

Incorporating Cooperative Learning to Enhance University Students' Speaking Ability in English

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Abstract: Cooperative learning involves an educational approach that encourages socializing and learning among students of all levels including preschool, primary and secondary schools, and tertiary education across all topic areas. Students take part in cooperative learning to attain a common objective or finish a group activity by communicating with each other. Many studies were conducted that clearly highlighted that cooperative learning can be utilized to increase reading and writing accomplishment, conceptual growth in science, problem-solving in mathematics, and higher-level thinking and reasoning. Thus, this study was conducted to investigate the university students' perceptions regarding incorporating cooperative learning to enhance their speaking ability in English. A total of 112 final-year students who had enrolled in a language course at the university participated in a survey conducted. The data was analyzed using SPSS where the mean scores were derived. The findings showed that most of the students responded positively regarding the implementation of cooperative learning. The mean scores ranged between 3.30 (speaking confidence) and 3.69 (enhancing teamwork spirit). Thus, the study recommends the practice of the cooperative learning method is used more profoundly in educational settings especially to enhance the speaking skills of English for university students.

Keywords: cooperative learning, speaking skills, confidence, university students

1. Introduction

In this 21st century, the pressure for everyone to excel in English language, particularly in speaking skills is tremendous due to the position of English as an international communication language (Lucena & San Jose, 2016). However, many perceive speaking in a second or foreign language as the most challenging of the other counterparts (listening, reading, and writing) (Malmir & Shoorcheh, 2012). Generally, many second language (L2) learners find it difficult to communicate and express themselves fluently in English due to the language barrier than hinders them from speaking confidently. One of the reasons is that the environment that the students stay in is not surrounded by English narrative language speakers.

Apparently, the Cooperative Learning Method is found to help in bridging the gap between the weaker and stronger students. Cooperative learning involves an educational approach that encourages socializing and learning among students of all levels including preschool, primary and secondary schools, and tertiary education across all topic areas. Students take part in cooperative learning to attain a common objective or finish a group activity by communicating with each other. Over the last three decades, many studies were conducted that clearly highlighted that cooperative learning can be utilized to increase reading and writing accomplishment, conceptual growth in science, problem-solving in mathematics, and higher-level thinking and reasoning (Gillies, 2014).

Cooperative learning was introduced by Johnson and Johnson (1989) which is a learner-centered method. This method has been widely used in activities related to group work and presentation activities (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018). In order to have a successful language lesson, clear objectives in constructing lessons to increase students' learning are important. Thus, cooperative learning was found to offer the essential basis for the faultless execution of the lesson plan during class (Hafeez et al., 2014). Besides, Gillies (2014) stated that the benefits of cooperative learning are indisputable where the obvious success of this method of learning had been acknowledged as one of the most considerable educational developments in modern history. In addition, a study conducted by Meena (2020) claimed that cooperative language learning activities supported by multiple intelligence have a highly significant effect on enhancing students' communication skills. Besides, cooperative learning has helped in developing students' attitudes to be more respectful as cooperative learning also emphasizes the issue of cooperation with others in order to increase productivity than being competitive or individualistic (Gillies, 2014). Thus, this study was conducted to investigate MTUN students' perceptions regarding incorporating cooperative learning to enhance their speaking ability in English.

2. Materials and Methods

In this research, we used a quantitative method using a survey technique. A questionnaire was used with options of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. In this research, the questionnaire was designed using the google form with 15 items. To address the objectives of the research, a survey was conducted regarding the respondents' knowledge of cooperative learning and the connections between the implementation of cooperative learning and English-speaking ability among final-year university students. The questionnaire covered the English-speaking ability before cooperative learning and the outcome of the implementation of cooperative learning in English-speaking ability. The questionnaire was designed using the Likert scale and distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was divided into two divisions: (1) demographic of the respondents to know their background in terms of courses, gender, and ethnicity, (2) students' perceptions about incorporating cooperative learning to learn English. This questionnaire is distributed online to the targeted respondents through media social platforms such as WhatsApp group chat, WhatsApp status, Instagram, and Telegram.

