

*The effects of Cooperative Learning strategies to develop fluency in 9th grade students at  
Guillermo Cano National Institute in the first school term, 2019.*



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**Abstract.**

This study is focused on the importance of implementing cooperative learning strategies for developing fluency of the English language on 9th grade students at Guillermo Cano National Institute. Therefore researchers formulated two main questions based on research objectives to guide it: What type of cooperative learning strategies should be applied for students to develop fluency in the English class? How do cooperative learning strategies contribute to develop the students' fluency? This research follows a qualitative design and aims at presenting new strategies that will be useful for English teachers and productive for students.

We identified which strategies are the most effective in the English class and can be applied by English teacher in Nicaraguan classrooms. Firstly, students of 9th grade can develop better communication through fluency with the implementation of cooperative learning in the learning process. Secondly, students' performance improved significantly and they developed good attitude toward learning English via cooperative learning. Thirdly, when using cooperative learning students are motivated and less reluctant. Therefore, this study recommends the adoption of cooperative learning as a strategy fluency development in English Learning speaking in particular.

**Key words:** fluency, cooperative learning and strategies.

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**Introduction.**

Cooperative Language Learning is an approach used to teach English language which aims at creating a more learner-centered environment in which students' learning is developed by themselves. Speaking, which is one of the skills in English language learning, is challenging for learners because they are required to cope with new vocabulary.

Cooperative learning is not a new teaching method, but appeared recently in the field of teaching and learning; but it has its roots in the history of

education, so it is important to remember that the cooperative learning method started just before World War II. Aman Mohammed (2017).

The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative learning aided strategies inside the classroom and learn to forge the new knowledge, and to analyze the factors that are affecting the development of the English speaking skill. Besides, we will explore the benefits of using cooperative learning to help students to reach more easily and effectively the knowledge. It points out

some of the best strategies in order to provide them a better feedback in every activity. Finally, we consider that it is important to motivate students in their learning process in order to fulfill the main purpose of education and gain more knowledge about the class; consequently, the students will feel more confident at the moment of speaking the second language.

### Elements that influence an English Fluency inside the classroom.

Fluency of a language is affected by certain elements; these elements are responsible for a bad speech of the language. The following ones are the most relevant when it comes to affecting fluency and the way we express our ideas in the target language.

#### **Anxiety**

According to Wilson (2006) (Anxiety in Learning English as a Foreign Language), is extremely related to speaking skill, hence it provokes students to be anxious while there are performing a target language. Anxiety has relation with the fluency of the pupils when these to demonstrate a subjective experience tension, imposed by the expectation of danger or distress how daily stress and affected fluency in students who in the size possible when stutter, the intend to communicate is the transfer effectively of foreign language.

#### **Shyness**

Shyness is described as the response to fear, that although it reflects the neurobiology of the nervous system, it is also strongly influenced by parenting practices and life experiences. The findings suggest that shy children's responses are constrained by their concerns about evaluation and do not necessarily reflect underlying differences in

competence. Researchers have demonstrated that shy students participate less frequently in class, are less likely to volunteer contributions, and give shorter and less elaborate answers to questions. The shy often experience low self-esteem, fear of rejection, or acute self-consciousness—which can prevent them from developing new relationships inside the classroom own behavior and perceived shortcomings. (Bashosh, 2013).

#### **Self- esteem**

Basically, self-esteem is a psychological and social phenomenon in which an individual evaluates his/her competence and own self according to some values. Accordingly, self-efficacy, which is the perception people have about their competence, is fostered mainly in schools. Self-esteem is how we value and perceive ourselves. It's based on our opinions and beliefs about ourselves, which can sometimes feel really difficult to change. (Bashosh 2007)

#### **Motivation.**

Cambridge Assessment English (2017) states that “Motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning.” (p.146). Children with a good attitude towards English are more likely to work hard and keep going when learning gets challenging. Children are also more motivated when they have a positive impression of English-speaking people and cultures. Learners of all ages achieve more when they are intrinsically motivated. In other words, when the learning experience is fun, interesting and meaningful.

#### **Importance of speaking fluency for foreign language learning.**

The goal of learning an additional language is to use it naturally. Gabino (2017) defines fluency as natural

language use like the native speakers. Speaking fluency is also an important component of communication competence, because the ability of speaking fluently can help the speaker to produce continuous speech without comprehension difficulties for the listener and to maintain the communicative ideas more effectively. The importance of speaking fluently will not only give us an assertive communication but will motivate us to develop an elevated self-esteem where there will be no place for shyness and the development of an anxiety that cannot be controlled by the student.

