ORIGINAL ARTICLE

EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE AND TEACHER'S VIEW TOWARDS THE APPROACH AT FASILEDES GENERAL SECONDARY SCHOOL, GONDAR CITY

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study is to find out the effects of cooperative learning on students' speaking performance and teacher's view towards the approach using quasi-experimental design. Two different sections of grade 9 out of 26 were selected at Fasiledes General Secondary School, Gondar City via simple random sampling technique. One section was randomly assigned to a control group while the other was allotted to an experimental group, each group consisting of 30 students. Both pre-and-post tests and interview were employed to generate data. The pre-test result indicated that the experimental and control groups were similar in their speaking performance at the commencement of the intervention, t(58)=-.03, p (.977) > .05. However, their post-test scores revealed that there was a statistical significant difference between the experimental and control group students' speaking performance t(58)=-2.52, p (.014) <.05. In the same test, the mean value of the experimental group was 32.87 and it was 26.93 for the control group. This indicates that the implementation of cooperative approach enabled the students to perform better in speaking test than that of individualistic approach. During the interview, the experimental group teacher replied that the cooperative learning helped the students develop a better understanding of the materials being learnt. The implications drawn from the findings suggested that teachers need to implement the cooperative learning as an approach in the EFL speaking classrooms.

Keywords: cooperative approach, individualistic approach, speaking performance, teacher's view

INTRODUCTION

There is an ongoing effort among scholars in adopting new educational paradigms for the development of learners' academic and social skills. This led to innovative classroom approaches, i.e. individualistic, competitive and cooperative, for those who seek students to engage in the active pursuit of knowledge rather than presenting information to them orally or through demonstrations. Along with other various inappropriate factors, teachers can influence students' academic achievement and social skills. In order to alleviate classroom problems and create conducive classroom environment, teachers must search for an effective teaching method (Slavin, 1994 and Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Among the various language teaching approaches, cooperative learning is found to be more effective than the traditional one for students with similar age and intelligence. For example, Myres (1954) and Rahvard (2010) discovered that college students who studied in small teams had more cohesive agreement among group members and communicated more appropriate information than those

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working competitively in speaking classrooms.

Moreover, Eva (2003) and Chen (2005) showed that the cooperative learning approach enables students to develop their social skills as well as their speaking performance. It increases opportunities to share ideas, respect and encourage one another in group discussions so that all group members can maximize their speaking kills. Students also develop more caring and supportive relationship with each other for the betterment of speaking performance. They can learn the value of interdependence. So, success in speaking skills is dependent on both individual and group efforts. Shen (2002) and Ghaith (2003) added that the cooperative approach helps students learn in small mixed ability groups. As a result, the weaker students gain from seeing how better students study and approach problems, and the strong students gain a deeper understanding of the subject by teaching it to others. However, in the traditional approach (Millis, 2002), the teaching-learning process is often teacher-centered where the teacher acts as the center of all instructions and controller of every aspect of the EFL speaking classroom. The teacher is considered as the sole provider of knowledge and developers of cognitive skills (Heather, 2006).

Research conducted in the Ethiopian context so far indicated that in EFL classrooms, there are different problems that hinder students' learning. To solve these problems, as Belilew (2015) stated the cooperative learning plays the pivotal role in enhancing the quality of group discussions and learning achievements. Although the benefits of cooperative learning are well known, implementing this approach in classrooms is a very challenging that teachers may have difficulties in accomplishing it. He added that cooperative learning is considered as ineffective in some academic institutions because the educational pedagogy recognizes and rewards individual effort and competition and discourages cooperation among students.

Moreover, Weldemariam and Girmay (2016) stated that teachers have important roles in realizing cooperative learning approach to maximize students learning. However, there are problems related to the monitoring and evaluations that teachers should have undertaken in order to successfully carryout cooperative approach. Most teachers depend upon individual learning instead of engaging their students' in the cooperative group. They even give opportunity to volunteer students which of course obscure the understanding of other students in the given activities.

