Enhancing oral proficiency through cooperative learning among intermediate EFL learners: English learning motivation in focus

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Abstract: The current study tried to investigate the impact of cooperative learning (CL) on improving Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ oral proficiency motivations toward learning English. To fulfil this objective, 90 participants were selected and divided into two equal groups; one experimental and one control group. Then, the sample’s speaking skills were first examined through an English oral test prior to and after some cooperative learning instructional activities were provided. Next, a seven-point Likert scale-questionnaire was administered to the participants before and at the end of the course to check students’ motivations towards the use of cooperative learning in English classes. After analyzing the data, the results indicated a significant improvement in the learners’ speaking skills after utilizing cooperative learning techniques. Furthermore, results proposed remarkable differences in favor of cooperative learning in enhancing intrinsic motivation, but no differences were observed on other sorts of motivation. The researchers suggested using CL in English classes might be beneficial for teachers, which may in turn progress students’ speaking skills and motivations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ehsan Namaziandost was born in Shiraz Province of Iran in 1985. He holds an MA degree in TEFL from Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz. Now, he is a Ph.D. candidate in TEFL at Islamic Azad University of Shahr-e Kord. His main interests of research are second language acquisition, EFL teaching, teaching and testing, teaching speaking, communication and language learning strategies. His research papers and articles have been published by different international journals.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

While a picture may be worth a thousand words, those words will no doubt come in handy if the picture is distorted or poorly understood. After all, the most effective way to communicate is through speech. Thus, speaking skills are a vitally important method of communication. Following the significant importance of speaking skill, the researchers tried to examine if using Cooperative learning, an instructional strategy in which small groups of students work together on a common task, has any impact on the intermediate EFL learners’ oral proficiency and motivation. After implementing the treatment sessions which were teaching speaking skill through cooperative techniques and activities, it was revealed that participants in experimental group (Cooperative learning group) outperformed the control group (traditional learning) in terms of speaking ability. Furthermore, the results indicated that the experimental group’s intrinsic motivation increased significantly thanks to cooperative learning.
1. Introduction

In recent years, one of the changes in the English language pedagogy has been the shift from a teacher-centered learning model to a learner-centered learning model. The shift signals a new era in which English-speaking teaching should give room to students to express themselves in speaking the language. Speaking is one of the most important skills to be developed and enhanced as a means of communication (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). The modern job market requires good command of English and especially of spoken English. Everybody wishing to get the benefits of modern education, research, science, trade, and technology knows that it is impossible without the working knowledge of English language and good communication skills (Carreira, 2011). A learner may have memorized endless lists of vocabulary but cannot speak fluently. A person who speaks effectively is able to receive and respond to information appropriately. He or she is likely to create a favorable impression of oneself and therefore interact with others effectively and confidently (Gorjian & Asaadinezhad, 2015).

English as a foreign language is taught in Iranian schools and other learning institutions. It is a language used for international communication hence those who master and speak it well; reap many academic, social and professional benefits (Efrizal, 2012). In a school setup, proficiency in English will make the learning of other subjects much easier. Bashir, Azeem, and Dogar (2011) have proposed ways of enhancing learners’ speaking skills with the help of different methods of teaching, use of appropriate exercises and a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. By use of the teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning, teachers seem to do most of the talking and act as the only source of knowledge to students while students are treated as passive recipients in the learning process (Ning, 2011). These types of methods according to Gomleksiz (2007) have negatively affected students and produced incompetent users of the English language who are unable to improve their speaking skills. On the other hand, in the learner-centered approaches, students are given the opportunity to express themselves in speaking the language. English classes are mainly taught using teacher-centered methods (Murray & Christison, 2010). The available communication and interaction in the classroom are insufficient to enhance learners’ speaking skills which should be developed along with other skills (listening, reading, and writing). This is because the integration of the skills will enhance the students’ ability to communicate.

