

Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in Enhancing Speaking Skills and Attitudes towards Learning English

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of cooperative learning in English language classrooms to enhance Yemeni students' speaking skills and attitudes. A quasi-experimental interrupted time series design was used with sixty undergraduates enrolled in the foundation English programme at Hadhramout University, Yemen. The data of the current study were gathered at multiple points of time before and after the end of the experiment to determine the effectiveness of cooperative learning on the sample's speaking skills and attitudes. In practical terms, the sample's speaking skills were first examined through an English oral test prior to and after some cooperative learning instructional activities were provided. Next, a five Likert scale- questionnaire was administered to the sample before and at the end of the course to identify students' attitudes towards the use of cooperative learning in English classes. The data were analyzed using basic and inferential statistical methods including mean scores, standard deviations, paired sample t-test, and effect size. The findings showed a remarkable development in the students' speaking skills and attitudes after the introduction of cooperative learning techniques. In light of the findings, the researchers recommend that teachers should benefit from applying CL in English classes, which may in turn develop students' speaking skills and attitudes.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, English speaking skills, Attitudes

1. Introduction

In Yemen, according to Al-Quyadi (2000:5), “English is used as a second language in the sense that it is the most dominant foreign language used in official, professional, academic and commercial circles”. It is taught as a subject in public and private institutions, schools and universities. As it is the language basically required for lucrative and powerful jobs, it is much in demand and becomes a must-have language for many individuals. Following this trend, all Yemeni universities offer compulsory prerequisite English language courses in the first year of BA programmes to promote students’ English speaking competence (Al-Tamimi and Pandian, 2008). However, Yemeni students are still weak in speaking skills and find difficulty in expressing themselves in English (Zuheer, 2008). According to Bose (2002) and Al-Sohbani (2013), EFL speaking courses in Yemeni schools are typically taught in large classes by teacher-centered lecturing, which ends up with skills of memorisation and recall, whereby students memorise their lessons and simply regurgitate the contents on demand. In this view, there is a central focus on grammar and vocabulary at the expense of communication. Students are provided with detailed rules and formulas about grammar (Bose, 2002). Teachers seem to do the most talking and act as the only source of knowledge to students, while students are treated as passive recipients in the learning process (Ning, 2011). This type of methods, according to Gomleksiz, (2007), has negatively affected students and produced incompetent users of the English language who are unable to improve their speaking skills in EFL classes.

In recent years, one of the greatest changes in foreign language pedagogy has been the shift from a teacher-centered learning model to a learner-centered model. This shift signals a new era in which English speaking instruction must give a chance for students to express themselves in speaking the language. A promising method to traditional speaking instruction is cooperative learning. It serves as an alternative way of teaching for promoting speaking and social interaction among students (Gomleksiz, 2007; Ning, 2011). Prior research suggests that cooperative learning is of great effect on developing students’ speaking skills (Pattanpichet, 2011; Liao, 2009) and also in improving their attitudes towards learning (Slavin, 1995). In Yemen, however, English speaking instruction within the framework of cooperative learning has not been tried yet at the tertiary level. In this study, the researchers compared cooperative learning instruction to traditional instruction to find out the effect of cooperative learning instructions on students’ English speaking skills and attitudes.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, English classes in Yemeni schools are rather teacher-centered (Bose, 2002) and probably this method impedes students’ speaking skills and attitudes. Little communication and interaction between students and teachers in the classroom are insufficient to enhance students’ English speaking, and also seldom satisfied Yemen’s workforce needs.

It has been reported that speaking practices in Yemeni universities, by and large, fail to improve students’ progress in speaking (Bose, 2002 and Al-Sohbani, 2013). Speaking skill in most of the Yemeni schools is based on teacher who is considered to be the authority of the classroom and students have no chance to practice their speaking skills and find difficulty in

expressing their thoughts in English (Al-Sohbani, 2013).

