

## Cooperative Learning Instruction: Its Impact on ESL Learners' Oral Performance

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Othman, J. & Chong, I. P. (2005) Cooperative learning instruction: Its impact on ESL learners' oral performance. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 9(1), 37-58.

This paper reports on a study in which the effect of cooperative learning (CL) instruction on learners' oral performance in the school-based oral assessment was investigated. The influence of CL on learners' patterns of communication during group interaction was also examined. Data were elicited from sixty two students from an urban secondary school in Malaysia. The quantitative results seem to imply that CL instruction has a positive influence on learners' performance in the oral assessment. Further analysis on learners' discourse showed that learners who received CL instruction produced patterns of communication which were more meaning focused and created opportunities for negotiations of meaning.

**Key Words:** cooperative learning, oral interaction, ESL

### 1 Introduction

The current emphasis on the teaching of communicative competence in language classrooms has resulted in a number of studies on how learners interact with each other. Much research, such as done by Kasanga (1996), Storch (1998) and Mackey, McDonough, Fuji and Tatsumi (2001) has shown that as opportunities to use the language in meaningful context increases, so does the acquisition of the second language. One of the techniques which could be used to provide opportunities for learners to increase their language use is cooperative learning.

What then is cooperative learning (CL)? It is the instructional use of small groups in which pupils work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; 1999). In the classroom, the pupils are expected to help, discuss and argue with each other; assess each other's current knowledge; and fill any gaps in each other's understanding. When properly organized, pupils in cooperative learning groups make sure that everyone in the group has mastered the concepts being taught (Slavin, 1995). Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping team mates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. In small group work and

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