Teachers need to apply methods and strategies for learner-centered instruction and a promising method to traditional speaking instruction is the Cooperative Learning Approach (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011). This method serves as the alternative way of teaching for promoting speaking and social interaction among the students (Ning, 2011). Cooperative learning as per the available research suggestions is of great influence on the development of learners’ speaking skills (Al-Sohbani, 2013).

The use of cooperative learning in teaching speaking has been the subject of extensive research (Nasri & Biria, 2017). A big portion of studies indicates that the use of cooperative learning techniques can lead to positive attitudes towards cooperative learning and increased speaking skills (Nasri & Biria, 2017; Pattanpichet, 2011; Sühendan & Bengü, 2014). Cooperative learning methods, which differ from traditional learning methods, have some benefits resulting from social interaction between students (Tahmasbi, Hashemifardnia, & Namaziandost, 2019). Classroom social interaction, according to Mackey (2007), is beneficial to overall language development. It has been observed that students who interact and speak achieve better in oral skills in most cases than those who always keep silent (Namaziandost, Hashemifardnia, & Shafiee, 2019).

To sum up, speaking is an important skill to be developed and enhanced in language learners. There is need, therefore, to improve the current level of speaking skills among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The impacts of Cooperative Learning (CL) on learners’ speaking have been previously
demonstrated and confirmed by studies carried out in first and second language learning classrooms (Namaziandost, Sabzevari, & Hashemifardnia, 2018; Ning, 2011; Ning & Hornby, 2010; Sühendan & Bengü, 2014). In a nutshell, there is a need to investigate the use of CL instruction in teaching speaking in Iranian classrooms. This can be done through carrying out an experimental study to investigate the effect of CL in enhancing students’ speaking skills and motivation toward learning English. It is very fundamental for students to fulfill good competence in speaking skills as being a skilled speaker becomes pivotal to convey one’s thoughts in and outside schools.

2. Literature review

Cooperative Learning is defined as an instructional method in which students work together in small heterogeneous groups to solve a problem, complete a project or reach other instructional purposes, while teachers act as guides or facilitators. As an educational approach, it aims at organizing classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences (Siltala, 2010). It is a situation where students work together in small groups to help themselves and others to learn (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The CL is an alternative method to lecture-based paradigm in the teaching and learning process. It is a learner-centered paradigm which has gained popularity. CL according to Kim (2006) produces higher learning achievement and motivation. Schweisfurth (2011) states that a learner-centered approach is a solution to a myriad of problems.

The role of teachers using CL shifts from transmission of knowledge to facilitators of student learning (Shakibaei, Shahomat, & Namaziandost, 2019). This role involves facilitating, modeling and coaching. Teachers who adopt this role should maintain a safe non-threatening and learner-centered environment. This environment of teaching will help students contribute positively to the cooperative activities assigned to their group (Abedi, Namaziandost, & Akbari, 2019; Ning, 2011).

To enhance students’ speaking skills, teachers mostly adopt cooperative learning activities as group discussion, role-play and debate to help students practice some expressions learned in class when using this method after students each generated some ideas by individual learning (Li, 2015; Lv, 2014; Wang, 2013). Different to the activities that have been conducted in other group works, these three cooperative learning activities, namely group discussion, role-play and debate are highly structured; the section that follows each activity is arranged in terms of easiest to implement (discussion) to most difficult (debates) in terms of the demands on the use of spoken English. These three activities adopted the learning together approach of cooperative learning, which aims to unite several different groups of individuals to form a community of practice that works to improve the academic ability of the group (Kagan, 1994). In terms of second language acquisition, a learning together approach creates a space for teachers and students to join their typically separate communities in order to learn more about their roles in supporting their English language learning (Ning, 2011). The activities that follow are highly structured characteristics in cooperative learning activities because (a) teachers design these activities for students after fully considering students’ oral English proficiency and other related elements and divide students into proper groups; (b) during students’ cooperative learning activities, teachers would observe and assist students’ learning process and (c) at the end of the activities, teachers would most likely give some evaluation of the students’ performance as well as encourage each group to provide evaluation for students’ performance on both spoken English learning and cooperative skills.

