



ISSN: 2959-6386 (Online), Volume 3, Issue 1, March 2024

Journal of Knowledge Learning and Science Technology

Journal homepage: <https://jklst.org/index.php/home>



Investigating the Impacts of Peer Conversations on Students' Speaking Ability at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade

Le Vu Ngan Ha 

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

Abstract

The facts that teachers asked some questions in English speaking classes, and students knew the answers but didn't respond because they didn't know how to express their opinions and experiences in English and students kept discussing some topics together in Vietnamese made the author concerned about major English students' speaking skills. The purpose of this study is to find out how students perceive about speaking English with peers and their attitudes towards this method. This research employed forty English majors from integrated-skill-2 classes at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT). A closed-ended questionnaire and Likert scale were used to gather the data, and a quantitative research method was used to analyze it. Speaking practice daily with peers is a highly useful approach to improving speaking skills, according to the data gathered. The study also indicates that students have positive attitudes toward English conversation practice. Additionally, peer interaction gives students confidence and meets their need to speak in front of an audience. Besides, the study demonstrates that through peer conversations, students' vocabulary increases significantly, and they find it much easier to articulate their thoughts and feelings more effectively.

Keywords: *English speaking skill, peer conversation, motivation, confidence.*

Article Information:

Article history: Received: 30/09/2023 Accepted: 05/01/2024

Online: 12/01/2024

Published: 29/03/2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60087/jklst.vol3.n1.p206>

ⁱ **Correspondence author:** Le Vu Ngan Ha

Email: halvn@huit.edu.vn

1. Introduction

For students to succeed in both their academic and professional lives, speaking is a critical ability. All of the knowledge that students acquire is useless if they are unable to communicate their understanding of the subject matter clearly and confidently. Unfortunately, this happens in most of English speaking classes in Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT) when the teacher – the author – asks some questions in English-speaking classrooms, and although the students understood the answers, many remained silent because they were unsure of how to convey their thoughts and experiences in the language. Instead, the students continued their group discussions on various subjects in Vietnamese. Speaking with peers—friends, classmates, etc.—can be a very helpful tactic to get over this weakness because students frequently have these kinds of talks with their partners on a daily basis. All they need to do is attempt to

communicate in English with their companions. The purpose of this study is to assess to what extent peer discussion facilitates language acquisition, encourages active learning in English, and increases fluency and competency.

HUIT provides multi-disciplinary and multi-degree education with an emphasis on application and practice in order to produce highly qualified human resources for the nation's industrialization and modernization. The university has 24 majors in technology, accounting, business administration, commerce, tourism and language. For English majors, in the first two years of their university study, students are supposed to enhance speaking, listening, reading, writing, and linguistic knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) in order to build and formulate their communicative abilities. However, the fact that learners hardly have opportunities to incorporate English into their daily lives causes most English majors' stress, nervousness, or anxiety when speaking English. In this case, having daily conversations with peers is a wonderful way to practice speaking. Students are able to explain their understandings, ask clarifying questions, explore concepts, and make their views understandable to their companions. As they converse with their companions, their comprehension deepens. They are able to pick up conversational English. Through peer interaction, they can also improve their fluency and clarity, making them highly effective and proficient speakers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Benefits of peer conversations

Language acquisition is generally thought to occur more smoothly among learners who are calmer and less stressed. As a strategy that helps create a welcoming and low-stress learning atmosphere in foreign language classrooms, collaborative learning has long been acknowledged for its relevance. Furthermore, numerous academics have endorsed the method's efficacy in terms of learning attainment and student pleasure.

Smith and MacGregor (2009) defined "collaborative learning" as a broad range of pedagogical strategies that involve students' or students' and teachers' combined intellectual work. It involves "a sense of the social nature of learning and the emphasis on a social approach to the development of learning skills, work skills and life skills". It is a method of teaching and learning where students collaborate in groups to find a solution, finish a project, or produce a product. Its objective is to enable students to collaborate in order to optimize both their own and others' learning. The foundation of collaborative learning is the notion that learning is an inherently social activity in which participants converse with one another. The conversation is how learning takes place. In community college classrooms, collaborative learning practices also present potential opportunities for fostering student independence and active learning (Foote, 2009).

