

THE IMPACT OF SMALL-GROUP COOPERATIVE INTERACTIONS ON STUDENTS' ORAL FLUENCY DEVELOPMENT IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. This article explores the impact of small-group cooperative interactions on the development of oral fluency among EFL learners. The study highlights how structured group tasks, peer collaboration, and interactive speaking activities contribute to increased learner confidence, improved speaking accuracy, and enhanced communication fluency. The research also examines the role of group dynamics, student participation, and supportive learning environments in fostering effective speaking practice. The findings demonstrate that small-group cooperative learning not only encourages active engagement but also provides learners with meaningful opportunities to use English in real communicative situations, ultimately leading to measurable improvement in oral fluency.

Key words: cooperative learning, small-group interaction, oral fluency, EFL learners, speaking skills, peer collaboration, communication practice, group dynamics, interactive tasks.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most challenging yet essential skills in learning a foreign language. For many EFL learners, limited exposure to real-life communication and insufficient classroom interaction opportunities often result in low confidence, hesitation, and reduced fluency. In recent years, cooperative learning has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach that encourages active participation, meaningful communication, and collaborative problem-solving among students. Unlike traditional teacher-centered instruction, cooperative learning places learners in small groups where they can interact, negotiate meaning, and practice language in a supportive environment.

Small-group cooperative interactions offer learners the chance to engage in authentic communication, share ideas, and receive immediate feedback from peers. These interactions help reduce anxiety, promote responsibility, and create a positive atmosphere where students are more willing to speak. As a result, learners gradually develop stronger oral fluency, greater accuracy, and improved communicative competence. This study investigates the impact of small-group cooperative interactions on the development of oral fluency in EFL classrooms. By analyzing learners' participation patterns, communication strategies, and speaking performance, the research seeks to determine how cooperative learning tasks contribute to oral skill enhancement. The findings aim to provide valuable insights for teachers, researchers, and curriculum designers interested in improving English speaking instruction through collaborative approaches.

MAIN PART

Cooperative learning is one of the most effective instructional approaches used in modern education, as it encourages students to work together, support one another, and actively participate in the learning process. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), the key principles of cooperative learning—positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face

interaction, and group processing—create an environment where learners can engage equally and contribute meaningfully to group tasks. In EFL classrooms, this approach offers learners natural opportunities to practice the language, interact with peers, and develop communicative competence in a supportive and less intimidating setting. Small-group interactions play a crucial role in enhancing students' speaking skills, particularly oral fluency. Working in small groups allows learners to have more speaking time, share ideas freely, ask questions, and receive immediate feedback from peers. Such interactions help learners speak at their own pace while gradually improving their pronunciation, vocabulary use, and overall confidence. Activities like discussions, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and information-gap exercises replicate real-life communication, pushing students to negotiate meaning and use English spontaneously. As a result, students become more fluent, speak more naturally, and express their ideas more coherently.

Various cooperative learning techniques have been shown to significantly improve oral fluency. The Think-Pair-Share technique encourages learners to think independently, discuss with a partner, and then share their ideas with the group, which increases confidence and fluency. The Jigsaw technique requires each student to become an "expert" on a specific part of a topic and teach it to group members, reinforcing vocabulary, accuracy, and clarity of explanation. Role-play activities immerse learners in real-world scenarios where they practice functional language, develop spontaneity, and refine their pronunciation and coherence. These techniques ensure active participation and give every student multiple opportunities to speak.

Cooperative learning has a positive impact on both linguistic and psychological aspects of speaking development. Linguistically, it helps improve fluency, accuracy, and communicative effectiveness through repeated practice and constant interaction. Psychologically, it reduces anxiety, increases motivation, and builds learners' self-confidence by creating a friendly environment where making mistakes is considered a natural part of learning. Students involved in cooperative learning tend to demonstrate measurable progress in speaking speed, coherence, vocabulary use, and interactional competence, becoming more independent and willing to participate in classroom discussions.

Despite its benefits, implementing cooperative learning can present challenges, such as unequal participation, dominance by more proficient speakers, limited language input, and difficulties in managing group dynamics. To overcome these issues, teachers need to plan tasks carefully, form balanced groups, provide clear instructions, and monitor group interactions closely. Effective guidance and constructive feedback are essential to ensure that students benefit fully from cooperative activities and that oral fluency continues to improve.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that small-group cooperative interactions play a significant role in developing oral fluency among EFL learners. Cooperative learning creates a supportive and interactive environment where students are encouraged to participate actively, express their ideas freely, and practice English in meaningful contexts. Through activities such as discussions, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and information-gap exercises, learners not only improve their fluency but also enhance their accuracy, confidence, and communication strategies. The analysis shows that students who engage in cooperative learning receive more speaking opportunities, make greater use of vocabulary, and develop stronger interactional skills. The collaborative nature of small-group work reduces anxiety, fosters

motivation, and allows learners to receive immediate feedback from peers. As a result, they become more willing to speak and more capable of maintaining natural, spontaneous communication. Although cooperative learning presents certain challenges, such as unequal participation and group management issues, these can be minimized through careful planning, balanced grouping, and continuous teacher guidance. When implemented effectively, cooperative learning serves as a powerful tool for improving oral fluency and overall communicative competence.

Small-group cooperative learning should be considered an essential component of EFL speaking instruction. Its ability to promote active engagement, meaningful communication, and learner autonomy makes it a highly effective method for helping students develop the speaking skills necessary for successful language use in academic, social, and real-life situations.

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