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# Integrating Cooperative Learning in EFL Classroom to Alleviate Students' Speaking (Fluency) Anxiety

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#### ABSTRACT

In the EFL classroom, even though students learn all the skills and are good at some skills, they still feel anxious when they speak in front of the teacher and their friends. The feeling of anxiety can happen because of some factors. One of them is the learning atmosphere. Students feel uncomfortable with a learning atmosphere that is too strict and formal. Cooperative learning can be an alternative way to help alleviate students' anxiety in speaking English. Since Cooperative learning is related to activities that focus on student learning through group work, it gives a supportive and safe learning vibe to those students who are afraid to speak their foreign language. This research investigates how to integrate cooperative learning in English Foreign Language classrooms to alleviate students speaking anxiety. This research employed a descriptive case study. The participants of this study were the teacher and 36 tenth-grade students in one of the senior high schools in Majalengka. The results showed that the teacher integrated cooperative learning in speaking activities through group investigation. Then, the students' perceptions toward cooperative learning have advantages in alleviating speaking anxiety in the learning activities. It indicates that students positively perceive cooperative learning as alleviating speaking anxiety. The results showed that most students were anxious because they lacked confidence and practice. In overcoming this problem, the teacher integrated cooperative learning in speaking activities through group investigation. Moreover, the teacher allowed students to communicate with each other by using group work and gave the students practice with fluency while having the discussion and presentation. Then, the students' perceptions toward cooperative learning have advantages in alleviating speaking anxiety in the learning activities. It indicates that students positively perceive cooperative learning as alleviating speaking anxiety.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning; Speaking Anxiety; EFL Students

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the context of EFL, speaking belongs to the four skills students need to understand. Speaking facilitates students to communicate with others. Brown (2000) defines speaking course as the oral communication skills that refer strongly to the conversation, which involves the ability to accomplish pragmatic goals through interactive discourse with other language speakers. Through speaking skills, students will reach the goal of being able to convey information or messages to others in oral form. Not only that, but through speaking, students can also express their feelings and thoughts. Moreover, it is difficult for students and teachers to build classroom interaction without saying(Syafryadin et al., 2022). In other words, this skill will benefit students' communication in English as their foreign language. As a problem, even though students learn all the skills and are good at some skills, they still feel anxious when they speak in front of the teacher and their friends. Thus, people know these feelings as students' speaking anxiety.Likewise, Horwitz, cited in Sadiq (2017), mentioned that speaking is arguably the most affected by language anxiety among all other core skills in language learning.

According to Spielberger, anxiety relates to arousal of the autonomic nervous system and refers to subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry. Anxiety is undeniably based in the brain, but conceptualizing anxiety as a brain-mediated process does not explain why the neurological circuitry related to fear recognition activates (Horwitz, 2013). Another researcher, Susidamaiyanti (2018), describes Foreign Language Anxiety as uneasiness, worry, nervousness, and apprehension.Briefly, anxiety is a set of uncomfortable feelings and tendencies of action that make someone aware of unpleasant things happening (Ellis & Doyle, 2016). Furthermore, anxiety is a normal response that can happen to humans while stressed. However, it may bother daily life when it becomes overwhelming and persistent.In other words, this feeling can distract students' confidence in speaking. Additionally, fluency can help students feel more self-confident in speaking. Zulfikar (2022) stated that EFL learners tend to have a lower level of fluency due to their lack of exposure to authentic language. To learn to speak English fluently, students need to practice consistently. It aligns with Hill's statement that fluency does not happen instantly but can happen. This means that improving students' confidence in speaking requires repeated and continuous practice.

Besides, in reducing speaking anxiety, the educator and students must be aware of the causes of it (Liu, 2018). Several factors that can affect them include a lack of vocabulary, fear of negative feedback, or fear of making mistakes. In making students not worry about making mistakes and they could try themselves less anxious about speaking English, the teachers also emphasized the importance of creating a friendly or relaxed atmosphere for students (Mon, 2019). Students feel uncomfortable with a learning atmosphere that is too strict and formal. According to Mon (2019), most teachers in language teaching still use traditional teaching methods and focus on reading and writing more. Also, when the teachers are too strict, the students get more anxious. Based on this opinion, there is a need for a learning process that can create a relaxed learning atmosphere to alleviate anxiety in students. Apart from this, in the initial observations of this research, students' anxiety in speaking related to their self-confidence while speaking in front of many people. Most students still hesitate to express their thoughts in their foreign language and have more courage in their mother tongue.

