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A REVIEW OF STUDIES ON COOPERATIVE LEARNING  
STRATEGY TO IMPROVE ESL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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## ABSTRACT

The research investigates the effects of cooperative learning strategy to ameliorate Malaysian ESL students' speaking skills. It is not an uncommon issue that ESL/EFL (*English as Second/Foreign Language*) students face some difficulties to interact fluently in English language, in fact, it is a problem faced by students not only in Malaysia but around the world. The Malaysian Education Ministry is working deliberately on increasing students' English language proficiency in order to unlock all sort of doors for students to excel in their future endeavors. In order to improve ESL students' speaking skills, an appropriate strategy is crucial in teaching-learning process. This paper also investigates of the ESL students towards cooperative

learning and their motivation towards speaking skills. This study is believed to be beneficial to the students, academicians and also the policy makers.

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill besides reading, writing and listening, is one of those four skills, considered as the most important skill that has a higher demand in this competitive world. Moreover, not speaking in someone's mother tongue, makes it more complicated to ameliorate the students' speaking competency, especially for those ESL students whose first language is not English language. Since English language is the second language as per the Malaysian education context (David et al, 2015), it is quite difficult to persuade the ESL students in Malaysia to speak in English language. The Ministry of Education has taken numerous approaches to improve ESL students' speaking skills, however, low proficiency in English language among students is inevitable. Perhaps, speaking fluently in English language that operates as an international lingua franca plays a very important role (Kamaliah *et al*, 2018; Lucena and San Jose, 2016; Raba, 2017). Speaking skill can be defined as a process of exchanging important messages through delivering and receiving the message between the both parties involved (Rusli, 2018).

Since, speaking in English language deteriorating among ESL students in Malaysia, the ministry, policy maker and the academician should implement a suitable strategy to improve the students speaking skills. Hence, this is why the cooperative learning strategy takes in charge of the pedagogy process to be implemented in classrooms to ameliorate students' speaking ability. In many countries, the implementation of cooperative learning seems to be proven that it has enhanced and boosted the students' speaking skills besides developing students' confidence level (Celik et al, 2013; Azizinezhad *et al.*, 2013; Ning and Hornby, 2014; McLeish, 2009; Soumia, 2016; Kandasamy & Habil, 2018; Lucena & San Jose, 2016; Hsu & Chang, 2017; Gonzales & Torres, 2016; Liang, 2002; Laguador, 2014).

This study is guided by one research question:

How do attitudes towards cooperative learning strategy and motivation towards speaking skills improve ESL students' speaking skills?

The primary investigation is to enhance the ESL student's speaking ability by utilizing the cooperative learning strategy as a mechanism. This purpose is based on previous studies that have been carried out over the years which disclose the essential outcomes of cooperative learning strategy and its implementation in pedagogy process. In order to investigate the outcomes of cooperative learning strategy, the attitudes towards cooperative learning and motivation towards speaking skills among ESL students are also studied to achieve the purpose of this study. This research also can be a platform for further research in the future besides, taking into account the suggestions for implementing cooperative learning strategy to improve ESL students' speaking skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cooperative Learning Strategy

Slavin (1995) stated that “Cooperative learning has an ancient pedigree”. Accordingly, even in bygone ages teachers had already started using informal and unstructured cooperative learning by encouraging the students to work in group activities. Hence, after ages of research and practical implementation by innumerable academicians, there are multitudinous cooperative learning strategies available out there for the current generation teachers to choose the most appropriate strategy according to their different purpose accomplishment. Over the years, the learning methods used in classrooms are constructed to work competitively, individualistically, and cooperatively (Johnson & Johnson, 2008, 2017; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2013). The first step to understand what cooperative learning is all about is by understanding what cooperation is (Johnson & Johnson, 2003, 2017).

Cooperative learning only happens when a group of students work together towards a common goal where the students are not only work collaboratively with each other but also can work with minimal interaction. This means that, if it is well structured, cooperative learning will be an effective teaching strategy in term of creating high-level interaction among students to learn better with their teammates (Williams, 2002; Murdoch & Wilson, 2008; Jones & Jones, 2008). According to Johnson & Johnson (2017: p3), in an excellent classroom environment, students learn to work cooperatively with other teammates with full of enjoyment and independently on the common goal to be applied in classroom that is determined by the teacher in the lessons. Regrettably, it is unfortunate that most of the teachers fail to fully savor the most dynamic and essential strategy that is the cooperative learning strategy, which is far beyond than just grouping the students by teachers who think that they are using cooperative learning strategy in classroom whereas, they are not. However, cooperative learning strategy can only be effective if the important segments of cooperation implemented attentively.