### **Challenges to develop speaking fluency in ESL.**

Problems that are commonly observed in the language classroom are related to individual learners' personalities and attitudes to the learning. Problems, challenges in teaching and learn speak English. The author Aleksandrak (2016) defined them as follows:

- Inhibition – fear of making mistakes, losing face, criticism; shyness.
- Nothing to say – learners have problems with finding motives to speak, formulating opinions or relevant comments.
- Low or uneven participation – often caused by the tendency of some learners to dominate in the group.
- Mother-tongue use – particularly common in less disciplined or less motivated classes, learners find it easier or more natural to express themselves in their native language. (p. 3)

### **Student-Centered Learning concept**

Student centered refers to a variety of ways where learners can acquire knowledge through this method

and assortments of techniques where learners are the center of their own apprenticeship. Even though there are many definitions for student-centered according to many investigations found. For instance, Corley (2010, p. 1) says that student-centered learning is an approach to learning in which learners choose not only what to study but also how and why. At the heart of the learning environment are learner responsibility and activity, in contrast to the emphasis on instructor control and coverage of academic content found in conventional, didactic teaching. **Cooperative learning in English teaching** Cooperative learning is a student-centered, instructor-facilitated instructional strategy in which a small group of students is responsible for its own learning and the learning of all group members. Students interact with each other in the same group to acquire and practice the elements of a subject matter in order to solve a problem, complete a task or achieve a goal.(Har, 2013)

Students' learning goals may be structured to promote cooperative, competitive, or individualistic efforts. In every classroom, instructional activities are aimed at accomplishing goals and are conducted under a goal structure and Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. It may be contrasted with competitive (students work against each other to achieve an academic goal such as a grade of "A" that only one or a few students can attain) and individualistic (students work by themselves to accomplish learning goals unrelated to those of the other students) learning. In cooperative and individualistic learning,

you evaluate student efforts on a criteria-referenced basis while in competitive learning you grade students on a norm referenced basis. While there are limitations on when and where competitive and individualistic learning may be used appropriately, any learning task in any subject area with any curriculum may be structured cooperatively. (David W. Johnson,2013)

### **Types of cooperative learning methods.**

**Formal cooperative learning groups** may last for one class period to several weeks to complete specific tasks and assignments (such as solving a set of problems, completing a curriculum unit, writing a report or theme, conducting an experiment, or reading a story, play, chapter, or book). (Johnson D. W, 2017)

### **Informal Cooperative Learning Groups**

Informal cooperative learning groups are temporary, ad-hoc groups that last from a few minutes to one class period.

During a lecture, demonstration, or film they can be used to focus student attention on the material to be learned, set a mood conducive to learning, help set expectations as to what will be covered in a class session, ensure that students cognitively process the material being taught, and provide closure to an instructional session. During direct teaching the instructional challenge for the teacher is to ensure that students do the intellectual work of organizing material, explaining it, summarizing it, and integrating it into existing conceptual structures. Informal cooperative learning groups are often organized so that students engaged in three-to-five minute focused discussions before and after a lecture and three-to-five minutes turn-to-your-partner

discussions interspersed throughout a lecture.

Johnson D. W. (2016)

### **Cooperative Base Groups**

The purposes of the base group are to give the support, help, encouragement, and assistance each member needs to make academic progress (attend class, complete all assignments, learn) and develop cognitively and socially in healthy ways. Base groups meet daily (or whenever the class meets). They are permanent (lasting from one to several years) and provide the long-term caring peer relationships necessary to influence members consistently to work hard in school. They formally meet to discuss the academic progress of each member, provide help and assistance to each other, and verify that each member is completing assignments and progressing satisfactory through the academic program. Base groups may also be responsible for letting absent group members know what went on in class when they miss a session. Informally, members interact every day within and between classes, discussing assignments, and helping each other with homework. The use of base groups tends to improve attendance, personalizes the work required and the school experience, and improves the quality and quantity of learning. The larger the class or school and the more complex and difficult the subject matter, the more important it is to have base groups. Johnson D. W. (2017)

### **Elements of Cooperative Learning.**

The most commonly explained elements of cooperative learning are five namely: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face/ promote interaction, interpersonal and small

group skills and group processing. According to Tufail (2017)

