The impact of cooperative learning approach on the development of EFL learners’ speaking fluency

Ehsan Namaziandost1, Mina Homayouni2, Pegah Rahmani3

Abstract: The current study investigated the impact of using two cooperative learning strategies on the development of oral English language fluency among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. First, 72 learners studying at a private English language institute were randomly assigned to two experimental groups and one control group, each of equal size (n = 24). An equivalence of language proficiency between the members of the three groups was confirmed with the results from an Oxford Placement Test. Next, all participants undertook an oral fluency pre-test prior to either an eight-week treatment intervention or control phase. Over the eight-week study duration, the two treatment groups were each engaged in different cooperative learning approaches either Numbered heads or Think-pair-share while the control group was engaged in conventional teacher-centered learning activities. One week after the last treatment session, all participants undertook the oral fluency post-test. A comparison of mean oral fluency score gains between the two treatment and control groups suggested that both cooperative learning approaches were valuable in supporting learners’ spoken English fluency, with treatment group members significantly outperforming those in the control group. This study offers
an important case of how the implementation of cooperative learning approaches can be valuable in developing important capacities like oral fluency over relatively short periods of time. Further, we emphasize the strong potential that such learner-centered, communicative approaches can have in imparting innovation and revitalization to teaching approaches that are not optimal for fluency development.

Subjects: Development Communication; Group Communication; Adult Education and Lifelong Learning; Educational Research; Higher Education; Teachers & Teacher Education; Theory of Education; Language & Linguistics; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: Cooperative learning; groupwork; think-pair-share; numbered heads; speaking fluency

1. Introduction

Teaching of a foreign language by its very nature is an interactive process, which involves active participation of both the teacher-student and the student-student interaction. It has been stressed, in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching methodologies that are more than a system of rules, but as a dynamic resource for the creation of meaning, shift away from the study of language seen as purely a system and shift towards the study of language as communication. For that reason, a great opportunity of classroom interaction is being truly demanded.

With a growing need for more effective, successful and active ways of foreign language learning. Innovation in the language field has been stimulated by a special concern for learning through active and collaborative setting. The predominant view is that language is best learned when students are interacting with each other in groups-completing a task or learning a content or resolving real-life issues—where their attention is not directed toward the language itself, except when a focus on language forms is necessary (Alipour & Barjesteh, 2017; Alrayah, 2018).

The primary purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in that language. Yet, we observed that EFL learners have difficulties in communicating in English. There are numerous and different explanations for learners' inability to speak properly. First of all, learners cannot absorb all they need to communicate immediately, nor can they learn easily from a random set of language activities in which the bulk of the time is spent completing lessons that do not engage students in intensive interactions and thus do not enable them to improve communicative skills (Namaziandost, Hosseini et al., 2020).

Teaching English in Iran makes teachers to keep in mind that English can only be instructed and learned in the classroom. Since the classroom is the main circumstance in which learners are able to use the target language, the type of approach followed has a significant impact on the production of languages. Enhancing learners’ oral proficiency requires primarily dominating these impediments. Therefore, teachers have to provide learners, with a method of incrementing those opportunities of language use. Organizing the class into groups is one of the best ways to provide learners with extensive oral production and communication (Kribo, 2013; Namaziandost, Hashemifardnia et al., 2019).

