

Cooperative learning to enhance oral proficiency meta-analysis of research

Aprendizagem cooperativa para melhorar a meta-análise de proficiência oral de pesquisa

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the usefulness of the application of Cooperative Learning elements and principles to enhance Ecuadorian students' Oral Proficiency in English Language Learning. This study began with the analysis of several theories in which many authors define cooperative learning as working together in small groups to reach a common goal, but perhaps the benefits of oral production should be emphasized. Cooperative Learning and its elements contribute to lower anxiety and hesitation increasing self-confidence and motivation likewise it fosters equal participation.

Keywords: cooperative learning, oral proficiency, English

RESUMO

Este estudo procurou determinar a utilidade da aplicação dos elementos e princípios da Aprendizagem Cooperativa para melhorar a proficiência oral dos alunos equatorianos na aprendizagem da língua inglesa. Este estudo começou com a análise de várias teorias em que muitos autores definem a aprendizagem cooperativa como trabalhar em pequenos grupos para atingir um objetivo comum, mas talvez os benefícios da produção oral devam ser enfatizados. A Aprendizagem Cooperativa e os seus elementos contribuem para diminuir a ansiedade e a hesitação, aumentando a autoconfiança e a motivação, ao mesmo tempo que promove a participação igualitária.

Palavras-chave: aprendizagem cooperativa, proficiência oral, inglês

INTRODUCTION

The English language is considered the universal language because it is one of the most spoken languages worldwide. Because of its importance, English learning improvement is the leading research object of some researchers in the language education field; thus, Marsh. D, Ellis. R, Krashen. S, among others., has set some language learning theories, approaches, and methods to raise and facilitate second language learning (Lema, 2022).

Latino America faces the challenge of developing skills to improve economic growth and deal with several obstacles. The efforts to develop the acquirement of English Language Learning in Latino America have been plenty, throughout different types of programs in private and public institutions. The access and facilities for people to learn the language increased considerably, even though previous and recent studies proved that the level of English learning is low. As countries in Latin America seek to enhance their competitiveness and prospects for economic growth, skills gaps of various types emerge that represent potentially serious bottlenecks. English proficiency is one such skill (Fiszbein, Cosentino, & Cumsille, 2016).

In recent years the government of Ecuador has changed the policies in the educational field concerning the English language to contribute to students as well as teachers. Instructors have been applying pedagogical practice focused on the student learner center. Notwithstanding several improvements in recent years, Ecuador ranks 90th among 112 countries surveyed in the 2021 EF EPI English Proficiency Index. Giorgio Iemmolo, EF Director of Academic Standards, said the poor showing is due in part to the addition of 12 more countries in the latest survey but says Ecuador continues to suffer from a poor system of language education (Life, 2021).

In 2016 CLIL methodology was introduced in Ecuadorian educational policy for English as a foreign language instruction to improve the teaching and learning process in zone 4 during 2019-2021 with 70 English teachers as participants from nine public and private educational institutions placed in Manabi Province of Ecuador. They used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as data collection instruments and the results show differences in the implementation between public and private institutions. Nevertheless, there is still a need for more research because the English level has not improved and the results have not been as favorable as expected.

Oral Proficiency is the ability to communicate accurately in the target language. Jeremy Harmer states that there are three main reasons for getting students to speak in the classroom; first, rehearsal opportunities to practice in a real-life context, secondly providing speaking tasks that provide good feedback for students as well as teachers, and finally, the use of the elements students have storage in their brains to become autonomous language users (Harmer, 2010).

(Harmer, 2010) present examples of types of speaking activity: decision-making (choosing the winner in a photographic competition), role-play, and an interview 'game'. And it is important to remark that these activities involve cooperative learning elements and even some teachers get very involved with their students and want to participate in the activity themselves!

Distributing students to work in groups is an old teaching practice, and collaboration is always immersed in class. There have been positive results in learning thanks to the application of cooperative strategies. One of the main issues is the extent to which diversity of student background affects the performance of groups. It is important to understand what are the factors that promote good and real group work and collaboration.

Cooperative learning is more than an instructional procedure. It is a basic shift in organizational structure that extends from the classroom through the district office. (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.) Considering the high level of productivity that generates working with peers and teams, the industry has made up its minds from individual and competitive work. A similar model from the industry was applied in the schools regarding the organization of teachers and groups of students. Students are given to a teacher in the same classroom, but (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.) claims that teachers can be assigned to any student to teach thus, reach a high-performance cooperative team base.