Some researchers contend that key features of CL teamwork provide a means of promoting learners’ intrinsic motivation (Abedi, Keshmirshekan, & Namaziandost, 2019; Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Ziafar & Namaziandost, 2019). These features include students’ satisfaction from helping others and being part of a group effort, as well as their increased sense of control over and ownership of their own learning. Also included are the use of peer evaluation and criterion-referenced assessment which are related to their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Johnson and Johnson (2009, p. 164) state that, “The more co-operative individuals’ attitudes, the more they see themselves as being intrinsically motivated”, which can further increase their perseverance in pursuit of goals, joint efficacy, desire for success and joy of learning.
In foreign language classrooms, effective ways to enhance students’ motivation include building up group cohesiveness and having positive learning experiences. “The cohesiveness-performance effect can be particularly strong in language classes in which the learners’ communicative skills are developed primarily through participatory experience in real world language tasks” (Dörnyei, 1997, p. 485). CL principles emphasize the importance of creating a supportive, caring and positively interdependent environment, where students feel safe to speak and are highly motivated to contribute to group goals (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Thus, CL is considered useful in facilitating learning motivation in foreign language learners.

However, the search of the literature did not locate any study evaluating the impact of CL versus traditional teaching on intermediate EFL learners’ speaking ability and motivation toward learning English in Iran. Therefore, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Does cooperative learning have any significant effect on developing students’ oral proficiency?

RQ2. Does cooperative learning enhance Iranian EFL learners’ motivation toward learning English? If yes, which aspect of motivation (i.e., intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation and amotivation) was affected more?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants
The participants of this study were 90 intermediate EFL learners who were selected among 120 students at an Islamic Azad University in Iran. The participants were all male and their age ranged from 17 to 19 years. They were selected based on their scores on an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). They have been studying English as a foreign language for at least 5 years. All participants were native speakers of Persian. The selected learners were randomly divided into two equal groups of experimental (n = 45) and control group (n = 45). The experimental group received the treatment which was teaching speaking skill through cooperative techniques adapted from the Student Team Achievement-Division (STAD) (Slavin, 2014) and Numbered-Heads-Together (NHT) (Kagan & Kagan, 2009); and the control group received the traditional instruction.

3.2. Instruments
The study mainly used three research instruments. The first instrument was OQPT. It helped the researcher have a greater understanding of what level (i.e., elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, or advance) his participants were at. This test has 60 multiple-choice items and based on it the learners whose scores were between 40 and 47 were intermediate (Li, 2015) and were regarded as the target participants of the current research.

The second one was speaking test used as a pre-test and post-test to measure students’ English-speaking performance. The test contains three tasks: talking about picture differences, reading a text aloud, and expressing one’s opinion about a particular topic. The scoring rubric of the test provided a measure of quality of performance on the basis of five criteria: pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, fluency and interactive communication on a five-rating scale ranging from 90–100 meaning “excellent” to 0–49 meaning “fail” based on the scales followed at Islamic Azad university in Iran (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011). Regarding validity, four experts were asked to validate and evaluate the test by completing a checklist for validating the English-speaking test. Reliability of speaking test in this study was estimated by test-retest method. The estimated reliability of the speaking test in the current study was 0.89 measured through Cronbach’s Alpha. Another essential component to test reliability is that of inter-rater reliability. In the current study, the correlation coefficients obtained for the two scorers were 0.898 and 0.964, respectively, indicating quite high inter-rater reliabilities. A scoring rubric, adopted from the
Ministry of Higher Education—Iran (2011), was used along with the scoring sheet for the purpose of grading. The grading of the speaking skills was based upon five criteria: (1) pronunciation (20%), (2) grammatical accuracy (20%), (3) vocabulary (20%), (4) fluency (20%), and (5) interactive communication (20%).

The third instrument is a seven-point Likert scale questionnaire which was used to measure students’ motivation towards CL before and after the experiment. The measure of motivation used in this study was Language Learning Orientations Scale (LLOS) developed by Dr Kimberly Noels (Noels, Pelletier, Clement, & Vallerand, 2000). The LLOS consists of 42 items and is intended to measure six factors: intrinsic motivation (10 items), integrated regulation (eight items), identified regulation (six items), introjected regulation (seven items), external regulation (seven items) and amotivation (four items).