The use of cooperative learning in teaching speaking has been the subject of extensive research (Zakaria & Zanaton, 2007). A big portion of studies indicate that the use of cooperative learning techniques can lead to positive attitudes towards cooperative learning and increased speaking skills (Suhendan & Bengu, 2014; Ning and Hornby, 2010; Ning, 2011; Pattanpichet, 2011; Yang, 2005). Cooperative learning methods, which differ from traditional learning methods, have some benefits resulting from social interaction between students (Levine, 2002). Classroom social interaction, according to Mackey (2007) and Ellis (2003), is beneficial to overall language development. It has been observed that students who interact and speak achieve better in oral skills in most cases than those who always keep silent (Khadidja, 2010).

English speaking ability is one of the most important skills to be developed and enhanced in language learners, particularly in an academic setting (Morozova, 2013). The preceding scenario shows that there is a need to improve the current level of speaking skill among university students in Yemen. This calls for immediate action to be taken. As noted earlier, the effects of cooperative learning on students' speaking skills and attitudes have been repeatedly demonstrated and confirmed by studies conducted in L1 and L2 learning environments (e.g. Ning and Hornby, 2010; Ning, 2011; Talebi and Sobhani, 2012; Pattanpichet, 2011 and Sühendan & Bengü, 2014). However, studies on this area with EFL students in Yemen are none and far between. Thus further investigation to examine whether the positive effect of cooperative learning also holds true for improving Yemeni students' speaking skills and attitudes, still calls for empirical validation. Therefore, it is the view of the researchers that Yemeni university students can improve their academic performance if they are taught or trained to become effective and competent speakers.

Taking all the above into account, there appears to be an urgent need to create a cooperative learning environment in the Yemeni EFL classrooms to enhance students' speaking skills and attitudes in which teachers work as facilitators in the learning process and motivate creativity and cooperation among students. With these research incentives in mind, the researchers formulate the following research objectives and questions.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to

- 1) find out the effect of cooperative learning on developing students' speaking skills.
- 2) identify the effect of cooperative learning on students' attitudes.

1.4 Questions of the Study

The study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does the effect of cooperative learning develop speaking skills among university students?
- 2) What affect does the cooperative learning have on students' attitudes?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of the study springs out of the fact that CL plays a major role in language learning contexts. Current research seems to validate this view that cooperative learning increases the social interaction among students and consequently leads to improving communication skills among them. University teachers will benefit from this study through using the up-to-date teaching methods used in the study, i.e. cooperative learning. English language classroom should no longer be dominated by the teacher but should be more student-oriented with the teacher adopting the role of facilitator. By doing so, it adds variety to teaching and learning context and making it fun for the students to improve their speaking skills. Furthermore, there are no studies, to our knowledge, investigated the effect of cooperative learning on improving university students' speaking skills and attitudes in Yemen. There is insufficient research effort, particularly in Yemen, to draw any firm conclusions on the centrality of cooperative learning in the teaching and learning process of English.

2. Theoretical Background

The basic theoretical premises of cooperative learning and speaking performance are presented in this section. In addition to this, some previous studies which carried out to examine the effect of cooperative learning on developing students' speaking skills and attitudes are reviewed.

2.1 Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning (hereafter referred to as CL) is defined as a set of instructional methods through which students are encouraged to work on academic tasks (Slavin, 1995). It also refers to a teaching technique where students work in groups on a certain activity in order to maximize one another's learning and to achieve certain goals (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). In CL, students work in small groups to help one another in learning academic content (Slavin, 1995). Teaching and learning process using CL techniques is a learner-centered paradigm which has gained popularity as alternative to the lecture-based paradigm. Much of the current research revolves around the notion that CL has positive effects on various outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). Most studies on the effects of CL have consistently indicated that this method improves students' English oral skills (Pattanpichet, 2011); English reading comprehension (Bolukbas, Keskin, and Polat, 2011; Meng, 2010; Law, 2011) and English writing (Roddy, 2009).

