

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OPS-ENGLISH PROGRAMME IN ENHANCING ESL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND SPEAKING ABILITY

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### Abstract

*This academic exercise aims to investigate the effectiveness of using the OPS-English programme to enhance ESL students' speaking skills and attitudes. A total of thirty students in Form Two are randomly selected as subjects for collecting the data. Experimental design is used in this study to suit the need of the research done. The experiment of the OPS-English programme was conducted over three months. First, students' achievement was analysed using a T-test based on the value of  $T=0.001$ . This study showed a significant scores difference in the pre-speaking test result after the students are treated with the OPS-English programme before the post-speaking test result. Besides, a Five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to the respondents at the end of the course to identify their attitudes towards using the OPS-English programme in English classes. Finally, the data were analysed using percentages. The findings showed the students' neutrality in speaking skills and attitudes after the OPS-English programme is introduced.*

**Keywords:** OPS-English programme, Cooperative Learning, Oral proficiency

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Speaking as one of the four skills ESL is taught in all secondary schools in Malaysia, but it is not an easy skill to teach. According to Chien, 2004, speaking is an essential skill to be developed and enhanced to communicate effectively. Proficiency in English as a second language (ESL) can be improved through Oral Proficiency in English for Secondary Schools programme (OPS-English). The Ministry of Education has introduced the OPS-English programme, Malaysia, to enhance Malaysian students' aural and oral skills. This programme

realizes the aspirations of the MBMMBI policy *Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuh Bahasa Inggeris* or 'To Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and to Strengthen the English'.

The OPS-English programme is entirely based on the existing English Language Syllabus for Secondary Schools and is merely a different realization of this syllabus. This programme aims to develop the aural and oral skills of the students. When learning a language, it is listening and speaking that start off the foundation of a language. Reading and writing are incidental. The stronger the foundation, the easier it is to build on reading and writing, not the other way round. The OPS-English programme adopts a back-to-basic approach with its focus on communication skills. Vast opportunities are created for students to engage in activities that are fun and non-threatening. The activities are interactive to promote participation and empower students to take charge of their learning. Students participate in a student-centred learning environment in pair work and group work activities that encourage active listening, speaking, active thinking, and ideas. Every student is also allowed to present individually and share ideas with their classmates and friends.

OPS-English is using the Cooperative Learning Theory in the classroom. Cooperative Learning started developing within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching. It is defined as an approach that encourages and promotes cooperative activities based on pair work and group work of learners in the classroom (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). However, Oral Proficiency in English for Secondary Schools is new to Malaysian schools. It can stimulate speaking and facilitate achievement, but not many schools in Malaysia use OPS-English to promote speaking performance in ESL. Therefore, the OPS-English programme emphasizes listening and speaking skills with incidental integration of the reading and writing skills.

Many Malaysian students cannot communicate in English fluently for many reasons. First and most importantly, it is due to the lack of self-confidence in the students themselves. The students do not learn English for communicative purposes, and their speaking ability has been minimal. It is a fact that in a rural school in Malaysia, English is only used and learned as a subject in school. No enforcement is done after school hours. Learning English is an exercise in translation and rote memorization of new words and sentence structure on paper. It gives the students little chance to practice speaking English in or outside the classroom, and because of the curriculum, they do not emphasize English for communicative purposes (Chien, 2004). Students respond to the teacher only when called upon, and the learning atmosphere is individualistic and competitive (Liu, 1997; Cheng, 2000).

The second reason identified is due to the limited usage environment. In Malaysia, the examination determined curriculum where the teacher's role has been to cover all the content in the textbooks to prepare students for entrance examinations which serve as the primary mechanism. These examinations determine students' future before entering higher education and lead many students to conclude that all they have to do is memorize English grammar points and vocabulary from the textbook. English teaching in Malaysia has been generally perceived as more an academic subject than a communication system (Chien, 2004).

Thus far, there are limited studies to see the effectiveness of using OPS-English to evaluate students' speaking performance in the Malaysian school setting. Research on the subject is also limited, which prompts this study to be conducted. According to the Ministry of Education (2015), it is a back-to-basics approach focusing on communication skills. Many opportunities are created for students to engage in fun and non-threatening. The activities are interactive to promote participation and empower students to take charge of their learning. Students participate in a student-centred learning environment in pair work and group work activities that encourage active listening, speaking, active thinking, and ideas. Every student is also allowed to present individually and share ideas with their classmates and friends.

