

Impact of Online Setting Collaboration through Strategy-Based Instruction on EFL Learners' Self-efficacy and Oral Skills

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of web-based cooperative teaching through strategy-based instruction on EFL learners' speaking and listening skills. Moreover, the use of cooperative teaching was hypothesized to have impact on the EFL learners' self-efficacy. To this purpose, the study followed a mixed-methods design by implementing both qualitative and quantitative data gathering procedures through tests, questionnaire and interviews. The population of the study was made up of 48 EFL learners in a language institute in Kerman, a city in the south east of Iran. In order to collect 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 finally an interview. Based on the obtained results, it was revealed that the learners in the online group improved much more satisfactorily than those taught through traditional teaching procedures. It was, therefore, concluded that collaborative teaching strategies were effective in the web environment. Besides, meaningful relationships were observed between the use of the applied strategies and the oral skills. Furthermore, the results of the questionnaire clearly indicated the learners' self-efficacy improvement from pre- to post-administration. Finally, the resulted obtained from the interview showed the positive effect of web-based cooperative and strategy teaching in the oral language class. In fact, majority of the learners in the online group clearly maintained that using collaboration in the web-environment could enhance their learning level. The findings of the study are of much help to language teachers who observe learning problems among their students. They can also assist learners who suffer from communicative difficulties in the situations where they have to collaborate with other groups and exchange ideas.

Keywords: Oral skills, web-based cooperative teaching, online learning, self-efficacy

Introduction

Various factors hinder the students from developing their oral communication skills in English which include insufficient teaching hours for English, unskilled teachers, students' poor proficiency, non-English speaking environment (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Chen & Goh, 2011), large class sizes, insufficient facilities and equipment (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu, 2006), teaching approach and inadequate emphasis on speaking in the classroom. In the same manner, learning and teaching English to EFL learners in Iran can be considered from a number of perspectives, the most important of which are 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), 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 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 providing 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 a number of linguistic and non-linguistic factors such as grammar, vocabulary, pragmatic variables, 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, use lectures and discuss language points, asking students to memorize vocabulary, grammatical rules, and to do several translations (Wang, 2007); this approach is easy to conduct as well as useful for controlling students in large-size classes taught within limited class time (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 at exploring a few dimension 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: to examine if the use of collaboration and strategy instruction may lead to the learners' self-efficacy enhancement. So, the following research questions were addressed in the present study:

RQ1. Does web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based instruction have any impact on the students' speaking skill?

RQ2. Does web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based instruction influence students' listening skill?

RQ3. To what extent does web-based cooperative learning via strategy-based instruction affect EFL learners' self-efficacy?

RQ4. What is the attitude of the EFL learners on the use of web-based instruction and collaborative learning in their language class?

RQ5. Is there any relationship between EFL learners' oral skills achievements and their self-efficacy?