Wiener (1986) stated an additional viewpoint emphasizing the dynamics among group members. He believed to reach a common goal, collaborative learning requires good interdependence among group members. Especially, when students are placed in groups, they remain in such groups and do not collaborate with one another unless the group activity is united by a task that requires consenting to learn. To create engaging and fruitful group learning experiences, teachers must help group members develop positive attitudes.

Regardless of the subject, numerous studies have shown that students who work in small groups retain and absorb more of the material delivered than those who get it in other teaching forms. According to a study by Ashton-Hay and Pillay (2010), language teachers can use collaborative learning to give diverse learners a more dynamic and inclusive education. According to Ronald, Heidi and Stephen (2005), it was proved that in a physiology course, peer interaction improved students' grasp of the original course materials and their capacity to tackle new challenges. Even though this is a physiology course, English language students could see similar benefits from the peer speak technique. In order to engage students in the classroom and aid in their understanding of the material, having conversations with classmates is a smart idea.

In addition to their academic lives, peer communication helps students succeed in their careers. Edleston (1987) found that speaking abilities ranked highest on a list of requirements for success in the workplace. For this reason, according to Hynds and Rubin (1990), learners should learn how to have talks, interviews, small-group discussions, and interactions with instructors, parents, peers, and community members. They have to learn how to adapt their speech to the right audience and circumstances. Furthermore, Loh (1993) believed that peer contact demonstrated growth in knowledge, self-assurance, leadership, and self-esteem in addition to the acquisition of group management and presentation abilities. Peer conversation thereby promotes the development of social abilities such as self-respect, leadership, and making new friends, in addition to language acquisition. Staab (1992) said, "I believe that oral language is important not only as a vital communication tool that empowers us in our daily lives but also as a valuable way to learn". In addition, Hernandez (2002) found that team learning increased students' motivation and also encouraged more advanced and active thinking.

Therefore, prior research clearly shows that peer discussion facilitates language learning. Students can get better at understanding what other people are saying and at expressing themselves. Furthermore, previous studies have highlighted the importance of students engaging in peer interactions as a means of enhancing their English-speaking abilities and boosting their confidence and fluency in the language.

2.2 Effects of positive attitudes towards peer interaction.

It is best to start with some definitions of the term "attitude" in order to assess the attitudes of the students. To Brown (2001), a significant amount of emotional involvement, including feelings, self, and relationships in the community, defines attitude. Besides, in her work, Eveyik (1999) concurs with the majority of researchers regarding the definition of "attitude," which is the disposition to act consistently toward an object and the state of preparedness to respond to a scenario.

The rationale is that attitudes affect actions, emotions, and hence, learning. It follows that there is undoubtedly a relationship between a student's upbringing and language acquisition. The success of language learning is significantly impacted by favourable attitudes. Oxford (1990) confirms that attitude is thought to influence how learners use strategies. Successful and highly motivated learners employed more methods, notably those requiring planning, evaluation, and monitoring, as noted by Bui and Intaraprasert (2013). Conversely, students who lacked motivation utilized a restricted range of tactics and exhibited less readiness for strategic action.

2.3 Aims and research questions

Aims

This study aims to explore the impacts of daily talks among companions on enhancing the speaking abilities of English major students at HUIT and learn their standpoint of using this method.

Research Questions

The study will address the following research questions:

1. *What benefits do students obtain from the utilization of peer conversations on a daily basis?*
2. *What are students' attitudes towards daily peer interaction ?*

3. Methodology

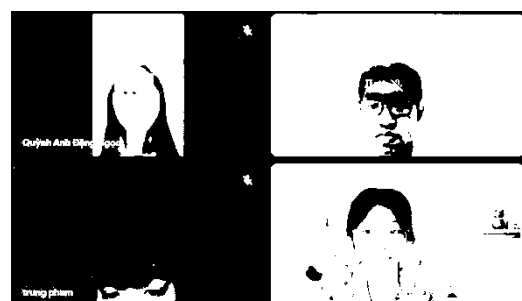
3.1 Participants and instruments

The study used the quantitative methodology to get the findings. The survey consists of 20 items using a 4-point Likert scale. The aim of the study is to collect survey data from a representative sample of 40 undergraduate students who have chosen a major in English at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT). All students at the age of twenty, including 14 males and 26 females. They are currently in their third year of study. The participants will be given 15 minutes to complete the survey in a manner that ensures their responses remain indistinguishable. And the resulting data will be utilized in the research study.