## **1.1 Research questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

- a) Does the OPS-English programme affect speaking skills among ESL students?
- b) What is students' attitude toward the OPS-English programme?

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Cooperative learning (CL) is defined as a set of instructional methods through which students are encouraged to work on academic tasks (Slavin, 1995). It also refers to a teaching technique where students work in groups on a particular activity to maximize one another's learning and achieve specific goals (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). In CL, students work in small groups to help one another learn academic content (Slavin, 1995). The teaching and learning process using CL techniques is a learner-centered paradigm that has gained popularity as an alternative to the lecture-based paradigm.

Much of the current research revolves around the notion that CL has positive effects on various outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). Most studies on the effects of CL have consistently indicated that this method improves students' English oral skills (Pattanpichet, 2011); English reading comprehension (Bolukbas, Keskin, & Polat, 2011), and English writing (Roddy, 2009). The role of teachers using the CL method shifts from transmitters of knowledge to mediators of learning (Nasri & Biria, 2017). This role involves facilitating, modeling and coaching. Teachers adopting this role should maintain a safe, non-threatening, and learner-centred environment. This teaching environment will help students contribute positively to the cooperative activities assigned to their group (Ning, 2011). For the activities to be genuinely cooperative, each type of activity requires five essential components of the CL (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2006).

Many researchers have conducted studies to determine how better to use CL in developing students' speaking skills and attitudes at each level. For example, Yang (2005) compared CL and traditional teaching methods on Taiwanese college students' English oral performance and motivation towards learning. Sixty Taiwanese college students from two intact classes were involved in the study. A quasi-experimental with non-equivalent control group pre-test post-test design was used. The total experimental period was eight weeks of instruction. The subjects were administered a pre-test and post-test, using the intermediate level speaking component of the GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) and the MIQ (Motivational Intensity Questionnaire) as a pre-test and post-test in the study. In addition, one-way ANCOVA was used to analyze the speaking component (intermediate level) of the GEPT scores and MIQ results. Data collection and analyses explored the effects of CL on Taiwanese college students in terms of English oral performance and motivation to learn in favour of cooperative learning.

Besides, Ning and Hornby (2010) conducted a study to investigate the effects of CL on Chinese EFL learners' competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary. Participants were 100 first-year College English learners from a university in the north of China. A pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design was employed to study the effects of the CL approach on students' language competencies compared to traditional instruction. Findings revealed apparent differences in favour of the CL approach in listening, speaking, and reading. However, no differences were found between the two approaches in writing and vocabulary. In comparison, an experimental study was carried out by Ning (2011) to find out the effect of CL in enhancing tertiary students' fluency and communication. It aimed to offer students more opportunities for language production and thus enhancing their fluency and effectiveness in

communication. The test result showed that students' English competence in skills and vocabulary in CL classes was superior to whole-class instruction, particularly in speaking, listening, and reading.

Pattanpichet (2011) conducted an experimental study to investigate the effects of using CL in promoting students' speaking achievement. Thirty-five undergraduate students participated in the study. The students were enrolled in the main English course at Bangkok University to examine their speaking achievement on an English oral test before and after they had participated in provided instructional tasks based on a cooperative learning approach. To explore the students' views on the use of the CL, they were asked to complete a student diary after finishing each task, fill in a four-scale-rating questionnaire, and join a semi-structured interview at the end of the course. The data were analyzed by frequency, means, standard deviation, t-test, effect size, and content analysis. The findings reveal improved students' speaking performance and positive feedback from the students on collaborative learning activities. In addition, the study provides suggestions and recommendations for further investigations.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The experimental design was used in this study. Experimental research, particularly the true experimental design type (a between-group design) labeled by Creswell (2008), served the research purpose. This is because the students need to be introduced to what the OPS-English programme is and how they are supposed to go over the process to complete it. The design will make us off all the students in this class to effectively produce their speaking skills based on a topic given. The pre-speaking test will first be taken as a guideline on what and how they are supposed to do the OPS-English programme.