The role of teachers using CL method shifts from transmitters of knowledge to mediators of learning (Calderon, 1990). This role involves facilitating, modeling and coaching. Teachers adopting this role should maintain a safe, non-threatening and learner centered environment. This environment of teaching will help students contribute positively in the cooperative activities assigned to their group (Ning, 2011). For the activities to be genuinely cooperative, each type of activity requires the presence of five basic components of the CL (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991). Given the centrality of this concept to the current study, CL basic components are given below:

2.1.1 Basic Components of CL

There are five key components which differentiate CL from simply putting students into groups to learn (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 2006). The first one is **Positive interdependence**. It refers to the idea that students are required to work together in order to achieve common learning objectives. In this case, students must believe that they are linked and that they either sink or swim in such a way that one cannot succeed if others do not succeed. Students need each other for support, explanations, and guidance. Without the help of one member, the group will not be able to achieve the desired objective. The second one is **individual accountability**. It implies that each team member is responsible for his/her fair share to the group's success. It is important that the group knows who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in completing the task. It is also vital that group members know they cannot "hitchhike" on the work of others (Jolliffe, 2007). It requires each student in the group to develop a sense of personal responsibility to learn and help the rest of the group to learn also. The third component is **promotive interaction**. It refers to the interaction of students in order to help each other accomplish the task and the group's shared goals. Students are required to interact verbally with one another on learning tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). They are also expected to explain things to each other, teach others, and provide each other with help, support, and encouragement. The fourth component is **interpersonal and social skills**. It refers to the skills such as giving constructive feedback, reaching consensus, communication accurately and unambiguously and involving every member in the learning process. However, not all students know these skills. They must be taught and practiced such skills before the groups tackle a learning task. Therefore, teachers should carefully and explicitly teach their students the required skills. The teacher is not a person who measures the capacities of the students in terms of the final product, but somebody who acts as a friend, coordinator, director, guide, counselor, and facilitator (Cowie et al 1994). **Finally, group processing** is an important aspect of CL. It requires group members to assess their functions and contribution to the success of all tasks. It focuses on positive behaviours and actions rather than on negative ones and involves students thinking about how they learn. Additionally, the teacher may choose to spend time specifically focusing on improving a skill such as speaking. The teacher can then monitor the different groups during the learning activities and provide feedback on what has been observed.

2.2 Speaking Skill

Speaking is the verbal use of language and a medium through which human beings communicate with each other (Fulcher, 2003). It is the most demanding skill that people need to communicate in everyday situations. Generally, speaking is the ability to express something in a spoken language. It is simply concerning putting ideas into words to make other people grasp the message that is conveyed. In this study, the term "speaking" is one of the four skills related to language teaching and learning.

At present, English has developed and expanded in the Arab world (Kharma, 1998; Zughoul, 2003). It is widely used as an instrumental language for various purposes and enjoys a higher status than in the past (Kharma, 1998). According to Zughoul (2003), English in the Arab

world is now associated with advancement in technology, trade, tourism, the Internet, science, commerce, politics, and so forth which have made English the most important language in different aspects of life. As a result, the ability to speak is required in many of the above fields, if not in all of them. However, most of Arab EFL students have difficulties in speaking English. They have troubles with pronunciation, vocabularies, grammar, fluency and comprehension.

Considering the foregoing problem, EFL teachers should train students to develop their oral communication. According to Brown (2007), oral communication can be maintained by having three components. The first one is **fluency** which is the ability to speak spontaneously and eloquently with no pausing and with absence of disturbing hesitation markers. It also refers to some aspects like responding coherently within the turns of the conversation, using linking words and phrases, keeping in mind a comprehensible pronunciation and adequate intonation without too much hesitation (Richards, 2006). The second component is **accuracy**. It refers to the mastery of phonology elements, grammar and discourse. It also refers to the linguistic competence that deals with the correction of the utterances to get a correct communication. According Thornbury (2005), speaking English accurately means doing without or with few errors on not only grammar but vocabulary and pronunciation. The third component is **pronunciation**. It is “the production and perception of the significant sounds of a particular language in order to achieve meaning in context of language use. This comprises the production and perception of segmental sounds of stressed and unstressed syllables and of the speech melody or intonation” (Carter & Nunan, 2004:56). Without a good pronunciation, listeners cannot understand what another person says and this will make the communication process more difficult. Therefore, pronunciation has a central role in both academic and social fields in the way that students can be able to participate and integrate successfully in their community. In conclusion, fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation are three important and complementary components in the development of students’ speaking skill.