Statement of the Problem
The researchers' experience as students and teachers reveals that the dominant approach to teaching speaking skill at Gondar General Secondary Schools is found to be the traditional one. English language teachers often give speaking activities as homework/individual class work for their students, and then discuss the answers in the classrooms. Most of the teachers do not often give the students the opportunity to discuss speaking tasks in small team settings. Instead, the only interaction that occurs in a classroom is when the teacher nominates and asks a student to answer a question or when the questions are directed to volunteering

students. Such practices negatively affect students by making them over-dependent on their teachers. They tend to remain passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in the classroom. Such students barely share their thoughts with other students. On the whole, there is no interdependence among students, and thus there is no interdependence among students.

Although the importance of cooperative learning over individualistic learning approach on various grounds has been discussed above, there is a debate among researchers on the effectiveness of certain approaches in EFL classrooms. For instance, John and Smith (2003) argued that the proven benefits of cooperative learning approach frequently encounter resistance and sometimes open hostility from the students. These authors claim that the implementation of the cooperative approach is not effective for all members in a similar group. Conversely, there are other researchers who proved the benefits of the cooperative learning approach for all learners. For instance, Shen (2002) and Adeyemi (2003) indicated that through the application of the cooperative learning approach, some students gain knowledge from seeing how better students study and approach problems while others go through the task in-depth to gain a deeper understanding of the subject by helping each other.

According to Slavin (1994) and Johnson & Johnson (1989) noted that the teachers' knowledge of its principles and theoretical assumptions are vital for the proper implementation of the cooperative learning approach. Since the approach needs established procedures and structured learning environment, it is mandatory for the teachers to be aware of the principles and assumptions. Thus, it is important to note that to successfully employ cooperative learning, teachers must view that it is worth making commitment to do it well, and they must set goals about learning the skills to manage it effectively.

Thus, in light of all the above perspectives, the researcher believes that it is worthwhile to examine the effects of cooperative versus individualistic learning approaches on students' speaking skills and the teacher's view towards the cooperative approach.

Objectives
The objective of the study is to examine the effects of cooperative learning versus traditional learning approaches on students' speaking performance and teachers' view towards the cooperative approach at Fasiledes General Secondary School in Gondar city.

Conceptual Framework
The concepts related to the cooperative learning approach have been derived from the constructivist theory. Accordingly, the conceptual framework lies in three major theories: Socio-interdependence theory which is based on Bandura theory of learning, socio-cognitive theory and Motivational Perspective which are dependent upon Piaget and Vygotsky theories of learning (Johnson and Johnson, 1989).

Socio-interdependence Theory: From the constructivist point of view, knowledge originates in learner's activity. When learners develop positive relationships and show active social competence, their knowledge becomes more powerful (Ahuja, 1994). Cooperative learning, like the theory of constructivism, is grounded on the principle that knowledge is not passively received but actively built by the individual. The use of the cooperative learning approach makes students share ideas with each other to succeed (Liang, 2002).

Socio-cognitive Theory: According to Liang (2002) and Chen (2005), from constructivists' point of view, learning is an active process in which learners establish new ideas or concepts based on the past and current knowledge. All learners select and transform information, construct a hypothesis and make decisions relying on a cognitive structure. Cognitive structure provides meaning, organization and interpretation to experiences and allows the individual to go beyond the information given to them. Likewise, cooperative learning (Seong, 2001 and Apple, 2006) aims at arousing cognitive conflicts among students by helping them to justify concepts and ideas through discussion and debate. This situation can be a significant point for problem solving approach.

Motivational Perspective: The constructivists' view advocates the importance of motivation to students. Motivation concentrates on the reward or goal structures under which a group operates. The reward acts as a stimulus for the students to lead to an effective learning (Slavin, 1994; Liang, 2002). Likewise, in the cooperative learning approach, individual's goal is dependent on the success of the group as a whole. Since students perceive that their success or failure is dependent on their ability to work together as a group, students are more likely to encourage one another. Therefore, rewards are given to individual students on the basis of the group performance, and group rewards are given on the basis of the sum of the individual's performance (Slavin, 1994; Liang, 2002).

Incorporating the constructivists' view with the speaking classroom and testing the results on students' speaking skills is a sound reasoning. Thus, in this research an attempt is made to examine the effects of cooperative learning (which is designed based on the constructivist point of view) and individualistic apporach on students' speaking skills.