Prior the method applied, the students who ranged from average to good speaking levels volunteered to take part in the study with the wish to have more chances to use English in daily life. They were divided into 10 groups of 4 who are close friends or in the same classes in almost all subjects. Each group has a zalo group named “English – Yes, I can”. The chosen students were required to communicate with each other totally in English for three weeks (21 days). Every day they had face-to-face talks or chatted in their zalo groups, exchanged routine information, discussed their studies and shared their favourable books, movies and social events with each other. Especially, the groups joined meetings on Zoom or Google Meet and had an English discussion on some current affairs for about one hour every three days. These are common topics they had:

- *Generation gap*
- *Popular websites for learning English*
- *Popular jobs in ten years*
- *Shopping trends*
- *Attitude and Confidence*
- *Your favourite book*
- *Problem-solving skills and critical thinking*
- *Time management skills*
- *Hard work vs. smart work*
- *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humans*

On the weekend, the students were asked to make a speaking clip about one of the topics they had talked over with each other. Students were given the questionnaire to assess the impact of peer talks at the conclusion of the study.



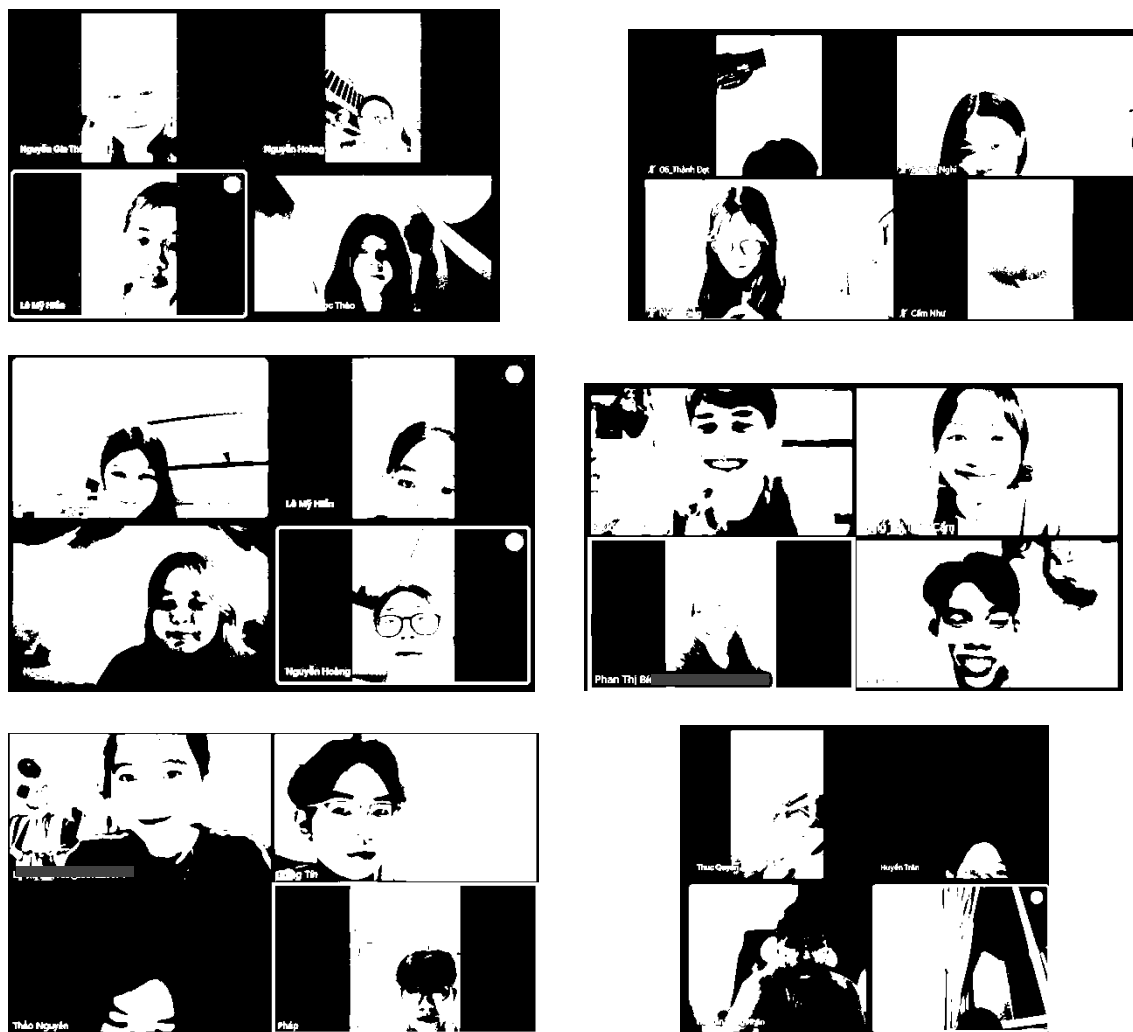


Figure 1. Zoom meetings in English

The quantitative approach was used to conduct the analysis. A Likert scale used based on Brown's (2008) four-point rating system—strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1)—to get the students' opinions on collaborative learning, the respondents provided the data. Attitude data was gathered using a questionnaire. The data that was gathered was subjected to a basic percentage analysis. In addition, an analysis is done on the relationship between speaking skill improvement and peer conversation.

4. Findings and Discussions

The author conducted the study on 40 students of Faculty of Foreign Languages at HUIT. The information was gathered by using a Likert scale of eighteen items. The first question in the survey asked