The questionnaire was on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7 (respectively representing “does not correspond at all” to “corresponds exactly”) for scoring. The LLOS was already available in English. However, some minor changes and adjustments were made to the Persian translation of several items for a clearer understanding. The two sets of data, from the pre-test and the post-test, indicated good internal reliability for the LLOS. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the total scale were 0.802 in the pre-test and 0.799 in the post-test. All six subscales had Cronbach’s alphas above 0.798.

3.3. Data collection procedures
Before the start of the experiment, oral performance test and attitudinal questionnaire were administered to the students in the control and the experimental groups. After that, the actual experiment began. Students in the control group were taught through the traditional method of teaching speaking skill, while the students in the experimental group were taught through using CL (i.e., STAD and NHT). In NHT strategy, first of all, teammates worked on tasks within a given time limit. The task was based on textbook learning materials, and might be a 5-minute class activity (e.g., brainstorming vegetable names) or a team assignment to be completed within a couple of weeks (e.g., preparing a 10-minute speech on a topic based on their knowledge, information from textbooks and after-class cooperative research). The teacher was available to provide scaffolding when necessary. Second, one team was randomly selected as a presenting team, and then a particular code-name was randomly selected for the team. Third, the student with the selected code-name from the team presented his/her home teams’ work in front of the whole class. Fourth, the student’s performance was assessed against the pre-set criteria by peers and the teacher through giving feedback and grades. Fifth, following the same procedures as the second, third and fourth steps, other students were selected to represent their home teams and report back to the class.

The general organization of sessions took the form of the adapted STAD including three components—class presentation, structured teamwork, and team assessment. Class presentation by the teacher was via whole-class instruction related to reading texts, writing skills, vocabulary, or grammar, or a replay of audiovisual materials if it was in the listening and speaking class. The whole-class instruction was brief compared with that in the traditional teaching group, because many learning materials were set aside to be completed by teamwork. For a team assignment, teammates needed to agree beforehand where and when to meet, how to divide the team task according to individual interests and competence, and what additional learning resources to access.

It should be mentioned that students in the experimental group were divided into nine groups each consists of five students. However, the students were given a choice to select their group members to work with on alternate weeks during the study duration. Throughout the group work, each member had to present a topic. Then, each group discussed a chosen topic, exchanged ideas, helped each other and shared knowledge. Each group member was assigned a role and responsibility that must be fulfilled if the group is to function. Those roles were assigned to ensure interdependence.
The control group teacher followed the traditional method of teaching speaking skill adopted in the University. The traditional techniques used with the control group mainly involved teacher-dominated whole-class instruction, which focused on the accuracy of vocabulary and grammar, and the processing of texts lexically and syntactically. All the classes had the same hours of learning speaking skill during the time of the experiment.

At the end of the study, post-tests of oral performance and students' motivation towards CL were administered to the students.

3.4. Data analysis
In sum, the data in this research were analyzed by means of a range of statistical techniques, which include paired-samples t-tests, effect sizes, and one-way ANCOVAs. It is considered that the combined use of a variety of analysis techniques enables the researcher to have a clearer picture about the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, it contributes to obtaining more valid and reliable results, and reduces the possibility of biased findings due to the use of a single statistical analysis.

To find out the effect of CL on speaking competence, descriptive statistics including mean scores, standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test were used. Inferential analysis was used to find out if any significant differences were found between the control and experimental group in both the pre-test and post-test.

Moreover, the data collected for analysis in this research comprised pre-test and post-test scores on the LLOS in six areas: intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation. The 25th version of SPSS was used to conduct data analysis. Since the two groups showed some differences on pre-test, one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used, with pre-test scores as the covariate, post-test scores as the dependent variable, and type of group as the fixed factor.

