


## Implementing Cooperative Learning to Enhance Oral Proficiency among EFL Learners

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### A B S T R A C T

The objective of this research is to investigate how the implementation of the cooperative learning method on students' performance in the learning process and to find out its impact on students' oral proficiency. In this study, the writer used a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected by observation and doing pre-test and post-test. The research samples are thirty seventh-grade students in SMP Tarsisius 1 Jakarta. After applying the method, the result showed that cooperative learning could help students work together in groups and solve problems or tasks effectively. During the discussion, students are more engaged with others, and the interactions are more vivid. They have slight awareness to achieve the goals, especially in group work. In this condition, the cooperation among the intelligent and weak students has shown. So they do not only focus on the individual goal but the group goals. Besides, cooperative learning also supports enhancing students' oral performance. The indication can be seen in pre-test and post-test scores. The students speaking scores were increased after the implementation of cooperative learning.

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning, oral proficiency, group work

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## INTRODUCTION

Everyone needs to have the ability to communicate in English. Because English is widely used in official, professional, education, politic, business, etc., this language is much in demand and has become a prerequisite in applying for a job. Mastering English is fully recommended for supporting someone's career in the future and for comprehensive communication national and international scale. Following this condition, most schools and universities provide English in their curriculum, and English is introduced as one of the subjects from kindergarten until university. Moreover, many schools in non-native English countries like Indonesia offer international English classes as its language instruction, indicating a prestigious school. They are very concerned about students' English accomplishments.

Nevertheless, having a demand for language skills is not in line with the result of learning achievement for communication. We have to realize that the primary purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in the target language. Yet, we observed that English learners struggle to speak and have

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difficulty expressing them in fluent communication. The phenomena were also raised at SMP TARSISIUS 1 Jakarta, where most students are still weak in speaking English. In the learning process, which needs interaction, the students tend to keep quiet and shy. When the teacher asks questions, they are reluctant and afraid to make mistakes. However, they have been learning English for many years and have acquired a bunch of vocabulary and rules but are still unable to talk fluently, even for simple daily utterances. Perhaps they are pretty good at reading and writing but still poor in speaking skills. Students' incompetence in producing fluent English communications can be caused by several conditions such as students' less English knowledge, teacher-centered approach, individual task rather than collaboration, and unfamiliarity of teachers with the appropriate method are some factors that trigger this happen (Bagheri, Dabaghmanesh & Zamanian, 2013). Likewise many traditional methods, the teachers act dominantly in speaking and seem the only source of knowledge to the students. In contrast, students prefer to receive and work passively as recipients in the learning process.

The teaching of a foreign language needs interaction between teacher and learners. The students as learners must be the center of activity that support interaction - communication both student-students and teacher-student (Namaziandost, Mina et al., 2020). It has been stressed previously in the method of teaching English which is more focused on a system of rules of language rather than as a dynamic resource for the study of language communication. According to Gomleksiz, (2007), this type of method will help students improve their speaking skills and produce incompetent users of the English language.

In recent years, the method of teaching English has been developing. The teacher-centered approach in the learning process has been shifted gradually into a student-centered one that supports students' interaction and engages in active communication. It gives students many chances to speak and express themselves in English. One encouraging method to traditional speaking instruction is cooperative learning. According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), cooperative learning is a learning method in which the instructional uses small groups so that students work together to maximize the individual and other members' achievements. While Kagan (1994) cited that cooperative learning is a communal activity in which learning is carried out through the mutual exchange of information. Within this framework, group members are stressed to be active and be responsible for their own construction of knowledge, as well as for facilitating and supporting the learning of the other group members. It also provides an alternative way of teaching for promoting speaking and social interaction among students (Gomleksiz, 2007).

Previous studies regarding Cooperative Learning have been done. It indicated the positive impact on developing students' attitudes on learning and increased speaking skills (Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014). Cooperative learners also develop socio-emotional skills, reflecting greater empathy and assertiveness among group students (Mondejar & Pastor 2017). The Cooperative Learning model is different from the traditional learning model. These differences can be seen in the learning process that emphasizes the process of learning together in groups. So in Cooperative Learning, the learners encourage to be more active, work together in groups and share their opinions. It supports learners' communication and their behavior in social interaction. Supposedly, they will be more confident and brave to take the risk of

