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«Երևանի Լեոյի անվան հ.65ավագ դպրոց»ՊՈԱԿ

ԱՎԱՐՏԱԿԱՆ ՀԵՏԱԶՈՏԱԿԱՆ ԱՇԽԱՏԱՆՔ  
Թեմա՝ *Implementing Group Work for Developing Speaking Skills*

Կատարող՝ Քնարիկ Բաղրամյան

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Գյումրի 2022

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## INTRODUCTION

In order to communicate with people, learners have to study how to speak English fluently as a foreign language. This skill demands practice more in many contexts of our life both inside and outside the class.

However, the English learning environment of our country is not really convenient and suitable enough for the students; which it is quite difficult for them to develop their speaking skills. Therefore, they are not confident and they do not want to talk when they communicate with foreigners. To learn this skill effectively, it is important to require some activities as learning environment so that help the learners have more opportunities to practice and feel more excited as well as motivated.

Working in groups is one of such expected ones. Participating in group activities will help them to not only be more confident in communicating but also their speaking abilities will certainly improve significantly as members of the team will help others correct their mistakes and then all students will be able to progress together. Nevertheless, students join in the speaking lesson much more active because they have a lot of opportunities to practice speaking English, share ideas with their friends as well as re-correct for others' mistakes than listening and writing something given from their teachers.

The aim of this paper is: to find out the effectiveness of pair work and group work in TESOL classrooms by different group work activities and approaches.

The main objectives of the current study are:

1. to analyze types of activities.
2. to use different types of activities and approaches in appropriate situation with appropriate learners.
3. to present the application and approach of a number of modern methods according to global standards by some authors.

Chapter 1 entitled "TYPES OF GROUP WORK" deals with the description of group work types.

Chapter 2 entitled "GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE SPEAKING" describes different types of activities which promote speaking.

## CHAPTER 1 TYPES OF GROUP WORK

Group work is an important part of many different teaching approaches. Harmer (2007) reiterates the advantages of group work because it increases the number of speaking opportunities; provides a space for speakers to give their different opinions; encourages cooperation and negotiation skills. [Harmer, J. (2007). The practice of English language teaching (4th ed.). London:] Longman In addition, Ur (2011) mentions that a good discussion is one in which most students speak as much as possible. If the participants are motivated, if their expressions are alive, if they react to the ideas of the speaker, and if they can use the language as they require, then it is a proof that the discussion is going well (Ur, 2011).

Motivation is a key factor in group work wherein students perform at a personal level because they feel less inhibited about committing errors, which is a stepping stone to learning (Long & Porter, 1985). According to Hess (2001), a group is a natural framework for sharing ideas in the real-world scenario, and it is ideal for a language classroom to communicate. In a large class, students can learn much from group work, because they practice oral fluency, and learn to speak with other members of the group (Hess, 2001). Also students lower their affective domain in small groups and feel more comfortable (Hess, 2001).

Depending on the quality of members in a group, group work can facilitate learning and can create a positive classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, some groups are able to create disharmony and dissatisfaction. Johnson and Johnson (1999) mention that the most influential theory that underlies cooperative learning is the social interdependence theory. This theory states that social interdependence exists when the achievement of a person's objectives is influenced by the action of others. The essential elements that make group work highly cooperative are that students should be positively interdependent and individually accountable. They should promote each other's success, use appropriate social skills, and periodically process how as a group they improve their effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2014).

Martin Parrott (1993) comments on the problems teachers face when group work is carried out. Students often make a lot of noise. The seating arrangement is fixed and does not lend itself to group work. The students tend to use their first language. Some students

mention that they would like to listen to the teacher's voice and not so much of the voices of their peers within the class.

To overcome these difficulties, Hess (2001) suggests that students should be aware of certain rules for group work. For example, every member has the right to speak without dominating; to encourage the passive members to speak; and to concentrate on arriving at a group consensus after the discussion is over.