Research Method and Design
To examine the relative effects of the independent variables (the cooperative and traditional learning approaches) over the dependent variable (students' speaking performance), a quasi-experimental design was employed. This type of design is used to determine whether a program or an intervention has the intended effect on the study's participants (Jefferson, 2007).

Sampling Techniques
In Gondar city, there are five General Secondary Schools: Idget Feleg, Fasiledes, Angereb, Hidar 11 and Azezo. In order to select this school, the researcher employed a simple random sampling technique (lottery method). This is because the sampling method gives each school equal chance of

being selected and consequently Fasiledes General Secondary School was chosen for the study. Grade 9 students were made to be the subjects of the study. The reason is that in schools like this— from grade one to eight—-students are made to study five subjects out of nine in their first language, Amharic. However, from grade nine up to grade twelve and then at tertiary level, all the subjects are offered in English. This study was based on the assumption that the students' speaking proficiency directly affects their overall academic performance, and grade 9 students should enhance their speaking skills to cope with the language shift from their native language to the foreign language. There are 26 sections of grade 9 at this school and each section consisted of 62 students. Among these sections, first, two intact sections were selected using simple random sampling technique. Then, the pre-test was given for the two groups. Those students who scored similar results were taken for the study. Using normality formula, students whose results extremely top and bottom were trimmed out while the average performers were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups.

Procedures of the Experiment
Experimental Group
The primary role of the experimental group teacher was shifting the traditional to the cooperative learning-based classroom. Thus, the teacher was made to be aware of the underlying principles and assumptions of the approaches. The teaching-learning process was made using the cooperative jigsaw technique in the following way (Slavin, 1994; Bradshaw, 2013).

First, the experimental group teacher formed the teams based on their pre-test scores: high, middle and low ability groups were assigned in a group so that they help each other. Then, the teacher introduced the speaking tasks that were assigned to that particular session. The teacher considered the number of students who were involved in the task before he let them began working with it. This made the teacher aware of balancing the distribution of activities among students.

Second, the group gave roles to its members. In one group at a time, one student was assigned as a leader, and his/her responsibility was to oversee the smooth functioning of the group and make sure that each member was on task. The second student was assigned as a recorder and his/her activity was to take notes during the discussions. The last student's role was acting as a reporter and he/she was responsible for reporting the group discussion to the whole class. To ensure that each student had the chance to experience all the roles and share different responsibilities, they were first assigned randomly and then rotated after every lesson.

Third, the students work on the tasks independently. The students have access to understand and analyze the activities. Every student focused on the material he/she was supposed to work. At this time, the teacher encouraged them to jot down notes of important concepts.

Fourth, every student had now some points related to his/her task. The teacher gathered the students of the same tasks. The students discussed

Table 1: *Results of independent sample t-test between the control and experimental groups' scores in the pre-test and post-test*

Test	Control Group				Experimental Group				df	t-value	p-value
	N	Mean	SD	SE	N	Mean	SD	SE			
Pre-test	30	27.33	8.89	1.62	30	27.27	8.66	1.58	58	-.029	.977
Post-test	30	26.93	9.71	1.77	30	32.87	8.48	1.55	58	2.521	.014

the tasks they did individually. The teacher encouraged them to jot down the main points whenever the groups exchange new ideas with one another. Fifth, all the students were 'experts' on the assigned activities. At this stage, they met with their home/original group and discussed the concepts, and highlighted other information which they felt most important. This group also created a summary of key points or highlighted notes which would be shared with others. The teacher did not assume that individual teams move in the right direction without some guidance. He made sure that each team prepared the main points of the activities for classroom discussions.

Finally, the teacher brought all the groups towards the end of the class and asked them for presentations/communications. The teacher gave comments after each presentation, and acknowledged those groups that did better.

The teacher, in all the steps, deliberately withdrew from being the focus of attention. He took a role of a guide and moved from group to group as a facilitator wherever he was needed. He encouraged the students to seek help and clarification from each other rather than from the teacher unless it was beyond their capacity.

Control Group
In the control group, the teaching/learning process followed the traditional approach which is the conventional one in the school. This teacher was not told to do anything and thus students completed the tasks and activities individually. Much of the time was taken by the teacher and student interactions. Individual students were awarded based on their own effort. In general, the teacher of this group never used pre-arranged procedures employed for the experimental group.

