



The Effect of Cooperative Learning on Students' Speaking Self-efficacy

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the improvement of student's speaking self-efficacy employing cooperative learning. One group of 31 participants studying in Mattayom Suksa 5 (Grade 11), Phanomphrai Wittayakarn School who possessed different levels of English proficiency were taught with six different CL activities for six weeks. The treatment took 50 minutes per session. The data was collected through a pre- and post-treatment questionnaire with the 5-point Likert scale to examine the change of students' speaking self-efficacy while the student written journal log was employed to evaluate the opinions of students towards their speaking self-efficacy. The findings showed the progress of students' speaking self-efficacy in all levels especially Group B (level B1). In light of student feedback, a positive trend was shown. From the findings, it is recommended for teachers to employ cooperative learning in the class to create a stress-free environment and to enhance students' speaking self-efficacy. The results of this study can be taken into consideration by course designers, teachers, and learners.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, Self-efficacy, Attitudes

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Introduction

In the world of language learning, finding the most effective teaching strategies is a challenge. Teaching method had been evolved from time to time. Grammar-translation was the first language teaching which focus on written form and teachers were considered Mr. and Mrs. Know-all for students. To response the global need for communication, communicative approach emerged. Under the umbrella of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Cooperative Learning or CL is one of the most effective and widely-used in language teaching around the world because of its benefits on academic achievement and interpersonal skills [1-3].

On top of teaching strategy, students' attitude toward learning is considered essential for learners to remain persistent and overcome learning difficulties. Self-efficacy or a belief in one's ability to complete a task with a substantial result [4] is strongly related to learners' expectation about what they will be able to achieve during their learning [5]. Students who are self-efficacious tend to be inspired and keen to make progress even on challenging tasks and be more persistent under pressure [6 - 8]. Moreover, students with a level of self-efficacy incline to capable to not only learn through various learning techniques, but also realize how to evaluate their learning [6].

As in many other developing countries, the role of English in Thailand is quite important and specific attention has been devoted to the design of curriculum in order to respond to the global pace of change in accordance with Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 [9]. However, English teaching and learning in Thai schools seems not meet the standard of global demand.

Despite an enormous effect dedicated to improve Thai students' English competence, their English performance remains under criteria. Especially English-speaking skill, it is the most concern and huge problem among Thai students in all levels. Why? According to Prasongporn [9] and Wiriachitra [10], they mentioned following reasons; 1) lack of confidence, 2) being afraid of making mistakes, 3) being too shy to express their feelings, and 4) being passive for a long time and lack of willingness to communicate. Anyadubalu [11] argued that factors that might influence learners' competence can be divided into 2 groups; language and extra-language. The former includes proficiency in the use of foreign language and the latter includes motivation, lack of practice, the structure and setting of the classroom, and self-efficacy. As already stated, self-efficacy is a belief in one's capability in doing a task, and it seems to be lacking in most Thai students, who have been surrounded with a passive learning atmosphere for a long time and are reluctant to communicate.

In the light of effectiveness of CL, this study aimed to investigate the change of students' speaking self-efficacy after the treatment of CL under the hypothesis that the modification of self-efficacy, consequently, would have an impact on students' performance. In brief, students may be able to enhance their speaking skill if self-efficacy is developed.

Objectives of the study

1. Do CL activities have an influence on EFL learners' self-efficacy?
2. What are students' opinions regarding their own speaking self-efficacy?

Methodology

Research Design

The current study used mixed method design of quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (thematic analysis). The participants who were studying in Mattayom Suksa 5 (Grade 11) in Phanomphrai Wittayakarn School were taught with six different CL activities for six weeks. The treatment was conducted once a week; one period per week. Each period took about 50 minutes. The researcher was the primary teacher, but there was one co-teacher who was able to communicate in English well so that she could help monitor the class.

Research Participants

The participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling method. Out of the 182 students who were studying in Mattayom Suksa 5 (Grade 11) in Phanomphrai Wittayakarn School, 31 students, 25 females and six males, were selected to be participants since they enrolled in a gifted program. They possessed varying English proficiency from A2 to B2 CEFR levels according to their test scores in the previous semester. In term of English communication, their level was considered intermediate and tended to understand simple instructions.