conversation with various responses. Therefore, the objective to be achieved is not only academic ability in terms of mastery of subject matter but also the elements of cooperation to promote the social interaction among learners.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1994) there are five features of cooperative learning that should be provided in implementing to gain the maximum achievement : firstly, positive interdependence, students work in the group, have commitment to support and help each other's to attain the objective of the group, so they sink or swim together; secondly, face-to-face interaction, students practice verbal communication that challenge sharing view and opinions, dealing with different perspectives and attitude to build a dynamic interactions; thirdly, individual accountability, every student is accountable and responsible for carrying out his or her assigned tasks; personal role in completing the task will give maximum effect of the cooperative learning process; fourthly, group processing, group members need to regularly evaluate how they involve and manage their group including what has been done and what they will need to do to accomplish their goal; this processing provides students a chance to give and receive feedback from other members; fifthly, social skills, students' learning activities provide an opportunity for good communication and well interaction. They will learn social relationships, manage conflict, and engage in democratic decision-making.

Applying any kind of method has positive and negative sides that affect the learning process. But apparently, cooperative learning has a lot of benefits than its drawbacks. Several research studies have shown the advantages that students gain in their learning objectives, as Johnson in Thanh (2014) said that the implementation of cooperative learning had been proven to create an atmosphere of academic achievement and to be effective in the learning process. It has also helped students develop English knowledge and human social life. Thanh (2014) also declared :

“There are at least two main reasons why cooperative learning is entering the mainstream of education practice. The first reason is there has been a host of research supporting the use of Cooperative Learning to increase student achievement, as well as other outcomes such as improved intergroup relations acceptance of academically handicapped classmates, and increased self-esteem. The enable students to learn to think, to solve problems, and to integrate and apply knowledge and skills”.

It can be said that cooperative learning has an integrated success for students' achievements, which helps both academic matters and social skills in the way they interact with each other. These complete tasks are a baseline to that students should belong. It is beneficial for their future career. Based on the explanations above, the writer was interested in applying the cooperative learning method at SMP TARSISIUS So, the research would investigate based on the two the research questions; 1) How is the Cooperative Learning method implemented in speaking learning? 2) How is the result of students' oral proficiency using the Cooperative Learning?. In short, this study aims to describe how cooperative learning was implemented in the classroom and investigate the effectiveness in enhancing the students' English speaking skills.

## METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. "Qualitative research is more holistic and often involves a rich collection of data from various sources to gain a deeper understanding of individual participants, including their opinions, perspectives, and attitudes" (Nassaji, 2015). It observes and interprets the fact of the object systematically and produces descriptive data in written form based on visible facts. In such research, data may be collected qualitatively, but it is often analyzed quantitatively, using frequency, percentage, averages, or other statistical analysis.

This research was conducted at SMP Tarsisus I Jakarta. It has four seventh-grade classes, namely 7A, 7B, 7C, and 7D, where each class consists of an average of 30 students. Since the limitation of the research, the writer only chose 7A class as a study sample, composed of 30 students, ten male and twenty female. For the implementation, the writer taught students using cooperative learning for four meetings and one last meeting for assessment. To obtain the data, the writer did observation in the learning process, how the method was taken place and how students responded and showed their oral performance. To support the significant result, the writer also provided pre-test and post-test. The tasks contain the materials designed to assess the fluency competence of the learners. For a deep analysis of the research, the writer also searched the theories and previous studies related to cooperative learning on the internet and in libraries. These sources supported the primary data and gave a baseline for discussion and analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the writer explains how the cooperative learning method was carried out from the first meeting until the last meeting. Before starting the teaching activity, the writer observed the class and surveyed student conditions and problems in terms of their learning process and oral proficiency. Several stages were conducted to find out the field problems. Firstly, the writer did a classroom observation to see the teaching and learning process in class 7A SMP Tarsisus 1. Secondly, the writer interviewed the English teacher to collect data about the student's problems, particularly speaking skills, the activities in the classroom, especially the speaking activities the obstacles the teacher faced, and derived the inputs for the coming research implementation. From observation and interview, the writer identified some significant problems in learning to speak, which are as the followings: the students were not confident in speaking English and tended to avoid the questions from the teacher or their peers, and the students had limited vocabulary to produce proper utterances even for basic conversations, the students were shy and afraid of making mistakes, the activities are more focused on writing and reading, limited class discussions or any engaging activities, students have low responsibility and less motivation to give responses toward teacher's explanations and class discussions.

