

A Narrative Literature Review on Oral Fluency and Language Use in EFL Classroom Group Work

Ishfaque Ahmed Abbasil¹, Elizabeth M. Anthony^{2*}

¹ Sukkur IBA University, Sindh, Pakistan

² Centre for Language Studies, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia
Parit Raja, Batu Pahat, 86400, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: eliz@uthm.edu.my

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Abstract: This paper examines the available literature to discuss the impact of group work on oral fluency and language use in EFL classrooms. This narrative review analysed the data from two digital databases, Google Scholar and Science Direct, from the years 2018 to 2022. The findings of the data show that group work is almost a part of all modern student-centred approaches; the students learn more and feel comfortable while learning in a student-centred environment. Though very effective, the modern methods of student-centred approaches for developing the speaking skills of EFL learners need more attention for their implementation in the Pakistani context. Furthermore, the review also brings into focus the popularity of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in EFL contexts for developing communicative competence among EFL learners.

Keywords: Group Work, Cooperative Learning, Speaking Skill, Oral Fluency, Learner-centered approach

1. Introduction

"Nature" and "nurture," in the words of John (2018), are two notions that pertain to the learning of a second language. The former describes how learners acquire a new language: by drawing on their intrinsic language of how languages work. On the other hand, the latter holds that language development is influenced by the interaction in which learners participate. The critical aspect of second language learning is interaction. Interpersonal communication that takes place in person-to-person encounters is referred to as "face to face communication" (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Ellis, 1999). The interaction affecting second language learning happens among non-native speakers of a second language or between non-native speakers and native speakers. According to Ellis (1985), interaction is concerned with the discourse that learners and their interlocutors collaboratively generate and the output produced

*Corresponding author: eliz@uthm.edu.my

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from the interaction. It improves language learning, engages students in language learning activities and creates more language outputs.

Acquisition is classified as either explicit or implicit by Krashen (1981). Learners who pay attention to language in order to learn and remember rules are included in the latter. When language is used for communication, however, the latter occurs. When students focus on expressing their thoughts and feelings, they are more likely to learn. "Language acquisition" refers to the process by which students improve their language and communication skills. Direct exposure to learners of the target language and formal language training can both help in acquiring the required skill (Ellis, 1999). It was found by Mackey (1999) in his study that students' involvement and the nature of interaction were critical factors in second language learning through interaction. Because the negotiating meaning has already been established, interaction can be defined as participation in trade. According to Long (1991), language acquisition is the result of an interaction between the learner's mental capacity and the linguistic context. When it comes to learning a second language, nothing beats face time with native speakers.

One of L2's most important aspects is its ability to communicate effectively, both as a method and its primary objective (Yashima, 2002). Supporting this, MacIntyre et al. (1998) discuss that the major goal of L2 learning should be preparing students for communication purposes so they can meet the needs of learners who see speaking English as the primary objective in an L2 situation. Language learners from around the world, according to Richards and Renandya (2002), come to school to improve their English competence. Learners have a hard time mastering this ability, though. As Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) point out, speaking is the most difficult and complex of the four skills, requiring understanding of grammatical patterns, retrieval of vocabulary, and social competence (or social intelligence). With little or no exposure to the language outside of class, students' chances of becoming proficient in the target language are reduced (Pawlak, Waniek-Klimczak & Majer, 2011). Inability to improve speaking skills due to anxiety is a result of this (Horwitz, 2010). Non-native English teachers who become so anxious about speaking that they avoid conversational activities and do not use communicative teaching methods are not just affecting their students, but they are also affecting their ability to teach (Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007). The pedagogical strategies for teaching oral language and speaking abilities to learners have not changed despite theories of second language acquisition providing numerous reasons for how to build oral language and speaking skills. The debate over the best way to instruct students in public speaking is also gaining steam.

Group work in English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, for developing students' communicative competence has now been established as a worthwhile practice. It is the basic pillar of all major methods and approaches of student-centred language teaching and learning, such as: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Cooperative Learning (CL), Collaborative Learning, and Task-Based Learning (TBL). The group work activities, comprising of buzz groups, circle of voices, debates and discussions, think pair and share, rotating trios, role play, inquiry technique, jigsaw, learning teams, and fishbowl technique (Romanov, 2021), enable learners to be no longer audiences and spectators but actors and performers (Wang, 2021). Even though significant research is available on group work and its impact in the EFL context generally, less research is available on group work and its impact on the oral fluency of EFL learners in the Pakistani context.