Nowadays it is essential for every person to have the ability to communicate in English with other individuals around the world. Indeed, the main objective of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in that language. Yet, we observed that EFL learners have difficulties in communicating in English. El-Khuli (2000, p. 23) believed that: “One of the common difficulties to communicate freely in the target language may be due to language teaching methodologies and the learning environment which may be said to be inappropriate for learning a foreign language”. It puts more emphasis on the other skills than speaking, so little speaking is practiced (Namaziandost, Shatalebi et al., 2019).
In Iran, many students are good at reading and writing skills, but not at oral communication skills. To help students learn English effectively, teachers can adapt their teaching methods and practices, develop techniques that will enhance the skill of the students and give students more chances to communicate and express themselves in the target language (Namaziandost, Rezvani et al., 2020). One of the main shifts in foreign language pedagogy in recent years has been the shift from a teacher-centered model of learning to a learner-centered model (Lak et al., 2017). This move is signaling a new era in which English-speaking teaching has to offer students a chance to speak the language. Cooperative coaching is a positive alternative to conventional speaking teaching. It acts as an effective way of teaching for boosting speaking and social interaction among learners (Gomleksiz, 2007). The extension of cooperative learning to the classroom dates back to the 1970s, when Israel and the United States started planning and researching collective learning for classroom contexts (Kessler, 1992). According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), cooperative learning is defined as “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning” (p. 36). Cooperative learning is now implemented in almost all fields of school curriculum and, progressively, in university and college contexts throughout the world (Kessler, 1992; Nasri et al., 2019), and is acclaimed by academics abroad and at home to be an important teaching tool in foreign language education. Co-operative learning is widely believed to be the best choice for all students, as it stresses active cooperation between students of diverse abilities and backgrounds (Tsai, 1998; Wei, 1997; Yu, 1995) and indicates more promising student outcomes in academic performance, social behavior and effectual progress (Kam et al., 2003; Namaziandost, Pourhosein Gilakjani et al., 2020).

Effective cooperative learning requires (1) positive interdependence, (2) individual accountability, (3) promotive interaction, (4) social skills, and (5) group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). When these components are well organized in the learning process, cooperative learning not only improves the academic success of the learners but also their involvement, accountability, basic needs, and speaking fluency (Hashemifardnia et al., 2018).

In this study, the researchers compared Think-pair share and Numbered heads as two main strategies of cooperative learning instruction to traditional instruction to find out the effects of cooperative learning instructions on students’ English-speaking fluency.

Cooperative learning has become one of the mainstream instructions used in the language learning classroom to improve student speaking fluency ability and student–student interaction (McCafferty, 2006; Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020). In addition, as Yu (1995) believed, a teacher’s experience with cooperative learning may influence the outcomes of such teaching process. Lai (2002) also proposed that in order to achieve professional ability in cooperative learning, the teacher requires prior instruction. Nowadays, English is an international language that is used to a greater and greater degree. However, not all English language learners could end up with fruitful reward (Namaziandost, Neisi et al., 2019). One important issue is very astonishing: while most learners have learned a vast range of vocabulary and have been able to memorize many grammatical rules in their minds, they can hardly speak a sentence completely, or write down a correct one. Teacher-centered classes in schools, competition rather than cooperation among students, unfamiliarity of teachers with cooperative learning mechanism are the three major issues which do not allow students to enhance their oral skills adequately and make English classrooms boring for them. To address this issue, this paper seeks to find an efficient way to help intermediate students develop their ability to speak fluently.

More specifically, this study is a discovery of the effects of incorporative cooperative learning (CL) strategies on developing Iranian EFL students’ speaking fluency in an institute. It particularly aims to investigate the effects of cooperative learning strategies on their speaking fluency ability. It offers the theoretical foundation for conducting pair talk and group work in English classrooms. The premise is that using cooperative learning strategies can help learners promote their speaking fluency toward learning English. Also, it provides important information regarding conducting two important techniques of cooperative learning (i.e. Think-pair-share and Numbered Heads) in the
classroom context. This study has two variables: the cooperative learning is the independent variable; the speaking fluency ability is the dependent variable.

Indeed, the importance of this research is its effort to realize the concepts of the cooperative learning practices, particularly in improving the speaking fluency of EFL learners. Speaking fluency, on the other hand, represents a key priority for EFL learners striving to attain it. EFL learners aim to communicate their messages quickly, efficiently and fairly fluently without having to delay or pause a lot; meanwhile, communication is the most important aspect of speaking and it is important to express the thoughts as naturally as possible (Alrayah, 2018; Mezrigui, 2011). The positive results of this paper definitely will enhance the speaking fluency, which is the main aim behind doing this study.

