The Use Of Group Work To Enhance Speaking Skills For High School Students In Vietnam

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the significance of using cooperative group work on improving students' speaking production and communicative skills in EFL classes. The present work is mainly attempts to investigate the students' awareness of the important of speaking skills in learning English at some high schools in Thai Nguyen province, Vietnam. The results of the study show that most of the students think that speaking is difficult for them because of the lack of real practice. They all agreed that cooperative group working will help them to talk more in a speaking class. It is also true for teachers who participate in the semi-structured interview. The findings from this research provide evidence that cooperative group work is the right technique for developing students' language use and increasing their classroom oral participation in interactional environment.

Key words: *cooperative, group work, speaking skills, communicative skills, language learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in that language. The students in Vietnam have many difficulties when they communicate in the English language. Improving the learners speaking ability in English is one of the most important challenges that Vietnamese teachers try to achieve. The problem we are confronted with here is that the importance of classroom participation is almost neglected and of little interest and the learners are just passive consumers of the knowledge.

It is generally accepted that knowing a language and being able to speak it are not synonymous because speaking is a skill which has to be developed and practiced inside and outside the classroom. We all know that speaking is one of the four macro language skills. For students who learn English as a foreign language in Vietnam, speaking can be seen as the most challenged task for them. This is because of some reasons. Firstly, the class size is large. There are often 30 to 40 students in a class that makes it impossible for teachers to take care of them individually. Secondly, students lack of background knowledge of the topic to be discussed. Thirdly, they might feel insecure about their performance in the target language or they do not want to lose face in front of their classmates so they are reluctant to speak in English. This can be solved by participation in speaking activities in groups that can limit the embarrassment while speaking English.

The use of group work has become more appealing in the teaching and learning process, as it is interactive and encouraging. Group work can be used in teaching varieties of language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Group work offers students opportunities to refine their understanding through discussions with members. It is often recommended for developing social interactions and language skills. It is also a means by which students can support, challenge and extend their learning together, for example by searching for information or through problem solving or working on creative tasks.

According to Douglas (2000: 11) group work can develop the students to interact with other students. It means that group work can develop quite warm, friendly atmospheres in which members feel comfortable and accepted in their membership. The appropriate use of group work in language classroom brings several benefits for the students. First, group work demonstrates the ability of students to communicate, discuss, and cooperate with other students. Second, group work is an effective means of dividing the workload. Third, this allows for small sections or units to be completed providing a sense of completion for everyone and allows better management of the project as a whole. As the result, group work can promote students' practice, the quality of their talk, their motivation, and positive classroom atmosphere in teaching and learning speaking.

Aims of the study

The overall aims of this study are firstly to advance an understanding of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom to enhance speaking skill. Secondly, the researcher would like to explore teachers' awareness towards cooperative learning activities such as pair works and group works. Finally, we would find out the effect of using cooperative activities in enhancing speaking ability

Research questions

With the objectives stated above, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- *What are students' perceptions towards group working activities to enhance speaking ability?*
- *What are teachers' awareness of the using cooperative learning?*
- *How can cooperative learning technique affect the learners' speaking skills?*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) requires learners' exposure to what is called the foreign language skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening. The main aim of acquiring such language skills are to achieve a high development of abilities of receiving and producing the second language either in oral or written form. Speaking skill has always been considered as the most essential skill to be mastered and developed because it is necessary for displaying the language proficiency, learners are going to be put in situations where communication in English is needed, that is why the emphasis is mainly on speaking. So that it is the teacher job and responsibility to develop learners' oral proficiency to allow them effectively use their background knowledge to respond coherently in a given communicative situation.

Communicative language teaching

The foreign language teaching in general and English language teaching in particular has winessed many changes over the last few years. Many methods and approaches have been investigated, trialed and piloted. These changes have created a variety of methods with different principles and techniques. Among them we have the grammar–translation method, the total physical response, the natural approach, and many others. In the 1970s, a reaction to traditional language teaching methods and approaches began and spread around the world as older methods such as grammar–translation method, audiolingualism, and situational language teaching. With the growing need for good communication skills and the importance of English on today's world, teachers seek to discover a significant that meets the demand of students to use this language for communication. Thus, communicative language teaching (CLT) is viewed as the best approach for this purpose. It is mainly related to the idea of Harmer (2001: 70) which stated that "language learning will take care of itself". According to the center for applied linguistics members, communicative language teaching is considered as the product of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the audiolingual and grammar-translation methods of foreign language instruction.

Therefore, on account of the limitations of the previous methods, CLT has been developed and it mainly focused on the students' ability to interact and communicate which was absent in the other methods. Nowadays, communicative language teaching is considered as an approach for teaching rather than a method; hence, it is based on the idea that language learning means learning how to use the language to achieve a better communication inside and outside the classroom. Richards & Rodgers (2001, quoted in Brown, 2007: 241) noted that "CLT is best understood as an approach rather than a method". CLT leads to a re-examination of language teaching goals, syllabi, and classroom activities and has had a major impact on changes in language teaching worldwide. Some of its principles have been incorporated into other communicative approaches, such as Task-Based language teaching, Cooperative language learning, and Content-Based instruction.

