
Applying a Learner-Focused Web-Based Approach to Enhance EFL Learners' Oral Skills and Self-Efficacy

Neda Ghabeli¹, Masoud Tajadini^{2*}, Neda Fatehi Rad³

¹ Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

² Assistant Professor, English Department, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

³ Assistant Professor, English Department, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

Received: October 2, 2020

Accepted: October 17, 2022

ABSTRACT

The present work adopted a multiphase design to investigate the effect of using web-based collaborative and strategy-based approaches on EFL learners' oral skills. Moreover, a more comprehensive objective was to check if the use of collaboration and strategy instruction could enhance EFL students' self-efficacy. The participants of the study consisted of 85 intermediate EFL learners who were studying at a language school in Kerman. To collect the data, four instruments were used: Cambridge Placement Test to homogenize the participants, pre- and post-listening and speaking tests, a questionnaire to estimate EFL learners' self-efficacy, and an interview. The results suggested that most of the students preferred cooperative learning strategy-based instruction. The findings indicated that the effective use of web-based collaboration in speaking and listening classes that could have a remarkable effect on the linguistic input of the learners. The sample also proposed that the appreciation of the program was a given sign of the positive effect of both web-based instruction and collaboration in the web environment. Above all, the results of the speaking and listening tests revealed that the participants improved satisfactorily.

Keywords: Learner-Focused Approach; Self-Efficacy; Technology; Web-Based Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Different factors hinder students from improving their oral communication skills in English. This could include insufficient teaching hours for English, unskilled teachers, students' poor proficiency, and non-English speaking environment (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Chen & Goh, 2011), large class sizes, insufficient facilities and equipment (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu, 2006), teaching approach classroom. In the same manner, learning and teaching English to EFL learners in Iran can be considered from several perspectives, the most important of which is considering the issue from methodological and pedagogical perspectives: poor performance of oral skills

(Afshar and Asakereh, 2016; Farhadi, Hezaveh, and Hedayati, 2010), lack of teaching systems that encourage collaboration (Hojat and Afghari, 2013), the inefficiency of learners-based instruction, and finally lack of psychological factors (Soureshjani and Riahipour, 2012) that are necessary for any teaching-learning environment.

Teaching English in general and teaching oral skills in the EFL context in Iran has been viewed as a failure because of some known and unknown reasons that can be brought into view. On the one hand, the learners suffer from inadequacy of materials that can sufficiently enhance their linguistic skills as well as provide them with enough language input and on the other hand, psychologically the learners' psychological needs are fulfilled. Hojat and Afghari (2013) maintain that speaking skills are under the influence of several linguistic and

*Corresponding Author's Email:
massoud_taj@yahoo.com

non-linguistic factors such as grammar, vocabulary, pragmatic variables, and affective factors (Shumin, 1997; Farhadi, Hezaveh, and Hedayati, 2010), and so forth, which, when combined, compound the problems of speaking skills. Several English teachers have noted that the traditional teaching approach does not help with students' oral English skills improvement because this form of instruction places little emphasis on using English in real situations and for a special purpose. Under a more traditional teaching approach, English teachers tend to manage their classes whose aim is developing oral skills, using lectures and discussing language points, asking students to memorize vocabulary, and grammatical rules, and do several translations (Wang, 2007).

This approach could be easy to implement. It could also be useful for class management in large classrooms (Xuan, 2015). However, under a traditional teaching approach, students hardly obtain the required opportunities to use what they've learned to communicate with the teacher and their peers; most students may not have the slightest idea of how to use proper expressions in certain communicative situations (Han, 2006). Of course, whether the situation calls for writing or speaking, the unique applicability of expressions in particular social contexts reflects a potential gap between language use within and beyond the classrooms.

The purpose, however, of highlighting the limited opportunity to practice a range of expressions that are often cued by social contexts that arise outside the classroom is not to suggest that this problem is unique to speaking. Rather, the intention is to indicate that the narrow range of likely social exchanges with a teacher suggests why the traditional teaching method does not enable students to improve oral competence in a way that is suited to diverse communication and oral interaction in the EFL context.

Regarding the discussion above, this study aims to explore a few dimensions through which oral skills can be improved among EFL learners.

This is supposed to be done by implementing web-based collaborative learning as teachers attempt to instruct their learners to use different learning strategies. All these follow another more comprehensive objective, which was to examine if the use of collaboration and strategy instruction may lead to the learners' self-efficacy enhancement. So, the following research questions are raised:

Q1. Does web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based instruction have any impact on the students' speaking skills?

Q2. Does web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based instruction influence students' listening skills?

What is the impact of web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based instruction on EFL learners' self-efficacy?

What is the attitude of the EFL learners of the study on the use of web-based instruction and collaborative learning in their language class?

