

PERCEPTIONS OF UPPER SECONDARY ESL
TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ON COOPERATIVE LEARNING
IN IMPROVING SPOKEN ENGLISH.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents and sister: **Mrs. Saraswathi M.Suppiah, Mr. Gunasagaran Rajamanikam, and Mrs. Angelina Ramesh**, for their encouragements, love and support throughout my every phase of growth. Thank you, for giving me the strength to reach for the stars in chasing after my dreams. You all are the role models and anchors of motivation for me to reach greater heights in this journey of life. Thank you for everything.

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ABSTRACT

Malaysian education is now experiencing a positive paradigm shift. Cooperative learning is an active learning technique, which at the same time promotes interpersonal and intrapersonal values. Thus, students could achieve self-motivation and self-confidence to speak or use the target language. Its notions of interaction and social skills through group cooperation are significant in fostering self-confidence and simultaneously sharpening ESL learners' speaking skills. This study provides an insight into upper secondary school ESL teachers' and students' perceptions of cooperative learning methods in improving English speaking skills. An online survey was carried out among 77 upper secondary ESL students to understand this phenomenon, and a semi-structured interview was employed among 7 ESL teachers. The quantitative descriptive statistics analysis and qualitative thematic analysis of coding determine that the CL method is significant in upper secondary ESL students' English proficiency and speaking skills. Potential findings shed some light on teachers facing some issues in implementing this operational method and its functionality in English learning classrooms. Overall, as for second language learners, it provides a positive platform as an initiation for improving their English language proficiency, which eventually develops their spoken discourse in the target language.

KEYWORDS: cooperative learning, active learning, speaking skill, perception

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan Malaysia kini mengalami perubahan paradigma positif. Pembelajaran koperatif adalah teknik pembelajaran aktif, yang pada masa yang sama dapat mempromosikan nilai interpersonal dan intrapersonal. Oleh itu, pelajar dapat mencapai motivasi dan keyakinan diri untuk bercakap atau menggunakan bahasa sasaran. Pengertiannya mengenai interaksi dan kemahiran sosial melalui kerjasama kumpulan adalah penting dalam memupuk keyakinan diri dan sekaligus meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur pelajar ESL. Kajian ini memberi gambaran mengenai persepsi guru dan pelajar ESL sekolah menengah atas terhadap kaedah pembelajaran koperatif dalam meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris. Satu tinjauan dalam talian dilakukan di kalangan 77 pelajar ESL menengah atas untuk memahami fenomena ini, dan temu bual separa berstruktur dilakukan di antara 7 orang guru ESL. Analisis statistik deskriptif kuantitatif dan analisis tematik kualitatif pengkodan menentukan bahawa kaedah CL adalah signifikan dalam penguasaan bahasa Inggeris dan kemahiran bertutur pelajar ESL menengah atas. Penemuan berpotensi memberi penerangan kepada guru yang menghadapi beberapa masalah dalam melaksanakan kaedah operasi ini dan fungsinya di bilik darjah pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Secara keseluruhan, bagi pelajar bahasa kedua, ini menyediakan platform positif sebagai permulaan untuk meningkatkan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris mereka, yang akhirnya mengembangkan wacana lisan mereka dalam bahasa sasaran.

KATA-KATA KUNCI: pembelajaran koperatif, pembelajaran aktif, kemahiran bertutur, persepsi

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CL	-	Cooperative Learning
ESL	-	English as Second Language Learners
ZPD	-	Zone of Proximal Development
L1	-	First Language

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Cooperative learning is an instructive and learning strategy whereby: the instructive medium instructor-coordinated and learning is cooperation by nature. In this specific setting, the content is conveyed to the students by the instructor, and they predominantly work together with their team members to gain insights and data to attain similar goals in their learning sessions. In a conventional or a traditional teaching and learning method, specifically in the Malaysian education context, students are passive learners and the recipient of the educational content, majorly via teachers' instructional notion. The evaluation of students' learning most often is based on approaches like; tests, exams, practical assignments, and quizzes. It is a norm; students are competitive in acquiring the highest scores that can be accomplished separately for their satisfaction of standing out. There is next to no communication among the students. They rarely have any chances to cooperate as a group and coordinate in their learning procedure, which results in a lack of communicative or interactive components in obtaining skills specifically.