Spada (2007) distinguished two versions of communicative language teaching, weak and strong versions, both of which emphasized the importance of promoting learners' communicative competence in the target language. The weak version's general consensus was that communicative language teaching is a meaning-based, learner-centered approach to second language teaching where fluency is given priority over accuracy and the emphasis is on the comprehension and the production of messages, not the teaching or the correction of the language form. Spada's strong version (2007: 275) described "communicative language teaching is an approach to L2 instruction which is primarily meaning-based and includes attention to both fluency and accuracy. When we compare the two versions we find that, the first one could be described as'learning to use English' while the second one entails using English to learn it".

Communicative language teaching (CLT) refers to both processes and goals in language classroom. The central concept in CLT is 'Communicative Competence'. Therefore, it aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching; it means the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately. In other words, its goal is making use of real-life situations in which communication is needed. Richards (2005: 3) declared that:

> "CLT can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom".

A deep understanding of Communicative Language Teaching theory and its implication for classroom practice is very crucial for both teachers and learners, as it aims to help learners to use the target language for communication. In addition, to give learners freedom to say what they want and when they want.

The nature of speaking

Speaking is one of the four macro skills in addition to listening, reading and writing that are necessary for effective communication language in both first and second language learning contexts. As it was noted at the beginning of this work, the main objective of learning any foreign language is to be able to speak and communicate in that language. So speaking is very important since it provides learners with the opportunity to hold successful conversation as well as manage interaction.

The learning of English speaking skills is a preference for a lot of English as a foreign/second language learners. Language learners sometimes evaluate their success in language learning based on how well they have improved in their spoken language ability. Teachers and textbooks use either direct approaches that concentrate on particular aspects of oral interaction such as turn-taking and topic management or indirect approaches which make situations for oral interaction by group work, task work, and other strategies (Richards, 1990).

According to Harmer (2007), human communication is a complex process. Persons need communication when they want to say something and transmit information. Speakers use communication when they are going to inform someone about something. Speakers apply language according to their own goals. Therefore, speakers should be both listeners and speakers at the same time

for the effective communication.

Speaking is very important in second language learning. Despite its importance, speaking has been overlooked in schools and universities due to different reasons like emphasis on grammar and unfavorable teacher-student proportions. Speaking has been absent from testing because of the problem in assessing it objectively and the time it takes to carry out speaking tests (Clifford, 1987). Speaking is a skill which is worthy of attention in both first and second language. Learning the speaking skill is the most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language and success is measured based on the ability to perform a conversation in the language (Nunan, 1995).

Of the most difficult skills language learners face in language learning is speaking skill. It is believed that speaking is the most important of the four language skills. Many learners state that they have spent so many years studying English language but cannot speak it appropriately and understandably (Bueno, Madrid, & Mclaren, 2006).

The teaching and learning of speaking

Speaking is an activity of delivering massage, it occurs between speaker and listener orally. In other words, the main point of speaking activity is that speakers communicate their massage to the listeners. In this case, the speaker and listener should be able to understand each other. The speaker can produce the sounds that involved the massages and the listener can receive, process, and response the massages. Byrne (1984: 8) in Temungingsih (1997: 6) further says that speaking is an activity involving two or more participants as hearers and speakers who react to what they hear and their contributions. Each participant has an attention or a set of intentions goal that he wants to achieve in the interaction. In speaking, there is a goal or a purpose to be achieved by the speaker.

Speaking involves two participants at least. It means that we cannot do it individually we need partner to communicate in the same language. So, speaking is a process of transferring information, ideas and expressions that used the good form of sentence in order to make the listener understand of what we are saying. In addition, speaking is described by Fulcher as much more than just a skill, it is actually "the ability that makes us human" (Fulcher, 2003).

Bygate (1987) distinguishes between language knowledge and language skills; knowledge is what enables people to talk and skills is knowledge actively carried out in interaction, something that can be imitated and practiced. He further states that language knowledge is basically a set of grammar and pronunciation rules, vocabulary and knowledge about how they are normally used; skills are considered to be the ability to use this knowledge. Brown (2000: 250) states that speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. Based on that idea, there are three important points that have to be occurred to the participants of communication (speakers and listeners) to construct the meaning during the interaction among them.

In speaking process, one tries to communicate with and send out his/her message to the others. In this case, the communication needs a speaker and a listener. Therefore, in speaking process, especially in dialogue, needs at least two people because we cannot do it individually. Referring to this, transactional dialogue is suitable to measure students' speaking achievements since transactional dialogue refers to situation where the focus is on what is said or done. The message and making oneself understood clearly and accurately is the central focus, rather than the participants and how they interact socially with each other. Itkonen (2010) mentions other relevant features as proficiency and coherence. Equally, Louma (2004) includes components of speaking as pronunciation, and spoken grammar.

According to Rivers (1987) the teaching of speaking skill is more demanding on the teacher than the teaching of any language skills. There are five aspects must be fulfilled in a speaking classroom, they are:

(1) *Fluency* which is defined as the ability to speak fluently and accurately. Signs of fluency include a reasonable fast speed of speaking and only a small numbers of pauses. Fluency refers to the ease and speed of the flow of the speech (Harris, 1974). Fluency is the smoothness or flow with which sounds, syllables, words and phrases are join to other when speaking. It means that when a person makes a dialogue with another person, the other person can give respond well without difficulty.