In the context of speaking anxiety, teachers may implement cooperative learning in the learning process as an alternative. According to (Guerrero, 2016), cooperative learning is connected to how students work together. As well as, when they can interact with one another and participate actively, students are more interested in learning activities Indrapurnama et al. (2022). Also, students who always feel left out are given a chance to shine through

cooperative learning (Al Jawad, 2023). Cooperative learning strategies change the classroom situation from threatening, not relaxing, into a friendly, supportive, and open learning atmosphere (Pabro-Maquidato, 2021). This method gives a relaxed learning vibe to those students who are afraid to speak their foreign language. Based on Aziz et al. (2021), cooperative learning also helps students overcome speaking anxiety in English through two emphasized aspects: self-confidence and fluency. Students may get the opportunity to be more effective and confident when speaking English with the help of pair work (Maca, 2020). Another researcher,Mon (2019), mentions that all the students respond with a significantly decreasing tendency in anxiety scores after implementing cooperative learning strategies. Therefore, with this problem, the researcher integrates cooperative learning to provide an efficient solution to the issues in this research.

There are eight elements for learning to be called cooperative learning groups effectively. The eight elements include positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal opportunity to participate, maximum peer interactions, group autonomy, heterogeneous grouping, and the teaching of cooperative skills (Jacobs & Renandya, 2019). Then, according to the expert cited in Hayati(2017), there are different cooperative learning models. The cooperative learning models mentioned include Student Team Achievement Division (STAD), Jigsaw, Group Investigation, Think-Pair-Share, and Numbered-Head-Together (NHT). Besides, Nunan (2003)mentions five principles for teaching speaking. The five principles of teaching speaking include being aware of the differences between the second language and foreign language learning contexts, giving students practice with both fluency and accuracy, providing opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work, and limiting teacher talk, planing speaking tasks that involve negotiation for meaning, designing classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking.

The researcher finds suitable issues in the learning process in one of the high schools in Majalengka based on the researcher's experience in observing and interviewing English teachers as an assignment for one of the courses. The teacher still uses the traditional method in the teaching process. Furthermore, the learning process focuses on textbooks and writing activities. So, there needs to be more speaking activities in the learning process. The researcher also finds that teachers integrate cooperative learning but not in speaking activities. Eventually, the researcher selects the school to be involved in this research.

With this problem, the researcher integrates cooperative learning to provide an efficient solution to the issues in this research. This research aims to explain how teachers integrate cooperative learning in English Foreign Language classrooms to alleviate students' speaking anxiety and to explain students' perceptions toward cooperative learning integration in EFL classrooms to alleviate speaking anxiety. By integrating cooperative learning through friendly learning activities, students expect to be more confident speaking their foreign language in front of their friends or the teacher. Moreover, the learning process focuses not only on active students' participation but also on all students. It is because they help each other while working together. As a result, the researcher expects cooperative learning to support students to be confident and alleviate anxiety in speaking English as their foreign language.

# METHOD

This research used a descriptive case study. The researcher chose this method because it fit the purpose of this study, which examined the topic through in-depth discussion. This reason is in line with Creswell & Poth (2017), who define case study research as a qualitative approach that investigates cases in considerable depth through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations and interviews). In the

same way,Seidman (2013) mentioned that interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Besides, Ciesielska et al. (2018) stated that observation is when we watch, evaluate, draw conclusions, and comment on interactions and relations.Therefore, this research gathered the data through observation to find out how teachers integrate cooperative learning in English Foreign Language classrooms to alleviate students' speaking anxiety and the interview to know students' perceptions toward the integration.

