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THE EFFECT OF PAIR AND GROUP WORK ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract. Speaking is an important skill in learning English, but many students do not have enough chances to practice it in class. In traditional lessons, students often spend more time listening, reading, and writing than speaking. Because of this, they may feel shy and find it difficult to express their ideas clearly. This study looks at how pair work and group work can help improve students' speaking skills in the classroom. The research was carried out at School No. 15 in Namangan district with 16 seventh-grade students. The study lasted four weeks. During the lessons, students worked in pairs and small groups and completed different speaking tasks such as role plays, discussions, and simple problem-solving activities. The teacher guided the activities and helped students use English as much as possible. The data were collected through classroom observation, simple speaking checks, and student feedback. The results showed that most students spoke more during lessons and became more confident when using English. They also used more vocabulary and were able to share their ideas more clearly. In addition, many students said that they enjoyed the lessons because they could work with their classmates. However, some problems were also noticed. For example, some students spoke more than others, and a few students used their first language during tasks. Overall, the study shows that pair work and group work can help improve students' speaking skills when the teacher gives clear instructions and supports all learners. Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning English, but many students do not have enough chances to practice it in class. In traditional classrooms, students usually spend more time listening, reading, and writing than speaking. Because of this, many learners feel shy, speak with pauses, and cannot express ideas clearly. This study examines the effect of pair work and group work on students' speaking skills in an English classroom. The participants were 16 seventh-grade students at an intermediate level. They joined speaking lessons based on Task-Based Language Learning for four weeks. Students completed tasks such as role plays, discussions, interviews, and problem-solving activities. Data were collected through observation, speaking checks, and student feedback. The results showed that most students became more active, confident, and fluent. They used more vocabulary and enjoyed lessons more. However, some problems such as unequal participation and use of the first language were also noticed. Overall, pair work and group work were effective in improving speaking skills when tasks were carefully organized and monitored by the teacher.

Keywords: pair work, group work, speaking skills, task-based learning, English classroom



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Introduction. Speaking is one of the most important skills in language learning because it helps students communicate ideas, feelings, and opinions in real situations. Many students study grammar and vocabulary for years, but they still feel nervous when they need to speak English. This happens because speaking requires regular practice, confidence, and interaction with others. In many traditional classrooms, the teacher speaks most of the time while students listen, write notes, or answer short questions. This teacher-centered style may help students learn grammar rules, but it often gives little chance for real communication. As a result, students may understand English but struggle to use it naturally in conversation. To solve this problem, many teachers use pair work and group work. Pair work allows two students to complete tasks together, while group work includes three or more learners working cooperatively. These methods increase speaking opportunities because many students can talk at the same time. They also reduce pressure, since students first speak with classmates instead of speaking alone in front of the whole class. Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) is a useful method for pair and group work. In this approach, students use English to complete meaningful tasks such as planning, discussing, solving problems, or role playing. Students focus on communication and meaning while naturally practicing grammar and vocabulary. Many researchers support the use of pair and group work in language classrooms. Long (1996) explained in the Interaction Hypothesis that learners improve language through communication with others. When students discuss ideas in pairs or groups, they ask questions, repeat meaning, and correct misunderstandings, which helps speaking development. Vygotsky (1978) believed learning is social and students improve through cooperation. His Zone of Proximal Development shows that weaker students can perform better with support from stronger classmates. Nunan (2003) found that communicative classroom tasks increased student participation. Students became more active speakers instead of passive listeners. Lightbown and Spada (2013) also reported that regular speaking practice in groups helped learners improve fluency and confidence. Dörnyei (2001) emphasized motivation and found that cooperative activities made students more interested and willing to communicate. Harmer (2007) added that pair and group work maximize student talking time because many learners can speak at once, unlike teacher-fronted lessons. Although many studies show positive effects, some classrooms still face problems such as passive learners, mixed ability levels, stronger students dominating tasks, and use of the first language. These challenges show that pair and group work need careful planning and monitoring by the teacher. Many previous studies focused on university students or adult learners. Fewer studies examined younger school students, especially seventh graders, in normal classroom conditions with mixed ability levels.

The research questions of the study:

How do pair work and group work affect students' speaking skills?

Do these activities improve students' confidence and participation?

What difficulties appear during pair and group speaking tasks?

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Method and Materials

This study used a classroom-based research design. It was conducted with 16 seventh-grade students at School No. 15 in Namangan district over four weeks. At the beginning of the study, a short observation and informal speaking assessment were carried out to identify students' initial speaking level. The results showed common difficulties such as low confidence, short responses, limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes. The study was based on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which focuses on learning language through meaningful communication and real-life tasks (Nunan, 2004). In addition, the study followed Communicative Language Teaching principles, which emphasize interaction as the main way of learning a language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Harmer (2007), speaking activities are more effective when students are given more opportunities to talk rather than only listen to the teacher. Pair work and group work were the main teaching strategies used in this study. Pair and group work are considered important cooperative learning techniques because they increase student talking time and reduce anxiety in speaking activities (Brown, 2001). These methods also help learners support each other and improve communication skills in a more natural way.