In addition, although there is a large body of literature on the positive effects of cooperative learning for EFL learners, there is a gap in the literature regarding the implementation of Think-pair share and Numbered heads cooperative techniques on the students of senior high school level in Iran. The current research seems to support that cooperative learning enhances students’ social contact and, ultimately, develops communication skills among them. Teachers at universities can benefit from this research by using the up-to-date instructional approaches used in the research, i.e. cooperative learning. English language classroom should no longer be dominated by the teacher but should be more student-oriented with the teacher adopting the role of facilitator. By doing so, it adds variety to teaching and learning context and making it fun for the students to develop their speaking fluency ability. The effects of cooperative learning on students’ speaking skills and attitudes have been frequently shown and corroborated by studies carried out in L1 and L2 learning environments (Ning & Hornby, 2010; Ning, 2011; Pattanpichet, 2011; Suhenndon & Bengu, 2014; Talebi & Sobhani, 2012).

The use of cooperative learning in teaching speaking has been the subject of extensive research (Zakaria & Zanaton, 2007). A big portion of studies indicates that the use of cooperative learning techniques can lead to positive attitudes towards cooperative learning and increased speaking skills (Ning & Hornby, 2010; Suhendan & Bengu, 2014; Yang, 2005). This study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing evidence that is needed to verify the existing studies so that Iranian EFL teachers can justifiably decide whether to use cooperative learning in their classrooms. In so doing the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. Do cooperative learning technique Think-pair-share have any impact on intermediate EFL learners’ speaking fluency?

RQ2. Do cooperative learning technique Numbered heads have any impact on intermediate EFL learners' speaking fluency?

2. Method

2.1. Participants
The population of the study was comprised of 90 English learners. They have been studying English for about 3 years at a private English language institute. Their age ranged from 15 to 17. An Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was administered to check the participants’ level of proficiency. It is worth noting that only male students were included as the target respondents. Among 90 intermediate EFL learners, 72 students with one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean score were selected as participants of this study. Then, they were randomly divided into three equal groups including two experimental groups (Think-pair share technique group (TPSTG) and Numbered heads technique group (NHTG)) and one control group (traditional instruction). Each group included 23 participants.
2.2. Instrumentation

2.2.1. Oxford quick placement test (OQPT)
The researcher used the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) as the first instrument of the study. In order to ensure the homogeneity of participants, an OQPT proposed by Edwards (2007) was taken from them before the pretest stage. OQPT in the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 440) is defined as: “A test that is designed to place test takers at an appropriate level in a course.” (p. 169). The term “placement test” does not refer to what a test contains or how it is constructed, but to the purpose for which it is used. Various types of test or testing procedure (e.g. dictation, an interview, a grammar test) can be used for placement purpose. This placement test included three parts: 50 multiple choice questions that assess students' knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary from elementary to intermediate levels, a reading text with 10 graded comprehension questions, an optional writing task that assesses students' ability to produce the language.

2.2.2. Pretest and posttest
Two oral tasks were used in this study as pretest and posttest. The tasks containing paired dialogs were designed to assess the fluency competence of the learners with regard to the linguistic characteristics. At the beginning of the course, the first task was performed as the pretest, and the second task as the posttest at the end of the semester (after 8 weeks). The first oral task that the learners undertook as a pretest was to inquire about the partners' favorite musician or football player, and the second oral task was to inquire about their partners' opinions regarding television programs. In both tests, the system of rating was the same.

2.2.3. Scoring rubric
A scoring rubric, adapted from authentic assessment for English Language Learners developed by O’Malley and Pierce (2005) was used for the purpose of grading. This rubric for grading of the speaking fluency ability of oral tasks was a 1–4 rating scale which provides simple descriptions for vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and interaction (Alipour & Barjesteh, 2017). Five points were devoted to each rank, for example, rank one had a 1 to 5 point, rank two had 5 to 10 point, rank three had 10–15 and rank four contained the highest rates, which had 15 to 20 points. The purpose of this kind of evaluation was to give fair and clear feedback to the students.

2.3. Data collection procedure
At first, an OQPT was conducted among 90 male students in a private English language institute in order to make sure about the participants' homogeneity. A random sampling of participants ensured that sample was representative of population. Seventy-two students with one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean score were chosen as the participants of this study. They were randomly divided into two experimental groups, namely TPSTG (n = 24) and NHTG (n = 24) and one control group (n = 24).