Given the main components of speaking skill, EFL instructors are appealed to introduce speaking activities. The types of activities that can be used are performance, guided and creative activities. The choice of these activities depends upon what we want learners to do. The first activity is **performance activities**. They provide students with opportunities to communicate in the target language. Teachers and students at this point should concentrate on the meaning and intelligibility of the utterance, not the grammatical correctness. With practice, grammar errors should disappear. The second is **guided activities**. They are such as repetition practice or set sentences prompted by picture or word cues, aim to improve the accurate use of words, structures and pronunciation. In **guided activities** the focus is usually on accuracy, and the teacher makes it clear from feedback that accuracy is important. Some examples of activities for controlled practices are: Find Someone Who, questionnaires, information gap etc. **Guided activities** include model dialogues which students can change to talk about themselves and to communicate their own needs and ideas, and tasks which the students carry out using language taught beforehand. Finally **creative activities** are usually designed to give either creative practice opportunities for predicted language items, or general fluency practice, where the specific language focus is less relevant. Some activities

for freer practice are: interaction or information gap, role-playing, simulations, free discussion, games, a jigsaw puzzle, and problem-solving. These activities are combined with cooperative techniques to motivate students and improve their speaking skill (Hedge, 2008). These types of activities are important in teaching language for communication and help create interaction in the language classroom (Johnson & Morrow, 1981).

In a nutshell, there is a need to investigate the use of CL instruction in teaching speaking in Yemeni classrooms. This can be done through carrying out an experimental study to investigate the effect of CL in enhancing students' speaking skills and attitudes. It is very important for students to fulfill good competence in speaking skills as being a skilled speaker becomes crucial to express one's thoughts in and outside schools.

2.3 Previous Studies

Many researchers have conducted studies to find out how better to use CL in developing students' speaking skills and attitudes in tertiary levels. Pattanpichet (2011) conducted an experimental study to investigate the effects of using CL in promoting students' speaking achievement. Thirty five undergraduate students participated in the study. The students were enrolled in a main English course at Bangkok University to examine their speaking achievement on an English oral test before and after they had participated in provided instructional tasks based on cooperative learning approach. To explore the students' views on the use of the CL, they were asked to complete a student diary after finishing each task, fill in a four scale-rating questionnaire, and join a semi-structured interview at the end of the course. The data were analyzed by frequency, means, standard deviation, t-test, effect size and content analysis. The findings reveal the improvement of the students' speaking performance and positive feedback from the students on the use of collaborative learning activities. The study provides suggestions and recommendation for further investigations.

Talebi and Sobhani (2012) conducted a study on the impact of CL on English language learners' speaking proficiency. Experimental design was used with 40 male and female students as a sample enrolled in a speaking course at an IELTS Center in Mashhad, Iran, were involved in the study. They were assigned randomly to control and experimental groups. The two groups were homogeneous in terms of their oral proficiency before carrying out this study. An oral interview was conducted to collect the data of the study. The control group received instructions in speaking; three sessions per week for one month, while the experimental group was taught speaking skills through CL. The results of the study showed that the performance of the experimental group on oral interview held at the end of the course outperformed the control group. The mean score of the experimental group was significantly higher than the control group.

An experimental study carried out by Ning (2011) to find out the effect of CL in enhancing tertiary students' fluency and communication. It aimed to offer students more opportunities for language production and thus enhancing their fluency and effectiveness in communication. The test result showed students' English competence in skills and vocabulary in CL classes was superior to whole-class instruction, particularly in speaking, listening, and reading.

Ning and Hornby (2010) conducted a study to investigate the effects of CL on Chinese EFL learners' competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary. Participants were 100 first-year College English learners from a university in the north of China. A pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design was employed to study the effects of the CL approach on students' language competencies in comparison to traditional instruction. Findings revealed clear differences in favour of the CL approach in the teaching of listening, speaking and reading but no differences were found between the two approaches in the areas of writing and vocabulary.