Harmer (2007) advises teachers to come to an agreement to a code of conduct jointly developed by the students and the teacher.[ Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). London: Longman] Finelli, Bergom and Mesa (2011) propose a framework for the successful conduct of group work as follows: design good team assignments; construct teams carefully; teach team-work skills; and assess student teams so that they can be better equipped for employability.

Taking into consideration some of the theories of experts mentioned above in ELT and Cooperative Learning, I would like to define group work which promotes speaking. Successful group work is one in which the students are highly committed to the activity given. Their level of participation is high and they help each other to achieve the goal. Students try to use English as much as possible during the discussions, and they speak only in English at the final performance.

Brown (2000: 3) has offered the following minimalist, common-sense definition of groups: 'a group exists when two or more people define themselves as members of its and when its existence is recognized by at least one another.' In another words, a group qualifies as a 'group' when it has become a psychological reality for insiders and outsiders alike.[ Brown, R. (2000). *Group Processes: Dynamics Within and Between Groups* (2nd Ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.] We can, of course, try and provide a more detail and more descriptive definition. Cohen (2014: 66) defines group work as: 'students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a clearly assigned learning task. [Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (2014). *Designing Groupwork Strategies for the Heterogenous Classroom* (3rd Ed.). Teachers College Press. Columbia University]

Moreover, students are expected to carry out their task without direct and immediate supervision of the teacher. Group work is not the same as ability grouping, in which the teachers divide up the class by academic criteria so that they can instruct a more

homogeneous group. It should also be distinguished from small groups that teachers compose for intensive instruction, such as the flexible and temporary grouping procedures often used in individualized reading instruction or differentiated instruction.’ Why use group work in language teaching? It is clear that in order to maximise the opportunities to learn in your classroom, student teachers should not just learn on their own, but engage in collaborative learning and support one another.

Research shows that group work is one of the most effective ways of increasing learning outcomes. Slavin and colleagues (1995: 177) reviewed a great deal of evidence and concluded that “co-operative learning is one of the greatest success stories in the history of modern research”. The four main reasons for this success seem to be Motivation, Social cohesion, Personalisation, Cognitive elaboration. If students are to get the help they need, especially in a large class, they must be available to help one another. Student teachers teaching one another can be surprisingly effective: in one study students learned almost as much when peer-tutored as they did from one-to-one instruction from their teacher, possibly because they feel less intimidated asking questions of a peer.[ Slavin, R.E. (1995). *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research and Practice* (2nd Ed.). London: Allyn and Bacon.]

Group formation is an important factor in creating positive interdependence. Richards and Rodgers (2001: 196) state that while the teacher breaks down his classes into pairs and small groups, many factors should be considered:[ Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T.S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.]

- Considering group size: typically group size is from two to four. This will depend on the tasks the students have to carry out, students’ age, and time division.

- Assigning students to groups: groups can be teacher - selected, random, or students - selected.

- Suggesting student’s role in groups: Each group member has a specific role to play, such as noise monitor, recorder, or summarizer.

#### Collaborative group work

Group work, or collaborative group work, is a teaching and learning strategy that can be utilized for all types of students and can take various forms in the classroom. Using group work as a pedagogical tool can be useful in numerous ways.

It can be used to organize activities or tasks in the class where an assignment is given by the teacher and students are expected to work as a group to solve the group task (Chiriak&Frykedal, 2011). In collaborative group work, every group member is involved in working on a given task to produce an outcome that they all agree upon (Chiriak&Frykedal,[2011Chiriak, E. H., &Frykedal, K. F. (2011). Management of group work as a classroom activity. *World Journal of Education*, 1(2), 3]; Kutnick, Ota, &Berdondini, 2006).