Synthesizing from a study done by, Rusli et al. (2018), they deduce that, "students' in Malaysia, absence of capability in communicating in English, due to their: mental components, wasteful of the executives' job and furthermore the impact of instructors' and companions' inspiration on their cycles of getting schooling and acquiring aptitudes. These components can be survived if all the students recognize their own capacity and attempt to choose activities that suit them most." They added that teachers are the main individuals which contribute in improving the English speaking skill among students, and cooperative learning may assist, through its beneficial features, to ensure students are future-ready towards their further studies and career pursuit. Tan et al. (2010), stated that, the issue that encompasses

numerous Malaysian educators today is that, there is a need to improve the teachers' way of educating, preparing educational contents, and the manner of conveying learning materials as in accordance with the current technological advancement and towards 21st-century teaching and learning.

Zakaria & Iksan (2007), stated that cooperative learning is set up in the dependence that learning is best when students are adequately connected with sharing contemplation and work pleasingly to complete educational tasks. This learning method has been used as an instructional technique, and, moreover acts as a means of academic mechanism, at different degrees of education and branches of knowledge.

Meiers (2007), in her study deduced that, cooperative learning enhances understanding and self-confidence. She further mentioned that, by using cooperative learning, it could be assessed similar to the data and aptitudes of every teacher. In this context, preparing and constant expert improvements through analysis and evolving policies, required for educators, together with joint effort among language pedagogues, could be empowered through frequent conferences, both formal and casual classifications. Educators can gain from each other and can look into the qualities and shortcomings of the guidance that has been executed, and their experience can be imparted to one another to create better work, notably towards the enhancement of students speaking skill, connected to their comprehension, critical thinking and self- confidence in conversation view through CL.

The purpose of this study: to understand the perception of upper secondary school teachers and ESL learners on cooperative learning methods, on English proficiency and in improving English speaking skill among the ESL learners.

1.2 Background of Study

In this globalization of the world, it is of prime importance, being able to communicate in the international language or lingua franca: the English language. The main rationale behind this is, the desire to express an individual's opinion and thoughts expressively with people of different backgrounds that share the same language tool (English). Rao (2019), cited that, "individuals' cravings are satisfied when they could unmistakably communicate their thoughts and conclusions with others. Consequently, they need to get familiar with the correspondence ability, on a standard global level, to satisfy their aspirations, wants, and objectives. In this advanced world, relational abilities assume an indispensable job and one should have the dominance over these aptitudes, to get achievement in their particular fields". As a result, the ability to utilize language skill of English is vital to gain success in any ventures, irrespective of the fields. English has been the communicative function across the globe, it has become the preferred language among the people of all nations. Alonso (2013), state that proficiency in spoken English discourse is an aspiration of many, in order to facilitate communication and interaction among people of diverging positions, walks of lives, education, mother tongues, ethnicity and career prospects. He continued that, with a good command of speaking skill in the English language, it would assist in, gaining self-confidence to promote mobility and mutual understanding between the target language users

Taking into consideration the Malaysian education system, the speaking proficiency in English language among Malaysian students is still on the lower side. This statement is backed up by a research done by, Yunus (2018), where her findings indicated that, contributing factors such as; psychological considerations, the ineffective position of administration, and also the effect on their morale from their peers and the role of teachers are significant in building better self-confidence in conversing in the English language. Therefore, urgent solutions needed to be taken to encourage students to improve their proficiency, specifically through dynamic interactive tasks. As the education system of Malaysia is progressing towards the 21st century learning and future readiness, it is important that the techniques of teaching

and learning are following the current evolving trend that are constantly being updated, for the betterment of the students' prospective locales of their lives.