4. Results
Before conducting any analyses on the pre-tests, post-tests, and questionnaires, it was necessary to check the normality of the distributions. Thus, Kalmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was run on the data obtained from the above-mentioned tests. Since all the p values were larger than .05, it could be concluded that the distributions of scores had been normal. It was thus safe to proceed with parametric test (i.e., Independent and Paired-samples t-tests and one-way ANCOVA in this case) and make further comparisons between the participating groups.

4.1. Results for “the effectiveness of CL on students' oral proficiency”
As it was pointed out above, the first research question of the study was: Does cooperative learning have any significant effect on developing students' oral proficiency? As shown in Table 1, the speaking performance mean scores of the experimental group in pre-test were all similar to that of the control group. Relative to each other, both the control and the experimental groups were similar in their speaking skills before carrying out the experiment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Descriptive statistics for comparing the experimental and control groups in the pre-test of speaking performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Groups</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experimental group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
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</table>
In order to find out whether this difference between the pre-test scores of the experimental group and control group learners was statistically significant or not, an independent samples t-test was run. The results demonstrated a lack of any significant statistical difference at the confidence level of $\alpha = 0.05$ between the students in the control and experimental groups before the experiment. The $p$ value $0.142 > 0.05$ reveals that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the pre-test ($\alpha = 0.05$). Thus, it is evident that the two groups had the same level of English-speaking competence before the experiment.

However, the mean score of the experimental group on the post-test was 65.55 with a standard deviation of 9.95, while that of the control group on the post-test was 59.55 with a standard deviation of 3.02. Table 2 presents the speaking competence mean scores of the experimental group in the post-test were all higher than that of the control group. This result provides confirmatory evidence of a noticeable increase in the post-test mean score of speaking skills in favor of the experimental group.

To ensure if the difference between mean score of the control and experimental groups in the post-test is statistically significant, an independent sample t-test was run. The results showed that there is a statistically significant difference in the post-test between the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group with $t$-value $= 3.86$, $p = .000 < 0.05$.

In order to find out whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of learners in each group (i.e., experimental group and control group) was statistically significant or not, paired-samples t-test was run. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test ($M = 60.13$, $SD = 3.01$) and post-test ($M = 65.55$, $SD = 9.95$) scores of the EG learners since the p value under the Sig, (2-tailed) column was smaller than the significance level (i.e., $.000 < .05$). This indicates that the treatment (Using cooperative learning) was effective so far as the speaking skills of the Iranian EFL learners were concerned. Regarding the control group which received the traditional instruction, no significant difference was found since the Sig, (2-tailed) column was a little higher than the significance level (i.e., $.54 > .05$). It can be concluded that cooperative learning was more effective than traditional instruction.

To further compare differences between the experimental group and control group and to find out the effect size of the CL on students’ speaking competence, the overall post-test scores of the two groups were compared. The result revealed an effect size of 0.815 which is interpreted as a large effect size of the independent variable (CL) on the dependent variable (speaking skill).

4.2. Results for “the effectiveness of CL on students’ motivation”

The second research question of the study was: what is the effectiveness of the CL approach in improving students’ learning motivation, compared with traditional instruction, in English teaching at a university in Iran? Results obtained from the analysis of scores on the LLOS are summarized in Table 3, which includes mean scores, standard deviations, effect sizes, and $p$ values from paired-samples t-tests within each group and the ANCOVAs, in each of the six aspects of the LLOS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Std. error mean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental group</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>65.55</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>59.55</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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</table>
Table 3. Summary of results on the LLOS for the experimental and control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LLLOs (42 items)</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre/Post</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Sig. t-test</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
<th>Sig. ANCOVA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>38.74</td>
<td>9.14</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>38.97</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>36.86</td>
<td>11.49</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>10.02</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>28.66</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>30.11</td>
<td>10.12</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>28.99</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>30.11</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identified</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>27.99</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
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<td>Post</td>
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<td>9.66</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
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<td>6.11</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>External</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>24.18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Post</td>
<td>25.19</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
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<td>5.09</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Post</td>
<td>26.09</td>
<td>5.09</td>
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Based on Table 3, experimental group’s intrinsic motivation increased significantly from pre-test to post-test (.00 < .05), but the control group did not (.09 > .05). Moreover, the effect size (of 0.53) for the experimental group was above average, but this was not the case for the control group. In the other five areas of integrated regulation, identified motivation, introjected regulation, external regulation and amotivation, results of t-tests, effect sizes, and ANCOVAs showed no significant difference between the two groups. In other words, there are no significant improvements for both experimental and control groups.