Research Instruments

To answer the two research questions, two main instruments were employed in this study: (1) *The Speaking Skills Self-efficacy Beliefs questionnaire* to assess learners' level of speaking self-efficacy, and (2) learner-written journal in Thai to inspect learners' opinions towards their own speaking self-efficacy.

The Speaking Skills Self-efficacy Beliefs questionnaire

The *Speaking Skills Self-efficacy Beliefs questionnaire* adopted from Asakereh and Dehghannezhad [12] was employed in this study to assess the learners' self-efficacy before and after using CL activities. It contained 28 items with responses using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from one (Strongly disagree) to five (Strongly agree). It was administered twice: before and after the treatment.

A journal log in Thai

A journal log in Thai was written by all participants twice during the treatment (1) at the end of week 3 and (2) the end of week 6 to obtain students' opinions toward their own speaking self-efficacy after the treatment of CL in using English in different situations: inside classroom, outside classroom, with teacher and with peers.

Research Procedures

This current study was conducted during the first semester of the 2018 academic year. The researcher had designed the six lessons to use six different CL activities: (1) Inside-Outside Circle, (2) Round Robin, (3) Numbered Heads, (4) Spot the difference, (5) Match Mine, and (6) Talking Chips. To avoid an uncomfortable atmosphere, Inside-outside circle, known as one of the noisiest CL activities, was utilized in the first lesson to initiate students' speaking self-efficacy while working in the whole class. Round Robin and Numbered Heads were used to reduce the number of group members to four and to allow a large percentage of students to process information at once. To limit the number of interlocutors to pairs and promote the frequency of speaking, Spot the difference and Match Mine were employed. The last CL technique which was used for this current study was Talking Chips, which aims to promote individual's

speaking self-efficacy through regulating discussion, ensuring that everyone has to participate even those who are shy and lack confidence.

In advance of the treatment, the lesson plans were reviewed by English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals. The content in the lesson plan was aligned with the questionnaire to make sure that the changes among participants were from what they were taught during the treatment. In addition, the pre-teaching of CL was arranged to enlighten students whose possess different backgrounds and experiences about how different CL procedure was from the lecture-based learning that they were used to. Thus, the training before the treatment is considered important [13-14].

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2016 to determine whether CL had an impact on students' self-efficacy. An emergent thematic analysis was utilized for the journal log data to determine what students shared through their journal log.

Results

The findings of the questionnaire

Table 1 Average speaking self-efficacy between pre and post treatment

	Number of students	Mean	SD
Pre-treatment	31	2.97	0.93
Post-treatment	31	3.29	0.91

Table 1 displays the comparison of average speaking self-efficacy of all participants on the pre-treatment and post-treatment questionnaires. The mean score increased from 2.97 to 3.29. The standard deviation decreased from 0.93 in the pre-treatment questionnaire to 0.91 in the post-treatment.

In addition, the increase of average speaking self-efficacy of all participants in all items is revealed (Table 2). Precisely, both before and after treatment, item number 2 (I am sure that if I practice speaking more, I will get better grades in the course) has the highest mean score, and item number 16 (I feel confident that I can achieve a native-like accuracy in speaking) has the lowest mean score. The findings show that the students generally believe that they will get better grades from practicing their speaking skill, yet they are not as fluent as native speakers are.

The results of learner-written journal logs

The participants were asked to compose a journal in Thai twice; after week 3 and week 6 treatments to discuss four topics; (1) confidence in speaking English inside the classroom, (2) confidence in speaking English outside the classroom, (3) confidence in speaking English with peers, and (4) confidence in speaking English with the teacher. These four situations were appointed in accordance with the items in the questionnaire used in this study to assure the reliability of the findings. To collect data, the participants were asked to compose only a few sentences in Thai to ensure

straight-to-the-point feedback and ease of analysis. Since bias can occur and has an effect on the result, the collected data was analyzed using emergent thematic analysis; that is, the themes were not set prior to the analysis; rather, the analysis was conducted after what students wrote in their journal log. Four main groups emerged along with one “others” of statements that were not related to each other or to any of the four main groups namely (1) less nervous (2) have fun (3) afraid of making mistakes (4) have some hesitation, and (5) other respectively. The most frequent theme was that being afraid of making mistakes (104 total students). In contrast, the least frequent was the other category, i.e. feedback that did not belong to any of the four main themes (26 total students). To follow up the students’ feedback and obtain more accurate and reliable findings, students were asked to give their feedback again after week-6 treatment (Table 4).