This allows all types of learners, including English language learners, the opportunity to be in an environment where they can work together to discuss their ideas, share and listen to their peers' thinking process.[Kutnick, P., Ota, C., &Berdondini, L. (2006). Improving the effects of group work in classrooms with young school-aged children: facilitating attainment, interaction and classroom activity. *Learning and Instruction*, 18(1), 83-95]

Nair and Alwee (2012) state that opportunities are provided through group work for students to talk freely with their peers, which ultimately allows all students to practice and improve their oral language skills. Working in pairs or groups is considered as one of the important factors to improve learners' communication.[ Nair, G.K.S., &Alwee, U. (2012). Group work in the secondary ESL classroom. *Asian Social Science*, 8(10), 3-7]

Different individuals have developed many approaches to group work over the last time. According to Toseland& Rivas (2009: 5) group work is defined as goal-directed activity with small groups of people aimed at meeting socio emotional needs and accomplishing tasks. It means that task is directed to individual members or a group and as a whole within a system of delivery. [Toseland, R. W., & Rivas, R. S. (2009). *An introduction to group work practice* (6th Ed.). Boston: Allyn& Bacon] Gillies& Ashman (2003: 54) state that group work, in language class, is a cooperative activity, it is designed and implemented to develop social strategies and acceptable social attitudes in students, and to improve social relations within and between groups. In cooperative activity the students share aims and responsibilities to complete a task assigned by the teacher in groups or in pairs.[Gillies. M. Robyn & Adrian F. Ashman. (2003). *Cooperative learning: The social and intellectual outcomes of learning in groups*. London. New Fetter Lane]

Blatchford &Kutnick (2009: 3) states that, there are four principles to be made successful of group work: first, the students and classroom need good organized and

strategically managed its means that make the group work more effective in composition classroom seating arrangements and the characteristics of groups such as their size. Second, group-work skills have to be developed. Third, group-work activities should encourage the activist of group, and the last, the students should adopt a range of roles that are supportive of group work and that encourage the independence of students directly.[ Blatchford & Kutnick. (2009). *Promoting Effective Group Work in the Primary Classroom: A handbook for teachers and practitioners*. USA and Canada. Rutledge Taylor & Francis Group.]

#### Student interaction

One of the greater benefits of implementing group work in the classroom is that students have the opportunity to communicate and interact with each other. By allowing students to interact with other students in the classroom, students can listen and have conversations with their peers. With limited interruptions by the teacher during group work, students can form discussions amongst themselves about the topic or problem being discussed. By participating in group work, all students are able to collaborate and have opportunities to exchange feelings, ideas, and thoughts (Tuan & Nhu, 2010).

Therefore, within group work, student interactions are encouraged and fostered between students, which allows all students to develop and practice their social skills. Student engagement and interaction is especially important for students because as Tuan and Nhu (2010) further state, one of the ways in which students acquire the English language is through their environment and the interaction occurring between the students. Small group peer interactions are paramount for students to acquire the language and research has shown that students feel less pressure to be accurate at all times working in groups (Long & Porter, 1985; Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Wong Fillmore and Teale (as cited in Helfrich & Bosh, 2011), report that through opportunities to interact with native or native-like speakers, there was an increase in the language of instruction with ELLs.[ Helfrich, S. R., & Bosh, A. J. (2011). *Teaching English language learners: Strategies for overcoming barriers*. *The Educational Forum*, 75(3), 260-270]

According to Tuan and Nhu (2010: 39), “interaction is a key of second language acquisition and exists as the central feature [,] it facilitates language learning and engages students in participating language learning activities”. It is evident that through group work,



students are provided with opportunities to engage in social interactions and conversations, which contribute to enhancing their oral language skills.

#### Classroom environment

Providing all students with a safe and an inviting environment will encourage students to explore their learning. When students participate and are engaged in group work, Long and Porter (1985) state that because it allows students to communicate face-to-face, it sets up a natural setting for conversation. Kutnick, Ota, and Berdondini (2006) further support that this natural environment in the classroom fosters students to communicate in a higher quality than during independent or teacher directed work period. [Kutnick, P., Ota, C., & Berdondini, L. (2006). *Improving the effects of group*]

Furthermore, Tuan and Nhu (2010) also note that group work also creates a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, which increases the quantity and quality of language use in students. When students work in groups, they feel that they are not hurried to create and produce sentences or answers as they would in a whole-class discussion. [Tuan, L. T., & Nhu, N.T.K. (2010). *Theoretical review on oral interaction in EFL classrooms*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 1(4), 29-48.]