(2) *Grammar* as defined by Heaton (1990) that grammar as the students' ability to manipulate structure and to distinguish appropriate grammatical form in appropriate ones. Meanwhile, Syakur (1978) defines grammar as a correct arrangement sentence in conversation.

(3) *Vocabulary*, the speaker cannot communicate well if he/she does not have sufficient vocabulary. Therefore, vocabulary means the appropriate diction which is used in communication as what stated by Syakur (1987).

(4) *Pronunciation*, which is the ability to produce easily comprehensible articulation (Syakur, 1987). Meanwhile Harris (1974) defines pronunciation as the intonation patterns.

(5) *Comprehension*, comprehensibility denotes the ability of understanding the speaker's intention and general meaning (Heaton, 1990). Defines comprehension for oral communication that requires a subject to respond to speech as well as to initiate it (Syakur, 1987). This idea means that if a person can answer or express the sentence well and correctly, it shows that he/ she comprehends or understands well.

Speaking difficulties in foreign language learning

The goal of teaching the oral skills is to enhance the learners' communicative efficiency, but when they try to express themselves there is always hesitation, repetition, and too much pauses. Learners often find some difficulties when practising the speaking skill due to a lack of interest in the subject, lack of self-confidence, etc. Ur (1991) claim that there are four main problems in getting students speak in the foreign language in the classroom which are: inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother-tongue use.

Inhibition

This problem which occurs more when EFL learners attempt to participate in the classroom, make them unfortunately face many difficulties that decrease the students' ability to speak confidently in front of their classmates, so that Guiora et all (1980; as cited

in Brown, 2000: 148) concluded after designing an experiment, that there is a direct relationship between inhibition and pronunciation ability in second language.

Nothing to say

The common expressions EFL Learners employ when they are imposed to participate in a given topic is "I have nothing to talk about", "I don't know", "no comment" or they keep silent. Ur (1991: 121) confirmed that when he states "even if they are not inhibited, you often hear learners complain that they cannot think of anything to say". Monath & Kase (2007) share the same idea, since they believe that people often feel nervous when they have to talk in public meeting, and the lack of self-confidence and preparation make them think that they have nothing to say, and they are going to look like idiots.

Low or uneven participation

This problem refers to the amount of each student's talking time. Ur (1991: 121) states that "only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is to be heard; and in a large group this means that each one will have only very little talking time". This problem is compounded by the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

Goh & Burns (2012: 234) share the same concern expressed so far when stated that "speaking lessons should not be limited to simply asking learners to complete a speaking tasks. There is more that teachers can do to help them gradually improve their speaking." Teachers should be careful by designing and selecting the appropriate classroom techniques, skills, strategies, and the most important emphasizing repeated tasks so that learners have further language resources for improving their first performance.

Mother tongue use

EFL learners of the same mother tongue tend to use it outside and even inside the classroom because they feel more comfortable and less exposed to the target language. Ur (1991: 121) confirmed that by stating: In classes where all, or a number of, the learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it: because it is easier, because it feels unnatural to speak to one another in a foreign language, and because they feel "exposed" if they are speaking their mother tongue. Therefore, learners will never be able to use the foreign language correctly if they keep using their mother tongue. Harmer (2001: 131) states that "it is an entirely natural thing to do; when we learn a foreign language we use translation almost without thinking about it, particularly at elementary and intermediate level." Unconsciously learners use their mother tongue, but Harmer (2001) ensures that this is not only learner's responsibility; rather it seems to be an example of failure for both learners and teachers. In other words, teachers should be aware if they frequently use the learner's language in the classroom, because learners also will feel more comfortable to use their mother tongue in the classroom, and this of course may not help them to improve their proficiency level.

Cooperative language learning

One of the specific adaptive approaches of group work is cooperative learning. In their research study, Kutnick et al. (2006) found that small cooperative and collaborative learning is more effective for students to share their cognitive perspective and problem-solving skills than students working individually. However, cooperative group work is different from collaborative group work because it must include, and students need to demonstrate five specific principles for cooperative group work to be successful (Cheong, 2010; Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011; Gillies, 2003; Sachs, Candlin, & Rose, 2003; Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013). According to Gillies (2003) and Chiriac and Frykedal (2011), in structuring cooperative learning, it must include these five key elements: positive interdependence, accountability, social and cognitive development, and interaction.

Cooperative learning is an effective way to encourage students to "want to learn more, like school better, like each other better, have higher self-esteem, and learn more effective social skills" (Johnson & Johnson, 1991:15). In cooperative learning groups, each student has a specific role and students are able to produce work based on everyone's input. By assigning roles in group work, students in the class will be able to contribute as well as gain from other members in their group. Furthermore, some of the benefits of cooperative learning include: academic gains across different subjects, increase in participation in classrooms, and more social interactions with peers (Gillies, 2003).

Therefore, cooperative learning is an essential strategy for supporting students in the mainstream classroom. For the strategy to be effective, it must be purposeful and meaningful for the students (Coelho, 2004). In cooperative learning, students will benefit by working with peers with more proficient English skills who will provide oral feedback and be language models for the students in the classroom (Coelho, 2004).