The OPS-English programme then being introduced to the students constantly and directly on how to improve their speaking skills in a short and limited period for the post-speaking test. In the end, a post-speaking test will be conducted on the same topic they have given. Their English teacher will observe it to give marks and band. A questionnaire also will be given to identify students' attitudes toward the OPS-English programme. Meanwhile, the quantitative method is the research technique used to gather information dealing with numbers and anything measurable (Nunan, 2001). Thus, statistics, tables, and graphs are often used to

present the results of this method. So, for this study, students' attitudes toward the OPS-English programme will be evaluated using the quantitative method.

This study used a pre-speaking test, a post-speaking test, and a questionnaire. Quantitative data consisted of pre and post-speaking test scores and students' attitudes toward the OPS-English programme. A speaking test was given at the beginning of the study and was selected as a pre-speaking test, and a test given towards the end of the study was selected as a post-speaking test. Then, a questionnaire will be given at the end of the study to investigate students' attitudes toward the OPS-English programme. The data obtained from the pre-speaking test and the post-speaking test were analyzed and interpreted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Finally, the results were used to answer the research questions.

## 4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Pre-speaking Test and Post-speaking Test

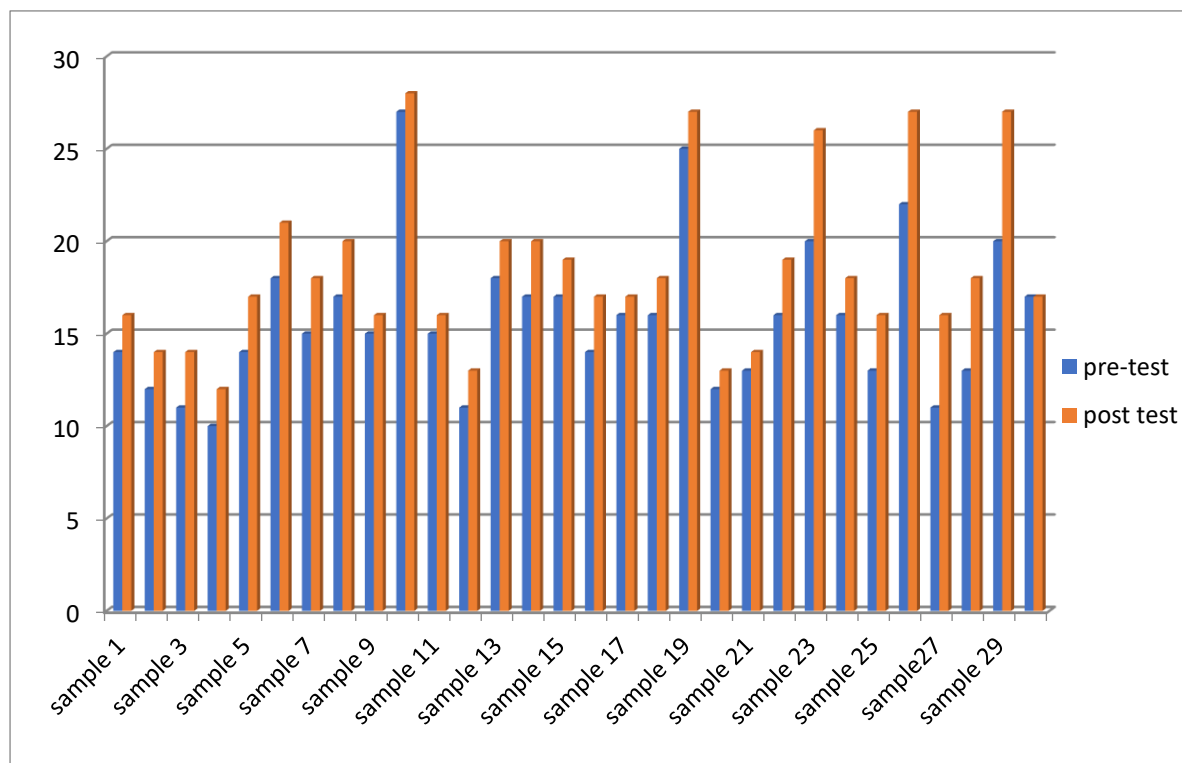


Figure 1: Result for Pre-Speaking Test and Post-Speaking Test

For this study, the thirty samples required to be seated for a pre-speaking test at the first and post-speaking test will be given after the treatment is introduced. Two sections are being tested for the test: section A and section B. Marks are given upon 30%, and the marking is done with the help and advice from the class's English teacher. The result for the pre-speaking test and the post-speaking test is stated in Figure 1.