Many researchers believe that via a highly engaging learning method, students could improve the area that needs a major positive paradigm shift, in this case, the speaking expertise. Cooperative learning is an instructional educational technique, where it utilizes little gatherings, so understudies could cooperate to amplify their own and every others' learning encounters (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998). Cooperative learning is an approach whereby students cooperate together on a subject matter and work hand in hand to accomplish the goal of the given task. Primarily, the concept of spoken discourse is emphasized in this learning manner, as communication is the key tool in achieving the completion of the given assignment. According to a study by, Hossain et al. (2012), cooperative learning is used to serve different capacities of ESL students with respect to their degree of appreciation, learning styles, sociological establishments that develop the understudies' academic achievements and aptitudes, and, help of the social solidarity among students of various and contrasting milieus

Brame and Biel (2015) stated that cooperative learning fosters better learning skills, specifically social skills. Social nuance, as an illustration, the speaking skill specifically, is essential for an individual to communicate effectively among peers and sharpen one's comprehension level, simultaneously building the student's self-confidence, specifically for ESL secondary students in conversing in the English language. One study was done by (Alias et al., 2018). It uncovered that Malaysia's teachers utilize a teacher-centered manner of teaching and learning refineries for a long period. It has become the norm in our education system. They further stated that the Malaysian education ministry stressed their degree of understanding, learning styles, sociological understudy's advancement in correspondence, imagination, and development through cycle intuitive, dynamic learning in class. Their study's findings concluded that teachers are positive towards cooperative learning but the execution of the method needed to be improved. The constraints surrounding the fullest potential from implementing this method should be addressed and be handled constructively.

By understanding the teachers' and students' perceptions, CL can be incorporated effectively into the English teaching and learning processes. By taking into account the limitations, difficulties, obligations, and other constraints that could be deciphered, decoded, and interpreted, using practical and effective solutions would benefit both teachers and students. The supreme goal is to make CL assimilated via a greater and productive establishment into the education system that would be advantageous to all associated parties.

1.3 Statement of Problem

The primary focus of language is to foster conjoint ventures via mutual cooperation on highly interactive tasks (Slavin, 2010). Similar studies had been conducted by Malaysian educators and the main problem is within the education itself, as there are more “chalk and talk” method in the classrooms, whereby students are required to just absorb what are being taught, with not much engagements in discussions for feedback (Norlida & Puteri, 2004). This eventually connected to the notion of the popular teacher-centered learning, where students do not have the autonomy and participate as passive learners (Ibrahim et al., 2015). On the other hand, with the heavy emphasis on rote learning, ESL learners are not given much opportunity nor participation in active conversational activities, one of the contributors to poor proficiency of the spoken English language (Fung, 2010). Adding on, the Asian culture is encompassed around being less assertive, thus the students, Malaysian included are obedient students and ought to be reserved and be quiet learners in the class. (Nguyen, 2019). Continuing, Hiew (2012) and Pan & Wu (2013), stated that, less successful ways of teaching are the source of failure in acquiring the benefits of the English language. Researches also have demonstrated that agreeable learning exercises for English language students help improve scholarly execution just as increment inspiration, fortify confidence, empower understudy holding and advance education skill (Calderon, Sanchez & Slavin, 2011). Most of the researches are carried out in the educational level of: universities, and primary schools. There is not much done in the setting of secondary schools,

specifically for the upper secondary level, thus this study is relevant to the current evolution of Malaysian education interrelated to English as the tool of the future.