Two common themes namely being less nervous and having fun were shown in after week-3 and 6 treatment. These two feelings occurred with students in all levels both before and after treatment. However, negative feelings like being afraid of making mistakes or having some hesitation were common only before treatment. After treatment, the students had more positive answers of being more confident and willing to speak. This demonstrates clearly that constructive conversion happened during the treatment of CL activities.

Discussion and Conclusions

Research Question 1: Do CL activities have any influence on EFL learners’ self-efficacy?

This research question is based on the hypothesis that students speaking self-efficacy can be improved employing CL activities. This hypothesis is consistent with two of Bandura’s [15] four sources of self-efficacy: mastery and vicarious experiences. The researcher assumed that CL activities might create those experiences during the treatment by providing students with opportunities to learn how to deal with obstacles they might confront and overcome as mastery experiences. Moreover, they would learn from observing peers’ failures and successes as vicarious experiences.

A significant relationship between CL and students’ speaking self-efficacy was shown in this study. The findings showed a positive trend of higher speaking self-efficacy among students. This is in agreement with the studies of Suwantarathip and Wichadee [16], whose findings on the impacts of CL on anxiety and proficiency in an EFL class were that the students were less anxious and more self-efficacious after the treatment of three CL activities, namely Think- Pair- Share, Numbered Heads Together, and Peer Review. Students believed that their anxiety decreased and their confidence increased. The reason for these findings suggested by Suwantarathip and Wichadee [16] was that this learning method provided opportunities to share and interact in pairs and groups. When working in groups, students feel more relaxed and dare to speak out since they do not need to focus on form rather than function. The current findings are also consistent with Worde’s [17] findings on the factors that reduce anxiety include a sense of community. When students work individually, they might feel alone and more self-conscious. Working in groups or having peers seems to reduce anxiety, create a more comfortable learning atmosphere, and increase self-efficacy.

However, there are some research studies that have found the opposite trend. Mari and Gumel [18] investigated the effects of Jigsaw on self-efficacy and academic achievement in Chemistry among concrete and formal reasoners in a college of education in Nigeria. In that study there was no significant effect on self-efficacy of students in either group when exposed to a CL method, even though the latter's achievement was significantly better than the former's. The result of Mari and Gumel [18] was in line with the study of Sengul and Katranci [19] whose research was to examine self-efficacy perceptions of seventh grade students in the Sakarya province of Turkey. The findings showed no significant difference in the level of self-efficacy perceived in mathematics.

The possible reasons to explain the varied results above might be the previous study participants' unfamiliarity with working in groups and unclear instructions that made students focus more on achievement instead of physiological state. However, the findings of the current study indicated the positive trend of higher self-efficacy and less anxiety among students.

Research Question 2: What are students' opinions regarding their own speaking self-efficacy?

Both positive and negative opinions were found among students after three weeks of application. The positive attitudes were being less nervous and having fun while the negative ones were being afraid of making mistakes and having some hesitation. However, only positive perceptions namely being more confident, being less nervous, having fun, and willing to speak were shown after week 6. Similar findings were reported by Tran and Lewis [20], whose study showed that students had fun when they were studying under CL treatment. They perceived a more enjoyable and comfortable learning environment than with a traditional strategy. Additionally, they found themselves more confident, less nervous, and more willing to talk.

All of the above findings may be explained as follows. When students worked in small groups under the concept of CL, they were allowed to interact, discuss, negotiate meaning, and teach one another in a way they had never done before. They could feel free and have fun with what they cooperatively did together. With regard to more confidence and willingness to communicate, they found that they were not the only one who made mistakes or was reluctant to speak English during the treatment session. They observed their peers and discovered that the CL environment provided opportunities for helping among the group members. Nobody focused on other people's grammar but rather on communication. For these reasons, students were less nervous and more willing to communicate in English with more confidence.