The total respondents for this research were 112 third-year students who were registered under the Faculty of Technology Management and Business (FPTP) from a Malaysian Technical University

Network (MTUN). The respondents were selected for measuring their readiness to enter the industry since most industries expected good language ability, especially in English which is the international language. The collected data were analysed using a statistical package for social science (SPSS) software to identify the mean score of every item. Based on the findings, the conclusion and recommendations were discussed.

3. Results and Discussion

The students’ responses were analysed to identify their perceptions and acceptance of incorporating cooperative learning into English lessons to improve their skills, particularly their speaking skills. Analysis was conducted based on the data collected from the questionnaire. The number of respondents (and the percentages) who responded according to the options provided on the items in the questionnaire were tabulated and the mean scores were calculated for all the items.

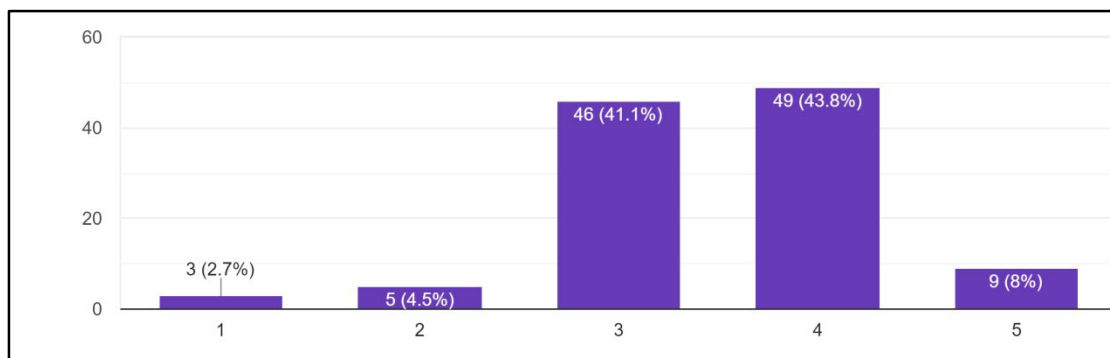


Figure 1: Students’ perceptions of cooperative learning strategies

Figure 1 shows the details of cooperative learning strategies practiced by 112 respondents who participated in this study. A total of 49 respondents responded positively (4=Agree) to the item, “I practice Cooperative learning strategies”. A total of 9 respondents responded very positively (5=Strongly Agree) to the questions. Meanwhile, 46 respondents responded neutrally (3=Neutral). However, 8 respondents students responded adversely to the questions with 5 disagreeing and 3 of them strongly disagreeing. The mean score was 3.50.

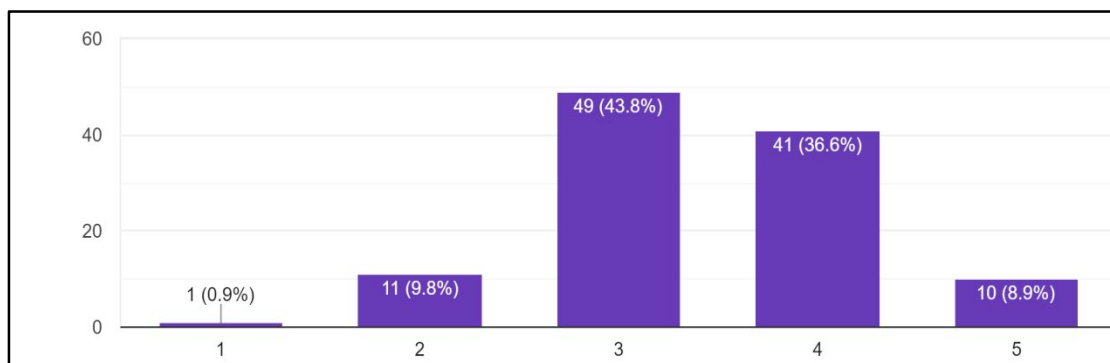


Figure 2: Students’ perceptions of benefits of cooperative learning

Figure 2 shows the perception of the benefit of cooperative learning. A total of 41 respondents responded positively (4= agree) to the item “I find cooperative learning is beneficial for me in learning.” The figure also shows a total of 10 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 49 respondents responded neutrally. However, 12 respondents responded adversely to the

questions where 11 respondents disagreed, and 1 respondent strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.43.