Time Frame
In the current research, the intervention lasted for eight weeks (two months) for the following prominent reasons. The experimental group went through the application of the techniques of Cooperative Jigsaw Model. This enabled the students to acquaint themselves with the specified and fixed procedures throughout the intervention in a short time (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1994). In addition, the researchers consulted the school principal on the time that could be allowed for the research. Since the final examination had to be conducted after 10 weeks, the school

allowed the research to take not more than 8 weeks. So, two months were enough to acquaint them with the necessary skills incorporated in the

Table 2: *Results of paired t-test within the control and experimental groups*

Group	Pre-test				Post-test				df	t-value	p-value
	N	Mean	SD	SE	N	Mean	SD	SE			
Exper.	30	27.27	8.65	1.58	30	32.87	8.48	1.54	29	-8.865	.000
Control	30	27.33	8.89	1.62	30	26.93	9.71	1.77	29	.757	.455

Note: The table 2 shows the comparisons within the control and experimental groups before and after the experiment.

cooperative learning approach. In line with the time frame, Johnson and Johnson, (1989) and Rahvard, (2010) stated that for any significant changes to be seen as a result of the cooperative versus traditional learning approaches, at least four to five weeks of exposure are needed. These authors identified three categories as far as the class-length is concerned. If the duration of a treatment is fifty minutes or less, it is considered a short treatment; if it is between sixty to hundred and twenty minutes, it is considered medium treatment; and if it is over hundred and twenty minutes, it is considered long treatment.

Data Collection Instruments
Tests

A teacher constructed test items to measure speaking performance before and after intervention. The pre-test and post-test were administered to all student participants. The pre-test was used to select students in the experimental and control groups who had similar speaking skill scores at the commencement of the intervention. The post-test was employed to determine whether there was a significant difference of achievement in speaking performance between the two groups. The questions, instructions and the time given in the post-test were exactly the same as that of the pre-test. The rationale for using the same tests before and after the experiment was to ensure an exactly comparable test. It was aimed to avoid the problem of equating different forms of tests. In the speaking skill tests the students were asked open ended questions. Besides, the time gap between the two tests was two months. Thus, the researchers believed that it was less likely for the pre-test to have a carryover effect on the post-test.

The researchers believed that adapting standardized test would not be suitable for the students as it might be culture-bound. For this reason, the researchers selected topics and designed questions consulting *English for Ethiopia Grade 9 Text Book (Ministry of Education, 2003).* Moreover, the researchers used IELTS-2001 and TOEFL- 2009 Editions for further reference.

Interview Guide
Interview guide was prepared to see the cooperative teaching approach from the teacher's perspective during the study. It is important to remind that the cooperative teaching approach did not get proper attention by the teachers in the General Secondary Schools in Gondar city (Belilew, 2015). To assess the teacher's latter opinion about the cooperative approach, the interview was conducted by the researchers. The teacher was inquired to express his views about his cooperative teaching experience and to reflect on the approach. To this end, a semi-structured interview was conducted. A list of questions was drawn up as a guide and further questions were asked following the teacher's responses. During the study, as mentioned above, the researchers and the teacher discussed the progress of the study and the teacher took notes accordingly. This helped the researchers to elicit more information on the overall procedures the teacher came across during the study.

Results and Discussion
Objective 1: Effects of Cooperative and Individualistic Approaches on Students' Speaking Skills

This objective deals with investigating whether there is a significant difference in speaking performance between students who are being taught using cooperative and individualistic approaches. For this purpose, the pre- and post-tests were employed in order to compare the performance between the two groups using independent and paired sample t-tests.

Note: The table 1 depicts that an independent sample t-test is employed to compare the mean value difference between the control and experimental groups before and after the experiment.

The pre-test results showed that the mean score of the control group is 27.33, and 27.27 for the experimental group. This indicates that the two groups have similar pre-test scores. In order to say whether or not there was significant difference between the speaking test score of the two groups, we should further refer to the t-calculated value. So, the t-value of the two groups in the pre-test is found out to be $t(58)=-.03$, p (.977) > .05. This is an indication that there was no a statistically significant difference between the speaking performance of the students in the experimental and control groups. Thus, the two groups were considered for the intervention with homogeneous results.