Furthermore, “students are more likely to participate orally in class when they [feel] supported by [their] teachers and peers” (Long & Porter, 1985: 19). [Long, M. H., & Porter, P. A. (1985). *Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(2), 207-228]

#### The role of the teacher with group work activities

Although group work is led by students and is created for student learning opportunities, it is the teacher’s responsibility to organize students and prepare tasks for group work. As there are great benefits to implementing group work in the classroom for all types of learners, teachers need to use this strategy to maximize each student’s learning opportunity to speak and listen to the English language (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Teachers often fear implementing group work in the classroom because of either previous negative experiences with classroom management challenges or lack of ability to hand over control to the students (Chiriack & Frykedal, 2011; Kutnick et al., 2006). [Chiriack, E. H., & Frykedal, K. F. (2011). *Management of group work as a classroom activity*. *World Journal of E3.ducation*, 1(2)]

Using group work as a pedagogical tool will empower all types of students to participate and enjoy learning in the classroom. Therefore, within the classroom, teachers need to integrate students as fully as possible and not underestimate the role of peers in the education of students (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). All students, including students, should be given the opportunity to contribute and all group members should be able to use each other as resources for the assigned group work. When grouping students together, teachers should also consider partnering native and non-native English-speaking students to work together so that they can learn from their different perspectives (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Therefore, although students benefit from teacher-led activities, these types of activities should be implemented along with peer-focused activities so that students have the opportunity to practice their oral language skills with their fellow peers (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). [Helfrich, S. R., & Bosh, A. J. (2011). Teaching English language learners: Strategies for overcoming barriers. *The Educational Forum*, 75(3), 260-270]

## **CHAPTER 2. GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE SPEAKING**

Group work in language learning is a powerful educational approach principally because of its contribution in enhancing students' achievement and productivity and providing more opportunities for communication. From the perspective of second language teaching, McGroarty (1989; in Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 195) offers the potential advantages

for ESL students in CLL classrooms:[ Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T.S. (2001). Approaches and methods in language teaching (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.]

- Increased frequency and variety of second language practice through different types of interaction.
- Possibility for development or use of language in ways that support cognitive development and increased language skills.
- Opportunities to integrate language with content - based instruction.
- Opportunities to include a greater variety of curricular materials to stimulate language as well as concept learning.
- Freedom for teacher to master new professional skills, particularly those emphasizing communication.
- Opportunities for students to act as resources for each other, thus assuming a more active role in their learning.

There are additional important benefits of cooperative learning. Slavin (1995: 60) found that the most important psychological outcome of group work is its effect on students' self-esteem. Students' beliefs that they are valuable and important learners are of critical importance for their ability to be confident decision-makers, and ultimately to be productive individuals. In cooperative classroom, motivation found to have great effect on enhancing students' performance Slavin (1995: 16) states that: Rewarding groups based on group performance (or the sum of individual performances) creates an interpersonal reward structure in which group members will give or withhold social reinforces (such as praise and encouragement) in response to group mates' task-related efforts.[ Slavin, R.E. (1995). Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research and Practice (2nd Ed.). London: Allyn and Bacon]

#### Discussions:

After a content-based lesson, a discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential that the teacher sets the purpose of the discussion activity. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, learners can become involved in agree/disagree discussions.

In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 4 or 5 in each group, and provide controversial sentences like “people learn best when they read vs. people learn best when they travel”. Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is essential that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. At the end, the class decides on the winning group who defended the idea in the best way.

This activity fosters critical thinking and quick decision-making, and students learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others. For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because quiet students may avoid contributing in large groups. The teacher can either assign the group members or the students may determine it by themselves, but groups should be rearranged in every discussion activity so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas.

