia, 2004).). Further, group investigation promotes open verbal interaction developing love for speaking and subsequently improving students' English speaking skills.

Group investigation can be implemented in the classroom as an activity. In this study, three different activities involving speaking were carried out; presentation, role play and debate. Group investigation technique was employed during each activity. Before the presentation, students were divided into groups and the stages of group investigation were followed to prepare for the presentation. Role play and debates were carried out in the same way.

The immense benefit of infusing group investigation technique can be apt in improving the speaking skills of the students in Bhutanese schools Therefore, this study was carried out with grade six students in a primary school in Western Bhutan.

2.Objectives

1. To enhance the English speaking skills of grade six Bhutanese students with the use of group investigation technique.
2. To explore the learning satisfaction level of the grade six Bhutanese students after using group investigation technique.

3.Research Methodology

Research methodology presents the methods taken up by the researcher to address the research question (Crotty, 1998) in which a range of steps are adopted by the researcher to explore the research problem or question along with the logic behind it (Kothari, 2004). The methodology takes an overview of the approaches also considering the ethics (Dawson, 2002). This study employed a quasi experimental research to find out if the use of group investigation technique enhanced the English speaking skills and to explore the learning satisfaction level of the grade six students in a primary school in Western Bhutan. Quasi-experimental study aims to evaluate interventions and reveal causality between an intervention and an outcome (Anthony et al.,2006).

3.1 Population

The population of this study comprised 60 students of grade six distributed in two sections. Each section consisted of 30 students with mixed gender. The age range of the students were from 11 to 15 years. A cluster random sampling was taken up to choose one section comprising 30 students. Of the thirty students in the sample group, 14 (47.7%) were males and 16 (53.3 %) were females

3.2 Research hypotheses

1. The use of group investigation technique enhanced the English speaking skills of the grade six Bhutanese students.

2. There was a high level of learning satisfaction of grade six students after using group investigation technique.

3.3 Research Instruments

This study employed four main instruments; speaking proficiency test, classroom behavioral observation, focus group discussion and lesson plans to acquire the data to justify the research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Rubrics for speaking was utilized to rate the speaking proficiency of the students. Focus group discussion and students' behavioral observations were carried out to obtain additional information. All the items of the speaking rubrics for the speaking proficiency test, focus group discussion, classroom behavioral observation and lesson plans were evaluated and validated using IOC (Item-Objective Congruence). All the items of the instruments were rated valid with +1. The research instruments were used as explained below:

3.3.1 Pretest and Posttest (Speaking Proficiency Test)

The speaking proficiency test which was a pretest posttest design was administered to the sample group to compare the enhancement of the students' speaking skills. The pretest was administered to the participants at the beginning of the study. Participants were asked to speak on a given topic. Then the intervention instrument (lesson plans) were used to during the sessions. The speaking activities; presentation, role play and debate employing group investigation were carried out during the sessions. The posttest was conducted after the intervention and the scores of the tests were compared to examine the enhancement of the students' speaking skills. Participants were rated based on four components of speaking; fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Speaking rubrics developed for the Bhutanese Curriculum (CAPSD, 2014) was employed to evaluate the speaking test.

3.3.2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion was adopted to examine the learning satisfaction level of the participants. There were five guiding questions to acquire the data. The discussion was conducted at the end of the study to explore the learning satisfaction level of the students. All the 30 participants were involved in five groups.

3.3.3 Students' Behavioral Observation

Observation provides immediate information required that is difficult to capture through other instruments especially the behaviors of the students (Hamzah, Ting, & Pendidikan, 2010). In this study observations were carried out focusing on the interaction and communication among the group members. The observations were carried out in the first sessions of the weeks when the students were engaged in group investigation. Students were observed as soon as group investigation began and continued till the end of the session. The observation sheet contained ten items for observation

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The mean of the pretest was 7.17 with a standard deviation of 1.783. In the posttest, the mean was 11.13 and standard deviation was 1.776 as shown in table 4.1 The mean difference between the pretest and the posttest was 3.96 showing an increase in the mean of the posttest. The significant value being 0.01 which was lower than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$)

indicated that there was a statistically significant rise in the posttest scores compared to the pretest scores. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the difference between the mean scores of the pretest and the posttest.