Literature Review

Chiu, Liou and Yeh (2007) developed a website equipped with automatic speech recognition technology that taught EFL learners in Taiwan the six speech acts in English, i.e. greeting, saying goodbye, request, complaint, apology, and compliment. The web-based environment guided the students through different situational conversations and required them to record their oral responses based on the given contexts. The participants practiced with the technology in class and at home during a course of six weeks. They were then administered a self-developed Discourse Completion Test. The findings showed that while students' appropriateness of speech act use improved, the comprehensibility level, i.e. how easy it is to understand the speech act utterances, did not. It seems that the study could only partially address its purpose in enhancing the learners' communication ability in using speech acts. In this case, the researchers developed themselves the website to provide linguistic input. In other studies, educators employ the real-life websites already available on the Internet for their language teaching purpose. For example, *TED Talks* is one of the most popular online websites for learning about presentation skills. Li, Gao and Zhang (2016) employed the TED videos in their public speaking course. In their study, the authors elaborated on the noteworthy reasons motivating them to choose TED Talks videos. First, TED videos featured a variety of topics that suited the language learners' individual interests. Also, the fact that presenters came from different countries around the world could help to familiarize their learners with different English accents. Students had the flexibility to watch the videos repeatedly, learn new vocabulary and acquire effective presentation techniques. Speakers in TED videos commonly possessed great presentations skills, for example, using body language, which learners could imitate and learn. Participants in their study were 150 EFL engineer-major students. During the treatment period, learners were requested to watch TED videos, take notes and present their own speeches in class. They also self-evaluated their own performance as well as receiving feedback from their classmates. Analyses from self-report questionnaires showed that students believed they picked up more linguistic information and enhanced their speaking proficiency. Specifically, the students reported an increased amount of speaking practice and became more confident in public speaking. The knowledge presented in the TED videos also benefitted the students' knowledge and critical thinking skill. However, it should be emphasized that TED Talks is only one representative among many other educational websites that can be utilized to enhance learners' presentation skill. Peyghambarian, Ashraf and Fatemi (2014) encouraged their Iranian EFL learners to access a website named "GoEnglish.Me" to learn and practice language skills. The online website contained different linguistic resources, e.g. reading and listening materials. The study had an experimental design with a control group whose participants only studied in regular classes without using the online resources. Consistent with many previous studies in web-based language learning, the experimental group students outperformed control group counterparts in speaking ability as indicated in their speaking posttest.

The above study aimed at exploring the impact of implementing WBLL at the expense of LLS on the oral performance and progress of EFL learners. Additionally, pedagogical implications for the use of collaboration and WBLL in teaching listening and speaking skills are discussed in the light of previous findings. For education, there are relatively few empirical studies where wikis have been applied as a platform for student interaction. In existing studies, the collaborative potential of the wiki concept as a writing tool is frequently assumed (cf. Arnold, Ducate & Kost, 2009; Augar, Raitman & Zhou, 2004; Forte & Bruckman, 2006). Features, which are stressed, include the promotion of revision and tracking of drafts, together with the pedagogical challenges of an open editing space, such as the organizational issues in course

management (Garza & Hern, 2006; Lamb, 2004). As far as empirical research studies of wikis in language learning are concerned, there are few studies so far discussing collaborative writing in relation to the implementation of a wiki in the pedagogical environment of language learning, which is the focus of this article. Studies of interaction in wiki environments by Lund and Smørđal (2006) and Lund (2008), show that there is tension between individual and collective ownership. Their studies discuss the fact that students need to get used to this collective ownership when writing. They claim that collective knowledge production first starts with local content development and then moves over to a networked level, a process that needs to be designed for. Mak and Coniam (2008) studied the use of a wiki as an online collaborative writing tool in an English as a second language programme for seventh graders to find out how students collaborate and what effects collaboration has on the finished product. Their results show that students produce a vast amount of text in the wiki environment. This text was expanded, reorganized and corrected by the students which resulted in improved coherence. However, it is concluded that for the students, peer reviewing was a new experience and something they were reluctant to engage in. Therefore, the idea of collaboration was not fully made use of by the students. Another study by Arnold et al., (2009) shows positive results of collaboration in an under graduate course in German as a foreign language. This study investigated the number of revisions students make on a wiki and what kinds of revision they make in relation to linguistic accuracy. In this study the participants were willing to embrace both teacher and self-initiated feedback. This study shows that students not only performed a large number of revisions of their writings, they also created higher quality texts due to teacher and peer initiated feedback. These results suggest that wikis can foster both writing skills and revision performance in linguistic accuracy. In Kessler's (2009) study of the usage of a wiki with pre-service English as foreign language teachers, the results indicate that the students are more willing to collaborate about aspects of content rather than form in such an environment. The results show that even though the students are asked to highlight both content and language in their feedback, they are primarily engaged in content-based feedback and not form-based. This suggests that the lack of attention is due to the level of grammatical accuracy being acceptable for the informal context of the wiki as a writing environment.

