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THE ROLE OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS AT B1 LEVEL

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Abstract: Speaking skills are key to learning the English language, especially when it comes to B1-level learners who are expected to communicate independently in everyday and academic contexts. Conventional teaching with an emphasis on the teacher often impedes meaningful interaction, leading to low fluency, accuracy, student confidence and so forth. The current article investigates the significance of collaborative learning in developing B1 learners' speaking in EFL education classrooms. Grounded in social constructivist theory, collaborative learning focuses on interaction, peer support, and mutual responsibility to give learners access to effective language learning experiences. This research investigates concepts in theory, uses collaborative tasks like role-plays, discussions, and problem-solving activities in practice, and explores how to enact these with students in a classroom setting. Collaborative learning not only increases oral fluency and communicative ability but also develops teamwork, negotiation and active listening. It ends with points on how and where collaborative strategies could be integrated into B1-level speaking instruction, thus achieving an effective learner-centered language environment and teaching students which is more interesting and effective.

Keywords: collaborative learning, speaking skills, B1 level, EFL, communicative competence, task-based activities

Introduction

In today's globalised world, where more people are communicating across cultures, proficiency in English speaking is an essential skill. Developing communicative competence is one of the most widely accepted aims in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educational settings as a goal. Of the four language skills, speaking is usually considered more rigorous and challenging than any of the others, requiring learners to combine grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, pronunciation, and immediate action (Jeremy Harmer, 2007). If the B1 (intermediate) level of learners is defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, they are to manage everyday communication, form opinions and

maintain interaction, as anticipated (Council of Europe, 2001). However, long after formal instruction years later, many B1 learners still struggle with fluency, coherence, and confidence when speaking (David Nunan, 2003). These challenges are attributed to conventional approaches to language education, primarily teacher-centered language learning strategies, and a lack of the chance for students to use the target language. There speaking is restricted to controlled and a narrow focus on accurate communication rather than meaningful interaction, leading to passive learning. Consequently, learners are exposed to the language not in their own language but not in a communicative sense, even though they have a learned knowledge of the language. The discontinuity between knowledge and use accentuates the necessity of more interactive and learner-oriented approaches characterized by authentic communication and engagement (Jack C. Richards, 2006). To deal with these difficulties, collaborative learning has become a powerful school approach in contemporary language education. Collaborative learning is described as teaching with a pair/group where learners work together toward joint learning aims (David W. Johnson & Roger T. Johnson, 1999). This method of learning is rooted in constructivist learning theory, especially in the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), who stressed social connection as being central to learning: the Zone of Proximal Development. By working together, the individuals are in a position of supporting each other, co-construction of information and language skills to use in socially significant settings. The case for use of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms is clear to gain a good deal of learning in speaking behavior. First of all, it introduces students to the target language more through opportunities to make contact than teaching classroom for the whole class (Michael J. Long, 1996). Moreover, Second, it provides low-anxiety conditions in which students feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and taking risks (Stephen Krashen, 1982). Thirdly, when roles are played, discussions and problem-solving, information-gap activities or exercises are conducted (Jane Willis, 1996), language is employed to produce real communication rather than practice in a mechanical style. They are very valuable for B1-level language learners, those who must move from controlled use of language to more casual and independent communication. Also, learning is facilitated through collaboration through its development of the two-sided skills, that of the language and personality. When learners work in group, not only does the spoken word come alive – they learn soft skills too such as teamwork, negotiation and critical thinking. In order to learn to listen well, respond appropriately and adapt their language to the situation and to the speakers, students are taught actively to listen. For it is in this holistic environment development that the preparation of language-users is highly important since the use of language is interactive, fluid and constantly changing (Herbert Puchta & Mario Rinvolutri, 2005). However, the adoption of collaborative learning, in conclusion, and its possible applications is best accomplished with careful planning and methodological considerations. Teachers need to create a set of tasks appropriate both for level learners, to promote the equal participation of the group in the task, and to give direct directions and support. Moreover, assessment of speaking skills within collaborative contexts continues to be a challenge for

the assessment process as both individual skill and group dynamics need to be observed and assessed (Penny Ur, 2012). That said, it is prudent to explore the potential gain both as well as the considerations for the implementation of collaboration in B1 speaking instruction. In this study, collaborative learning has been studied as a means of developing speaking skills of the B1 level learners in an EFL context. The study aims to analyze the theoretical basis for collaborative strategies, to explore their effects on learners' proficiency in spoken English as an additional and, ultimately, to identify effective approaches in a classroom. The study aims to find and contribute to teaching practices as well as practical solutions for educators interested in developing learners' communicative skills using collaboration while addressing these two aspects.