Q3. What is the relationship between EFL learners' oral skills achievements and their self-efficacy?

The study achievements apply to language teachers who observe learning problems among their students. They can also assist learners who suffer from communicative difficulties in situations where they have to collaborate with the group and exchange ideas.

METHOD

The study follows the principles of a mixed-method study by implementing both qualitative and quantitative data-gathering procedures through tests, questionnaires, and interviews. Thus, it implements experiments to study the impact of independent variables, i.e. strategy-based instruction as well as web-based cooperative learning on the dependent variables, i.e., oral skills and self-efficacy. It was a cross-sectional study with data collected at one point in time. The population of the study included 85 EFL learners in a language institute in Kerman_ a city in southeast Iran. The native language of the population of the study was Farsi with the age range of 18 to 27, all pre-intermediate levels and both genders. To collect the data of the study, four instruments were used: Cambridge Placement Test used to homogenize the participants, pre and post-listening and speaking tests, a questionnaire to estimate EFL learners' self-efficacy, and finally an interview.

The teaching procedures there were using both presenting and instructing learners to use language learning strategies as well as encouraging them to use collaboration in the

web-based context. To encourage the learners to use both web collaboration, the teacher proposes me certain set of procedures for the EG to follow. The first source of data was using a placement test that was used to homogenize the learners of the two groups. Using this test, very high and very low learners of the two groups were discarded. The second source was using listening and speaking tests to evaluate the listening and speaking levels of the learners before and after they were exposed to the treatment. To this goal, PET tests for listening and speaking were used. During the first and the last classes of the learners, the learners were exposed to the test listening containing 25 items, and immediately after it, every two

individuals were interviewed for the speaking test as two examiners rated their speaking skills. Miller, the candidates' voices were recorded for future reference. The next instrument was using self-efficacy questionnaire to estimate the EFL learners' efficacy.

The subjects received the questionnaire once at the beginning of the course and at the end when they had received the treatment. The interviews were tape-recorded to allow for transcription and close analysis. The focus group was interviewed (EG) to reflect on their attitude on the use of the teaching procedures in their speaking and listening as well as the use of collaboration in their class

Table 1
Data of Pre- and Post-Listening Tests (CG)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	10.5000	24	2.37743	.48529
Posttest	11.9583	24	1.87615	.38297

The data of the pre and post-listening test for the CG shows that a small change happened in the mean score of the learners from the pre-post-test. The mean for the pre-listening test was estimated to be 10.5 which changed to

11.95 for the post-test. The difference between the two means is an indication of relative improvement in the listening level of the EFL learners of the CG.

Table 2
Data of Pre-and Post-Listening Tests (EG)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	10.8750	24	2.45503	.50113
Posttest	13.3333	24	2.18028	.44505

In the same way, table 2 offers the data of the pre-and post-listening means for the EG. The mean for the pretest was calculated to be 10.87 which changed to 13.33 for the posttest. The change in the mean scores shows the improvement in the listening proficiency of the learners in the EG who received the treatment: web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based instruction. The pretest data for the CG was estimated to be 11.95 for the speaking test

which changed to 12.42 for the post-test. The raise is relative and shows some degree of improvement.

However, the data in the table shows the means of pre and post-test for the EG. The mean for the pre-speaking tests was calculated to be 11.08, but the speaking performance of the learners improved as it changed to 13.42 the improvement is somehow considerable.

Table 3
Data of Pre- and Post-Speaking Tests (CG)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	11.9558	24	1.99846	.40793
Posttest	12.4267	24	1.72898	.35293

Table 4
Data of Pre- and Post-Speaking Tests (EG)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	11.0817	24	1.50968	.30816
Posttest	13.4283	24	1.19793	.24453

To examine the consistency of the scores that were provided by three raters of speaking tests, an inter-rater reliability statistical procedure was run to ensure the degree of consistency among the three independent raters.

First, the Cronbach Alpha for the two pre and post-tests of both groups prove that they are reliable enough to trust the scoring procedures that were provided by the three scorers.

Second, the intra-class reliability proves that they are all between 0.95 and 0.78 which is high enough to show the scoring reliability of the three raters. Another question of the study sought to explore the relationship between different levels of the learners of the group and their self-efficacy development. In other words, it meant to explore if the learners of the high and low levels improved their self-efficacy equally or if it varied from level to level.

Table 5
The Mean Scores of Self-efficacy (speaking)

Levels	Means	Std. d.
High achievers	143.6	1.54477
Low achievers	82.45	2.3255

Table 6
The Mean Scores of Listening

Levels	Means	Std. d.
High achievers	149.4	2.4855
Low achievers	98.45	2.17331

It can be concluded that the higher the level of achievement among the learners, the higher would be the self-efficacy improvement of the learners. Based on this achievement, it can be postulated that the higher the level of listening

achievement among the learners, the higher would be their self-efficacy. It can be claimed that there is a meaningful relationship between the levels and the self-efficacy achievement of the learners.