Sühendan & Bengü (2014) investigated ELT students' attitudes towards CL. A questionnaire was given to 166 (F=100, M=66) university students whose ages were between 18-20 and were all studying at preparatory school and of different faculties. A questionnaire inquiring on the students' attitudes on CL was administered. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analyses. It was shown that 66,9% of the students were at the side of CL in ELT classes whereas 33,1% of them believed that if they worked alone they would have better results and they thought working alone was more enjoyable. A focus group was organized and the students mentioned both negative and positive sides of cooperative work. Furthermore, the findings reported that there were differences in gender and attitudes towards CL for the good of females.

Yang (2005) compared the effectiveness of CL and traditional teaching methods on Taiwanese college students' English oral performance and motivation towards learning. Sixty Taiwanese college students from two intact classes were involved in the study. A quasi-experimental with non-equivalent control group pre-test post-test design was used. The total experimental period was eight weeks of instruction. The subjects were administered a pre-test and post-test, using the intermediate-level, speaking component of the GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) as well as the MIQ (Motivational Intensity Questionnaire) as a pre-test and post-test in the study. One-way ANCOVA was used to analyze the speaking component (intermediate level) of the GEPT scores and MIQ results. Data collection and analyses explored the effects of CL on the Taiwanese college students in terms of English oral performance and motivation to learn in favour of the cooperative learning.

3. Methodology

Since randomization was not feasible, the current study employed quasi-experimental with a non-equivalent control group pre-test post-test design. Two intact classes were selected through non-random assignment. One class with 30 students was selected as a control group, and the other class with 30 students was used as an experimental group. The independent variable of this study is the CL proposed for this study versus the traditional method used for teaching speaking. The dependent variables are the students' speaking skill and attitudes. The dependent variables were measured by comparing the students' speaking skills and attitudes in the pre-test with the students' speaking skill and attitudes in the post-test. The experimental group received instruction in speaking skills based on the CL and the students of the control group were not exposed to this treatment and they were only exposed to the regular way of teaching followed in the college. Both groups were similar in sharing the same learning

materials, schedule and tests.

3.1 Research Sample

The participants in this study were 60 students studying in the first year of the English Department at Hadhramout University. The subjects were of similar age, ranging from 19 to 20 years at the time of conducting the study. They are all Yemenis studying English as a foreign language. They were all homogeneous with regard to age, sex, ethnicity, mother tongue, exposure to English and educational and cultural background.

The researchers assigned two experienced teachers to teach the experimental and control groups. The experimental group teacher was trained by the researchers of the current study in how to employ the CL instruction before the start of treatment, while the control group teacher followed the same regular way of teaching speaking skill adopted in the college. The two teachers had similar experiences on teaching speaking skills. All the classes were having the same hours of learning speaking skill during the time of the experiment.

3.2 Research Instruments

The study mainly used two research instruments. **The first one** was speaking test used as a pre- test and – post-test to measure students' English speaking performance. The test contains three tasks: talking about picture differences, reading a text aloud, and expressing one's opinion about a particular topic. The scoring rubric of the test provided a measure of quality of performance on the basis of five criteria: pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, fluency and interactive communication on a five-rating scale ranging from 90- 100 meaning "excellent" to 0-49 meaning "fail" based on the scales followed at Hadhramout University-Yemen (Ministry of Higher Education, 2008). Validity of a test is an important feature for a research instrument (Wiersma, 2000). An instrument is said to have validity if it measures exactly what it is supposed to measure. All the items in the speaking test were reviewed by the researchers as self-validation. Then the items were given to three experts to ensure the content validity of the test. The experts were asked to validate and evaluate the test by completing a checklist for validating the English speaking test. The results of the experts' evaluation of the test and the scoring rubric showed that all of the criteria used to assess the test on the five-scale indicating positive opinions of the experts. Reliability of speaking test in this study was estimated by test-retest method. It involved administering the same test twice to a group of students within the span of a few days (10 days) and calculating a correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores. The assumption was that the testees would get the same scores on the first and the second administrations of the same test. This statistical method was adopted in order to obtain the reliability of the speaking test. The estimated reliability of the speaking test in the current study was 0.85 measured through Cronbach's Alpha. Another essential component to test reliability is that of inter-rater reliability. As it relates to the current study, inter-rater reliability is the degree of agreement between two scorers. If the level of reliability between the two scorers reaches the level of significance, this may indicate that the two scorers are fair in their scoring. In the current study, the correlation coefficients obtained for the two scorers are 0.910 and 0.914, respectively, indicating quite high inter-rater reliabilities. Therefore, this test is reliable and valid for

experimentation and could be considered as a research tool for measuring the sample's speaking test.