In order to find out if cooperative learning has any significant effect on increasing the students' speaking fluency ability, participants' voices in the classroom were recorded; thereby their performance on the oral tasks was transcribed carefully based on the prepared scoring rubric of speaking fluency in order to evaluate the speaking fluency ability of students. The teaching materials and activities in the control group were based on the traditional techniques, which involved mainly the Grammar-Translation technique. In addition, the traditional teaching method in this study also included individual learning, as opposed to the cooperative learning in the experimental groups. During 8 weeks, eight lessons (each contained one reading passage and several tasks and activities) from senior high school English book were taught to both groups; however, different techniques of teaching were employed in these two groups. Students in the control group received traditional teacher-fronted instruction throughout the classroom time. In this class, the teacher began each new reading passage by reading it aloud and then translating each sentence into Persian. After transmitting the required knowledge, the teacher asked some of the students to answer the exercises individually. This approach was pursued every session for the whole semester.
In the experimental groups, the role of the teacher in implementing cooperative learning was to turn the traditional classroom into a cooperative learning context. Firstly, the teacher assigned four groups in each of experimental groups; each group had about six members in it. For the reading part, at first, the members of the groups were assigned a number from 1 to 4, the teacher first gave an explanation regarding the text. Then, the teacher or one of the students asked a question based on the text the class was reading and the students in each group researched the answer and put their heads together to come up with an answer or answers. The teacher called a number from 1 to 4. The person with that number gave and explained their group's answer. This technique (i.e. numbered heads) was pursued doing tasks and activities provided in the book. In the last quarter of each session, the teacher wrote a challenging question on the board, these questions were about students' ideas, positive and negative points of subjects such as education, virtual world, favorite job, marriage, money and fame. At this part learners thought silently about the question presented by the teacher; then, individuals had to pair up and talk about their ideas and after that each pair shared their ideas with the other pair or the class. This technique is known as Think-pair-share. During 8 weeks, these techniques of CL were executed for the experimental groups as treatment. No new strategy was given to control group. One week after the last treatment session, a posttest was given to both groups. This test was an oral task in which students were asked about their partners' idea about television programs. The system of rating was according to the prepared rubric as same as that of the pretest.

2.4. Data analysis procedure
The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 was utilized to analyze the data and find out differences between the three groups. To answer the research questions, the means, and one-way ANOVA test were calculated to determine the subjects' performance in the oral tasks. This study is a true-experimental and quantitative research. Experimental method can truly test hypotheses about cause and effect relationships. The aim of this study was to investigate the impacts of using CL techniques (Think-pair share and Numbered heads) on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking fluency. CL is actually the independent variable of this research and dependent variable is speaking fluency.

3. Results
Before conducting any analyses on the pretest and posttest, it was necessary to check the normality of the distributions. Thus, Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality was run on the data obtained from the above-mentioned tests. The results are shown in Table 1:

The values under the Sig. column in Table 1 determine whether the distributions were normal or not. A p value greater than 0.05 shows a normal distribution, while a p value lower than 0.05 indicates that the distribution has not been normal. Since all the p values in Table 1 were larger than 0.05, it could be concluded that the distributions of scores for the pretest and posttest obtained from experimental and control groups had been normal. It is thus safe to proceed with parametric test (i.e. one-way ANOVA in this case) and make further comparisons between the participating groups.

It was stated above that 72 intermediate learners were drawn from a larger pool of EFL learners as a result of their scores on the placement test, and were assigned to two experimental groups (EG) and one control group (CG). To further ascertain the homogeneity of the two groups in terms of their speaking fluency before the treatment, their pretest scores were compared via a one-way ANOVA:

Table 2 shows that the TPSTG and NHTG learners' mean score on the pretest equaled 11.54 and 11.89, respectively, and the CG learners' mean score was 12.08. To see whether the difference between these three mean scores, and thus the three groups on the pretest, was statistically significant or not, the researcher had to examine the p value under the Sig. (2-tailed) column in the one-way ANOVA table. In this table, a p value less than 0.05 would indicate a statistically significant difference between the three groups, while a p value larger than 0.05 indicates a difference which failed to reach statistical significance.
As it is displayed in Table 3, there was not a statistically significant difference in the pretest scores for CG (\(M = 12.08, SD = 1.99\)), TPSTG (\(M = 11.54, SD = 1.92\)), and NHTG (\(M = 11.89, SD = 2.38\)) because the \(p\) value under the Sig. column was greater than the specified level of significance (i.e., .66 > .05), indicating that the three groups did not significantly differ on the pretest. Hence, it could be inferred that the learners in the three groups were at the same level of pretest.