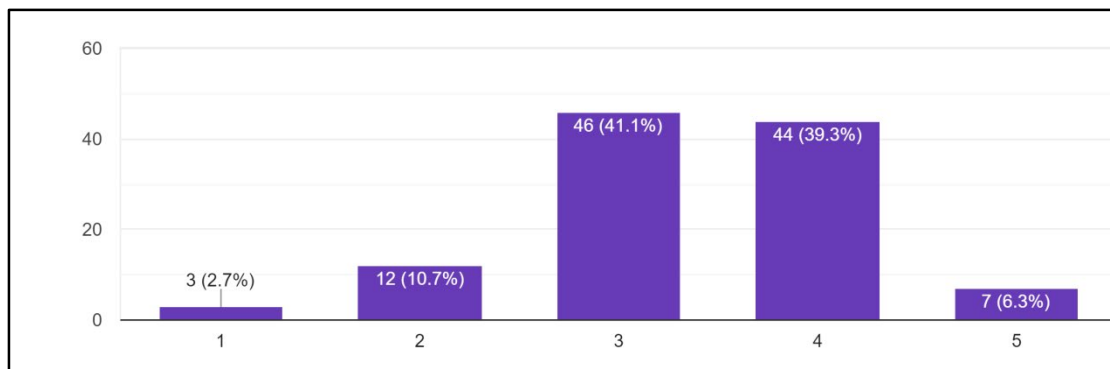


Figure 3: Students' perceptions of participation in class activities

Figure 3 shows the perception of the respondents regarding the use of cooperative learning in facilitating student participation in class activities. A total of 44 respondents responded positively (4= agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 7 respondents responded very positively (5= strongly agree). Meanwhile, 46 respondents responded neutrally. However, 15 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 12 respondents disagreed, and 3 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.36.

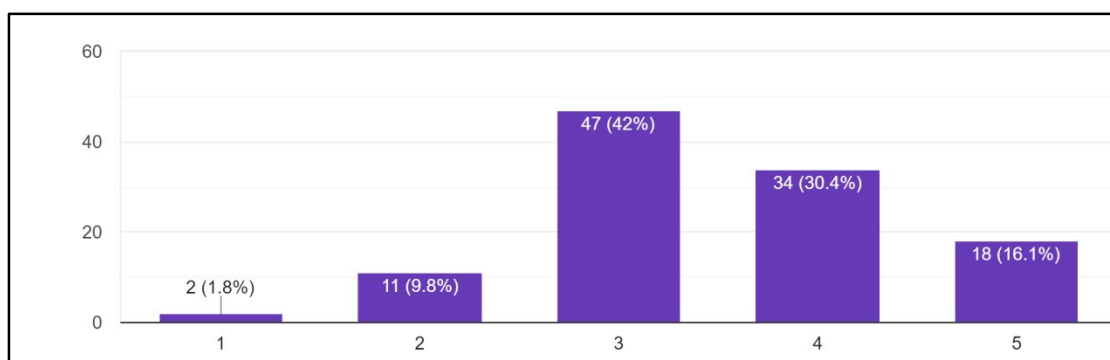


Figure 4: Students' perceptions of improving their English proficiency

Figure 4 shows the perception of cooperative learning as a good way of improving their proficiency in English. A total of 34 respondents responded positively (4= agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 18 respondents responded very positively (5= strongly agree). Meanwhile, 47 respondents responded neutrally. However, 13 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 11 respondents disagreed, and 2 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.49.