All studies stated and discussed above focused on the impact of WBLL on learning and developing language skills. Moreover, some of them elaborated the use of collaboration in digital environment. The studies also investigated the role of different web sites on speaking, listening, reading and even writing. None of these studies considered the impact of teaching learning strategies in the digital environment together with encouraging collaboration as regarding the tendency to impact the learners' self-efficacy. This study hypothesized that the use of WBLL is an essential need for the today's EFL learners and this has to be done by encouraging and implementing collaboration and using certain set of learning strategies that have to be presented and practiced as a part of classroom procedure.

Method

Design of the study

This study followed the principles the mixed-methods design by implementing both qualitative and quantitative data gathering procedures through tests, questionnaire and interviews. Thus, it implemented 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.

Participants

The population of the study was made up of 85 EFL learners in a language institute in Kerman, a city in the South-east Iran. They were randomly divided into two equal groups, i.e. the online group and the traditional group. The native language of the population was Farsi, and they age range was 18 to 27. All of them were studying at pre-intermediate level, and consisted of both genders.

Instruments and procedures

To collect the data for the purposes of the study, four instruments were used: Cambridge Placement Test to homogenize the participants, pre- and post-listening and speaking tests, questionnaire to estimate EFL learners' self-efficacy and finally an interview. The teaching procedure for the online group was to instruct them to use language learning strategies and to encourage them to use collaboration in the web-based context.

Cambridge Placement Test was first used to homogenize the learners of the two groups. Using this test, very high and very low learners of the two groups were excluded from the study. Then, the listening and speaking tests were administered in order to evaluate the listening and speaking levels of the learners before and after they were exposed to the treatment. To this goal, PET test for listening and speaking were used. During the first and the last classes of the learners, they were exposed to the test of listening, with 25 items, and immediately after it, each two individuals were interviewed for the speaking test as two examiners rated their speaking skill. Moreover, the participants' voices were recorded for any future reference. The next instrument was then used (self-efficacy questionnaire) to estimate the EFL learners' efficacy. The participants received the questionnaire once at the beginning of the course and again at the end, when they had received the treatment. The interview was tape recorded to allow for transcription and close analysis. The focus group was interviewed to reflect their attitude on the use of the teaching procedures in their speaking and listening as well as the use of collaboration in their class.

Results

The first two research questions investigated the impact of cooperative learning on the listening and speaking skills of the learners. To collect the data, pretest and posttests of listening and speaking were run. The results are presented below.

Table 1. *Results 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 results of the pre- and post-listening tests show that small change happened in the mean score of the learners from pre- to posttest. The mean for the pre-listening test was estimated to be 10.5, which changed to 11.95 for the posttest. 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. *Results 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
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In the same way, table 2 above offers the results 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.

Table 3. Results 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

The pretest results for the CG were estimated to be 11.95 for the speaking test, which changed to 12.42 for the posttest. Here, the raise is relative and shows some degree of improvement.

Table 4. Results 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

The results in table 4 show the means of pre- and posttest 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.

To examine the consistency of the scores that were provided by three raters of speaking tests, 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 posttests of both groups prove that they are reliable enough to trust the scoring procedures that were provided by three scorers. Second, the intra-class reliability proved that they are all between 0.95 and 0.78 that is high enough to show 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 it varied from level to level. The following tables are related to this issue.

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

It can be seen in table 5 that the higher is the level of achievement among the learners, the higher would be their self-efficacy improvement.

Table 6. The mean scores of listening

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

Based on the above results it can be postulated that the higher is the level of listening achievement among the learners, the higher would be their self-efficacy.

Table 7. Paired Samples t-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

The results in table 7 show that there is meaningful relationship between the levels and the self-efficacy achievement of the learners.

Table 8. Paired Samples t-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

Finally, it can be concluded on the basis of the results in table 8 that the better learners in listening and speaking class were more apt 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 impacts the quantity of their learning and 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 obtained results, the mean for the pre-administration of the questionnaire was estimated to be 80.58, which changed to 100.12 for its post-administration.. The raise in the mean from pre- to post-administration of the questionnaire shows the degree of the self-efficacy improvement among the learners in the EG.