Data in this research was obtained in conducting observation with the participants about integrating cooperative learning to alleviate students' speaking anxiety, supported by interviews to get validity in alleviating speaking anxiety. Additionally, the researcher needs sources to get the available data in taking the data. Data sources refer to the research subject from which the researcher gets the required information. In this research, the participants are teachers and students in one of the tenth-grade classes in the 2022/2023 academic year. The class consists of 36 students, including 14 male and 22 female students. The amount participants are all Indonesian and have been learning English in formal education for more than eight years. Thus, the participants of this research were teachers and 36 students from the Senior High School chosen.Therefore, to gain the sample in this research, the researcher conducts purposive sampling, in which individuals and sites can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the research (Cresswell, 2013).

Furthermore, the researcher observed the teacher integrating cooperative learning into speaking activities. In the observation section, the researcher learned the integration process by observing the teacher in the EFL class about the learning process. Besides, the researcher asked four students as the respondents of that class some questions about their perceptions of integrating cooperative learning in the EFL classroom to alleviate their speaking anxiety.

The researcher used triangulation of method in this research to double-check the validity of the data. To gain trustworthiness, the researcher chooses the triangulation method from the types of triangulation by Denzin, as cited in Flick (2018). In this triangulation, the researcher used two methods to collect and analyze the data for validity. The researcher used triangulation methods because this triangulation is more appropriate for this research than the other triangulation. Then, the reliability of the data was gained by giving genuine data, such as the observation checklist and interviewing transcripts.

The researcher planned steps to apply the research procedures well. The steps are as follows:

- a. Initially, the researcher determined that a case study approach was appropriate for studying the research problem.
- b. The researcher found the subject of the research. The issue is the tenth-grade students in the second semester of one of the Senior High Schools in Majalengka in the 2022/2023 academic year.
- c. The researcher conducted the research by holding four class meetings to gather the data through observation and interviews.
- d. The observation was used to learn how cooperative learning alleviates students' speaking anxiety. The researcher observed by observation checklist the activities in the speaking class and carefully gave attention to the student's ability to speak in front of the course or many people to collect some information by some indicators.
- e. After conducting the observation, the researcher interviewed the students to know their perception of integrating cooperative learning in alleviating students' speaking anxiety.

f. In the end, the researcher analyzed the data and reported the meaning of the case. The data analysis includes organizing and preparing the data for analysis, reading through all the data, using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for study, advancing how the report and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and making an interpretation or meaning of the data (Cresswell, 2014).

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Results**

The data on cooperative learning integration in speaking activities was obtained from the observation and used the observation checklist. Before the observation activity, the researcher did pre-observation to ensure the teacher used cooperative learning in speaking activities. Based on the result of the pre-observation, the researcher found out that in the tenth grade, the teacher did the process of integrating cooperative learning before but not in the speaking activities. The teacher used Cooperative learning only in the writing activity through project lessons. Meanwhile, the teacher used an individual test called 'MeraihBintang' for the speaking activity. In this speaking activity, the teacher asked questions, and then the students answered. The students who could answer the question would get a star in every question as their achievement. Besides, the students who could not answer the question would get additional time to collect the star. The extra time was done after the learning process. The teacher would ask students to answer the question just like they did in the class, but it was more private. The teacher did this activity with the intention that if there were students who felt embarrassed or anxious to express their opinions or answers in front of many people.

After the pre-observation section, the teacher agreed to integrate cooperative learning into the learning process in the project lesson and the speaking activity through discussion and presentation. The integration of cooperative learning was formed into four class meetings. The details of the implemented learning process are as follows, including integrating cooperative learningsteps to alleviate students' speaking anxiety.

- 1. Pre Activity
  - a) The teacher greeted the students and checked the attendance list.
  - b) The teacher prepared the material.

Before the teacher explained the material, the teacher had to prepare the material. During the learning process, the teacher used technology in delivering the material. So, the teacher had to check that all the learning media and tools needed were ready to be used in the learning process. The learning media and tools used were PowerPoint, a laptop, and a projector. On the other hand, the teacher also allowed the students to use technology to help students during the learning process.

- c) The teacher explained the topic.
- d) The teacher tried to create a discussion session.