This study focuses on understanding the perceptions of upper secondary school ESL teachers and students on cooperative learning and their view towards the improvement of ESL learners speaking skills. This is in the context of secondary schools, in the district of Batu Pahat, in the state Johor. The access to qualified educators, with the appropriate knowledge and skills in correlation to CL, may make a difference to whether or not students are able to achieve English speaking skill successfully. By deciphering the layered focal point of their mindsets, their views may provide effective measures for the betterment of both language pedagogues and students in the long run for enhanced speaking proficiency in English.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is, to have an in-depth understanding of the perception of upper secondary English teachers, and ESL students. Hereafter, to enable national education policy makers, curriculum developers, education and all, in concern of the education system of Malaysia, to come up with effective solutions on the dilemmas or contrasting perceptions both teachers and students experience with.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What is the perception of upper secondary ESL students on cooperative learning methods on their English language proficiency?
- ii. How do ESL teachers perceive cooperative learning methods in improving upper secondary ESL students' English speaking skill?

1.6 Research Objectives

- i. To gain an insight on the perception of upper secondary ESL students on cooperative learning technique, on their English language proficiency.
- ii. To understand the perception of ESL teachers on cooperative learning methods and its effectiveness in improving ESL learners' speaking skill.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Figure 1.1 shows the suitable theories are accumulated and figured, to clarify, foresee, and comprehend the focused research interest, and to a certain degree, to challenge and expand the current information, dive inside the constraints of basic critical suppositions.