the participants about their view on daily peer conversations. The second one, they were also questioned about their attitudes toward this method. The majority of participants demonstrated a lot of benefits they acquired and a favorable attitude towards peer communication and provided evidence in favor of the theory that conversing with friends and classmates actually improves one's ability to communicate.

4.1 Students' views on peer conversations

Research question 1: What benefits do students obtain from the utilization of peer conversations on a daily basis? The respondents supplied the data for the questionnaire which was adapted from Brown (2008) and used a four-rating scale: strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Table 1 shows the results of the participants' responses.

Table 1. Students' views on peer conversations

No.	Daily English speaking practice in groups	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Academic benefits					
1	allowed students to assist less proficient students in the group	55%	32.5%	7.5%	5%
2	helped understanding/comprehension	47.5%	42.5%	7.5%	2.5%
3	received useful/helpful feedback	57.5%	35%	5%	2.5%
4	got fresh insights	55%	27.5%	17.5%	0%
5	encouraged the sharing of expertise, information, and experiences	65%	32.5%	2.5%	0%
6	improved performance	60%	37.5%	2.5%	0%
7	motivated students to actively engage in the process of teaching and learning	55%	35%	7.5%	2.5%
Social benefits					
8	was fun	62.5%	27.5%	2.5%	7.5%
9	provided more relaxed atmosphere	52.5%	45%	2.5%	0%
10	better friendship	55%	37.5%	5%	2.5%
Generic skills					
11	made problem-solving easier	60%	30%	7.5%	2.5%
12	stimulated critical thinking	62.5%	32.5%	5%	0%
13	emphasized group efforts over individual effort	70%	15%	12.5%	2.5%
14	concentrated more on group efforts than on individual effort	45%	40%	2.5%	12.5%
15	enhanced communication skills	47.5%	45%	7.5%	0%
16	fostered team spirit	62.5%	25%	7.5%	5%
Challenges					

17	was a waste of time to explain things to other people	30%	22.5%	17.5	30%
18	was challenging to persuade participants to actively engage in tasks	30%	10%	32.5%	27.5 %
Additional comments					
19	performed optimally with a maximum group size of four	50%	37.5%	7.5%	5%
20	(pair/group work) should be encouraged/continued	47.5%	32.5%	15%	5%

Table 1 revealed the students' views on peer conversations on a daily basis . It is clear that two categories were created by combining the responses.: “strongly agree” and “agree” which mean they agree with the items, and “strongly disagree” and “disagree” for disagreement with two items.