After explaining the topic or material, the teacher tried to create a discussion with the students. It is about the material that is local legend stories as narrative text. The teacher discussed the topic by asking students questions. Then, students had to answer the questions asked by the teacher. Firstly, the teacher let students answer the questions in Indonesian as their mother tongue. As a result, the response was good. Twelve students could answer the questions given enthusiastically. Also, the teacher asked the students to answer in English as their foreign language. Only two students were confident enough to speak. Then, the teacher chose two more students randomly to try to answer in English.

- 2. While Activity
  - a) The teacher implemented teamwork.

After the discussion, the teacher moved to the next step. In this step, the teacher implemented teamwork in the learning process. It helped students to help each other and feel comfortable during the learning process. Also, there was a group formation. The teacher divided the group diversely. This group formation was intended so that the students not only interacted with their favorite friends or seatmates but also with other students who rarely interacted with each other.

b) The teacher followed the progress of the students.

During the students' group discussions, the teacher closely followed the progress of all the groups to ensure that every student did their duty as a team member. Also, every group had to prepare the content for presenting their final result. During this part, the teacher allowed students to use their creativity in designing their results. The presentation was intended as their speaking activity.

c) The students presented the final result as teamwork.

In this section, the teacher gave students a chance to do the presentation as their speaking performance based on the material. They had to present their final result of analyzing local legend stories based on their subtopic. During the students' presentations, the teacher assessed their speaking performance. Afterward, the teacher gave feedback and suggestions to every group about their final result in the presentation section. The teacher also let other groups ask questions about the material to the group doing the presentation.

- 3. Post Activity
  - a) The teacher and students concluded the learning process.
  - b) The teacher closed the learning process.

Table 1. Observation Checkhist			
Elements of Cooperative	Yes	No	Notes
Learning			
Positive interdependence			Students help each other in the discussion
(students' roles that reflect a			section.
connection between each other)	•		
			T . 1 . 1 . 1
Individual accountability	,		In groups, students have their respective
(Every student in a group is			roles.
responsible for doing their work.)			
Equal opportunity to participate	1		Students divide their roles and duties in
	N		the group.
Maximum peer interactions			Through discussion and presentation
Group Autonomy			Students rarely ask the teacher in the
1 2			speaking activity. They prefer to ask their
	,		
			group mates.
Heterogeneous grouping	2		The teacher makes the group formation
	N		consist of 6 students (male and female).
The teaching of cooperative skills			-
Cooperation as a value			-

 Table 1. Observation Checklist

The data on students' perceptions were obtained and analyzed based on the interview. In this part, the researcher interviewed the students related to the research. The researcher asked students about their perceptionsofintegrating cooperative learning in EFL classrooms to alleviate their speaking anxiety. Based on the interview results, the researcher found that anxiety is one of the problems experienced by almost all students in class while speaking English in front of many people.

Table 2. Students' Anxiety in Speaking			
Students' Anxiety in Speaking	Reasons		
Self-confidence	Fear of negative evaluation		
Self-confidence	Shyness		
Self-confidence	Fear of making a mistake		
Self-confidence	Lack of practice		

It is relevant to the following excerpts:

- Student 2: I feel nervous. It is because I am too shy when I speak English in front of many people.
- Student 3: I feel nervous because I am still not fluent in English. I often felt anxious when speaking English in front of the class or many people.
- Student 4: I often feel anxious when speaking English in front of the class or many people. The problem is that I rarely speak in English.

Moreover, through cooperative learning, students can share knowledge and their thoughts. Aside from that, there are perceptions of cooperative learning that have advantages.Students also have downsides in their perceptions of cooperative learning. Students from several groups said there were students from their groups who still needed to do their roles as they should. Nevertheless, all students have the same perception that they are more courageous to speak English in front of many people as a team. It is relevant to the following excerpts:

Student 1: For speaking in front of many people, I prefer it as a team.

Student 2: I am more courageous to speak English in front of the class or many people. That is because I feel nervous and shy when speaking in front of many people.

- Student 3: If I am already fluent in English, speaking as an individual is okay. However, I chose a team because I still need to become fluent.
- Student 4: I am more courageous to speak in front of the class or many people as a team. It is because I am too nervous to speak as an individual.