Cooperative Learning approach follows five principles: Positive Interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, face to face interaction, group processing, and effective group/social skills. These principles foster not only interaction.

EFL students might have the benefits of combining positive interdependence and social interaction to reach a common goal, through the application of this approach

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. Do cooperative learning strategies have any significant effect on enhancing students' oral proficiency?

RQ2. What is the effectiveness of the application of CL elements for improving Ecuadorian students' oral proficiency in the English language?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for the tail. For if they fall, one will lift his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him ...And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A threefold cord is not quickly broken (Gateway, 2022).

English is considered an all-around language, and the increasing need to acquire it has revolutionized currently in the hope that getting better job opportunities or traveling abroad. In the same way, technology has the English Language immersed.

As stated by (Sharan, 2014) Cooperative Learning (CL) is a generic pedagogy that is one of the most thoroughly researched approaches to education emphasizing accountable efforts together. (Namaziandost et al., 2019) claimed that the main objective of getting a language is to communicate in that language, even so, it the difficulties to deal with. First of all diverse concepts show the students' failures to communicate in English successfully. Secondly, teachers are always looking for and developing different methodologies, techniques, and strategies to create a positive learning environment.

As claimed by (Harmer, 2007) there are too many reasons to foster oral production in the EFL classroom. For instance, spoken practice lets students experiment with real context. In addition, feeling confident of they are doing a good job or not feeling daunted by making mistakes, on the contrary pushing each other's builds a positive learning environment.

According to recent studies, the necessity of formal and informal instructions to attain a better level of accuracy and fluency has incremented. English learning and their skills such as oral production is considered a challenge, and (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.) argues that adequate Cooperative Learning involves knowing what Cooperation means. Understanding the elements that make it different from traditional classes, and taking advantage of their strengths.

Oral Proficiency is the ability to communicate and interact with others in the English Language. It involves the acquirement of vocabulary and grammar structures following a process to achieve communicative skills (IPL, 2022).

In light of (Harmer, 2007) presenting three examples of speaking activities: photographic competition, role play, and portrait interview, which are developed in groups, students discuss the role they are going to play, discuss criteria, and make decisions together. The results are most of the time highly pleasant.

Fluency

Fluency in any language is the capacity to be able to hold a conversation with ease and effortlessness, using the correct words and combinations accurately. But it appears extremely difficult to pinpoint where this perception comes from (Gotz, 2013).

According to Gotz, several approaches contribute to a speaker's fluency, such as temporal variables in native speech, the use of formulaic language, performance phenomena, and, other global variables in native speech. Nevertheless, learners encounter difficulties because speaking in a foreign language is cognitively demanding, so it is relevant as teachers to seek strategies to boost the development of fluency.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning is the foundation on which most active learning is built. Cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goals. When cooperating, individuals work to reach outcomes that benefit everyone in the group (Manuel, 2019).

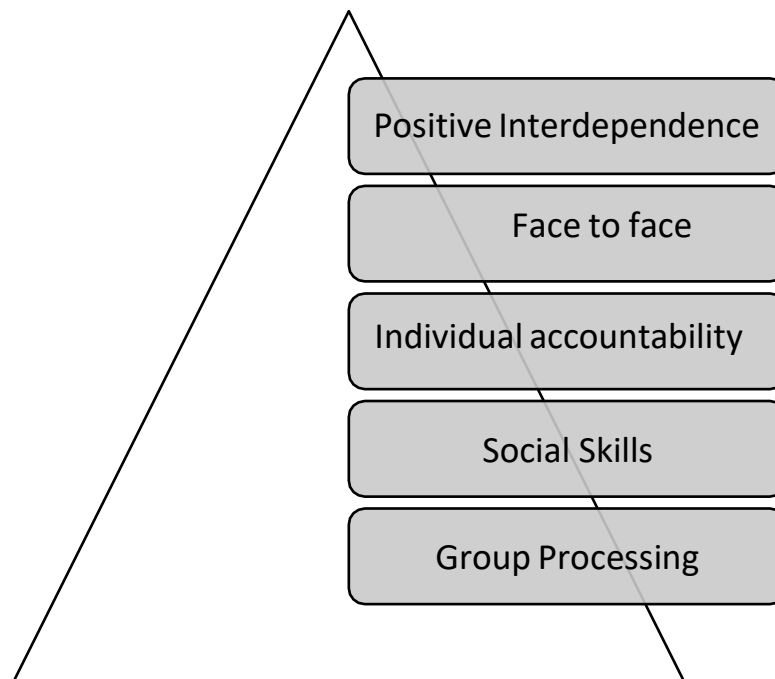
Based on (Johnson & Johnson, 2017) adequate Cooperative Learning involves knowing what Cooperation means. Understanding the elements that make it different from traditional classes, and taking advantage of their strengths.

