

**IMPROVING EFL SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH COOPERATIVE GROUP WORK:  
COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE FROM UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS IN UZBEKISTAN  
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**Abstract**

In this study the effectiveness of cooperative group work for enhancing students' oral performance in English as a Foreign Language classrooms will be investigated. This paper compares upper secondary school system and students' performance in Uzbekistan and Lithuania. The main objective of this research is to analyze collaborative learning activities can improve students' speaking fluency, confidence, and engagement. This research study uses classroom observation of both countries, speaking tasks, and comparative analysis of students' performance in speaking activities. The findings of this study indicates that collaborative group work can significantly influence students' communicative competence, encourage active participation, and reduce speaking anxiety. The results suggest that the implementation of collaborative work strategies in EFL can improve speaking instruction across different cultures.

**Key words**

cooperative learning, group work, speaking skills, EFL classroom, communicative competence, upper secondary students, comparative education

**Аннотация**

В данном исследовании рассматривается эффективность кооперативной групповой работы для улучшения устной речи учащихся на уроках English as a Foreign Language. В статье проводится сравнительный анализ системы старших классов средней школы и речевых достижений учащихся в Узбекистане и Литве. Основной целью данного исследования является анализ того, каким образом совместные учебные виды деятельности могут способствовать развитию беглости речи, уверенности и вовлеченности учащихся в процессе говорения.

В исследовании используются такие методы, как наблюдение за учебными занятиями в обеих странах, выполнение учащимися речевых заданий, а также сравнительный анализ результатов их устной деятельности. Результаты исследования показывают, что совместная групповая работа может значительно влиять на развитие коммуникативной компетенции учащихся, стимулировать их активное участие и снижать уровень речевой тревожности. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что внедрение стратегий совместной работы в обучении иностранному языку может способствовать улучшению преподавания устной речи в различных культурных контекстах.

**Ключевые слова**

кооперативное обучение, групповая работа, навыки говорения, обучение английскому как иностранному языку, коммуникативная компетенция, учащиеся старших классов, сравнительное образование.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the ability to speak English has become increasingly important for students around the world. Due to the globalization English has become widely used language in education, international communication, science, and other fields. For this reason, many education systems around the world try to place a strong emphasis on developing students' speaking abilities in English classes by using different strategies. However, for the learners of English as a Foreign Language, speaking remains one of the most difficult and troublesome skill to develop. Mostly, students can master grammar and vocabulary, but they often struggle to convey their opinions and express their thoughts orally when they have to speak. This problem remains common in many educational settings where students have limited real communication practises.

One of the main reasons for this difficulty is the traditional organization of many language lessons. In teacher-centered classrooms, teachers usually explain grammar, check exercises, and control most of the classroom interaction. As a result, students spend more time listening than speaking. When they are asked to speak, they may feel nervous or unsure about their language abilities. Such conditions can reduce students' confidence and discourage them from participating actively in classroom discussions.

Many researchers argue that language learning is more effective when students interact with others and use the language for meaningful communication. The sociocultural theory developed by Lev Vygotsky emphasizes that learning takes place through social interaction and collaboration. According to this perspective, students can develop their language skills when they work together, exchange ideas, and support each other during the learning process. Interaction with peers allows learners to practice language in a more natural way and helps them gradually build confidence in using the target language.

One of the most effective teaching approaches that can tackle problems related to speaking and encourage interaction is working collaboratively. In cooperative learning, students can work together in small groups and exchange their ideas, complete different tasks together, and solve problems. This approach enables students to freely share their ideas to their peers and become active participants during the lesson rather than staying passive. Studies conducted by David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson prove that cooperative work improves students' motivation, engagement, and communication skills in the classroom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers in the field of English as a Foreign Language education often claim that speaking skills develop through regular communication and interaction. Cooperative learning strategies are therefore recommended approach to enhance students' oral skills.

Previous research in language education emphasises that speaking practice must be incorporated into classroom activities rather than confined to solitary presentations. Jeremy Harmer says that communicative language teaching helps teachers set up activities where students work together to

share information, talk about ideas, and solve problems. These kinds of activities give students more time to talk and make communication in the classroom more useful.

To comprehend the impact of cooperative learning on speaking development, it is essential to examine the educational contexts in which students engage. Schools often decide how teachers teach, how students interact with each other, and what they can learn.

In the last few years, there have been a number of changes to the general education system in Uzbekistan. The structure of school education typically comprises primary education, lower secondary education, and upper secondary education. Students typically start school when they are six years old and finish twelve years of general education. Most of the time, upper secondary education includes grades 10 to 12 and is meant to get students ready for college or vocational training. Math, natural sciences, social sciences, and foreign languages are some of the subjects that are part of the curriculum. Uzbekistan has more than 10,000 general education schools, and about 6.7 million students are enrolled in secondary school across the country as of the 2024–2025 school year.

After finishing lower secondary school, students can go to academic lyceums or vocational schools to continue their education. These schools offer specialised academic or professional training and let students continue their education. The government of Uzbekistan is establishing new reforms aimed at improving students' oral performance, curriculum quality, and aligning the education system with international standards.

The education of Lithuania somewhat differs from the education system of Uzbekistan, offering a different structure. School education in this country includes primary education, basic education, and upper secondary education. In Lithuania upper education usually lasts 2 years and includes grades of 11 and 12. Mostly students are involved this education stage at the age of sixteen after completing basic education.

Upper secondary education stage is not compulsory for students in Lithuania, but most of the students widely attend to continue their studies at universities or colleges.

Upgrading the quality of foreign language teaching has become an important priority for both of the countries. Both Uzbekistan and Lithuania have introduced several new reforms regarding new strategies for improving students' communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language. These reforms place a strong emphasis on the importance of modern teaching methods, student participation, and communicative classroom practises.

One of the most effective strategies that can help students improve their communication skills in foreign language settings is cooperative learning. Both of these countries have implemented cooperative learning environment in their classrooms where students can practise speaking with their peers or in small groups. One of the main advantages of cooperative learning is that it can create a supportive and engaging learning environment for students. This environment helps them to freely express themselves and gradually improve their speaking fluency.

This study examined the importance of cooperative learning in enhancing oral skills of students in EFL with particular attention to the experiences of upper secondary schools students in Uzbekistan and Lithuania. The results of this study show that cooperative work creates more opportunities for students to actively use their speaking skills.

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