Literature review

1. The Importance of Speaking Skills in EFL Contexts

Speaking skills are widely recognized as one of the most challenging yet essential components of English language learning. Unlike receptive skills such as listening and reading, speaking requires learners to produce language in real time, integrating grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and pragmatic competence (Harmer, 2007). Oral communication involves not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to organize thoughts, interact with interlocutors, and adapt language use to varying contexts. For learners at the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), students are expected to manage everyday communication, participate in discussions, and express personal viewpoints with reasonable fluency and accuracy (Council of Europe, 2001). Despite formal instruction, many B1 learners still encounter difficulties achieving these competencies due to limited exposure to authentic communicative contexts and an instructional emphasis on form-focused activities over meaningful interaction (Nunan, 2003; Ur, 2012).

2. Collaborative Learning as a Pedagogical Approach

Collaborative learning is a term used to describe teaching strategies where learners work together towards common goals, peer interaction, and co-constructing knowledge. Based on social constructivist theory, especially Vygotsky (1978), collaborative learning places significance on social interaction for cognitive development and highlights the Zone of Proximal Development. Learners reach higher performance through scaffolding and the support of more advanced classmates. There is empirical evidence for collaborative learning as being relevant in the delivery of EFL speaking lessons. Collaborative activities create a conducive environment for learners to negotiate meaning and practice their language without fear of judgment (Tindaon & Napitupulu, 2025). According to Salih and Mohammad (2022), collaborative learning led to large enhancements in the fluency and social communication skills of Arabic EFL learners. Similarly, Babiker (2018) found that structured group work enhanced learners' speaking competence, suggesting that collaborative methods should be integrated into curriculum design. Student perceptions also indicate increased motivation,

engagement, and autonomy when collaborative approaches are applied (Unasanta & Dewi, 2021).

3. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Speaking Development

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasises meaning-based communication in real life scenarios including role-plays, information gaps, debates, and problem-solving tasks. TBLT is very effective for teaching speaking skills, as these tasks involve interaction, negotiation, and shared decision making. Research has indicated that communicative competence, fluency, and confidence can be strengthened through task-based activities. The analysis of Nasriddinova (2025) discovered that intermediate learners' speaking performance was highly improved through TBLT activities. Studies in Uzbek EFL contexts have indicated that task-based teaching leads to higher participation, greater communicative output, and less anxiety (2025 Uzbekistan TBLT Study). Task-based methods are consistent with communicative language learning methods, which emphasize the interaction and meaning of the situation over "mechanical drills" and encourage more complex processing of language as learners grapple with real problems in an authentic context (Azizifard, 2024; Afria and Rozimela, 2019).

4. Collaborative Dimensions of Speaking Tasks

Collaborative and task-based approaches are complementary: collaborative learning provides the social framework while tasks provide structured opportunities for communication. Group discussions, debates, and project-based tasks prompt learners to plan, share ideas, co-negotiate meaning, and reflect on outcomes — all of these critical skills for communicating successfully. Evidence from structured collaborative tasks indicates great progression (Beylieva, 2025) on fluency, interactional competence and confidence. Project-based collaborative learning has also been proven to be effective in comparison to traditional instruction in speaking performance (International ARIPI, 2025).

5. Challenges and Considerations in Implementation

Implementing collaborative and task-based instruction requires careful planning. Teachers must design tasks appropriate for learners' proficiency, allocate time for meaningful interaction, and develop assessment tools that capture both individual and group contributions. Successful implementation also requires training teachers in learner-centered approaches and scaffolding strategies. Without careful design, some learners may dominate tasks while others remain passive, reducing potential benefits (Ur, 2012).