The figures obtained present the results of a survey on daily English speaking practice in groups. Besides, The items from the table above can be classified into academic benefits, social benefits, generic/lifelong learning skills, and negative aspects.

+ Academic benefits:

Group English speaking practice offers several advantages for academic purposes, such as enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and comprehension abilities. Ninety percent of participants said that the practice facilitated problem-solving, and sixty-two percent strongly agreed that it encouraged critical thinking. Furthermore, 47.5% strongly believed that the practice improved comprehension and understanding.

+ Social Benefits:

The social benefits of group English speaking practice are also evident in the survey results. Specifically, 62.5% of participants strongly agreed that the practice fostered team spirit, and more than ninety percent agreed that it led to better friendships. Furthermore, 52.5% strongly agreed that the practice provided a more relaxed atmosphere.

+ Generic/Lifelong Learning Skills:

Group English speaking practice also contributes to the development of generic and lifelong learning skills. These skills include receiving useful and helpful feedback, getting fresh insights, and fostering the exchange of knowledge, information, and experience. In the survey, more than a half of responses strongly agreed that the practice provided useful and helpful feedback, while over eighty percent agreed that it offered fresh insights. Moreover, 65% strongly agreed that it fostered the exchange of knowledge, information, and experience.

+ Challenges:

Despite the numerous benefits, there are some challenges to group English speaking practice. For instance, 30% of participants strongly disagreed that the practice was a waste of time to explain things to other people, while 22.5% disagreed. This suggests that some participants feel that explaining things to others is not an efficient use of their time.

Another area of obstacles is the difficulty in getting members to actively participate in tasks. 30% of participants felt that it was difficult to get members to actively participate, and 27.5% strongly disagreed with the statement. This indicates that ensuring active participation might be a challenge in group English speaking practice.

In conclusion, group English speaking practice offers a range of academic, social, and lifelong learning benefits. However, it is essential to address the challenges related to active participation and the effectiveness of explaining things to others to maximize the benefits of this practice.

4.2 Students' attitudes on peer conversations

The research question 2: What are students' attitudes towards daily peer interaction? In order to know more about the participants' feelings after three weeks of taking part in daily English conversations with companions, the author provided them with two more statements and had them choose the one that express most their impression of the method and data, utilizing the Likert scale, asking the students to choose one of the following responses as appropriate for them: *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Don't Know*, *Disagree*, and *Strongly Disagree*.

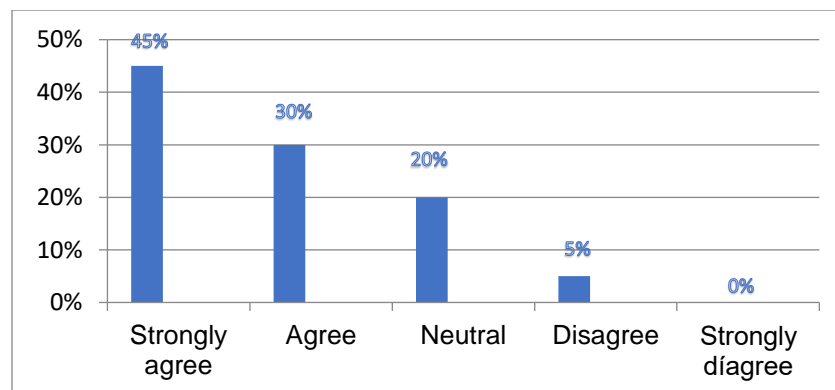


Figure 2. Enjoyment of daily peer conversations

The chart above illustrates the students' enjoyment of the activities of daily peer conversations. Based on the presented chart, it is evident that nearly 50% of participants strongly agreed with the question, approximately two-thirds of the overall sample agree that they were fond of engaging in daily peer conversations. Besides, just 5% disagreed, while 20% maintained a neutral stance.