Table 7
Paired Samples Test for the Speaking Levels and Responses to Questionnaire

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	levels - self-efficacy scores	-70.375	27.666	5.6475	-82.057	-58.692	-12.46	23	.000

Finally, it can be concluded that better learners in listening and speaking classes are more convenient to improve their self-efficacy when exposed to web-based cooperative learning. In other words, the learners who believe in collaboration and adapt themselves

to collaborative learning are more apt to improve this self-efficacy and this impacted their amount of learning and their self-efficacy.

Another aspect of this study was to investigate the effect of using web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based

instruction on the EFL learners’ self-efficacy in the oral language class. Based on the data, the mean for the pre-administration of the questionnaire was estimated to be 80.58 and it changed to 100.12 for the post-administration

of the questionnaire. The rise in the mean from pre- to post-administration of the questionnaire shows the degree of self-efficacy improvement among the learners in the EG.

Table 8
Paired Samples Test for the Listening Levels and Responses to Questionnaire

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	levels - self-efficacy scores	-76.38	19.439	7.3416	-92.53	-48.48	-10.32	23	.000

Table 9
Descriptive Data on Pre and Post-Administration of the Questionnaire (EG)

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Responses of Pre-and	80.5833	24	11.23626	2.29359
	Responses of Post-ad	100.1250	24	11.74109	2.39664

To investigate the relationship between using web-based instruction and collaborative learning and self-efficacy, the following question was presented: -What is the relationship between EFL learners’ oral skills achievements and their self-efficacy?

To discuss this question, the t-test data in the table can give some indications. According to the data, $p=.000<.05$ and it shows with a hundred percent certainty we can claim there is a perfect meaningful relationship between the

two administrations of the questionnaire. In other words, the use of the procedures has had the required impact on the EFL learners’ self-efficacy. To seek the attitudes of the learners who were exposed to web-based instruction and collaborative learning in their language class, an interview was organized. The participants were interviewed one by one as their voices were recorded. The ideas stated by the participants were classified into two categories positive and negative.

Table 10
Paired Samples Statistics for Pre- and Post- Administration of the Questionnaire (EG)

		Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Upper				
Pair 1	Responses of pre and post-administration	-14.02621	-7.329	23	.000	

Table 11
Summary of the Positive Attitudes

Items	Frequency	Percent
Collaboration	14	58%
additional sources of information	18	75%
Motivation	16	66%
Feeling relaxed	21	87.5%
Feeling independent	18	75%



As the data in the table shows, 58% believed that the use of collaboration procedures improved collaboration among the learners and teachers in a collaborative environment. A

majority of 87% claimed that they felt relaxed and felt comfortable when they were exposed to collaborative language learning via strategy-based instruction.

Table 12
Summary of the Negative Attitudes

Items	Frequency	Percent
Lack of required feedback	16	66%
Little access to the internet	22	91%
Too much material to study	14	58%
Lack of speaking opportunity	15	62.5%
Ignoring listening	15	62.5%

Table 12 demonstrates the summary of negative attitudes toward collaborative language learning via strategy-based instruction. The main obstacle that was identified by the learners is related to the technological problems: Lack of access to the net where the learners need it. To exercise the learning strategies, the teacher had to assign a great deal of material for the learners to study. This put a lot of burden on the learners' shoulders.

This is why 58% of the learners were dissatisfied with the heavy load of materials that they had to study. Moreover, when the learners are instructed using web-based teaching approaches, they naturally face a major problem: A lack of the required opportunity for everyone to practice speaking as they focus on listening. In other words, the learners do not have enough opportunity to practice speaking as much as listening and this made the students of this study complain about the use of the web in their language classes.

DISCUSSION

The scores of the speaking and listening tests that were achieved through scores that were provided by three raters indicated that the learners in the EG group improved much more satisfactorily than those who were trained using the traditional teaching procedures. The rise in the speaking scores was higher than the listening among the EG. It could be an indication of the effectiveness of collaborative teaching procedures in the web environment supporting the assumption that collaboration can impact oral production more than listening.

In other words, the use of collaboration is more effective to improve speaking rather than listening. However, for both these skills, meaningful relationships could be observed between the use of the procedures and the oral skills.

Moreover, the data of the questionnaire indicated the learners' self-efficacy improvement from pre- to post-administration. As a goal of the study, it was important to improve the learners' self-efficacy using strategies that could impact their learning level and strategies.

First, it was the impact of teaching strategies in speaking and listening that granted the learners the opportunity to behave independently. According to the data of the self-efficacy questionnaire, the strategies that were taught by the teacher and used by the learners led to self-efficacy improvement as the learners acted in collaboration with others. It was web-based cooperative learning that resulted in the self-efficacy of the learners since in this very environment, the teacher was absent and the learners were heavily dependent on their peers' assistance and advice for any improvement.