Table 9. Descriptive Results of Pre- and Post-administration of the Questionnaire (EG)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Responses of Pre-ad	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 posed:

-Is there any relationship between EFL learners' oral skills achievements and their self-efficacy?

The *t*-test results in the following table provide indications that there is a significantly meaningful relationship between the two administrations of the questionnaire. In other words, the use of the procedures has had a high impact on the EFL learners' self-efficacy.

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

To seek the attitudes of the learners who were exposed to web-based instruction and collaborative learning in their language class, an interview was administered. The participants were interviewed one by one and their voices were recorded. Then, the ideas stated by them were classified into two categories of positive and negative, as shown in tables 11 and 12 below:

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 results in table 11 show, 58% of the participants 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 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 on collaborative language learning via strategy-based instruction. The main obstacle that was identified by the learners was

related to the technology, i.e. lack of access to the net where the learners needed 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' shoulder. This is why, 58% of the learners were dissatisfied with the heavy load of materials that they had to study. Moreover, when the learners were instructed through web-based teaching approaches, they naturally faced a major problem, i.e. lack of the required opportunity for everyone to practice speaking as they focused on listening. In other words, the learners did not have enough opportunity to practice speaking as much as listening, and this made them complain about the use of web in their language classes.

Discussion

Based on the results collected via listening and speaking tests, questionnaire and interview, the researcher came to some significant findings. The scores elicited from the speaking and listening tests and rated by three raters indicated that the learners in the EG group improved much more satisfactorily than those who were trained through using the traditional teaching procedures. The raise 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, thereby 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 were observed between the use of the procedures and the oral skills. Also, the results derived from the administration of the questionnaire clearly indicated the learners' self-efficacy improvement from pre- to post-administration. As a goal of the study, it was important to see whether or not the learners' self-efficacy might improve through using the strategies that could impact their learning level. In fact, it was the impact of teaching strategies in speaking and listening that granted the learners the opportunity to behave independently. According to the results gained from 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. In fact, it was web-based cooperative learning that resulted in 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 advices for any improvement.

Moreover, and as additional evidence, the results of the interview supported the positive effect of web-based cooperative and strategy teaching in the oral language class. Actually, majority of the learners in the EG clearly supported the idea that using collaboration in the web-environment could impact the extent of their learning and speed. They could, in fact, 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 factor that led to their success. Although the participants faced some serious limitations in the use of web and collaboration, the achievements were much higher than expected. 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 their teachers' help.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that most of the learners under study preferred to be cooperative during the implementation of strategy-based instruction in oral skills as well as in all different activities that led to their listening-speaking development. They stated their appreciation of the program in the interview concerning the positive impact of both web-based instruction and collaboration in the web environment. In fact, the results of both

quantitative and qualitative research revealed that effective use of implementing web-based collaboration in the oral language classes could have significant impact on the linguistic input of the learners. The results of the speaking and listening tests also showed that the participants improved satisfactorily. According to the qualitative results, the program which encouraged the use of collaboration in the web-based environment helped the participants to invest more time and effort into language learning. It seemed they 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 participants. In the context of this study, autonomy was observed to be measured via interview where the participants expressed that they felt more independent when they were permitted to take part in the collaborative activities. Generally, web-based instruction, as one of the outcomes technology proved to provide a learning environment that helps learners succeed in improving understanding where other methods have failed.

The findings of previous studies suggest that spontaneous development of learner self-efficacy is usually a prolonged process, while the assisted procedure through learner-centered approaches, like web-based collaboration, is evidently much more effective. It is, in fact, 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. The findings of the present study are in line with this view.

A very important contribution of this study was encouraging the use of collaboration and learners-based classrooms where teachers just function as organizers, facilitators and chancellors. Thus, their role is undermined by over-stressing the role that is given to the learners.

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

Finally, the results obtained from the interview proved that the Web and its strategies provided more learning opportunities in terms of extra learning materials and sources. This is in line with Owston (1997) who 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.

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