After identifying the field problems, the writer tried to analyse the causes which might trigger the obstacles in speaking. A lack of confidence and vocabulary or any elements that inhibit delivering fluent oral proficiency is caused by many factors. But, the dominant thing is that the students did not get chances to speak and check their speaking skills since they were rarely given activities to encourage them ((Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014). In other words, a lack of practice makes speaking skills difficult to acquire. And the limited vocabulary caused worse conditions in their oral performance. At the same time, the issues related to group activities or acting initially to achieve the group objective were raised since they did not have skills with cooperative work and did not know how to deal with an engaged group work activity. Students' limited capability in group tasks is basically because they did not realize the benefits of working together and how it helps them obtain their goals

(Namaziandost, et al 2019), so it needed to introduce the learning method which emphasizes to group work.

Describing the students' problems and class atmosphere gave the writer a portrayal of what kinds of activities and materials should be applied in this research. The writer conducted teaching by using cooperative learning for five times meetings. In each session, there are some stages of the learning process, initially pre-teaching, the main activity of teaching, and post-teaching. In the meeting I which the first meeting, the writer explained the cooperative learning in a brief which that learning is more focused on working together; the writer did not explain the knowledge of the methods literally but rather how the activities and learning process would be taken place, the kind of tasks that they would do for implementation and the benefits to their learning process and their learning goal. The introduction of this method was to build students' awareness about the importance of the usage and its implication for their learning achievement. During this time, the writer also carried out a pre-test to obtain students' speaking ability before the implementation. The pre-test score would be compared to the post-test score after applying the method.

In meeting I, the writer gave the material about introduction and nationality. Before starting the main teaching activity, the warm-up stage of the learning process had been conducted as initial action; the routines of the class, such as praying together and taking the absence, were firstly carried out. After that, the writer introduced herself and administered the pre-test. The paired dialogs test was designed to assess the fluency competence of the learners regarding their language knowledge, especially speaking skills. After giving the pre-test, the writer delivered the topic about introduction and nationality but primarily by providing the students with some questions to observe their performance in speaking skills. A camera recorded the learning process to monitor students' interactions and derive the class atmosphere. Not all students responded; only two or three students answered the questions.

Next, the writer introduced the topics and then gave real examples of how the conversation should be conducted by asking two bright students to practice the dialogs with guidance from the writer. The students' performance was slow and hesitantly. They looked a bit shy although they have good English knowledge. The feeling of being afraid of making mistakes caused the conversation was stumbled. But the writer encouraged them to speak up about the errors and still appreciated them since they had been brave to perform. The writer added the reward to those who performed by giving an additional score for their daily score. By looking at the real examples of students' speaking performance, the students would be familiar with the task and know how to deliver it. In further activity, the writer asked them to make a group of four and create the dialog related to the topic and practice with it. Then the students chose their own members, the class was a bit noisy, and it took time longer than the writer's expectation. Several students did not get a group; they might not have been chosen by anyone, or the groups might have fixed members. So the writer asked them to create their own group. The students discussed the task, but only a few were working actively; some were kept quiet, chatting, or busy writing something. It showed that the task's responsibility belongs to the smart and active students. Since the limited time, the writer finished the session and assigned the students to practice the dialogs and perform for the next meeting.

For the second meeting, the teaching process was longer than the previous one since there was no pre-test carried out; the activity started directly to the learning process. After pre-teaching activities were conducted, the writer reminded the students about the previous speaking task that they had to perform. Each group had to perform their dialog was about 3 minutes. The writer did not push all groups to come forward, it was just based on their willingness and readiness to perform. The writer lets students act freely to let them explore their creativity and feel comfortable with the task. The group presentations in front of the class took about thirty minutes last. Because there were only 4 out of 7 groups did the task, 3

groups did not perform because they were not ready and reluctant to take the action. The students' performances were quite well because they had enough time to practice, but still, number of students forgot their dialogs, and had mispronunciations and flat intonations.

After finishing activity one, then the writer moved on to teach material 2 which is the topic is about asking for information and apology. After explaining the material, the writer gave a video that showed a short story related to the topic. For the task activity, the students worked in a group to practice the utterances for 15 minutes, and afterward, the students discussed the video and completed the task consisting of ten multiple-choice and three questions by answering the questions. During the discussion, the writer promotes cooperative learning by focusing on three principles: positive interaction, individual accountability, and face-to-face interaction. By guiding students and introducing these three points to the working group, they would have awareness and self-responsibility in their task. The comprehension of how to deal with group working and its elements becomes the learning goal. Two principles of cooperative learning, group processing, and social skill would be taught at the next meeting to avoid feeling overwhelmed with much information and instruction to the students.