A scoring rubric, adopted from Ministry of Higher Education – Yemen (2008), was used along with the scoring sheet for the purpose of grading. The grading of the speaking skills was based upon five criteria: (1) pronunciation (20%), (2) grammatical accuracy (3) vocabulary (20%), (4) fluency (20%), and (5) interactive communication (20%).

The second instrument is a questionnaire which was used to measure students' attitudes towards CL before and after the experiment. It was developed by McLeish (2009) and it has twelve 5-point Likert-type scale items, ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. All the items were written to find out the students' attitudes towards using cooperative method in learning speaking skill. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were initially determined by its originator.

3.3 Procedures

Before the start of the experiment, oral performance test and attitudinal questionnaire were administered to the students in the control and the experimental groups. After that, the actual experiment began. Students in the control group were taught through the traditional method of teaching speaking skill, while the students in the experimental group were taught through using CL. Students in the experimental group were divided into six groups each consists of 5 students. However, the students were given a choice to select their group members to work with on alternate weeks during study duration, i.e. three months. Throughout the group work, each member had to present a topic. Then each group discussed a chosen topic, exchanged the ideas, helped each other and shared knowledge. Each group member was assigned a role and responsibility that must be fulfilled if the group is to function. Those roles were assigned to ensure interdependence. At the end of the study, post-tests of oral performance and students' attitudes towards CL were given to the students.

3.4 Statistical Methods

Three approaches were used in order to analyze the data of the study. To find out the effect of CL on speaking competence and attitudes, descriptive statistics including mean scores, standard deviations of the pre- and post-tests were used. Inferential analysis was used to find out if any significant differences were found between the control group and experimental group in both the pre- and post-tests. However, statistical significance does not tell us the most important thing about the size of the effect. One way to overcome this confusion is to report the effect size which is simply a way of quantifying the size of the difference between two groups (Thalheimer & Cook, 2002). It is particularly valuable for quantifying the effectiveness of a particular intervention, relative to some comparison (Coe, 2002). In this study, the effect size was reported using the effect size “**d**” as proposed by Cohen (1992). The justification for using Cohen's “**d**” stems from “its burgeoning popularity” among large numbers of published studies (Thalheimer & Cook, 2002:2). Additionally, Cohen's “**d**” has a benchmark by which a researcher can compare the effect size of an experiment to a well-known benchmark (ibid). The criteria recommended by Cohen for interpreting the effect

size are as follows: 0.20 is considered a small effect, 0.50 is a medium effect size, and 0.80 is a large effect size.

4. Results

The main results are presented and displayed based on the questions of the study. The data obtained from the pre-/post-test of the oral performance and the attitudes were analyzed and interpreted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were used to answer the research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent does the effect of CL develop speaking skills among university students? The overall average mean score of the experimental group on the pre-test was 63.37 with a standard deviation of 10.17, while that of the control group was 63.63 with a standard deviation of 9.55. As shown in Table 1, the speaking performance mean scores of the experimental group were all similar to the scores of the control group. Relative to each other, both the control and the experimental groups were similar in their speaking skills before carrying out the experiment.

Table 1. Overall average mean-scores and standard deviations of the experimental and control group in the pre-test of speaking performance

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Experimental Group pr-test	30	63.37	10.17
Control Group Pr-test	30	63.63	9.55

To determine if there is any significant statistical difference between the students who were taught speaking skill using traditional instruction and those who had been exposed to CL, a paired sample t-test was conducted. Table 2 demonstrates a lack of any significant statistical difference at the confidence level of $\alpha=0.05$ between the students in the control and experimental groups before the experiment. The t-value $-0.779 > 0.05$ reveals that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the pre-test ($\alpha=0.05$). Thus, it is evident that the two groups had the same level of English speaking competence before the experiment.

