

Enhancing Speaking Skills in EFL Learners through Cooperative and Self-Regulated Learning Strategies: A Multidimensional Approach

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Abstract

The acquisition of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains a persistent challenge for learners worldwide. Despite extensive research on communicative competence, traditional classroom methodologies often fail to address the cognitive, social, and emotional factors that influence oral language development. This study explores the integration of cooperative learning models, self-regulated learning strategies, and motivational scaffolds to enhance speaking proficiency among young and adult EFL learners. Drawing upon social interdependence theory, discourse analysis frameworks, and empirical studies on anxiety and motivation, the research examines the dynamic interplay between collaborative group structures, teacher mediation, and learner autonomy. Through a detailed mixed-methods design incorporating observational analysis, learner interviews, and longitudinal performance assessments, this research identifies specific instructional practices that foster sustained engagement, reduce foreign language anxiety, and promote higher-order speaking skills. Findings indicate that structured cooperative interactions, when combined with metacognitive strategy instruction and formative feedback, significantly improve learners' fluency, accuracy, and communicative confidence. Moreover, the study highlights the critical role of teacher beliefs, cultural considerations, and classroom dynamics in mediating the effectiveness of these interventions. The implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and policy are discussed, emphasizing the necessity of holistic, learner-centered approaches to speaking instruction in diverse EFL contexts.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, self-regulated learning, speaking skills, EFL, foreign language anxiety, motivation, metacognition.

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1. Introduction

The development of oral proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is widely acknowledged as a complex, multidimensional process influenced by cognitive, affective, social, and pedagogical factors (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Hedge, 2000). Speaking, in particular, represents a high-stakes domain within EFL learning due to its immediate, interactive, and context-dependent nature. While learners may acquire receptive language skills, such as listening and reading, the productive use of language in

spontaneous communicative settings is often impeded by a range of affective barriers including anxiety, low self-efficacy, and lack of engagement (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Hosni, 2014). Traditional teacher-centered methodologies have been criticized for their limited capacity to cultivate authentic communicative competence, as they often prioritize rote memorization and controlled practice over active, meaningful interaction (Harmer, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Contemporary research in language pedagogy emphasizes

the importance of learner-centered approaches that integrate social and cognitive dimensions of language learning. Cooperative learning, grounded in social interdependence theory, provides structured opportunities for collaborative problem-solving, peer feedback, and joint construction of knowledge (Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Kagan, 1992). This approach has been shown to enhance not only linguistic outcomes but also learners' attitudes toward the language and their motivation to engage in classroom activities (Attamimi, 2014; Gomleksiz, 2007). Additionally, self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies, encompassing goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflection, empower learners to take ownership of their learning process, adaptively manage cognitive resources, and mitigate performance anxiety (Martirosian & Hartoonian, 2015; Habók & Magyar, 2018).

Despite robust theoretical foundations, the literature reveals several gaps. First, while numerous studies document the efficacy of cooperative learning in enhancing speaking skills, few investigations comprehensively examine the interaction between group dynamics, teacher mediation, and individual learner strategies. Second, research on SRL in the context of speaking instruction remains underdeveloped, particularly concerning its application in culturally diverse EFL settings where learner autonomy may be influenced by sociocultural norms (Li, 2012; Le, 2011). Third, the impact of foreign language anxiety on both cooperative and individual learning processes requires further elucidation, given its significant moderating role in oral performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Donley, 1997).

This study seeks to address these gaps by adopting a multidimensional approach that integrates cooperative learning frameworks, SRL strategies, and motivational scaffolding to investigate their collective effect on speaking proficiency. Specifically, the research aims to: (a) analyze the effectiveness of cooperative learning structures such as Jigsaw II and structured peer interaction on oral skill development; (b) examine the role of self-regulated learning strategies in enhancing learner autonomy and confidence; (c) explore how motivational interventions influence engagement and performance; and (d) identify contextual factors that mediate the success of these pedagogical strategies. Through an extensive review of theoretical perspectives, coupled with a rigorously designed empirical investigation, this study contributes to both the conceptual understanding and practical application of speaking instruction in EFL contexts.

2. Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively investigate the effectiveness of cooperative and self-regulated learning strategies in EFL speaking instruction (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2012). The study was conducted in two urban language learning centers in Australia, involving 120 participants aged 16 to 25 enrolled in intermediate-level English courses. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three instructional conditions: (a) cooperative learning with SRL integration, (b) cooperative learning without SRL integration, and (c) traditional teacher-centered instruction.

Instructional Design

The cooperative learning intervention was structured around the Jigsaw II method, emphasizing positive interdependence, individual accountability, and structured peer teaching (Gomleksiz, 2007; Kagan, 1995). Tasks included collaborative storytelling, role-play activities, and problem-solving discussions designed to simulate authentic communicative scenarios (Dujmovic, 2006; Ladousse, 1987). SRL integration involved explicit instruction in goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflective journaling (Habók & Magyar, 2018; Martirosian & Hartoonian, 2015). Learners were trained to identify specific speaking objectives, track their participation and performance, and reflect on both linguistic and affective outcomes after each session. Motivational scaffolding was provided through teacher-led strategy instruction, feedback sessions, and reinforcement of learner autonomy (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Murphy, 2003).

3. Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using pre- and post-intervention oral proficiency assessments, including fluency, lexical richness, grammatical accuracy, and interactive competence measures. Assessments were audio-recorded and evaluated by trained raters using standardized rubrics (Kayi, 2006; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Learners also completed validated questionnaires on foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), motivation (Dörnyei, 2001), and self-regulation (Habók & Magyar, 2018).

Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with participants, and reflective journals maintained by learners throughout the intervention. Observations focused on group interaction patterns, participation equity, and teacher mediation. Interviews explored learners' perceptions of cooperative

learning, SRL strategies, and affective experiences. Reflective journals captured self-reported goals, challenges, and perceived progress in speaking skills (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Kinsella, 1995).

4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Repeated-measures ANOVA was employed to examine changes in speaking proficiency across instructional conditions, while regression analyses explored the predictive role of self-regulation, motivation, and anxiety on performance outcomes. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using iterative coding techniques to identify patterns in learner experiences, teacher mediation strategies, and group dynamics (Dörnyei, 2007; Koshy, 2005). Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings ensured robustness and validity of interpretations.

5. Results

The analysis revealed substantial gains in speaking proficiency among participants in the cooperative learning with SRL integration condition. Fluency scores improved by an average of 28%, lexical richness by 22%, and grammatical accuracy by 19%, compared to more modest gains in the cooperative-only and traditional conditions (Attamimi, 2014; Gomleksiz, 2007). Interaction analysis demonstrated increased turn-taking, peer scaffolding, and corrective feedback in cooperative-SRL groups, with learners actively setting and evaluating their speaking goals.

Motivational measures indicated higher engagement and positive attitudes toward speaking tasks in the SRL-integrated condition. Participants reported reduced anxiety, greater confidence, and a stronger sense of ownership over their learning process (Martirosian & Hartoonian, 2015; Mahjoob, 2015). Observational data highlighted that structured group roles, such as discussion leader, summarizer, and peer coach, enhanced accountability and promoted equitable participation, mitigating common challenges of dominant-submissive dynamics in group work (Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Liang, 2000).

Qualitative analysis revealed nuanced insights into learners' experiences. Participants emphasized the value of reflective practice, noting that self-monitoring enabled them to identify specific weaknesses and track incremental progress. Teachers observed that explicit SRL instruction reduced reliance on teacher correction, fostering greater autonomy and collaborative problem-solving. Additionally, learners highlighted the affective benefits of cooperative

activities, including increased social support, peer encouragement, and a sense of community, which collectively contributed to sustained engagement (Attamimi, 2014; Dörnyei & Murphy, 2003).

6. Discussion

The findings substantiate the theoretical propositions of social interdependence theory and self-regulated learning frameworks, demonstrating their synergistic impact on EFL speaking development (Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Habók & Magyar, 2018). Cooperative structures provide scaffolding that promotes active engagement and linguistic output, while SRL strategies empower learners to self-direct, monitor, and reflect on their performance, mitigating the negative effects of anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Martirosian & Hartoonian, 2015).

The research underscores the critical interplay between cognitive, affective, and social factors. While cooperative learning facilitates interaction and peer feedback, it may not suffice in isolation to address individual differences in motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety. Integrating SRL strategies ensures that learners develop metacognitive awareness, enabling them to regulate effort, persist through challenges, and internalize learning gains. This combination addresses both the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of speaking proficiency (Dörnyei, 2005; Fahim & Zaker, 2014).

Despite the robust findings, several limitations warrant consideration. The study's sample, drawn from urban language centers in Australia, may not reflect the full diversity of global EFL learners, particularly in contexts with different cultural norms surrounding collaboration and autonomy (Li, 2012; Le, 2011). Additionally, the intervention's duration was limited to one academic term; longer-term studies are needed to assess the sustainability of gains and the transferability of skills to real-world communicative contexts. Future research should explore technology-mediated cooperative learning, cross-cultural adaptations of SRL strategies, and the differential impact of group composition variables such as language proficiency heterogeneity and personality traits (Kagan, 1992; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

The study also highlights practical implications for teacher training and curriculum design. Effective implementation of cooperative and SRL strategies requires explicit modeling, scaffolding, and ongoing support from instructors (Jolliffe, 2007; Hedge, 2000). Teacher beliefs and attitudes play a pivotal role in shaping classroom practices; professional

development should therefore address both pedagogical knowledge and affective dimensions such as sensitivity to learner anxiety and motivational needs (Liang, 2000; Kuzborska, 2011). Curriculum designers are encouraged to integrate structured speaking activities, reflective practices, and formative assessment protocols that collectively foster autonomy, collaboration, and communicative competence.

7. Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that the integration of cooperative learning frameworks and self-regulated learning strategies significantly enhances speaking proficiency in EFL contexts. By addressing cognitive, social, and affective dimensions of language learning, these interventions promote fluency, accuracy, and communicative confidence while mitigating foreign language anxiety. The findings underscore the importance of holistic, learner-centered pedagogical approaches that leverage both collaborative interaction and metacognitive self-regulation. Implications for practice include the design of structured cooperative tasks, explicit SRL instruction, motivational scaffolding, and ongoing teacher support to ensure effective implementation. Future research should expand the cultural and contextual scope, explore technology-enhanced applications, and investigate longitudinal impacts to further refine evidence-based practices in EFL speaking instruction.

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