



IMPACT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON LEARNER MOTIVATION IN SPEAKING AT A VIETNAMESE HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract:

Cooperative learning has been increasingly recognized as an effective instructional strategy in English language teaching and learning. However, traditional lecturing still dominates in education in Vietnam, thereby hindering learners from participating in speaking activities or sharing responsibility for their learning. Also, research into cooperative learning in relation to learner motivation in speaking at high school is scant in the Mekong Delta. This paper therefore reports on a study examining the impact of cooperative learning on learner motivation to speak English and investigating their attitudes towards this type of interactive learning. Data collected for this study include a one-group pre-test and post-test design, questionnaires, and interviews with grade ten learners at a high school in Vinh Long province. The findings indicate that learners were motivated and improved in speaking through cooperative learning after the study. Implications for this interactive speaking practice are also presented.

Keywords: cooperative learning, motivation, speaking performance, high school

1. Introduction

Cooperative learning as an effective instructional strategy has been widely documented since 1970s. This influence continues to grow in Asian contexts of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in China ([Zhang, Peng, & Sun, 2017](#)), Hong Kong ([Sachs, Candlin, Rose, & Shum, 2003](#)), in Thailand ([Waugh, Bowering, & Chayarathee, 2005](#)), in Malaysia ([Ismail & Alexander, 2005](#); [Taufik & Maat, 2017](#)), in Singapore ([Tan, Lee, & Sharan, 2007](#)), and in Vietnam ([Luu, 2010](#); [Tat, 2007](#); [Tran & Lewis, 2012](#)). Although English is a compulsory subject for learners in Vietnam and particularly cooperative

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learning has been introduced since 1990s, this type of instruction is still limited in high school contexts as a result of the dominance of traditional lecturing ([H. B. Nguyen, 2013](#); [Pham, 2010](#)). This may be due to learners' reluctance to speak English, limited English learning resources, and demotivation in classroom practices. It is therefore necessary to gain insights into the effects of cooperative learning and learner motivation in speaking at a high school in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The questions that guided the study reported in this paper were, "To what extent does cooperative learning influence learner motivation in their speaking performance?" and, "What are learners' attitudes towards the use of cooperative learning in their speaking class?"

2. Literature review

The following section reviews the literature on cooperative learning, motivation and speaking performance.

2.1 Cooperative learning

There are several definitions of cooperative learning in the literature. Cooperative learning (CL) is defined as "*the instructional use of small groups in which students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning*" ([Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 73](#)). These authors indicate five elements of this interactive learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social and interpersonal skills, and group processing. This set of complexity implies the idea that, if properly implemented, cooperative learning can enhance academic achievement of learners and help them reach learning goals ([Johnson & Johnson, 2009](#); [Kagan & Kagan, 2009](#); [Slavin, 2014](#)). If inappropriately used, this group learning can yield disastrous outcomes. Or in other words, CL is associated with a system of teaching and learning techniques in which learners are active agents in the learning process instead of passive receivers of knowledge. This system might increase learners' academic learning through reducing learning anxiety, getting learners involved in more talks in English, creating a supportive and less threatening learning environment, and retaining the learning rate. Drawing on the perspectives of cooperative learning, it is important for teachers to know how to integrate the main features of cooperative learning into their daily lessons, thereby contributing to learner motivation.

2.2 Motivation

Motivation has been widely researched as a potential tool for improving student learning a foreign or second language. There are several perspectives of motivation in the literature. Motivation is defined as "*the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity*" ([Gardner, 1985, p. 10](#)). This concept implies three components: efforts to achieve a goal, desire to learn, and satisfaction with the language learning task ([Tremblay & Gardner, 1995](#)). Or in other words, motivation entails four elements, namely a goal, effortful

behavior, a desire to reach the goal, and attitudes towards the learning activity ([Gardner, 1985](#)). Another view is that motivation refers to “*the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained*” ([Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008, p. 4](#)). Taken all views together, in the language learning process, once learners are motivated, they can expend their efforts in order to accomplish a particular task or desired goal ([Bandura, 1977](#); [Brophy, 2004](#); [Le & Nguyen, 2012](#)).