# Discussion

Based on the result above, the students participate in discussions and presentations. Furthermore, the presentation is part of prepared talks. Both of these activities belong to activities in the speaking class. It is in line with Harmer (2007) that there are five activities in speaking class, including acting from a script, communication games, discussion, prepared talks, simulation, and role-play. Moreover, through discussion and presentation, the teacher allowed students to communicate with each other, whether in the group or outside the group. As Nunan (2003) said, there are principles of teaching speaking, including giving the students

Student 1: I also felt anxious because many people looked at me while speaking English. I am afraid people would think badly about my English. So, I am so scared to talk in front of many people.

practice with both fluency and accuracy, designing classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking, providing opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work, and limiting teacher talk.

According to the observation checklist, the learning process during observation can be called cooperative learning based on the elements Jacobs (2004) mentioned, cited in Jacobs & Renandya (2019). The researcher also identifies that the integration of cooperative learning to alleviate students' speaking anxiety in the learning process during the observation is the group investigation type. Stages in group investigation include selecting the topic that is related to the activity where the students need to choose specific subtopics in a general problem given by educators, planning that refers to the plan of students and educators in arranging learning procedures and the specific objectives, implementation stage is related to the process where students carry out the set intent in the planning stage, analysis and synthesis stage that refers to the activity of the students in analyzing and evaluating the information obtained in implementation stage also plan how the information is summarized and presented in the class, presenting the final result stage refers to the process where students in group explaining the result of their investigations with the educators as the coordinator, and evaluation stage is related to the activity of evaluation (Hayati, 2017).

In the second discussion, based on the interview result, the researcher found that anxiety is one of the problems experienced by almost all students in class while speaking English in front of many people. This is in line with Mon (2019), who states that anxiety is one of the problems for students in speaking English. Also, students have different reasons to trigger speaking anxiety. The previous researchers, Rofi'i (2019), stated that one factor in learners' stress in speaking English is psychological factors related to learners' fear of making mistakes. Fear of making mistakes or negative evaluation is the condition of students being anxious when being evaluated or perceiving being judged by others in the classroom(Partridge & Eamoraphan, 2015). In the same way, in this research, the causes that trigger their anxiety include a lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, less preparation, and feeling embarrassed. In short, students' reasons cover psychological factors related to self-confidence.

Based on the results above, students also mentioned that they are more courageous to speak English as a team rather than individually while speaking in front of the class or many people. The reason is related to their anxiety while speaking in front of many people. The other researcher, Zulfikar (2022), also mentioned that when teachers allow learners to work cohesively in a group and students realize their peers are on their side, they feel less anxious about L2 learning scenarios.

Related to the discussion above, there is a gap between previous research and what the researcher has. In previous studies, researchers discussed students' speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom by examining their level of anxiety using the anxiety scale. On the other hand, in this research, the researcher discussed students' speaking anxiety based on the students' perceptions. Therefore, this research can contribute to the previous findings to strengthen arguments regarding integrating cooperative learning related to students' speaking anxiety.

Briefly, regarding integrating cooperative learning in the EFL classroom to alleviate students' speaking anxiety, the researcher analyses that there is a relationship between students' speaking anxiety and cooperative learning in EFL classrooms. Students are given a chance to be more confident in speaking English in front of their friends or the teacher through cooperative learning.

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion in the previous, it could be concluded that there is a relationship between students' speaking anxiety and cooperative learning in EFL classrooms. Almost all students in class experience anxiety while speaking English in front of many people—students' anxiety in speaking is related to psychological factors about their self-confidence. This feeling is caused by several influencing situations or factors. The situations or factors that affect students' self-confidence include fear of negative evaluation, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of practice. Moreover, through a group investigation model, the teacher integrates cooperative learning into the learning process to alleviate students' speaking anxiety. Besides, all students have the same perception that they are more courageous to speak English in front of many people as a team. In conclusion, it is found that the integration of cooperative learning can be beneficial in alleviating students' speaking anxiety by improving students' confidence through performing the learning process and speaking activities as a team in cooperative learning.

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