Cooperative language learning represents the systematic and carefully planned use of group - based procedures. It seeks to overcome some of the weaknesses of traditional group work. It was typically informal, unstructured, and only used on rare occasions (Slavin, 1995: ix). Macaulay and Gonzalez (1996: 2) characterize it as follow:

> "The instructional use of small groups so that learners are able to work together in a manner that enhances both group and individual learning. The key to cooperative learning is the careful structuring of learning groups. There are many ways to structure such groups, but some of the key elements are building interdependence, the designing of interactive processes, and account ability … the building of social skills around such areas as decision making, communication, and conflict management is also fundamental to cooperative learning."

Group work in language learning

Brown (2000: 3) has offered the following minimalist, common-sense definition of groups: 'a group exists when two or more people define themselves as members of its and when its existance is recognized by at least one another.' In another words, a group qualifies as a 'group' when it has become a psychological reality for insiders and outsiders alike. We can, of course, try and provide a more detail and more descriptive definition.

Cohen (2014: 66) defines group work as:

> 'students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a clearly assigned learning task.

Moreover, students are expected to carry out their task without direct and immediate supervision of the teacher. Group work is not the same as ability grouping, in which the teachers divide up the class by academic criteria so that they can instruct a more homogeneous group. It should also be distinguished from small groups that teachers compose for intensive instruction, such as the flexible and temporary grouping procedures often used in individualized reading instruction or differentiated instruction.'

Why use group work in language teaching?

It is clear that in order to maximise the opportunities to learn in your classroom, student teachers should not just learn on their own, but engage in collaborative learning and support one another. Research shows that group work is one of the most effective ways of increasing learning outcomes. Slavin and colleagues (1995: 177) reviewed a great deal of evidence and concluded that "co-operative learning is one of the greatest success stories in the history of modern research". The four main reasons for this success seem to be Motivation, Social cohesion, Personalisation, Cognitive elaboration.

If students are to get the help they need, especially in a large class, they must be available to help one another. Student teachers teaching one another can be surprisingly effective: in one study students learned almost as much when peer-tutored as they did from one-to-one instruction from their teacher, possibly because they feel less intimidated asking questions of a peer.

Group formation

Group formation is an important factor in creating positive interdependence. Richards and Rodgers (2001: 196) state that while the teacher breaks down his classes into pairs and small groups, many factors should be considered:

- Considering group size: typically group size is from two to four. This will depend on the tasks the students have to carry out, students' age, and time division.
- Assigning students to groups: groups can be teacher - selected, random, or students - selected.
- Suggesting student's role in groups: Each group member has a specific role to play, such as noise monitor, recorder, or summarizer.

Group work for speaking skills

Group work in language learning is a powerful educational approach principally because of its contribution in enhancing students' achievement and productivity and providing more opportunities for communication. From the perspective of second language teaching, McGroatry (1989; in Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 195) offers the potential advantages for ESL students in CLL classrooms:

- Increased frequency and variety of second language practice through different types of interaction.
- Possibility for development or use of language in ways that support cognitive development and increased language skills.
- Opportunities to integrate language with content - based instruction.
- Opportunities to include a greater variety of curricular materials to stimulate language as well as concept learning.
- Freedom for teacher to master new professional skills, particularly those emphasizing communication.
- Opportunities for students to act as resources for each other, thus assuming a more active role in their learning.

There are additional important benefits of cooperative learning. Slavin (1995: 60) found that the most important psychological outcome of group work is its effect on students' self- esteem. Students' beliefs that they are valuable and important learners are of critical importance for their ability to be confident decision-makers, and ultimately to be productive individuals. In cooperative classroom, motivation found to have great effect on enhancing students" performance Slavin (1995: 16) states that:

Rewarding groups based on group performance (or the sum of individual performances) creates an interpersonal reward structure in which group members will give or withhold social reinforces (such as praise and encouragement) in response to group mates" task-related efforts.

Types of group work
Collaborative group work

Group work, or collaborative group work, is a teaching and learning strategy that can be utilized for all types of students and can take various forms in the classroom. Using group work as a pedagogical tool can be useful in numerous ways. It can be used to organize activities or tasks in the class where an assignment is given by the teacher and students are expected to work as a group to solve the group task (Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011).

In collaborative group work, every group member is involved in working on a given task to produce an outcome that they all agree upon (Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011; Kutnick, Ota, & Berdondini, 2006). This allows all types of learners, including English language learners, the opportunity to be in an environment where they can work together to discuss their ideas, share and listen to their peers' thinking process. Nair and Alwee (2012) state that opportunities are provided through group work for students to talk freely with their peers, which ultimately allows all students to practice and improve their oral language skills.

Working in pairs or groups is considered as one of the important factors to improve learners' communication. Different individuals have developed many approaches to group work over the last time. According to Toseland & Rivas (2009: 5) group work is defined as goal-directed activity with small groups of people aimed at meeting socio emotional needs and accomplishing tasks. It means that task is directed to individual members or a group and as a whole within a system of delivery. Gillies & Ashman (2003: 54) state that group work, in language class, is a cooperative activity, it is designed and implemented to develop social strategies and acceptable social attitudes in students, and to improve social relations within and between groups. In cooperative activity the students share aims and responsibilities to complete a task assigned by the teacher in groups or in pairs.

Blatchford & Kutnick (2009: 3) states that, there are four principles to be made successful of group work: first, the students and classroom need good organized and strategically managed its means that make the group work more effective in composition classroom seating arrangements and the characteristics of groups such as their size. Second, group-work skills have to be developed. Third, group-work activities should encourage the activist of group, and the last, the students should adopt a range of roles that are supportive of group work and that encourage the independence of students directly.