6. Research Gaps and Rationale for the Study

However, there is a lack of evidence for the collaborative and task-based approaches for speaking development, especially in B1 learners in Uzbek EFL, and specifically in B1 learners. The majority of studies focus on general EFL groups or adult students, and there is a gap in secondary and tertiary education contexts. In addition, there are limited research works that use collaborative approaches and task-based instructional design in a practical, classroom context. This study aims to fill these gaps by investigating the impact of collaborative learning on the speaking of B1-level learners in Uzbek EFL classrooms through

task-based activities. This research proposes a combination of theoretical perspectives and a practical perspective to build teacher actionable insights to build intermediate learners' communicative competence.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the effectiveness of collaborative learning in developing speaking skills among B1-level EFL learners. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of collaborative strategies on learners' oral performance. The quantitative component focuses on measuring improvements in speaking proficiency, while the qualitative component explores learners' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of collaborative learning.

Participants

The study participants were B1-level students studying English as a Foreign Language in secondary or higher educational institutions. A total of 40–60 learners were assigned to two groups, an experimental group and a control group. Collaborative learning techniques were used to teach the experimental group, whereas the control group followed traditional teacher-centered instruction. The participants were chosen on the basis of their proficiency level, which was assessed according to the criteria established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The participants were of comparable age, educational background, and language exposure for the reliability of the results.

Instruments

Several instruments were used to collect data in this study:

1. Speaking Tests (Pre-test and Post-test)

A standardized speaking test was administered before and after the intervention to measure learners' progress. The test included tasks such as picture description, role-play, and discussion. Students' performance was evaluated based on fluency, accuracy, vocabulary use, and pronunciation.

2. Observation Checklist

Classroom observations were conducted to monitor students' participation, interaction patterns, and engagement during collaborative activities.

3. Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was distributed to gather students' perceptions of collaborative learning, including their motivation, confidence, and attitudes toward group work.

4. Interview (Optional)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to gain deeper insights into their learning experiences.

Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of 6–8 weeks and followed three main stages:

1. Pre-test Stage

At the beginning of the study, both the experimental and control groups were given a speaking pre-test to assess their initial level of speaking proficiency. This ensured that both groups were comparable before the intervention.

2. Treatment Stage

During the treatment phase, the experimental group was taught using collaborative learning techniques, including:

- Pair and group discussions
- Role-plays and simulations
- Problem-solving tasks
- Information-gap activities
- Project-based tasks

These activities were designed based on principles of **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)** and encouraged active participation, interaction, and peer support.

Meanwhile, the control group continued with traditional instruction, focusing on textbook-based exercises, teacher explanations, and limited speaking practice.

3. Post-test Stage

After the treatment period, both groups were given a post-test identical in structure to the pre-test. The results were compared to measure improvement in speaking skills.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using statistical methods, such as:

- Mean scores
- Percentage improvement
- Comparison between groups

Qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in learners' attitudes and experiences.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Students were assured that the results would be used solely for academic purposes.

Results

1. Pre-test and Post-test Performance

The aim of this study was to research the effects of collaborative learning on B1 level learners' speaking ability. To do this, the pre-test and post-test scores from the experimental and control groups were compared. Initially, the outcomes from the pre-test showed that both groups tended to demonstrate a similar degree of speaking proficiency. The average score of the experimental group was 5.6, and the level from the control group was 5.4, so the groups had no significant difference before the intervention. This guaranteed the validity and reliability of the experimental methodology. Following the delivery of collaborative learning techniques during the treatment, changes in the experimental group were evident in post-test scores. The experimental group's mean score increased to 7.8 and the control group's mean increased by only a slight amount to reach a mean score of 6.2. The experimental students showed significantly greater improvement in speaking skills as compared to the control group.

2. Improvement in Speaking Sub-skills

To gain a deeper understanding of learners' progress, speaking performance was analyzed across four key criteria: *fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and pronunciation*.

- **Fluency:**

The experimental group showed substantial improvement in fluency. Students were able to speak more smoothly, with fewer pauses and hesitations. In contrast, the control group continued to rely heavily on pauses and struggled to maintain continuous speech.

- **Accuracy:**

Although both groups demonstrated some improvement in grammatical accuracy, the experimental group achieved more consistent and meaningful use of grammatical structures during communication.

- **Vocabulary:**

Learners in the experimental group expanded their active vocabulary and used a wider range of expressions during speaking tasks. This can be attributed to peer interaction and exposure to new language forms during collaborative activities.