Moreover, as an additional source of evidence, the data from the interview could support the positive effect of web-based cooperative and strategy teaching in the oral language class. The majority of the learners in the EG supported the idea that using collaboration in the web environment could impact their amount of learning and speed. They could learn faster as they felt less anxious and more confident. The reason lies in the

established collaboration that was suggested by the teacher.

Moreover, the use of web-based instruction was an important aspect that led to their success. Although the participants faced some serious limitations in the use of the web and collaboration, the achievements were much higher than expected. The lack of teacher and instructors' help was a great problem for the learners since in some limited cases, to answer some of their questions, they needed to refer to their teachers' help.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data of the study and the achievements, it can be suggested that most of the learners preferred to be cooperative during the implementation of strategy-based instruction in oral skills, and their active participation in all different activities led to the listening-speaking development of the learners.

They expressed that appreciation of the program as stated in the interview was a sign of the positive impact of both web-based instruction and collaboration in the web environment. Results of both quantitative and qualitative research tools revealed that effective use of implementing web-based collaboration in oral language classes could have a significant impact on the linguistic input of the learners. The results of the speaking and listening tests showed that the students improved satisfactorily.

Moreover, web-based collaboration in the oral language classes had an impact on the students' efforts to learn English. According to the qualitative data of the study, the program which encouraged the use of collaboration in the web-based environment helped the students to invest more time and effort into language learning. It seemed that students developed more realistic expectations and felt empowered for achieving their goals. A major outcome of the use of collaboration in the web-based environment was the development of learner autonomy among the student participants. In the context of this study, autonomy was observed to be measured via interviews where the subjects expressed that they felt more independent when they were permitted to take

part in the activities collaboratively. One of the benefits of the new technology lies in providing a learning environment that helps learners succeed in improving understanding where other methods have failed. The findings of the study suggest that the spontaneous development of learner self-efficacy is usually a prolonged process, while the assisted procedure through learner-centered approaches like web-based collaboration is much more effective. It is believed that learners' self-efficacy is promoted through the provision of circumstances and contexts for language learners which allow them to take charge at least temporarily of the whole or part of their language learning program.

Another important contribution of this study was encouraging the use of collaboration as the use of procedures suggested and encouraged learners-based classrooms where teachers function as an organizer, facilitators, and chancellor. Thus, the role of the teacher is undermined by over-stressing the role that is given to the learners.

An important outcome of the study was the shift that was observed to happen from teacher-centered to learner-centered as it encouraged the autonomy of the learners. The activities that learners followed on the web improved the assumption that learners during the teaching processes can depend on their abilities as well as their peers. It encouraged the learners to focus on their abilities that are not discovered or used so far. The study achievements proved that EFL learners can practice their English skills without time and space constraints. It was proved that learners have more opportunities to learn and practice the target language through collaborative learning with their peers or by creating their projects. Studies done before supported this assumption too (Ghoneim & Elghotmy, 2016). It was proved that the use of WBLL can assist the language acquisition process in that it allows learners to interact with each other as well as gradually construct their knowledge (Lin, Shie & Holmes, 2017).

The data that was achieved via an interview with the EG proved that the web and its strategies provided more learning opportunities in terms of extra learning materials and sources.

Owston (1997) has observed that the Web can provide flexibility in teaching and learning, free from the physical boundaries of classrooms and the time restraints of class schedules. Added to this, lectures and demonstrations are possible through web-based multimedia learning experiences for students (net meetings, conferencing).

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Biodata



Neda Ghabeli is a Ph.D. student of TEFL at Kerman University, Kerman, Iran. She has been teaching English for several years at universities and language schools and has published a number of papers in international and national academic journals. Her main areas of interest include methods and techniques of language teaching, collaborative learning, and innovative teaching methods.

Email: neda.ghabeli@hotmail.com

Dr. Massoud Tajaddini is an assistant professor of English Language Teaching at Islamic Azad University, Kerman Branch, Iran. He mainly teaches language testing, research methodology, and teaching language methodology at the graduate level and his main areas of interest include teacher education, cooperative learning, language testing, and research. He has published some books in the

field of translation, language learning, and teaching and papers in international and national academic journals and also presented in seminars.

Email: massoud_taj@yahoo.com

Dr. Neda Fatehi Rad is an assistant professor of English Language Teaching at Islamic Azad University, Kerman Branch, Iran. She mainly teaches language testing, research methodology, and teaching language methodology at the graduate level and her main areas of interest include teacher education, cooperative learning, language testing, and research. She has published papers in international and national academic journals and presented in seminars.

Email: nedafatehi@yahoo.com