Cooperative Learning Elements

As it is observed in figure 1 the main strategies of Cooperative Learning are:

Figure 1

Elements of Cooperative Learning



Cooperative Learning Techniques

- Circle of speakers: The task follows the principle of equal participation; learners take turns and everyone participates in the same role. They could make notes to clear up any doubt. The teacher intervenes to make sure they are working in groups. This technique goes well with vocabulary too.
- Write-Pair-Switch: When students are assigned to write, they can interchange their annotations, to increase interaction and collaboration.
- Question-And-Answer -Pair: It can start with note-taking to build self-confidence before interacting orally.
- Numbered Heads: It is a good technique to increase oral interaction, every participant is assigned a number, the teacher sets the time and calls a number. The student with that number answers the question.

- Role-Play: It is constructively applied in cooperative learning groups because students interact in real situations. They solve problems together and active the oral production.
- Group Discussion: Once the teacher distributes the group works, they work with a discussion question taking turns to share their answers. (Brame & Biel, 2015).

Oral proficiency

Oral proficiency is the ability to communicate accurately in a target language. It has been challenging to develop in students who have seen it as one of the dreariest competencies in English learning language acquisition. Students face confusion and frustration when they try to communicate but they cannot do. They do not feel confident and do not develop fluency and confuse words and their functionality. Indeed, they prefer not to speak or just memorize when they have to do speaking activities.

As claimed by (Harmer, 2010) the reasons to promote students developing oral production in the classroom are too many. First of all, spoken practice lets students immerse themselves in a real situation. Additionally, being aware of what are they doing correctly and what are they failing. Finally, A sense of confidence is built due to the constant practice the moment of constructing the language.

According to recent studies, the necessity of formal and informal instructions to attain a better level of accuracy and fluency has incremented. English learning and skills such as oral production are considered a challenge, and (Chen, 2021) argues that Cooperative Learning is an effective approach to developing English skills in the 21st Century

RESEARCH METHOD

In the light of (Hernández Sampieri et al., n.d.) descriptive research seeks to specify properties and characteristics of any phenomena that are subjected to analysis. This study of documentary review has the purpose of analyzing how Cooperative Learning and its elements manifest themselves to enhance oral production.

The characteristics of the Descriptive study are:

- To collect information on the concepts and variables independently.
- Accurately display the angles or dimensions of a phenomenon, event, community, context, or situation.

The technique applied is Content analysis. It is defined by (Bardin, 1991) as a set of techniques of analysis of communications aimed at obtaining indicators. Throughout this study, it is demonstrated that most authors agree with their assumptions. The documentary analysis based on (Bermeo-Yaffar et al., n.d.) assumptions consist of searching, selecting, and analyzing a set of written materials to answer questions about a topic.

Authors who applied Cooperative Learning

This chart shows the summary of the authors and their research on Cooperative Learning and the enhancement of Oral Proficiency:

Table 1. Summary of studies that addressed Cooperative Learning research

Author	Research Method	Results
Sharan (2019)	Jigsaw, Learning together, Group Investigation.	In the process of change teachers and students are interconnected and interdependent, and together carry out the steps needed to create an authentic cooperative classroom.
Yanive C, Castillo P (2007)	Action Research	All the students at the end of the implementation showed a different attitude towards group work and the skill of speaking
Johnson D, Johnson R (2005)	Descriptive Research	Social interdependence theory has been widely applied, especially in education and business. These applications have resulted in revisions of the theory and the generation of considerable new research.
Namaziandost E, Shatalebi V, Nasri M (2019)	Quasi-experimental with a non-equivalent control group pre-test-post-test design	Cooperative learning had a positive effect on the student’s speaking skills.
Lemos Tello, Nubia Consuelo (2012)	Action Research	This action research project guided students to become aware and reflective in terms of identifying reasons for the lack of confidence and the possible solutions to overcome the problem
Guaranga Lema Jessica (2022)	Action Research	The final results showed that cooperative techniques like Numbered Heads, Three Step Interviews, Think pair share, and Jig – Saw were pretty helpful to support learners to improve learners speaking skills.