The reason behind administering the posttest was to see whether there was a difference in speaking fluency of the learners in the experimental groups and those in the control group. To this end, the posttest speaking fluency scores of the TPSTG, NHTG and CG needed to be compared via one-way ANOVA. This section, thus, presents the results of one-way ANOVA used to compare the posttest scores of the three groups. The descriptive results of the comparison of the three groups on the posttest are displayed in Tables 4 and 5.

The mean scores of the TPSTG (\(M = 14.68\)), NHTG (\(M = 14.85\)), and CG (\(M = 12.62\)) were different from one another on the posttest. To figure out whether the differences among these mean scores were significant or not, one needs to check the \(p\) value under the Sig. column in the ANOVA table (Table 5). As it could be observed in Table 5, there was a statistically significant difference in the posttest scores for CG (\(M = 12.62, SD = 2.03\)), TPSTG (\(M = 14.68, SD = 2.25\)), and NHTG (\(M = 14.85, SD = 1.00\)) on the posttest of speaking fluency since the \(p\) value under the Sig. column was found to be less than the specified level of significance (i.e., .000 < .05), meaning that the three groups significantly differed in terms of speaking fluency after the treatment. Pair-wise comparisons of the groups (Table 6) reveal which two groups were significantly different on the posttest.

In the top row, the comparison of TPSTG (\(M = 14.68\)) and NHTG (\(M = 14.85\)) revealed that the two CL techniques of Think-pair share and Numbered heads employed for teaching speaking fluency to

| Table 1. Normality test for the scores of the pretest and posttest |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                              | Kolmogorov–Smirnova         |
|                              | Statistic | df | Sig.          |
| Think-Pair Share Technique Group. Pretest | .24      | 24 | .121          |
| Think-Pair Share Technique Group. Posttest | .33      | 24 | .089          |
| Numbered Heads Technique Group. Pretest | .32      | 24 | .092          |
| Numbered Heads Technique Group. Posttest | .21      | 24 | .212          |
| Control Group. Pretest | .25      | 24 | .083          |
| Control Group. Posttest | .29      | 24 | .112          |

Notes: TPSTG: Think-Pair Share Technique Group; NHTG: Numbered Heads Technique Group; CG: Control Group.

| Table 2. Descriptive statistics results comparing TPSTG, NHTG, and CG mean scores on the pretest |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                              | N     | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error |
| TPSTG                       | 24    | 11.54 | 1.92          | .39        |
| NHTG                        | 24    | 11.89 | 2.38          | .48        |
| CG                           | 24    | 12.08 | 1.99          | .40        |
| Total                       | 72    | 11.84 | 2.09          | .24        |

Notes: TPSTG: Think-Pair Share Technique Group; NHTG: Numbered Heads Technique Group; CG: Control Group.
EFL learners did not differ significantly due to the fact that the p value corresponding to the comparison of these two experimental groups (i.e., .952) exceeded the significance level.

Moreover, it could be seen that the difference between CG (M = 12.62) and TPSTG (M = 14.68) was statistically significant since the Sig. value corresponding to this comparison (p = .001) was less than the significance level.

Table 3. Results of one-way ANOVA for comparing TPSTG, NHTG, and CG mean scores on the pretest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>307.37</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>311.05</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Descriptive statistics results comparing TPSTG, NHTG, and CG mean scores on the posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>Std. error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TPSTG</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHTG</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.85</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.62</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>14.05</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Results of one-way ANOVA for comparing TPSTG, NHTG, and CG mean scores on the posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>73.72</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36.86</td>
<td>10.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>235.75</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>309.47</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EFL learners did not differ significantly due to the fact that the p value corresponding to the comparison of these two experimental groups (i.e., .952) exceeded the significance level.

Moreover, it could be seen that the difference between CG (M = 12.62) and TPSTG (M = 14.68) was statistically significant since the Sig. value corresponding to this comparison (p = .001) was less than the significance level.