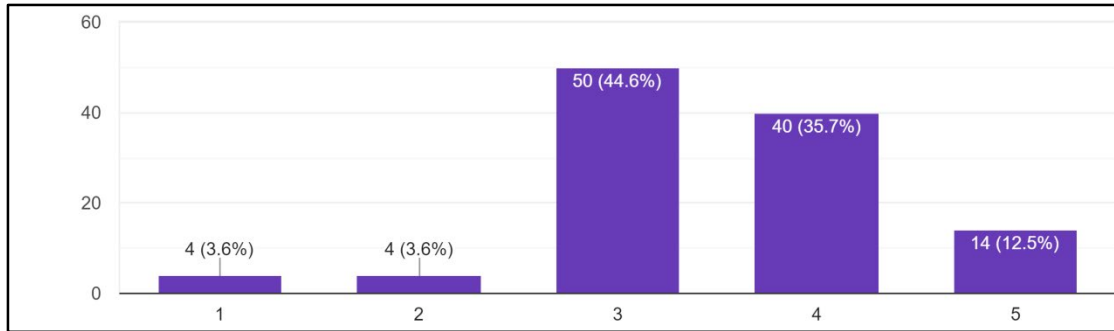


Figure 5: Students' perceptions of enhancing critical thinking skills

Figure 5 shows the perceptions of respondents about the benefit of cooperative learning in enhancing critical thinking skills among students. A total of 40 respondents responded positively (4=agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 14 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 50 respondents responded neutrally. However, 8 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 4 respondents disagreed, and 4 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.50.

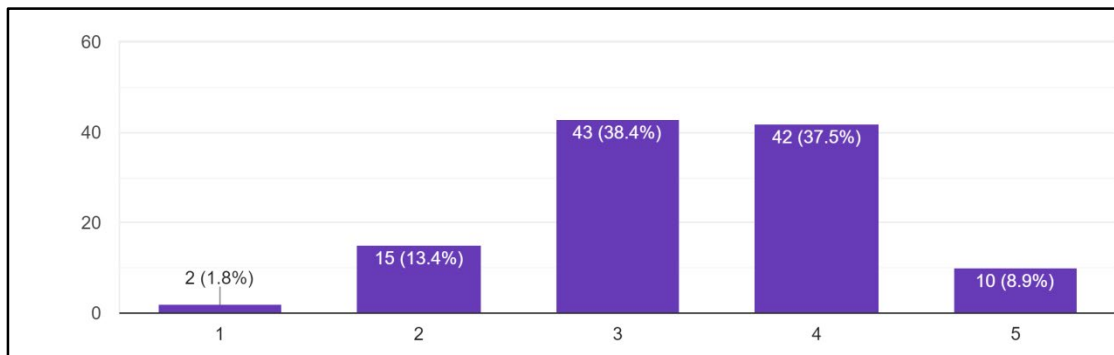


Figure 6: Students' perceptions of ability to speak in English in public

Figure 6 shows the perceptions of respondents about their overall ability to speak in English during presentations. A total of 42 respondents responded positively (4=agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 10 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 43 respondents responded neutrally. However, 17 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 15 respondents disagreed, and 2 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.37.

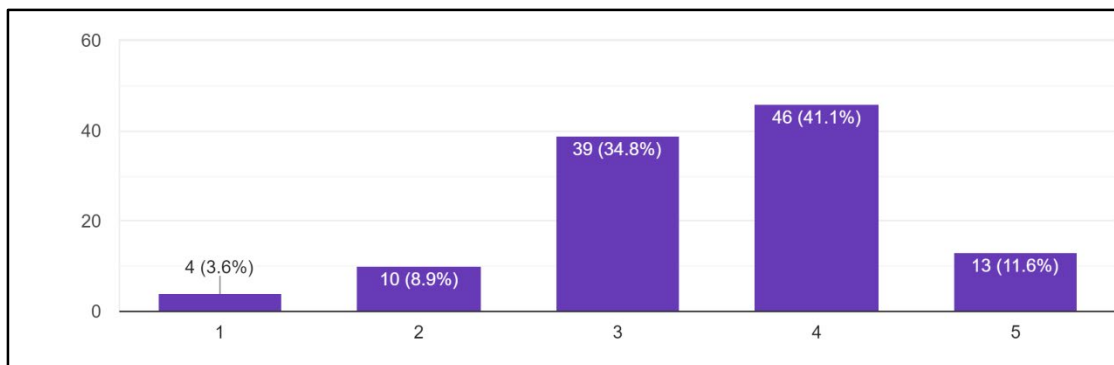


Figure 7: Students' perceptions of having sufficient vocabulary in English

Figure 7 shows the perceptions of respondents about having a sufficient vocabulary for presentation. A total of 46 respondents responded positively (4=agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 13 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 39 respondents responded neutrally. However, 14 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 10 respondents disagreed, and 4 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.48.