The lessons included several speaking activities. The first activity was pair discussion. Students worked in pairs and talked about topics such as daily life, school rules, and hobbies. They practiced simple expressions for agreeing and disagreeing. This activity helped students increase fluency and confidence.

The second activity was role play. Students acted out real-life situations such as ordering food, shopping, or talking to a friend. Role play is effective because it allows students to practice real communication in a safe classroom environment (Bygate, 1987). It also helps reduce speaking anxiety and improves fluency.

The third activity was group problem-solving tasks. Students worked in small groups to discuss and solve problems such as planning a class trip. Group work encourages collaboration and critical thinking. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, learning happens best when students interact and support each other. The materials used in this study were simple and suitable for students' level. They included topic cards, role-play situations, guiding questions, and visual prompts. The teacher also used the board and a mobile phone to record speaking activities for analysis. These materials created an active and student-centered learning environment.

Results

At the beginning of the study, students were shy, afraid of speaking English, and had low confidence. They often gave very short answers and avoided speaking in class. After four weeks of using pair discussion, role play, and group problem-solving tasks, a post-test was conducted. The results showed clear improvement in students' speaking skills. Students became more confident, spoke more actively in English, and were not afraid of making mistakes. Their participation in speaking activities increased, and they used more English words. Overall, the post-test showed that students' speaking ability and confidence improved significantly. We can see:



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	Pre-test	Post-test
Confidence	Low	Improved
Fluency	Low	High
Participation	Passive	Active
Willingness	Low	Increased
Use of first language	Frequent	Rare

The table shows that students improved in all areas after using action games. Their speaking skills developed noticeably, especially in pronunciation and fluency. In addition, students became more active and confident during classroom activities, showing higher participation compared to before.

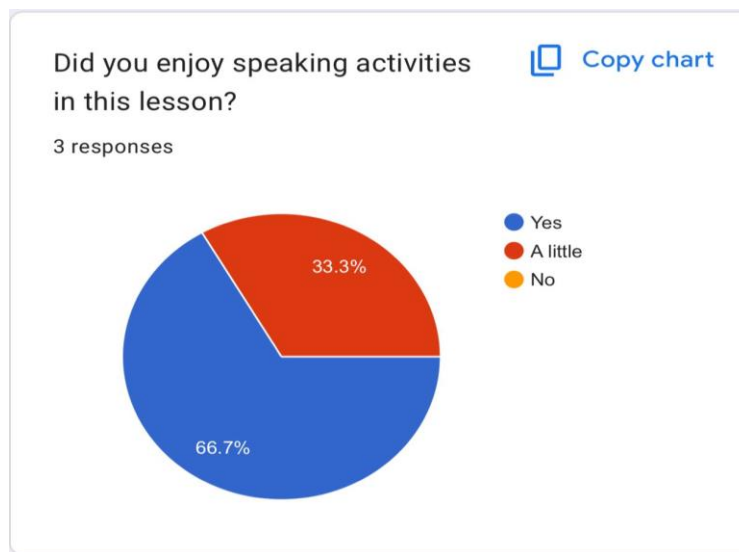


Figure 1 shows

66.7% of students answered “yes” and 33.3% answered “a little” regarding their enjoyment of speaking activities. This indicates that most students had a positive experience, although a smaller group showed only partial interest.



Figure 2 shows



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Again, 66.7% of students selected “yes,” while 33.3% chose “a little.” This suggests that the responses are consistent with Figure 1, showing a generally positive but not fully strong level of engagement among some students

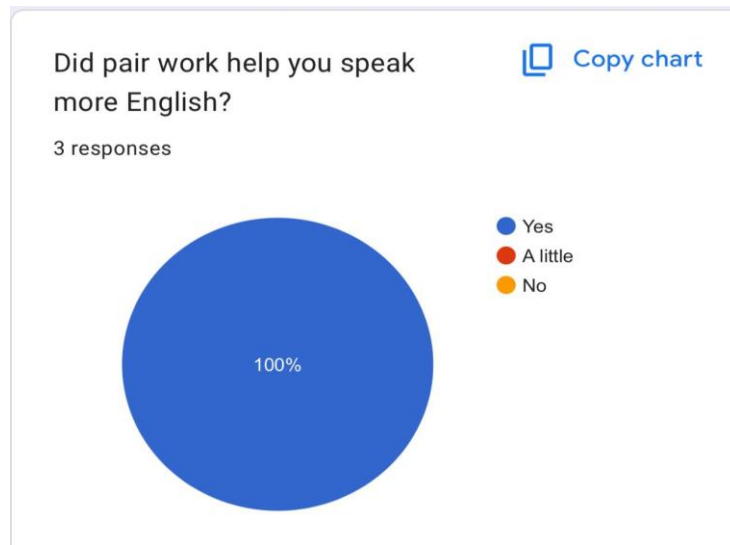


Figure 3 shows

100% of students answered “yes,” which clearly indicates a fully positive response. This means all students enjoyed the activity without any negative or neutral feedback.