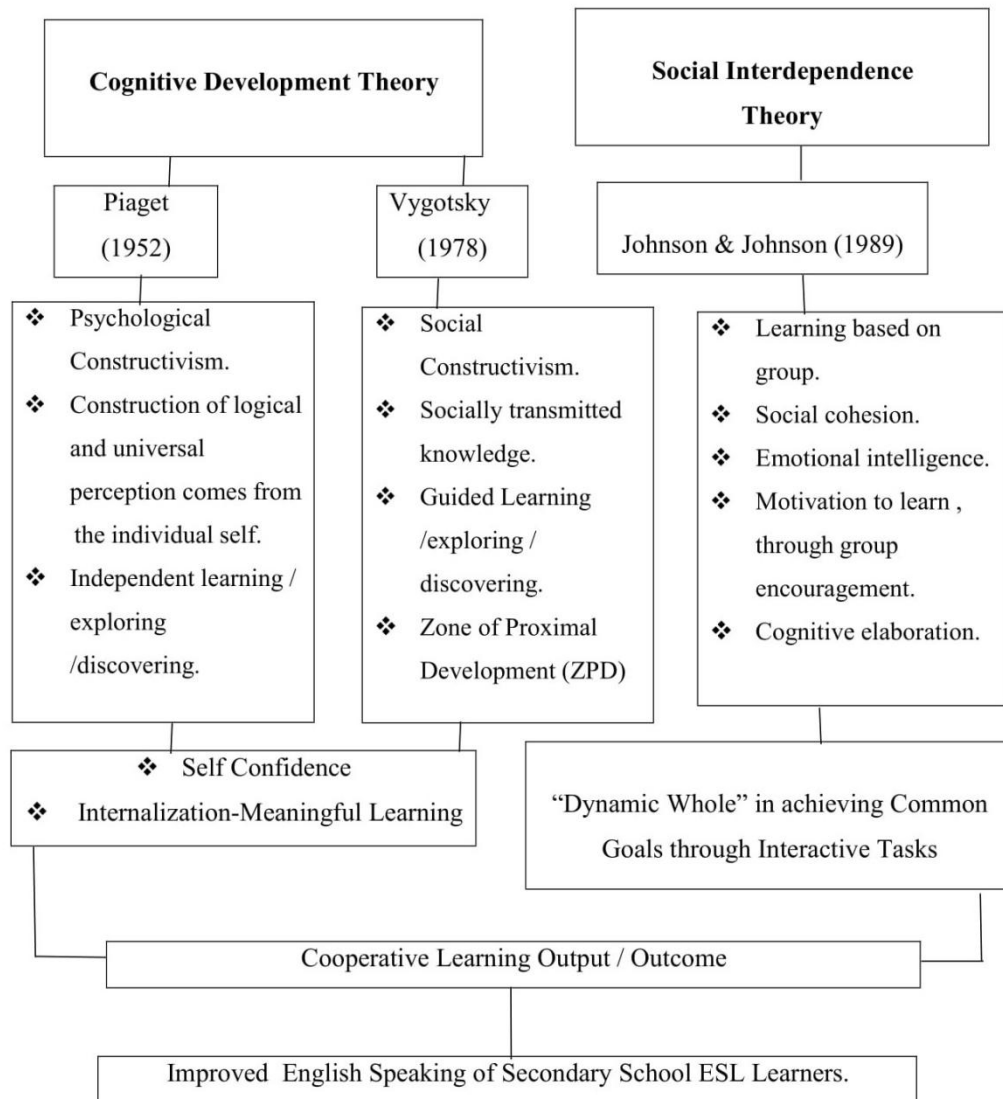


Figure 1.1: The Theoretical Framework

According to Osanloo & Grant (2016), “the theoretical framework makes sense for an exploration study. It fills in as the structure and backing for the reasoning of the investigation; the difficult assertion, the reason, the importance, and, the examination questions”. In an abbreviation, the theoretical framework comprises the hypothetical standards, builds, ideas, and inhabitants of a rationale behind the study.

The theoretical framework of this study, will be based on, Cognitive Development Theory and Social Interdependence Theory, for the main synthesis of the perspectives of upper secondary English language teachers and upper secondary ESL students interrelating to cooperative learning technique, impacting English proficiency and its effectiveness in improving English speaking skill.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

Establishing from the theories that guide the paramount aims of this research paper, the following concepts and principles are formulated and structured. This is, to further assist in the decoding of the inputs to the research questions and intent of the study. Figure 1.2 below, is the conceptual framework of this research project. It represents the proposed concepts generated from the theories for this paper. It indicates the foundation that will assist the analysis of the concepts encompassed around the rationale on the perception of both teachers and students on cooperative learning implementation, its characteristics and features in improving the speaking skill of secondary ESL students.