Student interaction

One of the greater benefits of implementing group work in the classroom is that students have the opportunity to communicate and interact with each other. By allowing students to interact with other students in the classroom, students can listen and have conversations with their peers. With limited interruptions by the teacher during group work, students can form discussions amongst themselves about the topic or problem being discussed. By participating in group work, all students are able to collaborate and have opportunities to exchange feelings, ideas, and thoughts (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Therefore, within group work, student interactions are encouraged and fostered between students, which allows all students to develop and practice their social skills. Student engagement and interaction is especially important for students because as Tuan and Nhu (2010) further state, one of the ways in which students acquire the English language is through their environment and the interaction occurring between the students.

Small group peer interactions are paramount for students to acquire the language and research has shown that students feel less pressure to be accurate at all times working in groups (Long & Porter, 1985; Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Wong Fillmore and Teale (as cited in Helfrich & Bosh, 2011), report that through opportunities to interact with native or native- like speakers, there was an increase in the language of instruction with ELLs. According to Tuan and Nhu (2010: 39), "interaction is a key of second language acquisition and exists as the central feature [,] it facilitates language learning and engages students in participating language learning activities". It is evident that through group work, students are provided with opportunities to engage in social interactions and conversations, which contribute to enhancing their oral language skills.

Classroom environment

Providing all students with a safe and an inviting environment will encourage students to explore their learning. When students participate and are engaged in group work, Long and Porter (1985) state that because it allows students to communicate face- to-face, it sets up a natural setting for conversation. Kutnick, Ota, and Berdondini (2006) further support that this natural environment in the classroom fosters students to communicate in a higher quality than during independent or teacher directed work period.

Furthermore, Tuan and Nhu (2010) also note that group work also creates a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, which increases the quantity and quality of language use in students. When students work in groups, they feel that they are not hurried to create and produce sentences or answers as they would in a whole-class discussion. Furthermore, "students are more likely to participate orally in class when they [feel] supported by [their] teachers and peers" (Long & Porter, 1985: 19).

The role of the teacher with group work activities

Although group work is led by students and is created for student learning opportunities, it is the teacher's responsibility to organize students and prepare tasks for group work. As there are great benefits to implementing group work in the classroom for all types of learners, teachers need to use this strategy to maximize each student's learning opportunity to speak and listen to the English language (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Teachers often fear implementing group work in the classroom because of either previous negative experiences with classroom management challenges or lack of ability to hand over control to the students (Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011; Kutnick et al., 2006).

Using group work as a pedagogical tool will empower all types to students to participate and enjoy learning in the classroom. Therefore, within the classroom, teachers need to integrate students as fully as possible and not underestimate the role of peers in the education of students (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). All students, including students, should be given the opportunity to contribute and all group members should be able to use each other as resources for the assigned group work. When grouping students together, teachers should also consider partnering native and non-native English-speaking students to work together so that they can learn from their different perspectives (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011).

Therefore, although students benefit from teacher-led activities, these types of activities should be implemented along with peer-focused activities so that students have the opportunity to practice their oral language skills with their fellow peers (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011).

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design

The present study employs a mixed method which consist of both qualitative and quantitative method. In the present study, the quantitative phase is carried out first to obtain teachers and students' awareness of their difficulties in teaching and learning speaking skill. The qualitative phase comes after as a source of information to consolidate what has gained from the quantitative phase.

Participants

The participants of the study consist of 272 grade 11 high school students. Among the participants, 142 (52.2%) are females and 130 (47.8%) are male students. In order to investigate teachers' awareness of cooperative activities in class, 10 teachers of English participate in a survey and interviews.

Instruments

Questionnaires and interview were the main tool to collect data.

Data analysis procedure

The data obtained from the survey will be analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel software to find out the mean figures for different items. These results will then be used for interpretation of the findings. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, were recorded, transcribed and translated into English.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results of research question 1

The first research question tries to find out the students' perception towards group work activities in a speaking class. There are 14 questions in the questionnaire. The findings from the survey are summarized in the table 1 below.

Items	A	B	C	D	E	F
1. How do you find speaking in English?	0 0%	0 0%	152 55.9%	120 44.1%		
2. What is the most important skill that you need to develop?	180 66.2%	51 18.8%	20 7.4%	21 7.6%		
3. How often do you participate in the classroom activities?	77 28.3%	150 55.1%	29 10.7%	16 5.9%		
4. If you are afraid to talk in the classroom, is it because of	32 11.7%	24 8.8%	167 61.4%	20 7.4%	29 10.7%	
5. Do you feel comfortable in the oral class?	28 10.3%	244 89.7%				
6. If uncomfortable, what makes you feel so?	85 31.3%	62 22.8%	125 45.9%			
7. Do you think that in order to learn the language you have to speak it?	101 37.1%	171 62.9%	0 0%	0 0%		
8. Have you ever heard about cooperative learning?	59 21.7%	213 78.3%				
9. In oral expression session, do you prefer?	63 23.2%	74 27.2%	135 49.6%			
10. Do you find it difficult to work with your classmates in groups?	117 43%	155 57%				
11. When you work in small groups, do you feel that you are?	60 22%	165 60.7%	47 17.3%	0 0%		
12. Which of the following problems do you usually face when working in groups?	78 28.7%	116 42.6%	13 4.8%	49 18%	16 5.9%	
13. Do you feel that cooperative group work helps you to	40 14.7%	32 11.8%	10 3.7%	83 30.5%	41 15%	66 24.3%
14. Do you think that cooperative learning helps you to improve your speaking skills?	196 72%	76 28%				