The first and foremost element for successfully organized cooperative task is **positive interdependence**. From positive interdependence viewpoint, learners have two responsibilities: firstly, to learn the allocated topic/material; and secondly, to ensure that all the group members learn the same. The presence of positive interdependence in the cooperative group makes students perceive that they are interconnected with their group companions in such a way that their success depends on their group mates' success; therefore, they are required to coordinate their exertions with their group mates' efforts to complete a task Tufail, 2017 (2017, p. 300)

**Face to face/ Promote interaction** : Face to face interaction is not only a verbal interaction in cooperative learning. It is promote interaction, which promotes more and more interaction in different forms such as exchange of verbal information, help, encouragement and concrete stuff such as materials required to complete the task Tufail (2017, p. 301)

**Individual Accountability** which involves students' understanding that they will be held accountable for their individual contributions to the group, that free-loading will not be tolerated and that everyone must contribute.

### **Cooperative Learning Strategies.**

This study presents three main strategies that help student get a good English fluency.

#### **Jeopardy**

According Erica Loop (2018) Jeopardy is a game such as Jeopardy as a learning tool may increase student engagement, according to the article "Playing Jeopardy in the Classroom: An Empirical

Study" in the Journal of Information Systems Education. Jeopardy can also help you to introduce material or help your students to better learn challenging content. Use the game after starting a subject or before a test. Doing so helps your students to recall facts and figures in a way that's more meaningful than simply staring at a piece of paper.

**Role-play** is an effective technique to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interests of learners, and make the language acquisition impressive. The outcome shows there are four crucial factors for its success: the topic chosen should be real and relevant; the teacher needs 'feed-in' the appropriate language; correct errors in a proper way; some of teachers' role are facilitator, spectator or participant. Incorporating role-play into the classroom adds variety, a change of pace and opportunities for a lot of language production and also a lot of fun. Also, when organizing the practice of role-play, the teacher must provide a context and several roles for students to prepare and then perform in the class.. Ding (2009)

#### **Board game.**

Putri (2015) defines a board game is a game that involves counters or pieces moved or placed on a pre-marked surface or "board", according to a set of rules. This game also makes students interact each other and communicate the language without hesitation. Thus, the speaking teaching and learning process should be attractive and done well. In order to solve those problems, used board game to improve the students' speaking skills. The research findings showed that there were improvements in students' speaking skills after using board games. In the

treatments, the researcher applied board game in teaching speaking.

### **Benefits of Cooperative Learning Method for students learning.**

Cooperative learning has been one of the best method to encourage students to work together to learn. According to Zecha A, One of the benefits of cooperative learning on students can be seen immediately:

- The students who cooperate with each other also tend to understand and like each other more.
- They have more opportunities for developing critical thinking skills and show a significant improvement in those thinking skills.
- They improve their oral communication skills. (pág. 478)

### **Difference between cooperative learning and collaborative learning methods.**

In agreement to (Cooperative versus Collaborative Learning, 2016) “This paper concludes that in cooperative learning each person is responsible for a portion of the work but in collaborative learning participants work together to solve a problem. In fact Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. However, Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement.

### **Cooperative learning and fluency development in the English class.**

Cooperative learning can be an efficient technique to help overcoming the students´ shyness and lack of confidence, thus improving their speaking competency. It can be hypothesize that if teacher use and design appropriate classroom techniques based on cooperative learning approach, then EFL students will use English fluently and spontaneously to produce and negotiate their intended meaning (Samah, 2015, pág. 3). Teachers should apply cooperative learning method to increase, motivate and facilitate themselves the process of teaching a foreign language and achieve enough fluency, which is a very important sub ability in English learners in order to make oneself understand, be coherent and be capable to create real and logical conversations in real life.

That is why Alrayah (2017, pg. 25) confirms that “students who study the language using cooperative learning, manage to train many different components of communicative competence. Strategic competence is used in the negotiation of meaning that takes place in the endeavor to be understood by others; pragmatic competence concerns the use of speech-acts that otherwise do not occur all that frequently in teaching situations such as praising, giving advice, asking clarifying questions. Discourse competence is at the very center of inside and outside-circle, both when they are listening to the structure of the presentation and when giving feedback to it, and when discussing the structure in teams. All aspects of at least the oral side of

communicative competence are involved when one works through cooperative learning.”

**Our research questions to reply in this study were:**

What type of cooperative learning strategies should be applied for students to develop fluency in the English class?