Table 2. Paired samples t-test of the experimental and the control groups in the speaking performance test prior to experimentation

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Pre-test	-.26667	1.87420	.34218	-.96651	.43317	-.779	29	.442

However, the mean score of the experimental group on the post-test was 69.00 with a standard deviation of 9.98, while that of the control group on the post-test was 63.63 with a standard deviation of 9.77. Table 3 presents the speaking competence mean scores of the experimental group in the post-test which were all higher than the scores of the control group.

This result provides confirmatory evidence of a noticeable increase in the post-test mean score of speaking skill in favour of the experimental group.

Table 3. Overall average mean scores and standard deviations of the experimental and control group in the post-test of speaking performance

Group	N	mean	Std Deviation
Experimental Group posttest	30	69.00	9.98
Control Group Posttest	30	63.63	9.77

To ensure if the difference between mean score of the control and experimental groups in the post-test is statistically significant, a paired sample t- test was run. Table 4 shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the post-test between the experimental and control groups in of favour of the experimental group with t- value =8.781, $p = .000 < 0.05$.

Table 4. Paired samples t-test of the experimental and the control groups in post-test of the speaking performance

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Post-test	5.3666	3.3475	.61117	4.1167	6.6166	8.781	29	.000

To further compare differences between the experimental group and control group and to find out the effect size of the CL on students' speaking competence, the overall post-test scores of the two groups were compared. The result revealed an effect size of 0.55 which is interpreted as a medium effect size of the independent variable (CL) on the dependent variable (speaking skill).

Research Question Two: To answer the second question: What affect does the cooperative learning have on students' attitudes?, a questionnaire was distributed among students and mean scores and standard deviations were calculated. Results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Mean scores and standard deviation of the experimental and control groups in the pre- attitudinal questionnaire

Group	N	mean	Std Deviation
Experimental Group pr-test	30	2.36	0.83
Control Group Pr-test	30	2.38	0.77

Table 5 shows that the mean score of the experimental group on the pre-test was 2.36 with a standard deviation of 0.83, while that of the control group was 2.38 with a standard deviation of 0.77. Attitudes mean scores for the students in the experimental group were all similar to the scores of the students in the control group. The data appear to suggest that both groups were similar in their attitudes towards CL before carrying out the experiment.

To determine if there is a significant statistical difference between the students who were taught by using CL techniques and those who have not been provided CL activities, a paired sample t-test was carried out. Table 6 clearly reflects that there is no any statistically significant difference between the students before the experiment. That is, the resultant t-value was (.735) with $p. 0.93 > 0.05$ illustrates that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the pre-test. Thus, it can be judged that the two groups were at a similar level of attitudes towards CL before the experiment.

Table 6. Paired samples t-test of the experimental and control groups in the attitudinal questionnaire prior to experimentation

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test	.93333	2.94704	.53805	-.16711	2.03378	1.735	29	.093

However, the mean score for the experimental group on the post-test is 2.84 with a standard deviation of 0.46, while that of the control group on the posttest is 2.47 with a standard deviation of 0.61. As shown in Table 7, the attitudes mean scores of the experimental group in the post-test are all higher than the scores of the control group. The available evidence points to an increase in the post-test mean score of students' attitudes in favour of the experimental group.

Table 7. Mean scores and standard deviation of the experimental and control groups in the post- attitudinal questionnaire

Group	N	mean	Std Deviation
Experimental Group posttest	30	2.84	0.46
Control Group Posttest	30	2.47	0.61

To determine if there is a significant statistical difference between the students who were taught by using CL and those who were not, a paired sample t-test was run. A significant statistical difference can be seen in Table 8 between students' attitudes, in the experimental group, towards CL in the post-test with t- value =-11.317, $p=.000 < 0.05$.