In summary, overall findings on the LLOS indicated that participants in the experimental group significantly improved their intrinsic motivation from pre-test to post-test, whereas the control group did not show significant improvements in any areas on the LLOS. However, according to the results of the ANCOVAs, it was only in the area of intrinsic motivation that the improvements of the two groups differed significantly.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate positive outcomes both in terms of Iranian EFL students’ oral performance and motivations towards the use of CL as a new instructional method in English-speaking classrooms in Iran. The findings of the study are discussed based on the two research questions of the study.

The first research question aimed to find out whether CL has any impact on developing speaking skill of the Iranian university EFL students in the sample. The performance of the experimental group after being exposed to CL activities demonstrated a significant difference between the findings of the experimental and control groups. Experimental group indicated positive score difference and/or enhancement after CL method was introduced as a teaching technique in speaking skill classrooms. Whereas the performance of the control group which was taught speaking skill through traditional method showed no significant difference between the outcomes of the pre- and post-tests of the speaking skill. This could be due to the fact that the traditional teaching method in Iran is a teacher-based in which less opportunity is given to students to practice their speaking skills in classrooms.

This finding is consistent with the results of Ning and Hornby (2010) that indicated significant difference scores between the pre- and post-tests in favor of the experimental group which was provided with CL treatment in listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary. The findings had ascertained that CL is fundamental for augmenting speaking proficiency. Along similar lines, the outcome of Johnson and Johnson (2003) revealed CL lead to higher individual success.

Furthermore, the outcomes of this study provide corroboratory evidence in support of the findings detected by Talebi and Sobhani (2012), Pattanpichet (2011), Ning (2011) and Yang (2005) which claimed that CL approach can help the development of learners’ speaking proficiency. A meticulous look at the data of the current study shows that the CL is exceedingly recommended than the traditional method in teaching English-speaking skill at university level in Iran. The study signifies the possibility of using CL method in Iranian schools and, thus, Iranian EFL learners can enhance their communicative ability.

In other words, in a less threatening context as that of cooperative learning, the students in the experimental group are able to demonstrate higher oral classroom participation, which is related to their statistically significant gain in language proficiency.

Based on the results of the current study, there was no statically significant difference between the control group’s pre-test and post-test. One can argue that this was expected, since the control group most probably had no opportunities to do communicative activities. Practitioners (Woods, 2013) argue that traditional methods are untrustworthy and insufficient because they do not
assist learners to utilize the target language as it is used in real-life situations, where they require to communicate efficiently with others.

Considering the findings of this study, cooperative learning had a positive impact on the student's speaking skills. The main differences between the experimental group and the control group could be attributed to numerous factors, firstly during the experiment, the experimental group provided with opportunities to speak most of the duration of the English period. On the other hand, the control group followed the traditional method.

Secondly, because of the Kagan's cooperative structures in the experimental group, all of the students were encouraged to speak and tried to be active so they became more confident and more willing to speak more, but in the control group, students who studied in the traditional classroom did not also have the opportunity to be responsible for their own learning and they were not very active in the class. Finally, such a learner-centered teaching method helped enhance the learner's oral communicative competence of the target language because it produced a more friendly and supportive learning environment within which students had more opportunities and more freedom to practice the target language.

The significant gains of the experimental group on the interaction-based task supported Brown's (2007) and Kagan's (1995) views that cooperative learning was actually a practice that could put the communicative approach into action. Such findings were in line with Woods's (2013) allegation that cooperative learning was regarded as the best instructional format developing learner's communicative competence. Yu (2004) expressed in his study that one of the impediments that hamper CL in the class is the classroom size, if the classroom size is big, students may get fewer opportunities to practice English.