The same table also shows the mean difference between the speaking performance of the control and experimental groups in the post-test scores. The mean score of the control group is 26.93, which is lower than the mean score of the experimental group (32.87). As a result, the t-score is found out to be $t(58)=-2.52$, p (.014) <.05. This indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups after the intervention. Thus, it was observed that the cooperative learning approach has a better effect on the experimental group's speaking performance when compared to that of the traditional one.

That means, the students in the experimental group had better scores than the students in the control group in the post-test. This result substantiates the findings of Avery and Avery (1994) and Yin-Kum (2011) who pointed out that through the cooperative learning approach students exchange learning strategies that would lead to the better learning. The cooperative approach promotes interest in speaking and understanding of the activities to be performed in groups.

The paired t-test analysis within the experimental group students indicated that the mean value of the pre-test and post-test are 27.27 and 32.87 respectively. In the same group, the t-value is found out to be t(29)= -8.87, p (.000) <.05. The figures show that there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group. In other words, the students in the experimental group scored better speaking test results after they were exposed to the cooperative learning approach.

The same table depicted that the mean value of the group in the pre-test is 27.33, and 26.93 for the post-test. This shows that the students in the control group obtained almost the same scores in the two tests. The t-value t(29)=.76, p (.455) >.05. It strengthens the above figure. This means that the control group students did not show a statistically significant difference between their pre-test and post-test scores. Thus, the use of traditional learning approach did not help the control group students enhance their speaking performance.

Objective 2: The Cooperative Group Teacher's View on the Approach

The cooperative group teacher reported that he was glad to have participated in implementing the cooperative teaching approach in his classroom. By using the cooperative teaching approach, the class became interesting to him as he could see and know everything that happened in the teaching learning process. It helped him to control the students since they were busy and could not find time to do non-task related activities. The students were also controlled by their group mates as they knew they would win or lose together. Therefore, the students took care of their group mates for the group performance. The teacher added: *the cooperative approach fostered the teaching-learning process. The students were able to work both individually and in teams. When one faced a problem, the others were there to step in to help.*

During the interview, the experimental group teacher reported that before the intervention he usually employed the teacher-centered approach that did not do much to enhance students' speaking performance. He did a lot of talking, and students listened and answered the questions when asked. The learning process was almost a one-way communication and students passively received what the teacher taught. Discussions and debate among students were rare. There were no cooperative techniques in the classrooms—making the process of teaching speaking skill as boring.

However, while implementing the cooperative approach, the experimental group teacher found out that mutual benefits were received among the students as groups were working and participating. The approach helped them develop a better understanding of the materials being learnt because the students read them first alone, then with other classmates of the same tasks and finally with their group members. This helped the students build retention of the materials. The teacher said, "*The approach has different techniques that enabled the students understand the materials being learned, and made them give attention to the teaching learning process*".
The teacher's reports were in line with those findings in a study carried out by Chen (2005) and Meng (2010). These authors state that the teacher asks the students to answer some questions in the traditional teaching classes after explaining everything. The main task for the students was to write the answers and communicate with the teacher voluntarily. However, in the cooperative teaching approach, students learn how to speak, communicate each other and solve problems in a systematic way.

Conclusions
- Based on the findings of the present research, the following conclusions are drawn: In the current study, the pre-test result indicated that the experimental and control group students were homogenous in their speaking skills at the begenning of the experiment. Whereas, in the post-test it was found out that the cooperative learning approach is more effective than the traditional one in improving students' speaking performance; adding to their confidence and sense of interdependence by providing appropriate learning experiences for students. The current research, therefore, revealed that the cooperative learning yielded higher academic achievement than the traditional learning approach.
- In general, the cooperative learning approach provided the students with appropriate experience to maximize their own and each other's learning by ensuring that students actively involved in constructing their own knowledge and at the same time encouraged each other to achieve their learning goals.

Limitation of the Study
The sample selection of the current study is comprised of two sections of grade 9. They were selected only from a single General Secondary School. One section was assigned as control and the other as an experimental group. Each group consisted of 30 students. The researcher did not check the results from repeated observations in other schools and sections of the same grade level. Therefore, the generalizability of the results was limited by the small scale of the study.

Acknowledgement

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