Table 1: Results of research question 1

In the first question, there are four options as the answers *(A) very easy, (B) easy, (C) difficult, (D) very difficult*. None of the students said that speaking is easy. 152 students (55.9%) said that speaking is difficult, 120 students (44.1%) said that speaking is very difficult. That can be inferred that most of the students think speaking is a challenge skill for them. In the second question. In the second question, the four options are *(A) Speaking, (B) Listening, (C) Writing and (D) Reading*. 180 students (66.2%) admitted that Speaking is the most important skill. About the same numbers of answers 20 and 21 for writing and reading respectively. This is rather strange that most of them find speaking is difficult but most of them said that speaking is the most important skill. Question number 3 contained four options as *(A) Frequently, (B) Sometimes, (C) Rarely and (D) Never*. 16 students (5.9%) said that they never participate in the classroom activities and 150 students (55.1%) said that they sometimes participate in classroom activities. Only a third of the students said that they frequently participate in activities in a speaking class. This might be an explanation why they find speaking is difficult. In question number 4, 167 students (61.4%) confirmed that they do not have sufficient vocabulary to speaking. 32 of the students (11.7%) afraid of making grammatical mistake whereas 29 students (10.7%) afraid of teaches' negative feedback. 24 students (8.8%) and the last 20 (7.4%) agreed that they are afraid of making pronunciation mistakes and they lack of self-confidence. In the next question, most of the students (244) affirmed that they do not feel comfortable if the speaking class. Only 28 of them (10.3%) agreed that they feel comfortable if the speaking class. In question number 6, 125 out of 272 students (45.9%) agreed that *(C) the different classroom activities* make them feel

uncomfortable. 85 students (31.3%) said that *(A)the teacher* is the reason that make them uncomfortable while 62 students (22.8%) confirmed that *(B) the classes* are the main reason. In question number 7, 171 students (62.9%) agreed and 101 students (37.1%) strongly agreed. None of them disagree or strongly disagree. In question number 8,213 students (78.3%) said that they have never heard about it. Only 59 students (21.7%) know what it is. In question number 9, 135 students (49.6%) prefer group work, 74 students (27.2%) like working in pair and 63 students (23.2%) love working on their own. In the next question, more than half of the students 155 (57%) find it easy to work with their friends, and 117 students find it hard to work in groups. In question number 11, 165 students (60.7%) find that they are motivated whereas 60 students (22%) said that they are strongly motivated and 47 of them (17.3%) agreed that they feel less motivated. None of the students find that they are not motivated during their English speaking class. In question number 12, 116 students (42.6%) found that they find it difficult to express their ideas to the group members. 78 of them (28.7%) were afraid of making mistakes. 49 students (18%) imposed points of view while only 16 students (5.9%) had to face with their group members noise and 13 students (4.8%) did not like when other members correct their mistakes. In question number 13, 83 students (30.5%) agreed that group work helps building good relationship among members. 66 students (24.3%) found that it helps them feel more comfortable, 41 students (15%) confirmed that it helps arguing the ideas to convince others, and 40 other (14.7%) believed that they can ask and respond for more questions while 32 students (11.8%) said that they can learn to listen to different opinion. Only 10 of them (3.7%) said that cooperative group work helps evaluate their peers' performance. In the last question, 196 students (72%) agreed while 76 students (28%) disagreed. It is clear that students understand about the benefits of working in groups.

Result from questionnaire 2
In order to find out teachers' awareness towards the uses of cooperative language teaching and learning activities in classroom the researcher carried out a survey using questionnaire for teacher (*See Appendix 2*). The findings from the survey are summarized in the table 2 below.

Questions	A	B	C	D
1. To what extent do you think your students value the importance of speaking in learning a foreign language?	3 30%	3 30%	2 20%	2 20%
2. Which of the following describes your students' level of oral performance in English?	0 0%	5 50%	5 50%	
3. Can you say that the majority of your students are motivated to speak in English?	7 70%	3 30%		
4. How often do your students participate in the oral expression session?	7 70%	2 20%	1 10%	
5. Do you think that students do not participate in because …	3 30%	4 40%	3 30%	
6. What do you find most difficult for teaching speaking?	2 20%	4 40%	2 20%	2 20%
7. Do you evaluate your students' oral production?	10 100%	0 0%		
8. If you answer YES, what do you prefer?	2 20%	2 20%	1 10%	5 50%
9. Do you agree that in order to learn the language, students have to speak it?	8 80%	2 20%		
10. Which of the following techniques do you use most?	5 50%	2 20%	2 20%	1 10%
11. How often do you use group work when teaching speaking?	7 70%	3 30%	0 0%	0 0%
12. Does cooperate language learning enhance your students' participation?	8 80%	2 20%		
13. Do you rise your students' awareness towards the value of cooperative learning?	15 100%	0 0%		
14. Do your students face problem working in groups?	8 80%	2 20%		
15. Do you think that cooperative group work technique improves learners' speaking skills?	15 100%	0 0%		