Table 6. Results of the Scheffe post hoc test for comparing TPSTG, NHTG, and CG mean scores on the posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Groups</th>
<th>(J) Groups</th>
<th>Mean difference (I–J)</th>
<th>Std. error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPSTG</td>
<td>NHTG</td>
<td>−.16</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>−1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CG</td>
<td>2.05*</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHTG</td>
<td>TPSTG</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>−1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CG</td>
<td>2.22*</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>TPSTG</td>
<td>−2.05*</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>−3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NHTG</td>
<td>−2.22*</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>−3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
This means that using Think-pair share technique could lead to a significant effect on intermediate EFL learners’ speaking fluency.

Finally, CG learners’ mean score CG \( (M = 12.62) \) was significantly lower than that of NHTG learners \( (M = 14.85) \) because of the fact that the \( p \) value related to this comparison was \( .000 \), which is lower than the significance level. As a result, it could be inferred that using of Numbered heads technique also led to a significant effect on EFL learners’ speaking fluency.

4. Discussion and conclusion

As shown in the statistical analysis of the data, the teaching techniques which were used by the researcher in his experiment have proved their effectiveness in improving the students’ performance in speaking fluency in the experimental groups compared to control group results. This indicates the effectiveness of implementing Think-pair share and Numbered heads techniques in teaching speaking fluency.

Cooperative group work is one way of teaching which according to many years of research and practical application by hundreds of teachers, now exists for virtually every imaginable instructional purpose. Furthermore, we now know a great deal about the effects of cooperative group work on students and the condition necessary for effective group work, especially for teaching speaking. Kao (2003) and Liao (2005) showed that speaking skills can be enhanced via cooperative learning.

In a recent study on effects of cooperative learning in a mathematics course, Veenman and his colleagues (Veenman et al., 2005) explored student cooperative behaviors in the dimensions of help seeking, help to give, and constructive activities. These behaviors were further examined in categories such as instrumental (e.g. requesting an explanation of process), executive (e.g. asking for a direct answer), confirmatory (e.g. verifying the proposed suggestion), and affective (e.g. giving positive comments on the collaboration process).

Dang (2007), Tuan (2010), and Vo (2010) also conducted various studies on the effectiveness of cooperative learning on the achievements of students in secondary and intermediate levels. The results showed that language skills and students’ achievements were improved, interpersonal skills were developed and creative thinking was promoted upon undertaking cooperative learning. Other studies such as Gillies (2011), Kao (2003), and Liao (2005) concluded that cooperative learning increased student’s achievements. In a survey, Hussein Poor (2009) studied the effectiveness of teaching social skills in a group on the emotional and behavioral problems of elementary school students in Pasargadae. Javadi Rahavard (2010) explored the relationship between cooperative learning strategies and reading comprehension. All of these studies support the effectiveness of cooperative learning in different educational domains.

The present study found that the performance of the students in the experimental group improved after using cooperative learning strategies as compared to the traditional approach. Al-Tamimi and Tamimi (2014) found that cooperative learning has a positive effect on English-learning students and that it has led to more interactions than any other learning approach. The present study is in line with previous studies on the benefits of cooperative learning in learning English as a foreign language for students in the affective domain (e.g. Ghaith, 2003; Ghaith & Bouzeineddine, 2003; Liang, 2002). It was also supported by NenChen et al. (2005), who conducted an empirical study in Hong Kong. They found that students taught by cooperative learning outperformed those who were taught by lectures.

In the present study, the experimental group who received cooperative learning strategies performed much better than the control group who received traditional method of teaching in the posttest of oral task. It was observable that students in experimental groups obtained higher scores in posttest of oral task than students in control group. The present study is in line with previous research conducted by Talebi and Sobhani (2012). They discussed that using cooperative...
learning has a significant and positive effect on English language learners’ speaking proficiency. Similarly, Pattanpichet (2011) and Liang (2002) proved that incorporating cooperative learning strategies can increase students’ oral skills.