In meeting three, the stages of the learning process were similar. The topic is about school and jobs. In this stage, the two last elements of cooperative learning, group processing, and social skill had been promoted. They learned how to evaluate the members' performance and gave feedback without feeling guilty, and received critics with no hard feelings. The values of cooperative learning and the skills of working together were emphasized in this process for the principles of cooperative learning were embedded in the students. In the fourth meeting, the last day of implementation, the writer gave the task that most of the activities are group work. The topic is about free time and holidays. After making an introduction about the topic and asking several questions as a warming up, the writer assigned each group to establish a travel agency that offers holiday trips and similar activities to the customer. In this stage, the members of each group had to work together to find the place to visit, count the budget, create interesting activities, etc. So this kind of competition activities whereas each member should contribute to the success of their travel. All elements of cooperation should be implemented. The class was a little bit busy and noisy and the group discussion was more dynamic which more students would like to give their opinion to make their travel is the best agency. After discussion, each group presented their holiday trips and the other groups should give a response about their presentation. The students looked enthusiastic and excited about their tasks. Overall this time, the group work was more applicable and the students were more engaged and had more fun with the activities.

Meeting five as the last meeting is assessment activities toward the individual ability and group work to see whether cooperative learning had been implemented successfully. In the first assessment, students gave a task to discuss in a group and they had to complete the task. The process of working together in the group was recorded to compare the atmosphere of discussion in the first meeting. Afterward, the individual test was conducted by giving a post-test which consisting 25 questions multiple choice. The material of the test was regarded to the material that had been taught in the last four days.

In applying the cooperative learning method, the group work and the contribution of each member to achieve the learning objectives of the group are very important. How the learning process is taken place, the learners' attitude and their interaction among others members can reflect the effectiveness of the method. In this study, the implementation of cooperative learning to solve the issues related to students' speaking skills has resulted. It was shown from the learning process in the group work and the increase in speaking scores.

By comparing the video recording, in meeting one the learning process in a group, tended slowly and had minimal interaction among the students. A lot of students did not engage in discussion; they were shy, reluctant, and nescience toward the task given by the teacher; only a few students had the responsibility to complete the task. In terms of pre-test, their linguistic knowledge of speaking was an average score of 72 and the highest score was 87. These scores were not very low but if the students could optimize their ability, they would have gotten higher grades.

In the second and third meetings, the learning process focused on group work. At this time, the cooperation was a bit applicable and the atmosphere was more dynamic. These better conditions caused the writer had introduced the principles of cooperative learning that learners should apply. More students had chances to speak up and gave their opinions. Although, they still mixed the languages with the Indonesian language, at least they were slightly brave to try giving comments. At this stage, individual accountability and positif interdependence had been encouraged, so that the other smart members had attention to persuade another member to participate and help them in completing the task. Despite the student's behavior not changing but the student's participation and awareness were hinger. This condition was in line with Al-Tamimi & Attamimi's view (2014) that cooperative learning has, a positive impact on developing student attitudes toward the learning process and increases speaking skills. It indicated that students have different attitudes on how to deal with group work after applying cooperative learning. Related to linguistic knowledge there was also a higher achievement; the average score on the pre-test was 72 and the average score for the post-test increased to 80. This result supported Johnson and Johnson's view (2009) that cooperative learning helps the students to maximize their individual and other members' achievements. It also supported Namaziandosts' et al claim (2019) that cooperative learning improved students' speaking skills and motivation. In this regard, it must be noted that there are many positive outcomes as a result of using the cooperative learning method as shown in this study and the previous research studies.

All and all, cooperative learning has a lot of benefits. It supports the learning system from individual tasks to group tasks which more positive impact on the result of learning achievements. It enhances students' ability for communication performance and their attitude in group work as well. It can be said that cooperative learning has been promoted as an alternative way of enhancing oral proficiency. It has placed itself above all other instructional methods and becomes one of the most powerful learning strategies utilized in recent times.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cooperative learning as a student-centered approach can help the students' speaking problems. It supports the individual task and the group task that leads to improved students' oral performance. It requires interaction and collaboration that is needed in communication. Therefore, teachers in schools, should be aware of the benefits and importance of cooperative learning and introduce it to the students' learning process. The traditional method which focuses on a teacher-centered approach can be changed toward a more student-centered approach. By giving an alternative way of teaching method, students have more opportunities to apply their language knowledge in a dynamic and fun classroom interaction which will affect their learning achievements.

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