Lastly, in class or group discussions, whatever the aim is, the students should always be encouraged to ask questions, paraphrase ideas, express support, check for clarification, and so on.

#### Role-play.

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that "You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and...".

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on.

Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, as Harmer (6) suggests, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role-play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.

Information gap.

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.

Brainstorming.

On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas.

Storytelling.

Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each class session, the teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening. In this way, not only will the teacher address students' speaking ability, but also get the attention of the class.

Interviews.

Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them becoming socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and "introduce" his or her partner to the class.

Story completion. This is a very enjoyable, whole-class, free-speaking activity for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences, he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on.

#### Reporting.

Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine and, in class, they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class.

#### Playing Cards.

In this game, students should form groups of four. Each suit will represent a topic. For instance:

- Diamonds: Earning money
- Hearts: Love and relationships
- Spades: An unforgettable memory
- Clubs: Best teacher

Each student in a group will choose a card. Then, each student will write 4-5 questions about that topic to ask the other people in the group. For example: If the topic "Diamonds: Earning Money" is selected, here are some possible questions:

- Is money important in your life? Why?
- What is the easiest way of earning money?
- What do you think about lottery? etc.

However, the teacher should state at the very beginning of the activity that students are not allowed to prepare yes-no questions, because by saying yes or no students get little practice in spoken language production. Rather, students ask open-ended questions to each other so that they reply in complete sentences.

#### Picture Narrating.

This activity is based on several sequential pictures. Students are asked to tell the story-taking place in the sequential pictures by paying attention to the criteria provided by the

teacher as a rubric. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use while narrating.

#### Picture Describing.

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.

#### Find the Difference.

For this activity students can work in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, for example, picture of boys playing football and another picture of girls playing tennis. Students in pairs discuss the similarities and/or differences in the pictures.

There are also some structured activities used to promoting speaking skills. They are pre-speaking, while-speaking and post-speaking activities.

Pre-Speaking activity is used to prepare the learners for the main speaking activity. Schemata activation is recalling prior world-knowledge of the participants that is relevant to the speaking situation. Questions, pictures and texts can be used to these ends. It is also used brainstorm activity as pre-speaking activity. It helps to generate ideas in small groups before main speaking activity. The main aim of this activity is to generate as many ideas as possible within a specific time period. The ideas are not evaluated until the end of activity time.

Motivation of learners can be enhanced when they clearly see the communicative problem and the ways to resolve it. While-speaking the participants actually resolve the communicative problem and reduce its resolution as a result of the role-play, problem solving, socialization or communication game. Post-speaking can provide opportunities for learners to re-visit the language and ideas produced and to think of the ways to make communication more effective. An important part of the post-speaking activity is the development of integrated communicative skills, i.e. reading and speaking task, listening and speaking task, speaking and writing task etc.

## CONCLUSION

Teaching speaking skill in a foreign language is not easy and it puts strong demands on both the teacher and students. Group-work activities are excellent tools and effective in increasing motivation for learning, positive feeling for the friendship, and problem-solving. In working in groups, students are centered and trained to be a cooperative, independent, and active learner. Moreover, they knew how to work in groups as well as how to divide duties equally to each member of the group, which helps them more and more mature.

There are a variety of factors that make a successful speaking lesson. There are some suggestions on ways to improve the use of group-work activities successfully in English



speaking lesson. Firstly, the teacher should organize group-work activities for the students to participate in order to enhance their skills in general and speaking skill in particular. In addition, the teacher should give clear instructions before asking the students working in groups, which helps them understand what they have to do. It means that the students know what they have to concentrate on to get a high result. Secondly, the students should self-study to improve their grammar, pronunciation as well as vocabulary. They can learn everywhere and every time. Moreover, they should spend at least two hours per day practicing speaking as well as other skills. They should make a smart schedule and follow it strictly; self-hanging awards for themselves is also a good way for learners to complete the timetable effectively. In addition, they can learn English from many sources such as via the Internet.

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