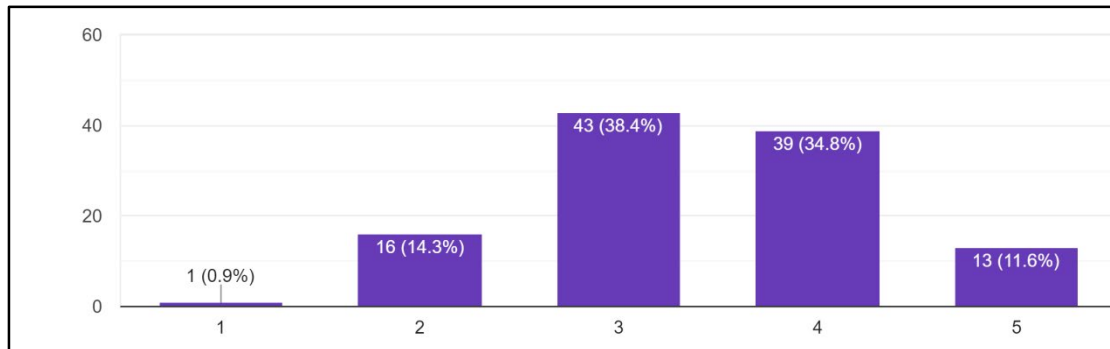


Figure 8: Students' perceptions of pronunciation ability

Figure 8 shows the perceptions of respondents about having the ability to pronounce sufficiently during the presentation. A total of 39 respondents responded positively (4=agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 13 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 43 respondents responded neutrally. However, 17 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 16 respondents disagreed, and 1 respondent strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.42.

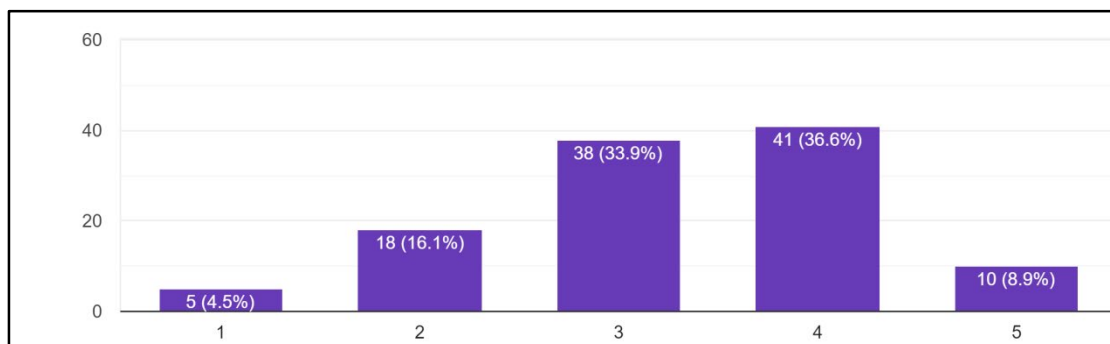


Figure 9: Students' perceptions of having confidence to speak in English

Figure 9 shows the perceptions of respondents about being confident during presentations. A total of 41 respondents responded positively (4=agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 10 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 38 respondents responded neutrally. However, 23 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 18 respondents disagreed, and 5 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.30.

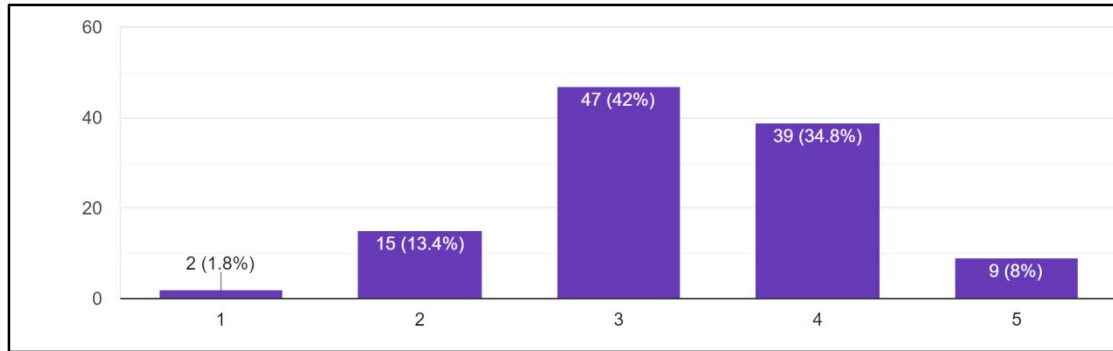


Figure 10: Students' perceptions of ability to focus in classroom

Figure 10 shows the perceptions of respondents about the ability to focus in class during lessons. A total of 39 respondents responded positively (4=agree) to the item. The table also shows a total of 9 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 47 respondents responded neutrally. However, 17 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 15 respondents disagreed, and 2 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.34.