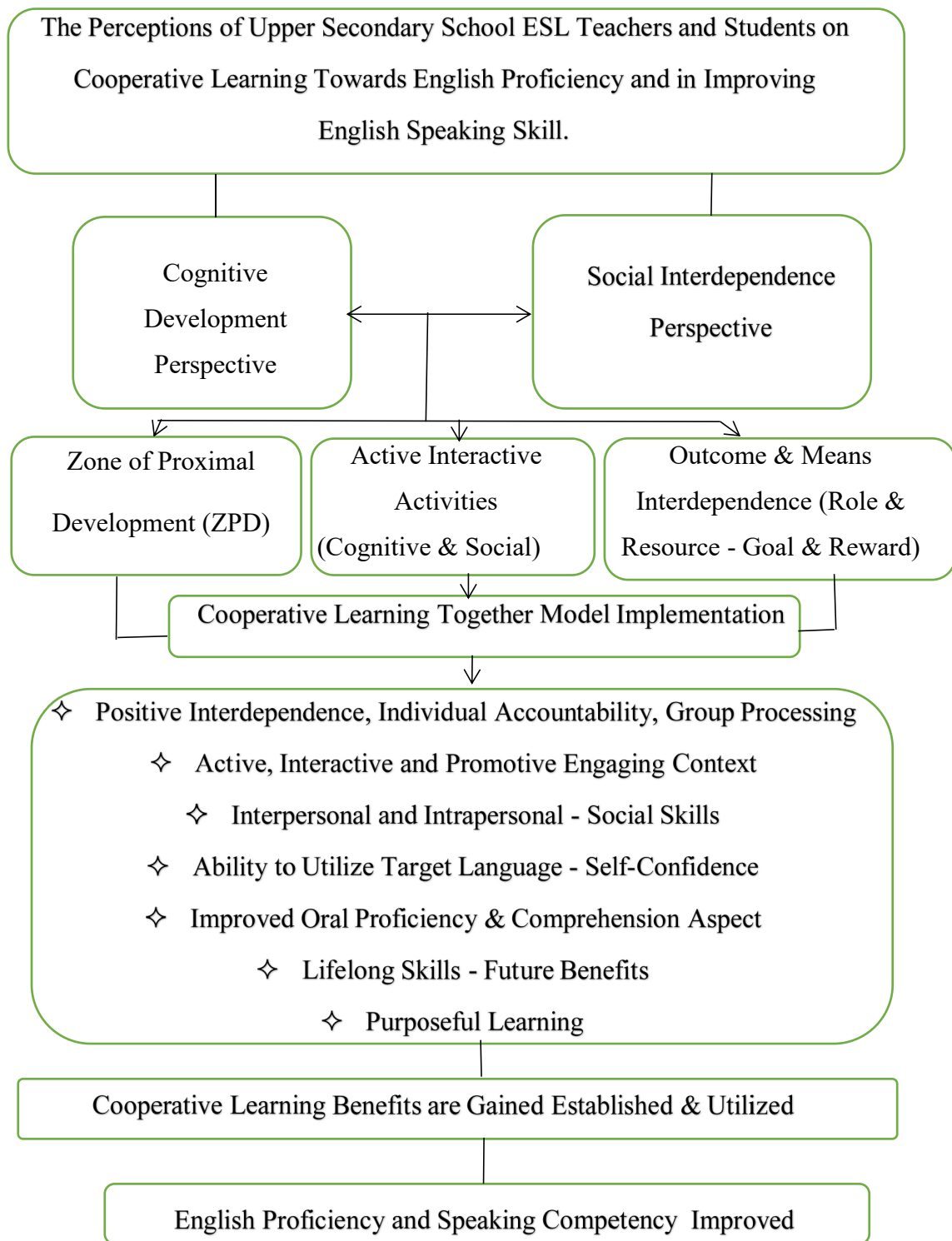


Figure 1.2: The Conceptual Framework

From the cognitive development theory (Piaget, 1952 & Vygotsky, 1978), stated that the procedures of interactivity decide results, not based on the structure of the condition directly. This theory centres educators around organizing learning

objectives to make wanted procedures of interaction among students and teachers. Once the ideal procedures of cooperation happen, results will eventually be generated. Correlated to the surroundings and impact from the learners and educators at the same time.

The Social Interdependence Theory proposed by Johnson & Johnson (1989) which explained that a positive interdependence exists when the achievement of every individual's objectives is influenced by the activities of others. Besides that, the concepts of individual accountability and group processing are significant components in the effectiveness of this particular approach in regards to improving in the target language - English for this research study. The notion of cooperating in cooperative learning generates new ideas, critical thinking, self-confidence, high-level reasoning, longer span of retention in regards to students' interaction.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This paper is valuable to the successful execution of the instructional methodology in optional schools, explicitly for students who complete their higher secondary education and pursue their tertiary education. Cooperative learning is known to be one of the effective means of teaching and learning techniques in the classroom environment. Besides that, many researchers agree that cooperative learning assists with building and shaping higher accomplishment, expanded maintenance, more certain connections and a more extensive group of friends of colleagues, more prominent inherent inspiration, higher confidence, better social help, leaning back towards on-task conduct, better perspectives towards instructors and school generally speaking. These elements that arise from the educational method of CL do provide a firm foundation not only towards the advancement and betterment of social, psychological, and soft skills but also spoken discourse of different contextual surroundings and usages.

Having an in-depth understanding and removing the layers would help look into the perceptions of both educators and learners of English on CL. The issues surrounding the utilization, and allowing the features of CL to become interested in teaching and mastering the English language, specifically in the speaking skill of students, could be rationalized. Thus, suitable and plausible solutions could be applied to provide a better revenue for teachers and students to enjoy CL components' benefits and advantages. It would also guide education policymakers to look into the issues surrounding implementing cooperative learning methods in a classroom context to ensure its firm establishment in the future, which would benefit both teachers and students of different English language levels.