The second research question tried to find out whether CL could enhance students' motivation better than the traditional method. The major result on the LLOS is that the experimental group, which was taught using the CL approach, improved on intrinsic motivation more than the control group instructed by traditional methods, although the difference was only marginally statistically significant. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in the other five aspects of motivation. These results and the possible reasons for them are discussed below.

The finding that the CL approach was superior to traditional instruction in enhancing learners' intrinsic motivation supports the widely accepted view that CL generates higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Mirshekaran, Namaziandost, & Nazari, 2018). Supportive evidence for this was also revealed in some studies (Namaziandost, Rahimi Esfahani, & Ahmadi, 2019) which indicated that, in comparison with traditional teaching, CL was more likely to improve students' positive attitudes towards EFL learning, which may facilitate students' interest and intrinsic motivation to learn. The positive link between CL and intrinsic motivation may be primarily attributed to the ability of CL to facilitate a supportive and non-threatening learning atmosphere, where students find it fun and enjoyable to learn and thus are intrinsically motivated to achieve goals.

In this research, there are four probable reasons for the finding of increased intrinsic motivation. These are closely associated with the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. First, students in the CL group had opportunities to use English as a communicative tool when working on team tasks. When students found they could successfully utilize the English language to finish a task or do something real and meaningful, they may have experienced positive feelings of meeting challenges and a high level of satisfaction from the results of their learning. This experience could have satisfied their need for competence and generated a sense of accomplishment which further stimulated their desire and interest to learn and try out the language.
Second, students were permitted more ownership and control over their learning in the CL group, for instance, by selecting their topics, sub-tasks or ways of completing teamwork, assigning individual accountability to team members, as well as assessing their learning consequences through self and peer grading. Empowering students and boosting their autonomy in learning may also have been conducive to the improvement of intrinsic motivation.

Third, intrinsic motivation tends to result from meaningful feedback relevant to the extent to which students competently complete their current tasks (Hashemifardnia, Namaziandost, & Sepehri, 2018; Johnson & Johnson, 2003). In the CL group, meaningful feedback was provided by peers and the teacher immediately after chosen teams had presented their work. Through feedback from others, students should have got an obvious picture about what their strengths and weaknesses were and how they could progress their work, which could have resulted in the feeling that their work and endeavor were valued and recognized by the teacher and their peers. This may have facilitated their intrinsic motivation for setting up new accessible objectives and getting involved in learning tasks.

Fourth, it is believed that, when students find out that their personal progression is crucial and useful to peers, they feel more positively related to others and thus intrinsically motivated to accomplish more (Woods, 2013). In this study, students in the CL classroom were clear that everyone stood a chance of representing their home team and that their success would benefit other teammates. This could have facilitated teammates’ enthusiasm for positive interpersonal support and further promoted students’ intrinsic motivation to improve and achieve.

However, the intervention group taught with the CL approach did not indicate considerable enhancement in any of the four subtypes of extrinsic motivation—integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation—compared with the control group taught in the traditional classroom. It is presumed that CL students’ successful experiences in using the target language to complete team tasks may provide them with positive feelings about the learning of the language that expedite students’ perceptions of being the kind of person who can speak the language (Efrizal, 2012). These perceptions of students may strengthen the link between the learning of the language and their personal importance. This supposition supported by the finding in this study that the experimental group developed their identified regulation more than the control group from pre- to post-test, although the between-group difference did not attain statistical significance. This proposes that the CL approach is possibly better than traditional instruction in increasing identified regulation. However, it may need more intensive and longer CL intervention to strengthen the link between learners’ identities and their learning of English in order to achieve a statistically significant impact.

The major cause of the non-significant between-group differences in integrated regulation and introjected regulation may lie in the fact that the experimental group, compared with the control group, was not provided with extra impetus to become integrated in the target culture or community (which forms an important part of integrated regulation in foreign language learning) or to feel under internal pressures (which is the main source of introjected regulation). This is because students in both the CL and the traditional classroom were using exactly the same textbook sand instructional materials, as well as teaching resources and purposes.