Source: the author (2023) with literature review

Discussion

Concerning the first research question, do cooperative learning strategies have any significant effect on enhancing students’ oral proficiency? This research determined that the application of cooperative learning enhances oral proficiency prompted a more cooperative environment among students in the oral process (Yanive & Castillo, n.d.) In agreement with (Al et al., 2012) who showed a very much alike result. They stated that after the implementation the students felt that their pronunciation had improved.

Regarding question number two, what is the effectiveness of the application of CL elements for improving Ecuadorian students’ oral proficiency in the English language? This study acknowledged that students showed more motivation and the final results exhibited a significant improvement in the speaking skill of young adult EFL learners (María & Lema, n.d.).

Another judgment in this study was the development of the interdependence of students in a positive way, it means they sink or swim together. The (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.) teacher creates positive goal interdependence by requiring group members to agree on the answer and the strategies for solving each problem.

Another finding in this study is that applying Cooperative Learning strategies, principles and elements generates higher positive results than working alone.

Table 2. Variables to take into consideration for the proposal

Educational context	Social context	Level of knowledge	Organizational context
Traditional teaching vs. new approaches: This variable affects learning performance.	Culture	Study habits	Disorganized groups
Lack of innovation and creativity: This variable influence the learning performance	Lack of social interaction between students	Different students’ levels of knowledge	No guideline
The ignorance of immersion of Cooperative Learning in new trends of teaching	Motivation	The appropriate application of the Cooperative Learning approach.	No roles

Source: the author (2023)

Proposal

This is a descriptive study, considering previous research, therefore a proposal is presented for the application of Cooperative learning strategies, principles, and elements combined with the new trends in teaching, in this way, students be aware of the benefits to enhance oral proficiency in Ecuadorian EFL students.

Table 3. Detailed proposal steps

Stages	Actions	Resources and expected scopes
Stage 1 Development of knowledge of the relevance of Cooperative Learning	Create a good classroom environment	Teacher and student motivation are expected.
	Create team works, set the guidelines, and establish the pedagogical context	Physical organization of the classroom, the role of students Students' assumptions of their roles are expected.
Stage 2 Application of Cooperative Learning,	Since the pre-test, the principles of CL will be applied.	The analysis of oral proficiency to make a final assessment of the application of Cooperative Learning
	During the process, the Cooperative learning principles, strategies, and elements will be applied.	It is expected students work collaboratively in a holistic way
Stage 3 Analysis of Results	Analysis and organization of the information that appears in the study.	Data collection instruments. It is expected that students demonstrate accountability during the process.
	Carry out a process of testing the success of the program.	A holistic assessment instrument to analyze students' performance. It is expected that students who applied the Cooperative Learning method have enhanced their oral proficiency

Source: the author (2023)

Limitations

One of the hardest limitations could be the shyness of people, those who are quiet and might not feel comfortable. They probably prefer to talk one-to-one and need more chances to talk until they get involved.

Another limitation could be that people sometimes do not get along and their personalities clash. In this case, the first stage must be crucial to building relationships among students.

Opportunities

After facing the possible limitations, they might become opportunities to demonstrate the impact of the combination of Cooperative Learning and new trends of teaching to reach the enhancement of Oral Proficiency in Ecuadorian EFL students.

According to recent studies working collaboratively maximize their own and the other's learning. Cooperative learning was based on the social interdependence on individual interaction within a given situation which, in turn, affects the outcome of that interaction (Rusydi M. & Syarif, 2023).

Regarding teaching-learning strategies that work better for rural teachers in the classroom in Esmeraldas-Ecuador (Saavedra Delgado & Ramírez Lozada, 2023), the results revealed that the main strategies were cooperative learning strategies such as dialogues and discussions in group work or pair work.

Conclusion

Cooperative learning is crucial in all learning activities, even though it is an old teaching practice, as time evolved and new trends in teaching appear the principles, strategies, and elements are involved and the improvements in the development of oral proficiency have been demonstrated for researchers. It is necessary to raise the level of awareness that the assertive application of this method benefits and can enhance the oral production.

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