Table 8. Paired Samples t-Test of the Experimental and the Control Groups in the Attitudes towards CL after experiment

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Post-test	-11.06667	5.35584	.97784	-13.06657	-9.06676	-11.317	29	.000

To further compare differences between the experimental group and control group and to find out the effect size of the CL on students' attitudes, overall post-test scores of the two groups were compared. The result revealed an effect size of 0.69 interpreted as a medium effect size for the independent variable (CL) on the dependent variable (attitudes).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal positive outcomes both in terms of Yemeni EFL students' oral performance and attitudes towards the use of CL as a new instructional method in English speaking classrooms in Yemen. The findings of the study are discussed based on the two research questions of the study.

The first research question sought to find out whether CL has any effect on improving speaking skill of the Yemeni university EFL students in the sample. The performance of the experimental group after being exposed to CL activities showed a significant difference between the results of the experimental and control groups. Experimental group showed positive score difference and/or improvement after CL method was introduced as a teaching technique in speaking skill classrooms. Whereas the performance of the control group which was exposed to traditional method in learning speaking skill showed no significant difference between the results of the pre- and post-tests of the speaking skill. This could be attributed to the fact that the traditional teaching method in Yemen is a teacher-based in which less opportunity is given to students to practice their speaking skills in classrooms. This finding is consistent with the finding of Ning and Hornby (2010) that showed significant difference scores between the pre- and post- tests in favour of the experimental group which was provided with CL treatment in listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary. The result had proven that CL is essential for maximizing speaking proficiency. Along similar lines, the finding of Johnson & Johnson and Mary Stanne (2000) lend support to the claim that CL resulted in higher individual achievement. The findings of this study provide confirmatory evidence in support of the results gained by Talebi and Sobhani (2012) Pattanpichet (2011), Ning (2011) and Yang (2005) which asserted that CL approach can contribute to the improvement of students' speaking proficiency. A closer look at the data of the current study indicates that the CL is highly recommended than the traditional method in teaching English speaking skill at university level in Yemen. The study signifies the possibility of implementing the CL method in Yemeni schools and, thus, Yemeni EFL learners can increase their communicative ability.

The second research question sought to find out whether CL could improve students' attitudes better than the conventional method. Significant differences were found between the students' attitudes in the experimental group and the control group. The participants in the CL classes have a more positive attitude towards speaking skill compared to the participants who were exposed to the traditional approach. The results in this study support the findings of Sühendan & Bengü (2014) who found that the CL method enhanced students' attitudes. In this regard, it must be noted that there are many positive outcomes as a result of using the CL approach as reported in numerous research studies which concluded that students who completed CL group tasks tended to have higher academic test scores and greater comprehension of the skills they are studying (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec 1993; Slavin 1991).

6. Further Research

The foregoing discussion implies that not only does CL improve speaking skill, but can strongly and indirectly enhance students' attitudes. The skill that has been investigated in this study was speaking. Hence, future research should also focus on whether the same results will be yielded by investigating the impact of CL on other English skills such as writing and reading. Future research should also replicate the same study on all other disciplines, in urban or rural areas. Based on the findings of the current study, it is recommended that English teachers should adopt CL as an effective learning method in order to improve student's speaking performance. Finally, in respect of the findings and the other empirical findings, we suggest that the CL should be part of the daily instructional methods used in all the teacher training programmes in Yemen. It is the responsibility of teachers to be aware of the various learning preferences that students bring to classroom and to try to take full advantage of them during the daily teaching and learning process. The application of the CL method should be tested on different levels of education, such as elementary, secondary and higher education. This study only lasted for one term. Therefore, prospective researchers should take a longer time to cross validate the results of the current study.

7. Conclusion

CL as student-centered approach improves speaking skill and attitudes among the students in this study. Therefore, teachers in schools, especially teachers who teach English speaking skills need to be aware of the benefits and importance of CL. There are positive changes taking place when teachers change their teaching methods towards a more student-centered approach. Teachers need to master the types of speaking techniques to be used and plan how to implement them with the CL method. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to practice this method regularly and effectively. There is overwhelming evidence corroborating the notion that CL has a positive effect on the formation of positive attitudes towards speaking among students. Finally and on the basis of the evidence provided by this research, it seems quite reasonable to state that CL has many benefits, such as improving speaking skills and attitudes. Although, there is no 'perfect methodology', CL is an instructional method which is effective in enhancing the acquisition of English speaking skills and improving students' attitudes.

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