So, these findings are understandable since the experimental group did not have advantages over the control group in getting access to the target culture or having personal communication with native speakers of English. Likewise, the CL intervention is unlikely to have acted as a catalyst for developing students’ feelings of shame, guilt or embarrassment if they did not know or speak the language well. The fundamental objective of CL is to provide a supportive and non-stressful learning environment and enable students to progress the target language in a pleasurable and positive manner rather than intensifying negative feelings about themselves.
Generally speaking, the utilization of external motivators to reward team successes and cooperative behaviors should have the power to produce more external regulation from learners (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). But the results of this research did not indicate this propensity. The clarification of this outcome might be related to several reasons. First, team scores made lower percent of the final course evaluation in this study, with the significant percent assigned to individual scores from the final examination at the end of the semester. This percent extent of team scores to individual scores in the final evaluation, plus the short-term utilization of group rewards for only one semester, might not have made group rewards into a significant and permanent external motivator for the learning of English.

Using group rewards is another point which crucially important to discuss here. According to self-determination theory, extrinsic motivators for learning can be internalized by students and turn into inherent interest if the task fits their values, beliefs and basic psychological needs (Sears & Pai, 2013). Group rewards paired with positively interdependent learning settings progress learning consequences and intrinsic motivation. In this study, the CL students’ intrinsic motivation developed instead of being eroded and also learners were not found to demonstrate negative performance towards the sharing of group grades within home teams. This could have been due to the moderate utilization of group rewards, since the team grade was utilized for a short term accounted for only less percent of the final course evaluation.

In summary, this research suggests that CL may have a paramount impact on English instruction in Iran because of the results that CL was better than traditional instruction in enhancing learners’ intrinsic motivation. Since intrinsic motivation is regarded as a vital factor for delightful and prosperous language learning in the long period, but is specifically hard to achieve in the foreign language learning context (Carreira, 2011), and typically dwindles among foreign language learners (Busser & Walter, 2013; Namaziandost, Nasrī, & Ahmadi, 2019a), this study may be of notable enthusiasm to foreign language teachers who teach intermediate learners.

However, several limitations in this research may affect the validity or generalizability of its results. Considering these limitations, some recommendations suggest:

1. The number of participants was limited only to 90 students. So, the findings must be generalized and used with caution. Future studies should be worked on more participants.
2. Only male learners were included in this study; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to female students. It is recommended that both genders will be considered in future researches.
3. The time allocated to the instruction was so limited. Therefore, prospective researchers should take a longer time to cross validate the results of the current study.
4. This study concentrated on speaking skill. Hence, future research should also focus on whether the same results will be yielded by investigating the impact of CL on other English skills such as writing and reading.
5. Using CL should be tested on various levels of education, such as elementary, pre-intermediate upper-intermediate, and advance.
6. The study was limited to Iranian EFL learners; it can be conducted in other EFL and ESL contexts.
7. As the researchers had access to only these Iranian EFL participants, they had to resort to convenient sampling. It was not possible to enjoy randomization.

In a nutshell, CL as learner-centered approach improves speaking skill and motivation among the students in this study. Therefore, teachers in schools, specifically teachers who teach English-speaking skills require to be aware of the advantages and eminence of CL. There are positive changes occurring when teachers change their teaching methods towards a more learner-centered approach. Teachers
need to become proficient in various kinds of speaking techniques to be utilized and plan how to carry out them with the CL method. Thus, teachers are inspired to put this method into practice regularly and efficaciously. There is enormous evidence authenticating the notion that CL has a positive impact on the formation of positive motivation towards learners’ speaking. Finally, and based on the outcomes of this study, it looks absolutely reasonable to express that CL has many advantages, such as enhancing speaking skills and motivation. Although there is no “perfect methodology”, CL is an instructional method which is efficient in ameliorating the acquisition of English-speaking skills and increasing learners’ motivation.

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