Table 2: Results of research question 2

In the first question, 6 out of 10 teachers (60%) agreed that the students find the important role of speaking in learning foreign language. 4 of them (40%) showed that their students understand a little and did not know about the important role of speaking. The second question, 5 teachers (50%) stated that the students are at average levels, and the other 5 (50%) believed that their students are at low level of oral performance in English. In the next question, 7 teachers (70%)confirmed that most of the students

are motivated to speak in English in speaking lessons while 3 teachers (30%) believed that the learners are not motivated speak in English during their speaking lessons. In the fourth question, most of the teachers, 7 (70%) said that their students frequently participate in the oral expression session. 2 of them (20%) stated that they sometimes take part in the activities and only one teacher said he/her students rarely participate in the oral expression session. Question number 5, 4 out of 10 teachers (40%) showed that the students are not interested in the classroom activities whereas 6 teachers (60%) assigned that the learners are shy and the classroom are overcrowed. In question number 6, 4 teachers (40%) found pronunciation is the most difficult for teaching speaking while 6 of them (60%) found that grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure were the problem when teaching speaking. In question number 7, all teachers agreed that they evaluate learners' oral production. In question number 8, 5 of the teachers (50%) preferred all types of evaluations including self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and teacher-evaluation. 4 teachers (40%) preferred self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and only one of them (10%) preferred teacher-evaluation. In question number 9, most of the teachers questioned,8 (80%), agreed that in order to learn the language, students have to speak it. Only 2 teachers (20%) did not agree with the idea. In question number 10, 5 teachers use group work techniques in their class, 4 of them (40%) use role-play and problem solving techniques to teach, and only 1 teacher uses discussion in her/his lessons. In the next question, 7 teachers (70%) said that they always use group work when teaching speaking while 3 of them (30%) said they often have group work activities in their speaking lessons. In question number 12, 8 (80%), agreed that cooperate language learning improve their students' participation. Only 2 teachers (20%) did not agree with the idea. In question number 13, 10 teachers (100%) stated that they rose their students' understanding towards the value of cooperative learning. In question number 14, most of the teachers, 8 (80%), agreed that their students have difficulties when working in groups. Only 2 teachers (20%) said that the students have no problem when working in groups. In the last question, all of the teachers confirmed that cooperative group work technique improves their students' speaking skills.

Results of research question 3

In the last phase of the study, the researcher interviewed 5 teachers of English at Chu Van An high school in Thai Nguyen province. The selected format is semi-structured interview. The interviews are conducted in Vietnamese language because all of the teachers and the interviewer are Vietnamese. The response then will be recorded and noted for further analysis. After that all the notes are transcribed and translated into English.

The first interviewee was an experienced teacher of English. She has been teaching English for over 15 years and holds master degree in English language teaching. She is quite concerned about the teaching and learning of English, especially speaking skill. She understood that the communicative language teaching should focuses on speaking and listening, however, the time limit and exam-based syllabus prevent her from carrying out activities to promote speaking ability. She admitted that her students do not enjoy speaking too much. They paid most of their time doing grammar and pronunciation exercises which are useful for their graduation examination. For the question of possible problems when teaching speaking, the teacher said that most of the students do not talk even they know the answers. They are not willing to co-operate with other students. The teacher expected a change in the format of the graduation exam so that students shift their aims to speaking rather than grammar and readings.

The second teacher in the interview was a newly-graduated student. She was quite open and talked a lot about how to change students' attitudes about English language learning. The teacher emphasized the importance of productive skills. She used many co-operative activities in class and assigned many extra reading for students. However, as she said, her students are lazy and be dependent to some strong students. That means when she assigned homework, only some students work, the rest does nothing. She also agreed that the final exam format shapes the way her students learn English.

The third teacher in the interview is a young teacher. She started teaching two years ago. She admitted that students are not willing to participate in the speaking activities, especially group or pair work. Students are also reported that they have little knowledge to participate in the speaking activities. Sometimes the poor vocabulary prevents students from speaking. The teacher also mentioned the exam-based syllabus is the most challenges for the teaching and learning of speaking.

The fourth teacher in the interview said that she rarely carries out speaking activities in class because not many students pay attention to the activities or want to talk. What they want to work on is reading and grammatical exercises. She also noted that students are negative and poorly activated speakers. That means they do not see the importance of speaking when studying English.

The last teacher in the interview is an old teacher who have been teaching English for nearly twenty years. She confessed that she herself rarely practice speaking. She tries to avoid speaking activities such as group works and pair works. She gave students a lot of reading exercises and tried to make them be aware of grammar points. She said that her students prefer doing those exercises to doing speaking activities.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

By looking at the results from the quantitative research, the researcher found that most of students in the study think speaking is a difficult skill to develop. Most of them do not participate in speaking activities such as group work or pair work, but they do not speak because they do not want to make mistakes. Another reason for not speaking in class is that they do not have enough vocabulary. However, most of them said that speaking activities are motivated and they found cooperative learning method such as group work and pair work help them speak better.

The results from teachers' survey show that all the teacher use speaking activities in speaking classes and they all evaluate students' speaking skill. Almost of the teachers agree that speaking activities enhance their students' speaking skills. Most of the teachers said that they actively carried out speaking activities while teaching. However, the interviews show some contradict results. Most of the interviewed teacher said that they rarely do speaking activities in class because their students do not enjoy speaking as they prefer exercise for the final graduation exams.