### Speaking Skills

Speaking plays an essential role in everyone’s life and speaking skill (besides reading, writing and listening) is really crucial in order to deliver one’s mind and thoughts in daily life (Kamaliahet al., 2018; Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014; Rusli, 2018; Raba, 2017). It means that, speaking ability is the most essential skill in our daily life to express ourselves through communication (Swaran Singh et. al., 2020). Comparably, it is all about the points that we try to convey through words to make people understand the message (Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014). Educators and students need to be extremely conscientious on developing ESL students’ speaking skills (Kamaliahet al., 2018; Swaran Singh et al., 2017). Although speaking skill aids people for interaction, communication, discussion and sharing their notions and perceptions about their feelings as well as the surrounding environment, ESL

students nowadays have one problem in common that is the difficulty to speak in foreign language (Raba, 2017).

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

This paper provides the documentation on the effects of cooperative learning to improvise ESL students' speaking competency based on past researches done by many researchers. The information related to this study is collected through the document analysis techniques. This section comprises of two (2) parts which are ESL students' attitudes towards cooperative learning and motivation towards speaking skills which will determine the findings of this paper.

**Table 1** Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning

| No. | References                 | Research Title  | Findings   |
|-----|----------------------------|---|--|
| 1.  | Hsu and Chang (2017)       | "Using Large Data to Analyze the Effect of Learning Attitude for Cooperative Learning between the High Achievement Students and the Low Achievement Students" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative learning is proved to be suitable for all students from all levels</li> <li>• It is believed that students from all levels could guide each other in the same team cooperatively and smoothly by putting aside all their attitude differences</li> </ul>  |
| 2   | Gonzales and Torres (2016) | "Filipino ESL Learners' Attitudes Toward Cooperative Learning and Their Relationship to Reading Comprehension"  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative learning has not only encouraged students' extreme involvement and cooperation, but also persuaded the learners to be more attentive to each other, effective decision making, and team work achievement</li> </ul>   |
| 3   | Laguador (2014)            | "Cooperative Learning Approach in an Outcomes-Based Environment"  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A proper guidance with clear motives is important to carry out cooperative learning process by everyone getting involved and accomplishing the task given</li> <li>• Teamwork is an essential component of unity, interaction and social responsibility in term of providing a better learning experience.</li> </ul> |
| 4   | Azizinezhad et al., (2013) | "Application of Cooperative Learning in EFL Classes to Enhance the Students' Language Learning"   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helped to build greater learning experience for the learners by combining the area of cooperative learning, the acquirement of second language and the teaching skills of second language</li> <li>• Cooperative learning had contributed</li> </ul>  |

|    |                |  |   |
|----|----------------|--|---|
|    |                |  | <p>massively to enrich the junior high school ESL learners' verbal communication proficiency and their determination in learning English language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly recommended that cooperative learning to be consolidated into the school Curricular as a medium of English instruction</li> </ul>   |
| 5. | McLeish (2009) | "Attitude of students towards cooperative learning methods at Knox Community College: A descriptive study" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are apprehensive and carry a various kind of fears</li> <li>• Low academic achievement students are more comfortable to work individually rather than in groups</li> <li>• Informal cooperative learning strategies have been practiced at the institution and due to time constrain not all the fundamental of cooperative learning strategy could be imposed in the classroom pedagogy</li> </ul> |

**Table 2** Motivation towards Speaking Skills

| No. | References                 | Research Title   | Findings   |
|-----|----------------------------|--|--|
| 1.  | Kandasamy and Habil (2018) | "Exploring Cooperative Learning Method to Enhance Speaking Skills Among School Students"         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students were socially interacted with each other through teamwork like, modifying and encouraging their teammates before they presented it in front of their peers.</li> <li>• Students learned to depend on each other to achieve their objectives</li> <li>• Through cooperative learning the students really enjoyed leaning English language and could present it boldly in front of the class as it was more student-centered with minimal teacher involvement</li> </ul> |
| 2.  | Lucena and San Jose (2016) | "Cooperative Learning in Enhancing the Speaking Skills of Students: A Phenomenological Approach" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are able to communicate and convey their thoughts and feelings with teammates during cooperative learning activities, through cooperative learning strategy</li> <li>• Even weak students are able to share and bestow their thoughts and viewpoint about the themes taught in class</li> <li>• The students obtained the opportunity to boost their self-confidence as they know that they are responsible on their overall team achievement</li> </ul>               |
| 3.  | Ihsan (2016)               | "Student's Motivation in Speaking English"   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The students were motivated to speak English language was because they wanted to score well in exams, to speak English eloquently, and to</li> </ul>  |