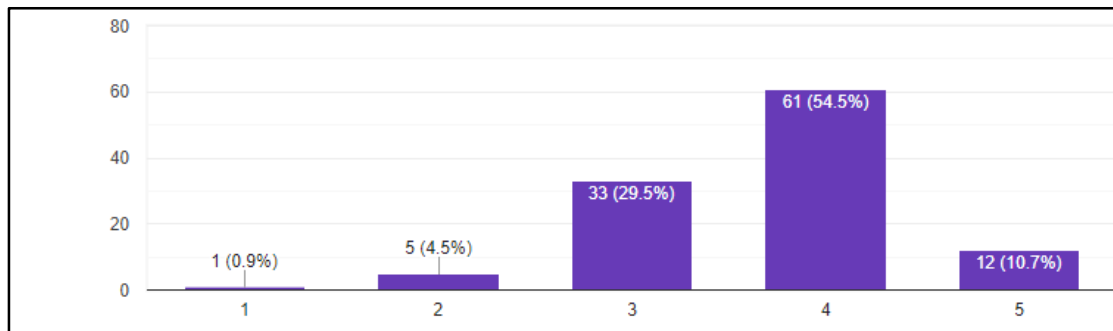


Figure 11: Students' perceptions of ability to participate in group

Figure 11 shows the perceptions of respondents about the ability to participate in group work to complete group projects. A total of 61 respondents responded positively (4=agree) to the item. The figure also shows a total of 12 respondents responded very positively (5=strongly agree). Meanwhile, 33 respondents responded neutrally. However, 6 respondents responded adversely to the questions where 5 respondents disagreed, and 1 respondent strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.69.

The findings showed that all the mean scores were within the acceptable range. Thus, majority of the respondents were satisfied with the practice of cooperative learning to learn English. Apparently, a huge number of the respondents chose to be neutral in their responses and this showed that they did not mind having the cooperative learning method to learn English. However, a small number of the respondents were found to disagree with this learning method. The reasons for this need to be investigated in order to improvise the practice of this method in future.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students perceived that there were many positive effects of incorporating cooperative learning methods towards enhancing students' English language proficiency, particularly in speaking ability. The findings of this study are also in line with the findings of a study conducted by Lucena and San Jose (2016) in the Philippines that the students were able to improve their speaking skills by way of imparting their ideas and opinions in class which also helped to boost their self-esteem by practising cooperative learning methods. Thus, cooperative learning can be one of the most effective methods for students in improving their use of English in class.

Nevertheless, this method should be used consistently with good guidelines. Therefore, this study attempts to provide some recommendations that could improve the effectiveness of using cooperative learning in the development of speaking ability in English among university students. Firstly, upgrading the cooperative learning method by dividing the task among each group member appropriately. This is important to build positive interdependence in the learning environment so that everyone in the group is aware that they are interconnected and due to that they need to learn to coordinate their efforts to succeed. When students realize that they are each responsible for completing that part of the work, inevitably everyone must accomplish their parts for the group to achieve its goals. Thus, positive interdependence is developed within the group. Apparently, by giving different members of the group different aspects of the assignment to perform, teachers can ensure that this happens. Secondly, cooperative learning has been proven to have numerous benefits such as improvements in achievement, performance, and enhanced class participation. Thus, more emphasis should be placed by the educational departments on promoting this method. In this way, students also have the ability to improve their communication skills and know how to implement cooperative learning precisely. This study shows that many students are already familiar with this method based on their responses. Therefore, it is obvious that students who participate in cooperative learning activities or projects, whether in the classroom or outside, could improve their level of achievement and attitude towards group work. This attitude needs to be cultivated which is very crucial in developing teamwork spirit among learners so that they can implement this at the workplace upon employment.

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