Table 4.1 Comparison of pretest and posttest

Group	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference	t	P-value
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD			
Sample Group	7.17	1.783	11.13	1.776	11.13 - 7.17 = 3.96	-20.377	0.01

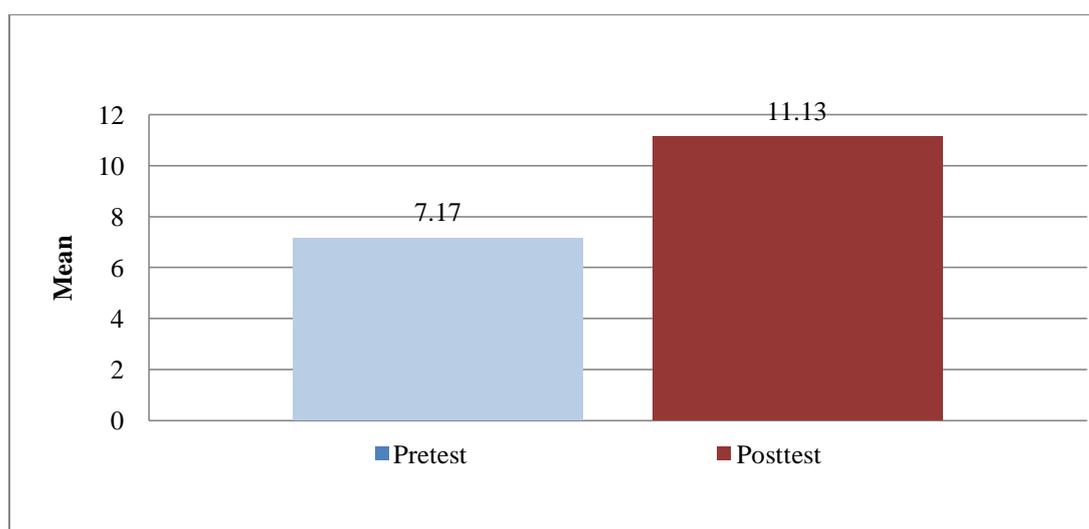


Figure 4.1 Comparison of pretest and post mean scores

The data gathered through the focus group discussion with the 5 groups were analyzed employing content analysis technique (Cohen & Morrison, 2011). The data obtained were condensed, coded and analyzed through identification of themes. The themes that were drawn from the focus group discussion were: enjoyment, developed confidence, enhanced speaking and interaction, and knowledge.

The participants found that the use of group investigation technique was effective. All the participants were of the opinion that the activities were enjoyable and the use of group investigation technique exposed them to a new interactive learning environment. The participants were also of the opinion that the absence of teacher during the discussion made them more comfortable and pleasurable to speak in English. Participants claimed that the various activities such as presentations, role play and debate facilitated in developing their confidence. At the beginning, the participants were hesitant to speak English in their groups but the activities employing group investigation technique gradually helped boost their self assurance. Participants expressed that the speaking activities which involved a lot of discussions encouraged them to communicate and as a

result they felt confident to speak in English. The participants stated that they felt at ease to work in groups without any fear of being laughed at. Participants acknowledged that repeated activities employing group investigation technique helped them heighten their confidence.

All the participants agreed that the use of group investigation had impacted positively on the speaking skills. They felt empowered when they got the opportunity to select topics, being assigned roles and when involved actively in the activities. It provided all the participants an opportunity to speak out their ideas and was constantly encouraged by their group members. Most of the participants expressed that even those who shied away felt encouraged to comment on the opinions of others. They were also of the opinion that the activities were well designed that every member in the group got a chance to speak, which had helped in enhancing their speaking skills. Most participants were willing to speak English and were active throughout the session. The participants found group investigation created an environment to expand and exchange knowledge. The participants cited sharing of ideas as exchange of knowledge. Besides enjoying listening to the opinions of group members, participants acknowledged the use of new vocabulary and language. This in turn improved their vocabulary competency and enhanced their speaking.

The participants agreed that group investigation technique had helped enhance their speaking skills. The pronunciation skills improved with instant corrections by other members. As the participants took turns to speak, not only did they learn new vocabulary from their friends but also their fluency developed with continued speaking. Some of the participants considered group investigation as an opportunity to exhibit their talent as everyone was provided with opportunities to speak and do presentations.

Students behavioral observations were carried out by a peer teacher to look into whether the use of group investigation technique brought in some transformation in the behaviors of the students. Observations were carried out from the first stage of group investigation technique until the fifth stage. The students were observed for three sessions by the same teacher when group investigation was being implemented. The lessons were observed for three times by the same teacher. There were 10 items to mark the behaviors. The observation showed a gradual improvement in the behaviors of the students. In the first observation the item 'take time to speak' was observed to be dominated by some members. Similarly, it was observed that some members did not communicate in English throughout the discussion. Further, it was noted that not all the members shared views with group members.