2.3 Speaking performance

There are several perspectives of speaking in foreign or second language learning and teaching in terms of oral proficiency ([Bygate, 2010](#); [Kanda, 2015](#); [Nzanana, 2016](#); [Shantha & Mekala, 2017](#); [Swanson & Nolde, 2011](#)). Speaking refers to an individual’s automatic skill to use language in real time focusing on meaning (e.g., [Derwing & Munro, 2013](#); [Foster & Skehan, 1996](#); [Galante & Thomson, 2017](#)). This view implies performance and proficiency of learners in using the target language to communicate ideas with others. Others view speaking as a multifaceted construct in terms of fluency, complexity, accuracy ([Ellis, 2009](#); [Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005](#); [Galante & Thomson, 2017](#); [Skehan, 2009](#)). While fluency and complexity highlight learners’ effective communication, accuracy may hinder them from speaking well in various learning contexts where the target language is used ([Do, 2017](#); [H.B. Nguyen & Do, 2017](#)). Speaking occurs when individuals are face-to-face, thereby making the learning process interactional ([Richards, 2006](#); [Thornbury & Slade, 2006](#); [van Lier, 1998](#)). Drawing on communicative perspectives, speaking can allow learners opportunities to use the target language and interact with other peers.

3. Methodology

This study employed a one group pretest posttest design to explore the effects of the implementation of cooperative learning on learner motivation to learn speaking. Forty-four tenth graders (19 males, 25 females), ages 16 to 17, from a high school in Vinh Long province participated in this study.

The data collected in the study included questionnaires, speaking tests, and interviews. The questionnaires were used to find out learner motivation in speaking performance before and after the study. The twenty-item questionnaire was adapted from Deci and Ryan’s ([1985](#)) Intrinsic Motivation Inventory, rating with five-point Likert Scale ([McDonough & McDonough, 1997](#)). The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire (α) was .72, indicating that the questionnaire was a reliable instrument. The speaking test was developed from the topics presented in the textbook entitled *Tieng Anh 10* (English for tenth graders), the main source of material. Five criteria of the marking scale for the oral test are appropriateness, vocabulary, accuracy, intelligibility, and fluency. This scoring rubric of the test was used to assess learners’ speaking performance in both pretest and post-tests. After implementing cooperative learning,

ten learners were interviewed to explore their attitudes towards the use of cooperative learning in their speaking class.

This study was conducted within a sixteen-week semester. The pre-questionnaire was administered to learners on the first week of the study. The questionnaire was designed in Vietnamese in order that learners could understand the questions and provide appropriate answers. On the second week, once learners completed the pre-questionnaire, they took the oral pre-test. To ensure the reliability of the scoring or consistency of data between raters ([Stenlund, 2013](#)), one teacher of English was invited to participate in marking individual learner's responses. On the fifteenth week, the post-questionnaire was delivered to the learners. At the end of the study, the oral post-test and interviews were administered respectively. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for gaining insights into learners' attitudes in a particular situation ([Creswell, 2014](#)). Therefore, five learners (two high-performing, two average-performing, and one low-performing) were interviewed individually. They were asked to express their views with regard to the use of cooperative learning and the extent to which this learning strategy helped motivate them to learn English in their speaking class. Each interview took approximately twenty minutes. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire and tests were subjected to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for analysis. The qualitative data from interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using themes ([Boyatzis, 1998](#)).

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study to answer the two research questions.

4.1 Findings from the questionnaire Learner motivation in speaking

Table 1: Learner motivation in speaking before and after the study

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Pre-	44	2.80	4.15	3.47	.36
Post-	44	3.00	4.65	3.70	.34

Table 1 shows that the mean score of learner motivation to speak English after the study ($M_{post}=3.70$, $SD=.34$) is higher than that before the study ($M_{pre}= 3.47$, $SD=.36$). The results indicate that there was a change in learner motivation to speak English after the study. This tended to support the conclusion that cooperative learning contributed to the increase of motivation in speaking, as noted by the large effect size ($d=.65$).

As shown in Table 2 and Table 3, female and male learner motivation in speaking before and after the study are examined. The mean score of female learners' motivation before the study ($M=3.45$; $SD= .35$) is lower than that of male learners' ($M=3.49$; $SD= .38$). However, the mean scores of female learner motivation ($M=3.70$;

$SD=.28$) and that of male learner motivation ($M= 3.70$; $SD= .40$) after the study are similar. The data suggest that both females and males are motivated to learn speaking.

Table 2: Female learner motivation in speaking before and after the study

		Min	Max	Mean	SD
Pre-	25	2.80	3.95	3.45	.35
Post-	25	3.15	4.10	3.70	.28

Table 3: Male learner motivation in speaking before and after the study

		Min	Max	Mean	SD
Pre-	19	2.80	4.15	3.49	.38
Post-	19	3.00	4.65	3.70	.40

4.2 Findings from tests

Learners' speaking performance

The oral pretest and posttests were used to examine learners' speaking performance before and after the study. The *Descriptive Statistics* was used to evaluate learners' speaking performance before and after the study.