Pakistan is one of the countries where the English language is given the status of an official language of communication and interaction (Khan, 2020). English is prioritized as a means of communication for every day-to-day official, academic, and social matter (Raza & Nor, 2018). Most public and private sector universities have English as a medium of instruction for academics. From Grade 1 of schooling to university level, English is taught as a compulsory subject (Ahmad & Arif, 2020). People feel privileged to be proficient in speaking English. It is considered a symbol of high status. Having so much importance in society, it becomes the dream of almost all the young population to be proficient at all the skills of the English language for communication purposes. Unfortunately,

most of the young population struggle to achieve the reality of this dream of being communicatively proficient in English. Speaking skills, especially oral fluency in speaking, seem to be an unachievable task for many EFL learners in Pakistan. There might be many reasons to this but the major reason is the language teaching and learning methods (Memon & Shaikh, 2021).

2. Methods

As the purpose of this article is to review and discuss the articles on group work in EFL classroom; Oral Fluency and Language use, the primary data source was journal articles from the digital database Science Direct and Google Scholar. The websites were accessed and searched for articles for the years 2018 to 2022 using numerous keywords including Group Work, Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, Speaking Skill, Oral Fluency, Learner-centred approach. Some of the sources were obtained through the snowballing method by checking the reference lists of the existing sources. The studies that were published before 2018 were excluded as the focus was on updated literature. The search results were downloaded, thoroughly read, and examined, focusing on finding how group work plays its role in EFL classroom on oral fluency of EFL learners.

3. Findings

3.1 Group Work Activities and Modern Methods of ELT

In their study "The Impact of Cooperative Learning Approach on the Development of EFL Learners' Speaking Fluency," they investigated the impact of two cooperative learning strategies, think pair share and numbered heads, on the development of oral English language fluency among Iranian intermediate learners. They conclude that the implementation of cooperative learning approaches can be valuable in developing oral fluency within shorter periods of time. A strong correlation has been found between cooperative learning practices and the ability of language learners to speak fluently. According to their analysis of the data gathered from the students, there is a statistically significant difference between students taught using cooperative learning methodologies and those taught using traditional instruction. It is also important to note that group discussion, creative thinking, and brainstorming, rather than individual thought, can lead to more enjoyable classrooms and more fluent students. This study shows how important group work is for developing learners' oral fluency. However, it is done at an intermediate level and uses a quantitative method.

In another study, "Communicative language teaching and English as a foreign language undergraduates' communicative competence in Tourism English", Ho (2020) discusses the influence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (the learner-centred approach where group work activities are used for making students practice the target language) on cultivating undergraduates' communicative competence in Tourism English. Using a mixed-method research design on 70 undergraduates in Taiwan, he came to the conclusion that CLT improves students' ability to communicate by making it easier to learn a language and that it also boosts their confidence.

Noor et al. (2021) in their study titled, "An Evaluation of Communicative Language Teaching in Pakistan: A Study of Undergraduate English Learners of Pakistan" have focused on the Pakistani context of EFL in a women's university and have evaluated the role of CLT. Using the quantitative research approach and applying the questionnaire as the data collection tool for gathering data from 100 female students, they conclude that although CLT is the most appropriate teaching approach in other countries for developing speaking skills among the learners, it requires improvements to work more efficiently in Pakistan. They consider that the large classroom size, teachers' negative feedback, trial and error process, etc. are the factors for the lack of getting positive results from CLT in Pakistan.

By adopting the qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews, Wang (2021), analysed the in-depth views of EFL learners on group work in an actual language classroom. In his study titled, "Friendship Group Activities: Voices from Chinese EFL Learners," he discusses that group

interaction provides the learners with more opportunities to share ideas, which results in improving their communicative competence. Wang recommends that though his study closely observed the impact of friendship groups on the oral fluency of the learners, more studies on the teachers' perceptions on this matter would be beneficial to triangulate the degree of accuracy. He also recommends more detailed observations on students' performance in group work.

Waragh and Suwaed (2021) explore the perceptions of Libyan EFL University students towards the use of group work in their speaking classes by using a quantitative research approach employing a questionnaire as the data collection tool. They found that students see group work as a good way to learn because it helps them become more independent and gives them chances to speak more in the target language.

They have also reported some of the drawbacks of group work as per students' perceptions. These drawbacks are that low-level students feel frustrated working in groups; the domination of one student in the group; and some students find it difficult to work in a mixed-gender group.

