

IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

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Annotation: This article examines the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing English speaking skills among 5th grade EFL students. Through a six-week case study at School No. 37, the research showed an 11% improvement in speaking performance following the use of strategies like Think-Pair-Share, group discussions, and role-play. The findings suggest that cooperative learning fosters a supportive environment that boosts confidence, fluency, and classroom participation.

Keywords: cooperative learning, speaking skills, English as a Foreign Language, primary school, peer interaction

Introduction

In recent years, the emphasis on communicative competence in language education has grown significantly, placing speaking skills at the forefront of English language instruction. Despite this shift, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to face challenges in developing oral proficiency due to limited classroom interaction, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Traditional teacher-centered

approaches often fail to create the dynamic and supportive environment necessary for effective speaking practice.

Cooperative learning, which involves structured group activities where learners work together to achieve shared goals, has emerged as an effective alternative for promoting active language use. By encouraging peer interaction and collaboration, cooperative learning strategies offer learners more opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful contexts. Techniques such as Think-Pair-Share, Jigsaw, and small group discussions have been found to enhance learner engagement, motivation, and communicative competence.

This case study investigates the impact of cooperative learning on improving speaking skills among secondary school EFL learners. The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of selected cooperative strategies and explore how they influence students' confidence, fluency, and participation in speaking **tasks**.

Literature Review

The role of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education has gained increasing attention, with communicative competence now considered a core goal of language instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, many learners still face challenges in developing oral fluency, often due to limited classroom interaction, fear of making mistakes, and lack of practice. In this context, cooperative learning has emerged as a promising approach for fostering learner engagement and improving speaking abilities.

Slavin (1995) emphasizes that cooperative learning strategies, when well-structured, lead to significant academic gains across subjects, including language learning. He argues that through positive interdependence and group accountability, students are motivated to help one another succeed, creating a more inclusive and productive classroom atmosphere.

Nation and Newton (2009) underscore the importance of meaningful, context-rich speaking tasks in language development. They suggest that cooperative learning activities

mirror real-world communication and therefore better prepare students for authentic language use. Their work also highlights how such tasks help develop both fluency and accuracy.

Gillies (2016) further supports the use of cooperative learning by emphasizing its role in building social and emotional competencies. When learners collaborate, they practice essential skills such as active listening, giving feedback, and negotiating meaning—all of which are fundamental for effective spoken communication.

Research by McDonough and Shaw (2012) points out that traditional teacher-centered classrooms often limit learners' speaking opportunities. In contrast, cooperative learning shifts the focus to students, increasing interaction time and promoting learner autonomy. This shift is especially important in large classes where individual speaking time is often constrained.

Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory provides a theoretical foundation for cooperative learning by highlighting the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. Language acquisition, particularly speaking, is facilitated when learners engage in collaborative dialogues within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), guided by more capable peers or teachers.

In conclusion, the literature strongly supports the integration of cooperative learning strategies in EFL classrooms to improve speaking skills. It not only enhances language proficiency but also builds a more interactive, motivating, and socially supportive learning

Methodology

This case study was conducted at School No. 37 with 5th grade students to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in improving English speaking skills. A total of 25 students participated in the study over a six-week period. The research design included a pre-test and post-test format to measure students' progress in speaking fluency and confidence.

During the intervention phase, various cooperative learning strategies were implemented in regular English lessons. These included Think-Pair-Share, small group discussions, and

role-play activities aimed at encouraging student interaction and verbal communication. Lessons were structured to allow students to collaborate, share ideas, and support each other in completing speaking tasks. Data was collected through teacher observations, student feedback, and the comparison of pre- and post-test results. The analysis showed an 11% improvement in students' speaking performance by the end of the study. This increase indicates that cooperative learning had a positive impact on learners' oral proficiency and engagement in the classroom.