How do cooperative learning strategies contribute to develop the students' fluency?

### **Methodology.**

#### Research Design

Our research design is qualitative, because we implemented some innovative strategies in the classroom and analyzed their effects on English teaching by observing classes, participating in the teaching process and getting opinions from the students

#### **Subject Selection**

This research was carried out at the National Institute Profesor Guillermo Cano Balladares. This is a public institute located in Igor Ubeda neighborhood and attends a total amount of 1,016 students and three English teachers. The class size is between 50 to 55 students per classroom.

#### **Population and sample**

The population selected were 200 students of 9th grade, this study used a classroom from 9<sup>th</sup> grade

consisted of 56 students. The sample of this study to carry out interviews was a group of twenty students from 9<sup>th</sup> grade A and one English teacher. Therefore, twenty students were selected by convenience to apply the selected strategies in different sessions.

#### **Sampling**

The sample of this study was selected through a convenience sampling method, which is a non-probability sampling technique, this seems method seems more appropriate for the purposes of the study.

#### **Data Collection Method**

To develop this research, we applied data collection techniques like interviews and observations. The interview was applied to the teacher and students and observation guide in the classrooms as well. The observation guide was “successful” to the extent that it satisfies the research objectives by capturing relevant events and participants along with the constructs of interest.

#### **Data Analysis**

In our research the data analysis consists on interpreting and analyzing qualitatively the strategies used by the teacher in teaching how to develop their English fluency. All the information gathered through the two instruments applied were interpreted with the aim of obtaining the answers of our two research questions, and pointed out on how the strategies are effectively through the cooperative learning method to develop the fluency in the students. As results, we realized that the strategies applied have had effectively results

#### **Results and Discussion.**

For the purpose of this research, we observed nine English classes with the main objective of identifying if the strategies applied by the teacher were effective to develop English fluency on students in the target language. Besides, students and teacher were interviewed in order to get relevant information about the correct use of the strategies under study. In this part of the document, we present and discuss the main results obtained from all the data gathered based on the research questions previously raised.

Cooperative learning is an innovative method that promotes the active participation of students, developing in this way their cognitive abilities. It allows them to collaborate to discover their own abilities and makes language learning more creative. By using this method, we also observed that learning does not follow a traditional path; instead it is cause and effect. This method works particularly well with a technique called "the king of the mountain" where an 'x' participant can make grammatical, fluent corrections while others acquire the intrinsic acknowledgment. Since students get along well the same environment, they are not shy to express their own ideas in other language because groups are created by affinity, where the teacher is only a facilitator in the process.

The main strategies used development fluency to nine grade student were: board games, jeopardy and roleplays.

### **Conclusion**

We conclude that the uses of the cooperative learning method help to develop students' fluency in English Language. In order to get the best results out of cooperative learning in the English class, the teacher

must find the right materials and make use of innovative tools to engage students so that they are able to learn the new content successfully. In this way, teachers and students are challenged to change traditional process in teaching learning and at the same time it involves them both into participating in the English learning process.

We found out that there are specific strategies that improve students' English Fluency that are: Board Game, Jeopardy and Role Play, where we observed that these strategies have a positive impact on learners' speaking capacities. It primarily gives the opportunity to receive comprehensible input and feedback through regular interaction with others to develop their fluency. Also, students were capable to share their prior knowledge and knowledge they got from one to another practicing with cooperative learning activities.

### **Limitations**

- 1- Mismatch of time to applicant the instruments.
- 2- The lack of time to develop the strategies.
- 3- Indiscipline.
- 4- The lack of assistance.
- 5- The excessive amount of students.
- 6- The inadequate context of the school.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results obtained we recommend some suggestions to the English teachers, the recommendations are:

1. Teachers should not only focus on writing, also on speaking. Therefore, they should try to provide more time to develop English speaking.

2. Teacher has to find out other strategies and techniques that promote the students'

Interaction in the English class development such as Role plays, Board game and Jeopardy.

3. The teacher should use different kind of strategies and techniques to motivate the

Students and use interesting activities for each content, such as:

A. Use of warm-up activities at the beginning of the class to introduce content.

B. Use flash cards, pictures or other type of materials made by the teacher to make Students speak.

C. To use the strategies 'such as Jeopardy, Role play, and Board Game, for matching prior Knowledge and reinforcement of topics or units.

D. We also do not omit to recommend the use of a workbook in the student, where this will reinforce the knowledge obtained in the classroom.

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