By looking at the results from qualitative and quantitative study, the researcher would like to suggest some ideas for teaching students at high schools as followed:

- Teachers should raise the awareness of teaching and learning speaking for the students.
- There should be extra exercises for students so that they can accumulate an input for speaking as an output. These include reading assignments.
- Teachers should be positive when giving feedbacks to students' performance, especially the speaking performance.
- In a long term, the English assessment should include communicative activities so that students may change their attitudes towards the learning of English.
- There should be varieties of activities outside classroom for students to speak

<div align="center">REFERENCES</div>

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Appendix I: Students' questionnaire

Dear students,
*We are preparing a research on "**The use of group-work to enhance speaking skill for students at Tran Phu high school**". We would be grateful if you could answer these questions to help us in our research. Your answers are very important for the validity of this research we are undertaking. Please, circle the letter (A, B, C…) to indicate your choice.*

General information
Full name: ………………………………………………………….
Class: ………………………………………………………………
Ethnic minority group: ………………………………………………….

1. How do you find speaking in English?
   A. Very easy
   B. Easy
   C. Difficult
   D. Very difficult
2. What is the most important skill that you need to develop?
   A. Speaking
   B. Listening
   C. Writing
   D. Reading
3. How often do you participate in the classroom activities?
   A. Frequently
   B. Sometimes
   C. Rarely
   D. Never
4. If you are afraid to talk in the classroom, is it because of
   A. Fear of making grammatical mistakes
   B. Fear of making pronunciation mistakes
   C. Having deficient vocabulary
   D. Lack of self-confidence
   E. Fear of teacher's negative feed back
5. Do you feel comfortable in the oral class?
   A. Yes
   B. No
6. If uncomfortable, what makes you feel so?
   A. The teacher
   B. Your classes
   C. The different classroom activities
7. Do you think that in order to learn the language you have to speak it?
   A. Strongly agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree

      D. Strongly disagree

8. Have you ever heard about cooperative learning?
   A. Yes
   B. No

9. In oral expression session, do you prefer?
   A. Individual work
   B. Pair work
   C. Group work

10. Do you find it difficult to work with your classmates in groups?
    A. Yes
    B. No

11. When you work in small groups, do you feel that you are?
    A. Strongly motivated
    B. Motivated
    C. Less motivated
    D. Not motivated

12. Which of the following problems do you usually face when working in groups?
    A. Fear of making mistakes
    B. I find it difficult to express my ideas to the group members
    C. I do not like when students in my group correct my mistakes
    D. Imposing points of view
    E. Group members noise

13. Do you feel that cooperative group work helps you to
    A. Ask and respond to more questions
    B. Learn to listen to different opinions
    C. Evaluate your peers' performance
    D. Building good relationships among students
    E. Arguing your ideas to convince others
    F. Feel more comfortable

14. Do you think that cooperative learning helps you to improve your speaking skills?
    A. Yes
    B. No

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix II: Teachers' questionnaire

Dear teachers,

*We are preparing a research on the "**The use of group work to enhance enhance speaking skill for high school students**". We would be grateful if you could answer these questions to help us in our research. Your answers are very important for the validity of this research we are undertaking. Please, circle the letter (A, B, C...) to indicate your choice, and specify your answer when needed.*

General information

Your full-name: ……………………………………………………..

Your institution: ………………………………………………….

Your qualification: ………………………………………………….

Your experience of teaching English: …………………….…..... years

1. To what extent do you think your students value the importance of speaking in learning a foreign language?
   A. Very much
   B. Much
   C. Little
   D. Not important
2. Which of the following describes your students' level of oral performance in English?
   A. High
   B. Average
   C. Low
3. Can you say that the majority of your students are motivated to speak in English?
   A. Yes
   B. No
4. How often do your students participate in the oral expression session?
   A. Frequently
   B. Sometimes
   C. Rarely
   D. Never
5. Do you think that students do not participate because?
   A. They are shy.
   B. They are not interested in the classroom activities.
   C. The overcrowded classroom.
6. What do you find most difficult for teaching speaking?
   A. Grammar
   B. Pronunciation
   C. Vocabulary
   D. Sentence structure
7. Do you evaluate your students' oral production?
   A. Yes
   B. No
8. If you answer yes, what do you prefer?
   A. Self-evaluation
   B. Peer-evaluation
   C. Teacher-evaluation
   D. All of them
9. Do you agree that in order to learn the language, students have to speak it?
   A. Strongly agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly disagree
10. Which of the following techniques do you use most?
    A. Group work
    B. Role-play
    C. Problem solving
    D. Discussion
11. How often do you use group work when teaching speaking?
    A. Always
    B. Often
    C. Rarely
    D. Never
12. Does cooperative language learning enhance your students' participation?
    A. Yes
    B. No

13. Do you rise your students' awareness towards the value of cooperative learning?
     A. Yes
     B. No
14. Do your students' face problems working in groups?
     A. Yes
     B. No
15. Do you think that cooperative group work technique improves learners' speaking skill?
     A. Yes
     B. No

Thank you for your cooperation!

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW (For teacher)

1. How often do you use cooperative techniques during your speaking class?
2. How do your students react to the activities?
3. What are possible problems of using those cooperative techniques?
4. Do you find the effectiveness of using those techniques in enhancing speaking ability?