In the EFL classroom, group work has many benefits in improving students' fluency by providing more chances to practice target language and practice multiple interactions (Phan, 2018). In his study entitled, "*An Evaluation of Using Group Work to Improve Speaking Fluency for First Year Non-Majored English Students at Dong Nai Technology University*", Phan (2018) also focuses on the importance of clear instructions before the group work starts. He also emphasizes, in his study, the importance of the role of the teacher during the group work activities. He suggests that the teacher must plan the activities keeping the students' levels in mind. He must always use clear instructions while assigning tasks in group work. Further, his study also argues about students' perceptions regarding group size. He concludes that a group of four students seems appropriate to achieve the required target of group work in an EFL classroom for language fluency.

In their study titled, "*Using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) On Speaking Fluency; A Case Study of Iranian EFL Students in Zahedan*" (2021), Kord & Mojavezi (2021) examined the effect of CLT on speaking fluency in their study. Using quantitative research methods by randomly selecting thirty-five intermediate EFL female students from two teacher education centres in Zahedan, Iran, Kord and Mojavezi collected data for assessing students' quality of spoken productivity. The researchers compared the impact of two methods—the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)—on intermediate students' speaking fluency. They conclude that students taught using the CLT approach have more self-confidence than those taught by ALM. The students taught by CLT seemed more enthusiastic than those who were taught by ALM. The students of CLT were more fluent and less disfluent.

In his study titled, "*Using Communicative Language Teaching to improve the Speaking Skills of Brazilian EFL Young Adult Students*", Loebens (2019) explains that speaking is undoubtedly the most important skill in language learning, as the majority of students regard it as the most essential skill. When asked about their reasons for learning English, they commonly say, "I want to learn English so I can speak it." Students usually evaluate their success in the target language based on their improved speaking abilities. (Richards, 2008, cited in Loebens, 2019).

Loebens (2019) suggests that role play, group work, and communication games are the most important fluency-building activities in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Rather than memorizing dialogues and rules, CLT emphasizes meaningful and purposeful dialogue. Students are permitted to select what they say, have autonomy, and not be strictly regulated. Unfortunately, this method is frequently misunderstood as a disregard for syntax and clarity. Rather than a singular teaching method, it is a collection of concepts accessible to individual interpretation and application in a variety of ways. It emphasizes a less mechanical, more practical, and more meaningful approach to teaching language, with an emphasis on its practical application. The major focus is to engage students in

speaking as fluently as possible. Loebens (2019) argues that during these activities, students should not be bothered with mistakes that do not hinder communication.

In his research, Haliwanda (2021), by using experimental quantitative research methods, attempts to analyse the cause and effect of the grammar translation method (GTM) and communicative language teaching (CLT). The researcher employs a number of communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques, such as role-play, information gap, interview, group work, opinion sharing, and scavenger hunt, in the English classroom in order to elicit students' enthusiasm for the thoughtful and enjoyable learning of English, particularly in speaking. According to Bittencourt et al. (2015) cited in Haliwanda, (2021), many proponents of CLT utilize role-playing exercises, group presentations, problem-based learning, technologically assisted tactics, and visual-only video teaching strategies to boost possibilities for language speaking and sharing. The communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques can influence the teaching and learning of English for speaking skills in all activities, such as role-playing, information gap, group work, interviews, opinion sharing, and scavenger hunts. He argues that when students are taught using a communicative language teaching approach as opposed to a grammar translation method, there is a substantial difference in their proficiency. He comes to the conclusion that CLT helps students improve their fluency, accuracy, and clarity when they speak.

Rospinah, Ampa and Nappu (2021) conclude in their study that most students participate in group work because it helps them improve their fluency and accuracy when speaking. Frank Lyman's claims were backed up by the facts. Think-pair-share, according to Frank Lyman (1981), cited in Rospinah, Ampa and Nappu, (2021), is a three-step group activity that involves individual thought, pair discussion, and class-wide idea sharing. Consequently, students in such a group are required to attempt an initial response to a given question, which they can then elaborate on and clarify through collaboration. Introverted students may feel more comfortable participating in class if they can practice their ideas first in a smaller group before presenting them to the rest of the class. A primary goal of this group is to build students' confidence in their responses and to encourage more students to participate actively in plenary discussions (Rospinah, Ampa, & Nappu, 2021).

The literature reviewed clearly presents the importance of group work in ELT especially in EFL context. It emphasizes the use of group work in almost all skills of language particularly Speaking because of its focus on participatory nature. It provides many options to learners for practicing the target language resulting in improved fluency.