The additional advantages of CL resonate far beyond social skill but concomitantly help students to organize their thinking order in explaining and expressing their thoughts and ideas through cognitive elaborations, which as a result, could enhance their comprehension criteria. When the understanding level increases, the confidence to speak using the targeted language (in this scenario, English language) increases. From this, students would want to engage more in interactions, conversations, and the desire to use more English in their means of communication to intensify significantly. At the same time, this would create an English speaking atmosphere, which would help aid students to have a regular basis of conversing in it, where they are exposed to the language, which would encourage them in maintaining the language, for future-readiness, into the real world (education, career, and business).

Furthermore, by understanding the hurdles faced by teachers, policymakers, governmental organizations, education personnel, and responsible authorities, we could develop action plans to enable CL to be established in a more uplifting manner and favourable to the educators and learners altogether. The main reason is that teachers must not feel burdened or forced to use CL in any classroom setting, but via a constructive proposition, which would be fruitful in fully upgrading the mind of interpretation of language pedagogue to procure the benefits of CL for their students. Nevertheless, additionally by having a better and more profound awareness of the outlook of CL from students' point of view, teachers would be able to impart

preferable and satisfactory lesson plans that suit each different student. In a way, it will make learning engaging, fun, and instrumental, and students would be more involved with the activities presented by their English teachers in any tasks or projects. Besides, the researcher hoped that this study would be an eye-opener and provide the information and suggestions in revamping the educational technique corresponding to the attributes of CL to improve the English spoken skill of ESL secondary students.

1.10 Scope of the Study

This study looks at the perceptions of teachers and students on cooperative learning in improving the secondary school students' speaking skill. 77 ESL students of upper secondary (Form4 & 5). The English teachers are from the different schools (7 teachers). These two groups represent the data of the population the researcher intended to study about. This study would be done through the utilization of a survey questionnaire, and semi-structured interview questions. All information and conclusions drawn from this study were obtained from the mentioned group of students and particular teachers. By this strategy, the researcher will be able to know and understand the perceptions of both the teachers and students about CL in regards to the betterment of ESL secondary school learners' English proficiency and speaking skills.

1.11 Definition of Terms

The terms that would be used throughout this study are explained below:

1.11.1 Cooperative Learning (CL)

It is a teaching and learning technique, where learners work together to achieve common goals. It comprises understudies cooperating, for one class period to a little while, to accomplish shared learning objectives and complete mutually explicit errands and tasks (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008).

1.11.2 Interactive Learning

According to, Pradono et al. (2013), “the word intuitive is the way to have a successful and proficient instructing and learning measure where the instructor can catch students' interest and they can learn more in contrast with that of the conventional strategy.”

1.11.3 Perception

Perception can be defined as awareness and perception of sensory information. It also involves how we react to this knowledge. We should think about perception as a mechanism in which we take sensory input from our environment and use that information to communicate with our surroundings.

1.11.4 Social skill

It is a communicative tool used to convey an individual's thoughts, express his or her ideas, opinions and beliefs. It is divided into verbal and non-verbal notions. Verbal interaction aspect is the use of semantics, syntax and pragmatics, tone of voice, volume of speech and the words we choose. On the other hand, non-verbal is one's body language, eye-contact, and gestures in interpreting subtle messages.

1.11.5 Speaking Skill

It is interpreted by Mauranen (2006), as an intelligent discourse between at least two individuals, which is a wide based language marvel in day-by-day life. Cornish (2015), cited that, “Speaking is the progressing, arranged understanding of a speaker's informative goals, of which the recipient's normal and genuine responses are a necessary part”.

1.12 Summary

The issues in relation to upper secondary ESL students' English proficiency and English speaking skill has been discussed in this chapter. In order to gain an in-depth understanding pertaining to the problem, further analysis would be carried out. English proficiency and English speaking skill among upper secondary ESL students is still an issue, and therefore it is necessary to look into this problem, understand the hurdles faced by both ESL teachers and students, in order to provide some solutions for both current and future aspects. Thus, this study investigates the perception of ESL teachers and students on cooperative learning methods in improving both competency and spoken English.

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