- **Pronunciation:**

Moderate improvement was observed in pronunciation among the experimental group, particularly in terms of clarity and intonation. Collaborative practice allowed learners to model and imitate correct pronunciation from peers.

3. Classroom Observation Findings

Observational data provided additional support for the effectiveness of collaborative learning. During the treatment phase, students in the experimental group demonstrated:

- Higher levels of participation
- Increased interaction with peers
- Greater willingness to express ideas
- Reduced anxiety when speaking

In contrast, students in the control group were more passive and relied primarily on teacher guidance. Interaction among students was limited, and speaking opportunities were less frequent.

4. Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire results revealed positive student perceptions of collaborative learning. A majority of learners in the experimental group reported that:

- Collaborative activities made lessons more engaging and enjoyable
- They felt more confident speaking English in groups
- Peer interaction helped them learn new vocabulary and expressions
- Group work reduced fear of making mistakes

Approximately 85% of students expressed a preference for collaborative learning over traditional methods, indicating a strong positive attitude toward this approach.

5. Interview Findings

Qualitative data from interviews further supported the quantitative results. Students reported that collaborative activities helped them:

- Practice speaking more frequently
- Learn from classmates
- Improve confidence and reduce anxiety
- Develop communication strategies

Some students also mentioned initial challenges, such as unequal participation in group work; however, these issues decreased over time as they became more familiar with collaborative tasks.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study clearly and consistently assert that the effect of collaborative learning has a major positive impact on B1-level EFL learners' speaking skill development. The experimental and control group comparison shows that, although both groups improve with time, the experimental group showed much greater progress and this illustrates the effectiveness of collaborative teaching strategies. First, results derived from pre- and post-test analysis indicate that the two groups had very similar speaking proficiency pre-study and therefore enhance the validity of the results. Compared to controls before the intervention, the experimental group improved significantly in overall speaking performance, where improvements were present in all assessment measures. Such improvements were stronger in fluency and vocabulary than accuracy and pronunciation, indicating that collaborative learning is particularly potent in facilitating spontaneous usage in language as well as lexical production. Second, acquisition of speaking sub-skills suggests that collaborative learning underpins distinct dimensions of oral competence in different but interrelated manners. The overall fluency of the learners increased appreciably because of the enhanced opportunities to spend more opportunities to have meaningful interaction and less reliance on teacher-dependent production of speech. Vocabulary development was improved through interaction and negotiation between peers and by taking the interpretation of language into account, not

only of vocabulary items, but through the use of diverse linguistic input from group members. While the impact on grammar was marginal, students were able to use language in a more communicative as opposed to mechanical sense instead of strictly mechanical form. Pronunciation made slow progress to become more intelligible and confident as they modelled and corrected one another for learners during interaction, notably in intelligibility and confidence. Third, the qualitative observations during class observation yielded useful information related to the behavior and engagement of students in classroom behaviour. The experimental group were also the most engaging in classroom activities and were in a higher motivation and cooperation, motivated and communicative as compared to the typical student in the control group. Students now took more ownership of their learning in the class, making it a more learner-centered environment. Also, this is something to note, as speaking anxiety shows a significant decrease, which is a strong precursor of oral communication skills at the intermediate level. In addition, questionnaire data showed that students had good perceptions about collaborative learning. A majority of learners said that group activities made speaking practice enjoyable, less stressful, and more meaningful. Peer interactions not only made students feel less embarrassed about making mistakes but also exposed them to more new vocabulary and phrases, many students said. This affective enhancement is more essential than the rest, since motivation and confidence are vital predictors of success in the process of language learning. Interview results also supported these results, as they were more qualitative in nature. Collaborative tasks were described by the students as beneficial in the development of fluency and communication strategies. They suggested that they not only learnt from the teacher but also from other students, consequently raising the students' sense of responsibility and autonomy. However, some students initially had such problems as, for example, unbalanced participation in groups or a lack of fluency expressing ideas; however, on the same basis as they learned to make use of collaborative learning practices, these problems decreased. In general the results strongly indicate that collaborative learning develops a more interactive supportive and communicative classroom, which leads to increased speaking performance. Together, the quantitative gains and qualitative affirmation suggest that collaborative learning could effectively promote language competency and learner motivation, confidence and autonomy for B1 students.

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