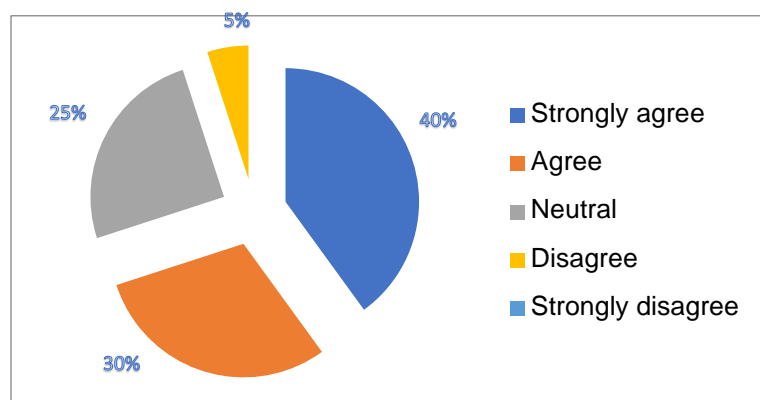


Figure 3 – Intention of continuing practicing in the group

The pie chart shows information about the participants' intention of continuing practicing in the group. Around two-thirds of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they had the plan to keep practicing English speaking in the group. On the other hand, less than a third of students chose a neutral response, indicating that they were not sure whether they still took part in the group's speaking practice. In addition, a small percentage (5%) disagrees with the idea of maintaining the group's activities.

4.3 Discussion

The results of this investigation showed an abundance of significant benefits students acquired for their time of participating in daily English conversations with companions as well as their positive attitudes toward the method.

Research question 1: What benefits do students obtain from the utilization of peer conversations on a daily basis?

Initially, when students work well together, they become more unified and comfortable with one another. As they collaborated with their peers more often, the students got to know one other and the tasks at hand. The students' response indicated that they were stress-free, at ease, and having fun in groups, while their familiarity and camaraderie grew, their anxiety and face threats decreased concurrently.

Secondly, peer conversations as a daily basis are a suitable and efficient teaching strategy for classes in HUIT when the lecturers and students work together once a week. A number of techniques have been demonstrated to enhance students' speaking skills, including the use of technology outside the classroom, group projects, and peer team support. They raised students' awareness of the responsibility for their own English skill development and at the same time created knowledge-sharing atmosphere.

Furthermore, although peer conversations took place outside of the classroom, students could engage, compromise, and exchange ideas with one another—a setting that was reminiscent of social and professional settings. The approach gave the students plenty of chances to practice within unlimited amount of time. The learners could practice as much as they wished outside of the classroom with their companions. In addition to the various practices they accomplished, the participants also gained teamwork skills. They gained social skills from this that will aid them in the future.

Research question 2: What are students' attitudes towards daily peer interaction?

From the fact that the majority of the participants chose “strongly agree” and “agree” for both statement “I was interested in daily speaking practice with friends” and “I will definitely continue joining the group to practice English speaking”, the learners showed how much they enjoyed participating in the study activities and how eager they were to keep practicing speaking English in groups. In other words, the learners showed positive views toward peer conversations on a daily basis.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

6.1 Conclusion

One of the most crucial abilities for language learners to acquire and improve is the capacity to speak English, especially in an academic context. Peer-to-peer interactions in English are a powerful way to enhance language acquisition. Students who participated in group conversations improved their speaking fluency and confidence, which made it easier for them to articulate their thoughts and feelings in a clear and concise manner. Thus, students who engaged in peer interaction on a regular basis could improve their speaking abilities over time. Besides, encouraging peer interaction and cooperation is a significant tool inside as well as outside the classroom, especially for English language learners, as it not only gives students opportunities to utilize language but also gives them the opportunity to observe how their peers learn and solve problems. Additionally, peer conversation has been found to be beneficial for developing speaking skills, as it provides students with the opportunity to practice every day English conversation and language for academic or professional settings. Furthermore, the results also show the learners' positive attitudes toward using collaborative learning as they really enjoyed joining the activities during the time of study and showed their willingness to continue practising speaking English in groups. Based on the results, it is evident that the strategy can be very helpful in enhancing students' competency and fostering a happy learning environment for several reasons.