Table 4: Learners' speaking performance before and after the study

	N	Mean	SD
Pre-	44	2.78	.911
Post-	44	3.45	.803

As shown in Table 4, the mean score of learners' speaking performance after the study ($M = 3.45$, $SD= .803$) is higher than that before the study ($M= 2.78$, $SD= .911$). This result indicates that their speaking performance changes through the use of cooperative learning.

Table 5: Female learners' speaking performance before and after the study

	n	Mean	SD
Pre-	25	2.81	.862
Post-	25	3.59	.758

Table 6: Male learners' speaking performance before and after the study

	n	Mean	SD
Pre-	19	2.73	.911
Post-	19	3.26	.843

Tables 5 and 6 show the mean scores of the learners' speaking performance between males and females before and after the study. From the tests, it can be seen that both male and female learners' speaking performance change after the study. The mean score of females' performance after the study ($M_{post}= 3.59$) is higher than that of the same participants before the study ($M_{pre}= 2.81$). Similarly, the mean score of males' performance after the study ($M_{post}= 3.26$) is higher than that of the same participants

before the study ($M_{pre} = 2.73$). These results indicate that learners' speaking performance is different after the intervention.

Table 7: Paired Samples *t*- Test of learners' speaking performance

Paired differences	M	SD	SD error Mean	95% confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
				Pair 1	-.159			
Pair 2	-.818	.582	.088	-.995	-.641	-9.331	43	.000
Pair 3	-.705	.553	.083	-.872	-.536	-8.448	43	.000
Pair 4	-.682	.639	.096	-.876	-.488	-7.080	43	.000
Pair 5	-.977	.457	.069	-1.116	-.838	-14.187	43	.000

A *Paired Sample t-Test* was run to compare the mean scores of the learners' speaking performance within the five pairs before and after the study, as shown in Table 7. These include accuracy (Pair 1), fluency (Pair 2), intelligibility (Pair 3), vocabulary (Pair 4), and appropriateness (Pair 5). Table 7 reveals that there is a significant difference in learners' fluency, intelligibility, vocabulary, and appropriateness. Findings indicate that, after the study, learners improved their speaking performance in these four aspects. However, with regard to accuracy (Pair 1) ($t = -.816$, $df = 43$, $p = .419$) no significant difference was observed. This suggests that learners' accuracy after the study was not improved.

The *Pearson's Correlations* were employed to examine the relationships within the pairs before and after the involvement of cooperative learning in relation to learners' speaking performance (see Table 8). Strong positive correlations or relationships were found between the involvement of cooperative learning and each of the four speaking aspects: fluency ($r = .893$, $p = .00$), intelligibility ($r = .790$, $p = .00$), vocabulary ($r = .845$, $p = .00$), and appropriateness ($r = .888$, $p = .00$). Only weak correlation was observed in accuracy ($r = .358$, $p = .017$) (Pair 1).

Table 8: Correlations within the pairs, cooperative learning, and speaking performance

	N	Correlation	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pair 1 (pre-post)	44	.358	.017
Pair 2 (pre-post)	44	.893	.000
Pair 3 (pre-post)	44	.790	.000
Pair 4 (pre-post)	44	.845	.000
Pair 5 (pre-post)	44	.888	.000

** : correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)
Correlation between motivation and speaking performance

Table 9: Correlation between motivation and speaking performance

Correlation	N	R	Sig. (2 tailed)
	44	.42	.006

** : correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

The *Pearson's Correlation Test* was computed to test the relationship between learner motivation and their speaking performance. As shown in Table 9, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r=.42$, $p=.006$) illustrates that there is a moderate strong correlation between learner motivation in cooperative learning and their speaking performance. Although this correlation is not statistically significant, this result indicates that 42% of the learners are motivated to learn speaking through the use of cooperative learning.

4.3 Findings from the interview

Findings from the interview reveal that the learners had positive attitudes towards the use of cooperative learning in their speaking classes. Three themes are identified as entertaining learning atmosphere, comfortableness, and difficulties.

Cooperative learning as entertaining

When asked about the use of cooperative learning in learning to speak in English, all of ten interviewed learners reported that cooperative learning in speaking class could make the learning atmosphere more entertaining. The following extracts of two learners illustrate their views.

"I found speaking activities very interesting because they gave me time to discuss. I can learn from friends to avoid mistakes" (Cuc, interview extract).