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to examine the effect of pair work and group work on students’ speaking skills in a seventh-grade English classroom. Based on the results, it can be said that these activities had a positive effect on students’ fluency, confidence, participation, and vocabulary use. The findings also gave clear answers to the research questions and were similar to many previous studies in language education. The first research question asked how pair work and group work affect students’ speaking skills. The results showed clear improvement after four weeks of speaking activities using pair and group work methods. At the beginning of the study, many students gave short answers and needed more time to express simple ideas. Some learners were afraid of making mistakes and often stayed silent. However, after practicing in pairs and groups, students became more active speakers. They used longer sentences, responded faster, and shared opinions more easily. Their fluency also improved because they had more chances to speak regularly in class. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, 66.7% of students answered “yes” and 33.3% answered “a little,” which shows a generally positive change in speaking practice. This result supports the ideas of Lightbown and Spada (2013), who explained that regular communication practice helps learners become more fluent. It also agrees with Harmer (2007), who stated that pair work and group work increase student talking time. In traditional teacher-centered lessons, only one student can speak at a time. In contrast, pair and group activities allow many students to speak at the same time, which gives more practice opportunities. The second research question focused on confidence and



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participation. The findings showed that both areas improved during the study. At first, several students were shy and nervous when speaking English. Some students avoided answering questions in front of the whole class. However, when they worked with partners or small groups, they felt more comfortable and less stressed. Speaking with classmates was easier than speaking directly to the teacher or to the whole class. Because of this, students became more willing to participate. As shown in Figure 3, 100% of students answered “yes,” which clearly shows a strong improvement in enjoyment and participation. Many learners who were quiet in the first lessons became more active later. They started asking questions, answering classmates, and joining discussions. This finding is similar to Dörnyei (2001), who found that cooperative learning activities increase motivation and willingness to communicate. It also supports Nunan (2003), who explained that communicative tasks help students become active learners instead of passive listeners. The third research question asked what difficulties appeared during pair and group work. Although the overall results were positive, some problems were noticed. In one pair, the stronger student dominated the conversation and the weaker student had fewer chances to speak. In another pair, both students often used their first language instead of English. One group also became distracted and needed extra support from the teacher. These problems are common in many language classrooms. Pair work and group work are effective, but they need careful planning and teacher monitoring. Without guidance, some students may speak too much while others stay silent. Some learners may also choose their native language because it feels easier. During the study, several solutions were used to improve these problems. To solve unequal participation, the teacher gave each student a role such as leader, reporter, or timekeeper. This helped all students become more involved. To reduce first-language use, the teacher provided simple English classroom expressions and reminded students to use English during tasks. As a result, English speaking increased in later lessons. For shy students, the teacher first paired them with friendly and supportive classmates. This helped them gain confidence step by step. For distracted groups, the teacher used time limits and clearer task instructions, which improved focus and task completion. The findings of this study are also connected to earlier theories. Long (1996) explained in the Interaction Hypothesis that language improves through communication. This was visible when students asked for clarification, repeated ideas, and corrected misunderstandings during pair and group tasks. Vygotsky (1978) believed that learners improve through cooperation with others. In this study, stronger students often helped weaker classmates with vocabulary, pronunciation, or sentence building. This peer support was useful for mixed-level learners. One important point is that this study focused on seventh-grade students in a real classroom environment. Many previous studies were done with university students or adults. Therefore, these results are useful for school teachers who work with younger learners. The study shows that even teenage students with mixed ability levels can benefit from pair and group work when tasks are interesting and well organized. Overall, several positive achievements were reached during the study. Students spoke more often in English, became more confident, improved vocabulary use, and



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enjoyed lessons more. The classroom atmosphere also became more active and student-centered. Instead of only listening to the teacher, students learned through communication with classmates. In conclusion, the discussion shows that pair work and group work are valuable methods for improving speaking skills. They help students practice English in a natural way, reduce fear, and increase participation. Although some challenges may appear, these problems can be solved through clear instructions, balanced grouping, role assignment, and teacher support. For this reason, pair work and group work should be used regularly in English speaking lessons.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effect of pair work and group work on seventh-grade students' speaking skills in an English classroom. The findings show that these methods had a positive impact on students' fluency, confidence, participation, and vocabulary use. The results of the study revealed clear improvement in students' speaking skills after four weeks of practice. At the beginning, many students were shy, gave short answers, and were afraid of making mistakes. However, after using pair and group work activities, students became more active and willing to speak. They started using longer sentences, responding faster, and sharing their ideas more confidently. The survey results also supported this improvement, as most students selected "yes" or "a little," and in one case 100% of students reported positive experience. The study also showed that pair work and group work increased students' confidence and participation. Working with classmates made students feel more comfortable and reduced anxiety when speaking English. As a result, even quiet students became more involved in classroom activities over time. Although some difficulties were observed, such as unequal participation, use of the first language, and distraction in groups, these problems were reduced through teacher support, clear instructions, and role assignment. This shows that effective classroom management is important for successful pair and group activities. In conclusion, pair work and group work are effective teaching methods for improving speaking skills in English lessons. They create more opportunities for students to practice speaking, build confidence, and communicate in a supportive environment. Therefore, these activities should be regularly included in English speaking lessons to help students develop better communication skills.

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