As in the present study that showed cooperative learning strategies can help students develop their speaking fluency and learning motivation, Al-Tamimi and Tamimi (2014) and Liang (2002) found that learners’ oral communicative competence and their motivation toward learning English will be improved by incorporating cooperative learning. In a similar study, Yang (2005) compared the effectiveness of cooperative learning and traditional teaching methods on Taiwanese college students’ English oral performance and motivation towards learning. He found that students taught by cooperative learning outperformed those who were taught by lectures in oral performance and learning motivation. Also, the result of the present study especially on the part of learning motivation is in line with the study done by Yoshida et al. (2014). They examined the effects of online cooperative learning on motivation in learning foreign language. They found that students’ learning motivation improved significantly.

It is worth mentioning that in this study, the cooperative learning method worked well during the English Language lessons. This could be due to numerous reasons. Firstly, students learned to be helpful towards each other which is in line with the findings of Johnson et al. (2006) where students of heterogeneous grouping will become group members as they are different from each other. Secondly, the results revealed that students not only studied in the classroom but also proceeded to learn at home utilizing technologies (computers and handphones). This finding supports the findings of Morris (2010) and Uzunbıyık and Özdamlı (2011) where educational technologies help students collaborate with their teammates from the comfort of their homes after school. Thirdly, the results in this study revealed that, unlike teacher-led instruction, students can cooperate to answer a significant problem or build a constructive project that is competitive and individualistic, as Huba and Freed (2000) believe. This finding is also compatible with the findings of Zakaria et al. (2013) where students retained new concepts longer in their memory when peers explained to each other. Fourthly, the students demonstrated that they can overcome challenges on their own during cooperative learning which is in line with the findings of Farzaneh and Nejadansari (2014) where they believed that when students work in groups they feel that they can depend on others for help and this gives them the confidence to solve problems and enjoy learning. Fifthly, the findings also showed that students improved their oral presentation where they were able to speak confidently while presenting their topics to the class.

In summary, this study investigated the impacts of incorporating cooperative learning strategies on the development of the EFL learners’ speaking fluency. The findings revealed that there is a high correlation between the cooperative learning strategies and speaking fluency ability of language learners. Based on the results obtained through the statistical analysis on the collected data, it can be safely claimed that there is a significant difference between the speaking fluency of those students who were taught through cooperative learning strategies and those taught through traditional instruction. Moreover, the significant improvement of the participants’ speaking fluency and learning motivation resulted from the fact that discussing, creating, and thinking in a group, rather than individually, can provide more enjoyable classrooms and more fluent students in speaking skill.

Like all studies, this study had limitations and could not include all the issues related to the topic. They are as follows:

(1) One limitation is that the study included only participants that were 15 to 17 years old. So, the results cannot be generalized to the other age groups.
(2) The population was limited to 72 people. Therefore, this cannot be generalized either.
(3) The time allocated to the instruction was so limited.
(4) The gender of the participants was limited to the male learners; therefore, the results of the study may not be generalizable to female learners.
This paper ends with a discussion of the pedagogical implications of the study. The cooperative learning started with the formation of a group but later encompassed the whole class. This method of learning has the potential to become a useful tool for teachers teaching at all levels of academic contexts. It is believed that cooperative learning provides the opportunity for learners to:

1. Be responsible for their own learning through student-centered approach.
2. Be confident speakers who are less fearful in carrying out oral presentations, where they come to the front of the class to present their part of the presentation.
3. Make learning enjoyable and fun without feeling stressed.

The researcher would also like to propose the adoption of cooperative learning as a workable and reliable tool for schools to provide students the ability to practice reading aloud in order to develop their grammar, fluency, and precision, which is important for speaking skills. The findings in this study further support that using cooperative learning in the classroom brings about improvement in students speaking skills.

In sum, in the Iranian educational context, cooperative learning is a powerful tool in learning and has the potential to be used in ways that can make a positive contribution to classroom language learning. Moreover, what is most crucial is that students strive to be comfortable as effective communicators not just on a person-to-person level but also in front of an audience in their English competences. If cooperative learning is applied properly, with working groups of students studying together and not competing with each other, learning would be successful and productive.

Funding
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information
Cite this article as: The impact of cooperative learning approach on the development of EFL learners’ speaking fluency, Ehsan Namaziandost & Mina Homayouni, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2020), 7: 1780811.

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