In the second observation except for the item 'communicates in English throughout the discussion', not all the members were engaged in the discussion. The final observation showed a significant improvement in all the items. All the members in the class were observed to have agreed on the plans, began work promptly and shared responsibilities. Participants portrayed respect to their peers and listened to the views of members, took turns to speak and supported each other in sharing ideas. The item 'Communicates in English through-out the discussion' which was found difficult for the members to maintain was observed to have improved drastically

4.2 Discussion

In alignment with the previous studies (Ahsanah, 2015; Haqqi, 2013; Iswardati, 2016; Maylinda's, 2015; Nelli, 2015; Parchment, 2009), the findings from this study revealed that group investigation technique enhanced speaking skills of the students. The results showed significant difference in the performance of the posttest. The means of the pretest and the posttest were 7.17 and 11.13 respectively showing a difference of 3.96 and a significant p-value of 0.01 ($P < 0.05$) as shown in table 4.1 The results indicated a remarkably high difference which confirmed that the use of group investigation technique significantly improved the English speaking skills of the grade six Bhutanese students.

The increase in the posttest scores and the enhancement of speaking skills of the participants were attributed to providing platform for speaking and interaction among the group members. Such interactive behaviors induced by the use of group investigation technique resulted in the significant improvement of students' speaking ability since discussion and exchange of opinions among peers to complete a task or presenting the results of their work rarely happen (Listiana, et.al., 2016). Similarly, Mitchell, et al. (2008) reported that group investigation technique encouraged the students to monitor and evaluate their work. Students claimed that they had opportunities to explore their idea and practice speaking and even the students who never spoke in the class were motivated to speak up as the technique demanded speaking when students investigated and presented their project (Haqqi, 2013).

Further the data acquired from the focus group discussion showed that the students found group investigation technique constructive and practical. For example; as reflected in the lesson observation by the peer teacher observer, there was a gradual improvement in the students' participation in the group and students were observed communicating in English throughout the discussion in their groups.

It was in line with the findings of Haqqi (2013) and Nelli (2015) that the students had a high level of satisfaction after using group investigation technique. Group investigation succeeded in raising students' enjoyment in learning, participation in speaking and sharing opinions. The study revealed that participants exhibited a high level of learning satisfaction which helped to enhance their speaking skills and stimulated them to be more interactive. Students found group investigation pleasurable and interactive with equal opportunities to make presentations which helped in building confidence and in improving their speaking ability. They were also of the opinion that working in groups fostered in them a sense of team work, respecting views and ideas, and becoming conscious of accurate outcomes. The findings of this study also corroborated with the previous studies by Arifin (2017) and Iwarsdati (2016) that group investigation helped reduce the students' reluctance to speak, worry of making mistakes and minimized their fear of being laughed at. The students also gave the opinion regarding their excitement in ability to communicate throughout the lesson in English.

The data acquired from the focus group discussion and the classroom behavioral observation form were in accordance and supported each other. It was observed that at the beginning students preferred to remain quiescent with the fear of being laughed at. However with more activities employing group investigation, students were determined to shift from an individual stance to a more cooperative one and communicated among

the group members. They contributed to the group process and found encouragement to participate in discussion during the group investigation process.

Further, observations indicated a gradual improvement in the behavior of the participants. With topics allotted to each group and roles assigned to individuals within the group, the group members began work promptly and were on the task. Members shared ideas and were found to be participative. Similar findings were highlighted by Haqqi (2016) in his study that group investigation technique ran well during the teaching and learning process.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study shows that the use of group investigation technique enhanced the English speaking skills of the students. As stated by Iwarsdati (2016) the use of this technique can help minimize students fear of making mistakes and trim down their reluctance to speak in the desired language. The posttest scores revealed a remarkable improvement in their speaking performance indicating that students could speak better after the implementation of group investigation technique. Further it was revealed that students showed a high level of learning satisfaction. The technique was found to be enjoyable and helpful. Participants demonstrated an increased confidence level and there were more interactions among themselves. Therefore group investigation technique should be adopted to teach speaking skills in various grade levels in the Bhutanese schools. The technique can also be used to teach reading using literary text and other subjects to examine if the technique bring similar outcomes.

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7. Author(s)

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