"I like to share my opinions with my friends and my teacher while speaking. My friends and teacher are friendlier in these activities. The class atmosphere is interesting. My friends and I feel like contributing ideas to peers of the other groups (Truc, interview extract).

Feelings of comfortableness

With regard to this aspect, nine learners expressed their feelings. The two examples are shown below.

"While working in pairs or in a group of three, I feel comfortable to give ideas to the topic without being afraid of making mistakes. I think that if I correct my friends' grammatical mistakes and their pronunciation problems and vice versa, my friend and I will be discouraged." (Hung, interview extract)

"While working with my partner, he is willing to help me and this keeps me talking more. Therefore, I think I can speak more naturally than I used to." (Dung, interview extract)

These learners' accounts suggest that cooperative learning activities were useful as they allowed learners to feel confident not only through interaction between them

but also through maintenance of communication beyond the guided or controlled practice.

Challenges in expressing ideas

With regard to challenges during cooperative learning lessons, one female learner revealed that she did not like working in pairs or small groups as a result of inhibition from friends' presence.

"Although working with friends or in groups is good and fun, I sometimes do not want to share with them my ideas. You know, I am a kind of shy learner, I feel like not speaking well or fluently as others in a group. I am afraid of saying something wrong or making mistakes and I also do not like my friends correct my mistakes" (Cuc, interview extract).

The above quote seems to indicate that lack of self-confidence or face-saving issues might hinder this learner from participating in speaking and interacting with her peers.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study reveal that cooperative learning positively influenced learner motivation in their speaking performance and that learners had positive attitudes towards this effective instructional strategy in tenth grader class at a high school in the remote rural area, Vietnam. The following sections are discussed in relation to the two research questions.

The first research question investigated the extent to which cooperative learning influenced learner motivation in their speaking performance. Analysis from the questionnaire indicates the moderate strong correlation between learner motivation and their speaking performance through the use of cooperative learning. This finding is consistent with other studies ([Chen, 2005](#); [Kim, Kim, & Svinicki, 2012](#); [Slavin, 1996, 2014](#)) that lend support to the claim that cooperative learning can contribute to learner motivation in relation to the improvement of speaking performance as motivation is seen as a key factor in student learning process ([Dörnyei, 2001](#); [Zimmerman, 2000](#)).

The findings from the tests indicate that there were improvements in learners' speaking performance through the use of cooperative learning. In particular, learners improved their speaking in four aspects, namely fluency, intelligibility, vocabulary, and appropriateness. The finding of this study supports the widely held view that learners could improve their speaking performance if motivated.

The second research question sought to explore learners' attitudes towards the use of cooperative learning in their speaking classes. Analysis from interview data indicates that learners preferred cooperative learning to the traditional one. In particular, most participating learners noted that cooperative learning could bring them entertaining learning atmosphere, give opportunities to share their ideas, and allow

them feelings of self-confidence and comfortableness. These positive attitudes that link motivation and speaking performance build on the research in several studies (e.g., [Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014](#); [Amedu & Gudi, 2017](#); [Sühendan & Bengü, 2014](#)). These authors contend that learners involved in cooperative learning activities were more likely to develop their speaking skills and attitudes. As cooperative learning and speaking performance are intertwined, positive attitudes reported in this study suggest that providing opportunities for learners to practice cooperative learning strategies should be an indispensable part of their speaking lessons. However, the other learner was reluctant to work with other peers due to lack of self-confidence and face-saving issue. Understanding such challenges suggests that teachers should identify factors that might prevent these shy learners from participating in speaking and then give them a floor to express their voice and play their roles within the natural and entertaining learning atmosphere and space. Once learners are motivated, they are more likely to be willing to involve in speaking activities with other peers as active participants in the learning process.

6. Conclusion

This study provides insights into how cooperative learning influenced learner motivation in speaking and their attitudes towards this interactive instruction. The positive correlation between learner motivation and their speaking performance was confirmed, which contributes to the cooperative learning literature in ways that there are factors that inform teachers' decision-making about speaking practices and learner outcomes.

The findings from this study present some implications for school administrators and teachers. It is recommended for administrators to provide teachers with professional development training workshops on how cooperative learning activities and appropriate tasks can be integrated into speaking lessons conducive to fostering an interactive and entertaining learning atmosphere. Teachers should consider the frequent use of this type of instruction as an effective student-centered approach that fits learners' needs and interests in order to maximize their speaking performance over time in relation to other speaking aspects, namely fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Future research of a replicate study with a larger sample size should focus on the impact of cooperative learning on other English language skills to extend the relationships between learner motivation and attitudes.

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