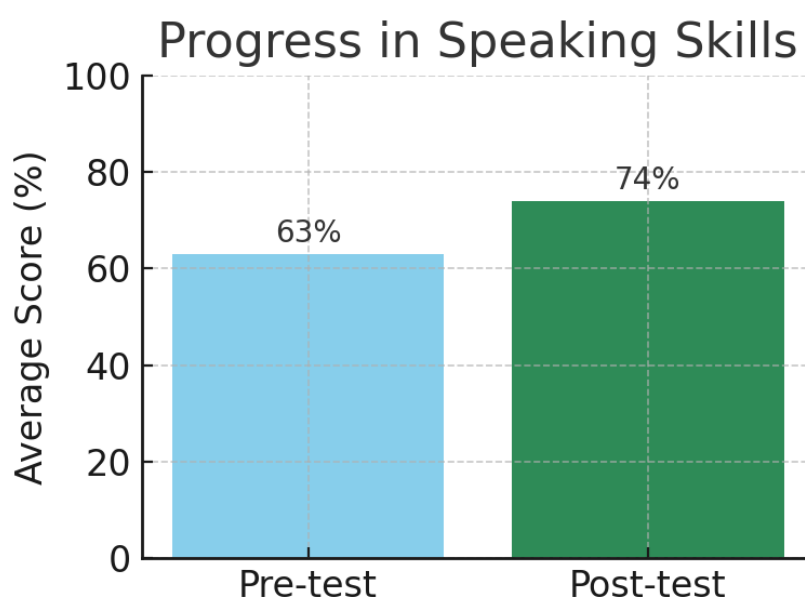
Results

The results of the study clearly indicate that cooperative learning strategies contributed to the improvement of students' speaking skills. After six weeks of implementation in the 5th grade classrooms at School No. 37, students' average speaking scores increased by 11%.

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Average Scores

Test Type	Average Score (%)
Pre-test	63%
Post-test	74%

Figure 1: Progress in Speaking Skills (Pre- vs Post-Test)



Student Feedback (Qualitative Results):

- “I like speaking in groups because I feel less shy.”
- “My friends help me with words I forget.”
- “Now I’m not afraid to speak English in class.”

These comments suggest that the cooperative learning environment reduced anxiety and increased motivation. Teacher observations also confirmed that students were more focused, supportive of one another, and willing to take speaking risks in a collaborative setting.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that cooperative learning strategies can significantly enhance speaking skills among 5th grade EFL students. The 11% improvement in post-test scores suggests that students benefited from the increased opportunities to practice English in a collaborative and supportive environment. This aligns with previous research indicating that peer interaction promotes greater language use, lowers anxiety, and increases learner confidence.

One key advantage observed during the study was that cooperative learning allowed students to express themselves more freely without the fear of making mistakes in front of the whole class. By working in smaller groups or pairs, students felt more comfortable taking risks and experimenting with language. As a result, their fluency and participation increased.

Student feedback also indicated positive changes in motivation and classroom engagement. Learners enjoyed the group activities and reported feeling more supported by their peers. The cooperative setting fostered not only language development but also social skills such as active listening, turn-taking, and mutual assistance.

However, it is important to note some limitations. The study was conducted with a relatively small group in a single school, and the duration was limited to six weeks. Further

research involving larger samples and extended timeframes is recommended to validate and expand upon these findings.

Overall, the study supports the use of cooperative learning as an effective pedagogical approach in EFL classrooms. When appropriately implemented, it can lead to measurable improvements in students' speaking abilities, as well as foster a more interactive and inclusive learning environment.

Conclusion

This case study explored the impact of cooperative learning on the development of speaking skills among 5th grade EFL students at School No. 37. The findings revealed that cooperative strategies such as Think-Pair-Share, group discussions, and role-play activities contributed to an 11% improvement in students' speaking performance. In addition to measurable gains in fluency, students demonstrated increased confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate in speaking tasks.

The qualitative feedback from students and observations by the teacher further support the effectiveness of cooperative learning in creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment. Learners felt less anxious, more collaborative, and more willing to take linguistic risks when working with peers.

Based on these results, cooperative learning can be recommended as a valuable approach in English language teaching, especially at the primary school level. Its emphasis on interaction, peer support, and active engagement aligns well with the communicative goals of modern language education. Future research could extend this study by involving a larger population, diverse age groups, and examining long-term outcomes.

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