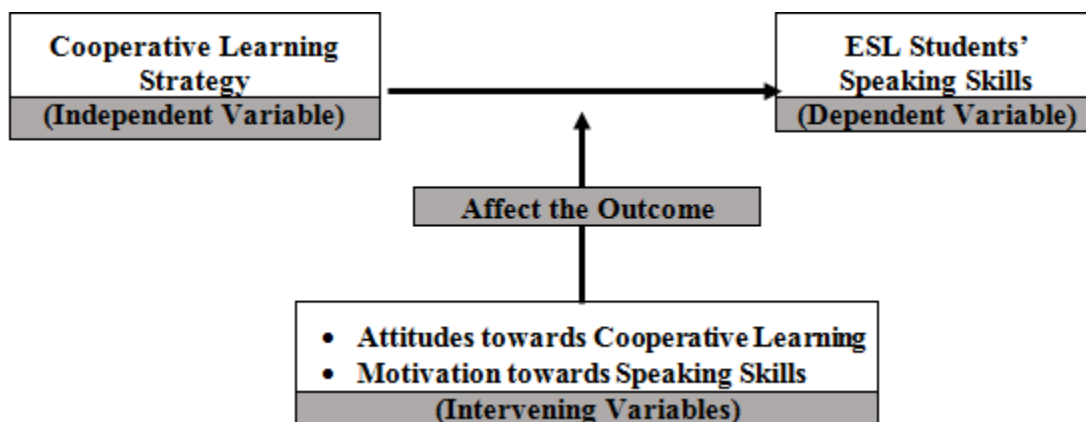
|    |                               |  |   |
|----|-------------------------------|--|---|
|    |                               |  | <p>converse well with the native speakers in term of securing a job</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve students' motivation to communicate in English language is by the aid of media and avoid repetition of the same old boring techniques of pedagogy</li> <li>• Introduce other interesting methods, reward the students who articulate well in English language, and provide a comfortable classroom ambience.</li> </ul>   |
| 4. | Al-Tamimi and Attamimi (2014) | Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in Enhancing Speaking Skills and Attitudes towards Learning English” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After cooperative learning strategy has been implemented in the classroom, the ESL learners' speaking ability and their attitudes in learning the English language had increased tremendously</li> <li>• Teachers are recommended to take the opportunity to conduct their classes by implementing cooperative learning strategies, to improve students' speaking skills</li> <li>• With proper guidance and training, the ESL learners can improve their overall academic achievement if the students possess an eloquent and impressive speaking skills</li> </ul> |
| 5. | Ning and Hornby (2014),       | “The Impact of Cooperative Learning on Tertiary EFL Learners' Motivation”                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The results showed remarkable differences in cooperative learning strategy in the improvement of intrinsic motivation, whereas there were barely any remarkable differences in favor of cooperative learning strategy on the extrinsic and a motivation of the ESL students.</li> </ul>  |

## DISCUSSION

Cooperative learning has been demonstrated to be the most effective approach compare to competitive and individualistic approaches. Therefore, the implementation of cooperative learning strategy teaching-learning process has more advantages such as 1) higher academic achievement, 2) more student-centered learning, 3) students take responsibility and accountable for their and their peers learning, 4) students involve in active learning, 5) increased interpersonal and interactive skills, and 6) increased self-confidence and motivation. Prior to implementing cooperative learning strategy in classroom, the five essential cooperative learning elements should be taught for better outcome. The five elements are 1) positive interdependence, 2) individual and group accountability, 3) face-to-face promotive interaction, 4) interpersonal and small group skills, and 5) group processing. It is duly because if students thoroughly understand what cooperative learning is all about and how it works, cooperative learning strategy could be easily implemented in teaching-learning

process, besides the students are aware of their responsibilities and encourage the attitude to help each other to accomplish a common goal.

In order to understand the study thoroughly, a conceptual framework is designed by referring to The Vygotskian Perspective on Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Doolittle, 1995) and Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, 2008, 2009, 2017; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2013), to have more clarity on the current study. Figure 1 shows the connection between the independent variable and the dependent variables to investigate the effects of cooperative learning strategy in order to improve ESL students' speaking skills. Hence, the independent variable represents cooperative learning strategy, the dependent variable represents student's speaking skills and the intervening variables represent attitudes towards cooperative learning and motivation towards speaking skills. The foundation of cooperative learning is constructed through Social Interdependence Theory by Johnson and Johnson (2009) and it helps the researcher to interrelate with the current study.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## CONCLUSION

Review on the related researches has given a great exposure to conduct this study in order to determine the effects of cooperative learning strategy to ameliorate ESL students' speaking competency. Cooperative learning strategy is believed to be far beyond just simply placing the students in groups, whereas the commitment of students to accomplish a given task cooperatively is what matters the most. Cooperative learning strategy, if well-structured could benefit all parties such as the students, teachers, school management and also the policy makers. This eventually could bring forward the Malaysian education system to another level so that the students could probably speak fluently and eloquently in English language which acts as the lingua franca of the globe.

There are quite a good number of researches done on cooperative learning to be implemented in classrooms, thus, to study the repercussion of

cooperative learning strategy on ESL students' attitudes on cooperative learning as well as motivation towards speaking skills is obligatory. To put in a nutshell, cooperative learning strategy is actually playing an extremely essential role in enhancing ESL students' speaking skills which aid them to speak freely and confidently without feeling apprehensive. Implementing cooperative learning strategy to boost ESL students' speaking skills is a good move to attract and persuade the students to learn English language actively and in full enjoyment.

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