3.2 Group Work Activities in EFL context of Pakistan

In a study titled, "Analysis of EFL Teaching in Pakistan: Methods and Strategies in the Post-Method Era," Khan (2020) investigates the strategies and methods practiced by EFL teachers to teach language in the post-method era. The findings of his study show that EFL teachers in both the public and private sectors use a variety of teaching methods and approaches in their classrooms rather than sticking to a single method. The teachers' teaching approaches and practices in both sectors are also differentiated by the statistics. Surprisingly, it indicates that EFL teachers in the private sector prefer communicative ways of instruction. Teachers in the public sector, on the other hand, are more likely to employ grammar translation methods (GTM). He concludes that language teaching is handled using two different extreme-level methods in the Pakistani EFL context. The public sector teachers focus the most on accuracy by practicing GTM, paying less attention to the communicative aspect, whereas the private sector teachers focus on the proficiency of language to promote meaningful communicative aspects, having less focus on accuracy.

In the Pakistani context of EFL, despite the theoretical effectiveness of CLT, it has not been able to take its place in the classroom, Memon and Shaikh (2021) claim in their study. In their study titled, "Effectiveness of CLT at Tertiary Level in Pakistan", they discuss that the approaches for teaching English are inappropriate and inadequate for communication. Ahmad et al. (2011) cited in Memon &

Shaikh (2021) noted further that despite the fact that English is supposed to be Pakistan's second language, the English language syllabi in Pakistan do not align with the specified curricular objectives. The majority of English as a Foreign or Second Language teachers utilize outmoded/traditional teaching methods and contextually irrelevant textbooks; they lack adequate training and modern teaching methods.

Ilyas, Khaliq and Ahmed, (2021) analyse that an excellent strategy for engaging all students in communication is to have them participate in group activities where they can demonstrate their abilities. Their study also discovered that these activities provide an opportunity for students to use target language to develop their speaking abilities in a more effective way. Simple linguistic knowledge may not be as useful as putting it into practice. The study concluded that teachers are partly to blame for students' incapacity to communicate effectively in English. Some activities demotivate students, causing them to abandon their attempts to speak the target language appropriately and correctly. The study found that large class sizes, unfavourable teacher criticism, the trial and error process, and other factors overwhelm students' hard efforts when attempting to speak the target language successfully.

Mehmood et al. (2019) observe that the government of Pakistan's slogan "One nation – One vision" is based on a knowledge economy to increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by increasing tertiary education. English is the language of instruction in higher education, and students must possess strong language abilities to advance academically. Students with poor skills perform poorly in English and in other disciplines as well. This circumstance has made language proficiency an essential condition for pupils' academic advancement. Low academic achievement causes unhappiness, and student satisfaction is crucial for achieving higher education goals. Through emotional support, their motivation level can be increased to achieve improved academic performance. Students' inadequate English proficiency has shattered their self-assurance and rendered them unable to participate in the classroom. The teaching method and the teacher's demeanour in the classroom exacerbate the divide between students and the teacher. Some changes appear to be necessary in Pakistani EFL classrooms, according to teachers and students, such as a new syllabus, teacher training, communication games, group work, and more oral practice for students to develop their communicative competence (Mehmood et al., 2019).

According to Laghari, Kakepoto and Arshad (2022), university students face multiple obstacles when learning English. To maximize students' English language learning issues in the modern era of computer technology, teachers must plan effective instructional strategies in this dimension. To assist students in overcoming their fear and reluctance, a learner-centred approach to instruction should be utilized, along with the introduction of novel classroom activities. As a result of the teacher's dominant role in the classroom, students experience difficulties. So they suggest a student-centred approach may help students learn language properly by having communicative activities in the classroom. Working in pairs and small groups might be incorporated into the curriculum to encourage student participation. It will decrease students' anxiety and fear (Laghari, Kakepoto & Arshad, 2022).

4. Conclusion

This narrative review study found that Group Work is the major part of all student-centred approaches and methods of ELT. Its benefits especially in EFL contexts for developing speaking skill include overpowering fear among students for language practice, student participation for language learning, fluency enhancement through practice, confidence building and overall appropriate classroom environment. Though in Pakistani context student centred approach in ELT is praised and advocated much but its real application in classroom is yet to be witnessed. Many higher education institutes have been doing their best to implement the student-centred approach through practicing group work in EFL classrooms for speaking skills. This narrative review study based on the findings from the literature suggest more practical approach to implement students centred approach by focusing on teachers' pedagogy, curriculum revival and resource arrangements. This study also finds it important to have

more research in the aspects of the effects of group work in developing speaking fluency among EFL students specifically in Pakistani context.

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