6.2 Suggestions

Two challenges were identified as unfavorable characteristics of the method: time waste and difficulty in getting cooperation among members. The following are a few suggestions.

First and foremost, it is critical that educators create appropriate cooperative learning activities. To make it easier for everyone to understand their duties in completing the activities, the jobs should be streamlined and have some sort of structure or pattern. That way, time won't be lost on explaining how to complete the duties and persuading others to complete them. In order to assist pupils in getting started, teachers should also provide certain guidelines and ensure that they are closely monitored at all times.

In addition, it is imperative that lecturers carefully assess the project's scope, size, and makeup of the groups. The author has not specified one perfect group composition type. Nonetheless, the research's findings show that the students thought the smallest possible group size should be four.

6.3 Limitations

The study's conclusions are in favor of teaching English speaking through peer exchanges. However, the current study solely collected student perspectives regarding peer chatter. To find out how fluent they had gotten through practicing in-group conversations, the participants were not given oral exams. Once more, because it is a time-consuming process that demands a lot of resources and time, students' progress over an extended period of time was not observed. Due to time limits, the researcher was unable to witness the learners conversing in English in the classroom with the teacher or other students.

References

Ashton-Hay, Sally & Pillay, Hitendra K. (2010). Case study of collaborative learning in two contexts : what do English language learners gain? In: Luzzatto, Edda & DiMarco, Giordano (Eds.) *Collaborative Learning: Methodology, Types of Interactions and Techniques. Education in a Competitive and Globalizing World*. Nova Publishers, New York.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed.). San Francisco Public University.

Brown, F.A. (2008). Collaborative Learning in the EAP Classroom: Students' Perceptions. *ESP World*, 1(17). Retrieved December 20, 2023 from http://www.espworld.info/Articles_17/PDF/Collaborative%20learning.pdf

Bui, T. T. Q. and Intaraprasert, C. (2013). The Effects of Attitude towards Speaking English and Exposure to Oral Communication in English on Use of Communication Strategies by English Majors in Vietnam. *International Journal of Science and Research Publications*, 3(2), 1-9.

Cortright, R.N., Collins, H.L., & DiCarlo, S.E. (2005). Peer instruction enhanced meaningful learning: ability to solve novel problems. *Advances in Physiology Education* 29(2): 107-111. DOI: 10.1152/advan.00060.2004.

Edleston, C., ed. (1987). *A program of games and activities to increase listening and attentional skills in kindergarten children*. Nova University.

Eveyik, E. (1999). *Development of an attitude scale to investigate Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes towards communicative language teaching*. Bogazici University.

Foote, E. (2009). Collaborative Learning in Community College [online] Retrieved December 20, 2011 from <http://www.ericdigests.org/1998-1/colleges.htm>

Hernandez, S. A. (2002). Team Learning in Making Marketing Principles Course: *Cooperative Structure That Facilitate Active Learning and Higher Level Thinking*, Journal of Marketing Education

Hynds, S., & Rubin, D.L. (1990). *Perspectives on talk and learning*. NCTE Forum Series.

Loh, H. (1993). Peer assisted study session in anatomy for nursing students. *Proceedings of the conference peer tutoring: Learning by teaching*, held 19-21 August 1993, (193-202). University of Auckland

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: what every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House

Smith, B.L., and MacGregor, J. T. (2009). What is collaborative learning? National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Pennsylvania State University [online] Retrieved December 3, 2023 from <http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/pdf/collab.pdf>

Smith, C. (1993). How can parents model good listening skills? In *Eric Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills*. Bloomington, IN: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Staab, W.J. (1992). The peritympanic instrument: Fitting rationale and test results. *The Hearing Journal* 45(10): 21-26.

Weiner, H.S. (1986). *Collaborative learning in Classroom a Guide in Evaluation*. College English.