This research investigated the impact of CL activities toward students' speaking self-efficacy, the belief in speaking ability among participants who possess different English proficiency levels, and the opinions toward the application of CL. The results showed the improvement of students' speaking self-efficacy after the treatment. In addition, most students reported their opinions in both positive and negative ways after week 3, namely that they were less nervous, had some hesitation, and were afraid of making mistakes. However, they tended to be more positive after week 6. In conclusion, this study found benefits of CL as an effective learning method to improve students' confidence and lessen their nervousness in communicating English.

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Table 2 Average speaking self-efficacy between before and after by items

No.	Items	Mean	
		Before	After
1.	I have enough ability to improve my speaking skills.	3.74	3.81
2.	I am sure that if I practice speaking more, I will get better grades in the course.	4.03	4.35
3.	I can speak better than my classmates.	2.32	2.65
	Even if the speaking task is difficult and I don't have the required vocabulary, I can		
4.	find the strategy to get the message across.	3.42	3.65
5.	I am not stressed out when speaking English in the classroom.	2.90	3.32
6.	I enjoy speaking with a proficient partner.	3.42	3.58
7.	I am one of the best students in speaking course.	2.00	2.61
8.	I enjoy meeting tourists because I can speak with them well.	2.55	2.94
9.	The more difficult the speaking practice is, the more enjoyable it is.	3.71	3.81
	When the instructors ask a question, I raise my hand to answer it even if I'm not sure		
10.	about it.	2.94	3.00
11.	I'm confident about my ability to interact with other English speakers.	2.74	3.23
12.	While speaking, I can deal efficiently with unexpected situations.	2.65	3.13
13.	While speaking, I can remain calm when facing difficulties.	3.19	3.39

Table 2 Average speaking self-efficacy between before and after by items (Cont.)

No.	Items	Mean	
		Before	After
14	When I'm talking with fluent speakers, I let them know if I need help.	3.58	3.81
15	I'm confident I can communicate what I mean easily.	2.77	3.10
16	I feel confident that I can achieve a native-like accuracy in speaking.	1.94	2.42
17	I'm able to actively participate in my speaking classes.	3.03	3.42
18	I'm sure I can use English outside the classroom.	3.19	3.65
19	I believe I am a good English speaker.	2.84	3.29
20	I strongly believe that I can achieve native-like fluency in English.	2.39	2.74
21	I can describe my school to others in English.	2.39	3.23
22	I can tell a story in English.	2.39	2.97
23	I can ask my teachers questions in English.	3.26	3.42
24	I can produce sentences with idiomatic expressions.	2.87	2.90
25	I can introduce my teacher to someone else in English.	2.97	3.29
26	I can discuss subjects of my interest with my classmates.	2.81	3.10
27	I can introduce myself in English.	3.94	4.00
28	I can answer my teachers' questions in English.	3.13	3.45

Table 3 Results after week 3 treatment

	wk3									
	less nervous		have fun		afraid of making mistake		have some hesitation		others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
confidence when talking to peers	20	64.52	25	80.65	22	70.97	18	58.06	5	16.13
confidence when talking to teacher	10	32.26	12	38.71	28	90.32	27	87.1	10	32.26
confidence when using English inside classroom	18	58.06	22	70.97	25	80.65	23	74.19	5	16.13

Table 3 Results after week 3 treatment (Cont.)

	wk3											
	less nervous		have fun		afraid of making mistake		have some hesitation		others			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
confidence when using English outside classroom	8	25.81	12	38.71	29	93.55	14	45.16	6	19.35		

Table 4 Feedback categories of after week-6 treatment

	wk6											
	more confident		less nervous		have fun		willing to speak		others			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
confidence when talking to peers	24	77.42	22	70.97	27	87.1	20	64.52	6	19.35		
confidence when talking to teacher	18	58.06	17	54.84	17	54.84	14	45.16	9	29.03		
confidence when using English inside classroom	22	70.97	20	64.52	28	90.32	22	70.97	7	22.58		
confidence when using English outside classroom	12	38.71	14	45.16	19	61.29	17	54.84	8	25.81		