Based on Figure 1, there is a positive effect on the students' performance in their final speaking marks (post-speaking test). Based on the drilling approach conducted as 'treatment' using the OPS-English programme, the students could check their previous speaking mistakes. They were able to correct them in their following speaking product. As a result, they could speak and show better performance, as there is an attractive 5% of their final total marks during their post-speaking test, which was conducted three months after their pre-speaking test.

#### 4.2 Results for pre-speaking test and post-speaking test

Table 1: Statistics for pre-speaking test and post-speaking test

	N		Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing				
POST	30	0	61.7333	58.0000	53.00	14.4936
PRE	30	0	52.6000	51.5000	46.00	13.2551

From Table 1, the valid statistic chalked at 30, which means it is involved 30 students, and there is no missing statistic. There is a significance score for statistics between the pre-speaking test result and the post-speaking test result. The Standard Deviation result for the post-speaking test is higher than the pre-speaking test. The Standard Deviation for the pre-speaking test is 13.26, while the post-speaking test is 14.49. It proves achievement in students' scores after the OPS-English programme is being used in the classroom. Meanwhile, the mean for the pre-speaking test is 52.60, and the post-speaking test is 61.73.

Table 2 shows that there are different scores in value. For the pre-speaking test, the t value is 21.73, and the post-speaking test is 23.32. In addition, there are significant difference scores between both of the t values, which is 1.59. Meanwhile, the Mean Difference for the pre-speaking test is 52.60, and the post-speaking test is 61.73. Moreover, there are significant difference scores between both of the mean, which is 9.12. So, we can see achievement in the

post-speaking test after the OPS-English programme is being introduced before the pre-speaking test.

Table 2: One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
POST	23.329	29	.000	61.7333	56.3213	67.1453
PRE	21.735	29	.000	52.6000	47.6505	57.5495

### 4.3 Presentation of Data

Table 3: Students' Attitudes towards the OPS-English programme.

SD	D	N	A	SA
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

NO	STATEMENT	SD	D	N	A	SA
		%				
1	I like working together with other students in speaking class.	1 3.3	2 6.7	9 30	11 36.7	7 23.3
2	I do not like asking other students for help in speaking class.	8 26.7	5 16.7	9 30	8 26.7	-
3	I would rather work alone in speaking class.	10 33.3	8 26.7	6 20	4 13.3	2 6.7
4	I like participating in speaking class discussion.	-	4 13.3	9 30	10 33.3	7 23.3
5	Working with other students helps me stay on task.	2 6.7	4 13.3	4 13.3	12 40	8 26.7
6	I help others stay on task when we are speaking together.	3 10	9 30	13 43.3	4 13.3	1 3.3
7	In speaking class I like explaining things to other students.	7 23.3	10 33.3	6 20	4 13.3	3 10
8	When I discuss with other students, I understand it better.	4 13.3	2 6.7	9 30	8 26.7	7 23.3
9	I like when other students participate in discussion about something.	3 10	5 16.7	4 13.3	11 36.7	7 23.3
10	Discussing with other students help me learn.	2 6.7	5 16.7	8 26.7	5 16.7	10 33.3



11	Other students encourage me to express ideas.	2 6.7	3 10	17 56.7	6 20	2 6.7
12	I feel more like asking questions when working in a small group.	1 3.3	2 6.7	6 20	14 46.7	7 23.3
Total Responses: 360		41 11	58 16	101 28	97 27	63 18

As seen in Table 3, Statement 1, 'I like working together with other students in speaking class', the OPS-English programme requires the students to work in groups. Therefore, they need to speak in English with their friends fully. From the study, we can see a clear result. 36.7% of the samples agree that they like to work in groups with their friends. However, 30% neutral, and 23.3% strongly agree about that statement. While 6.7% and 3.3% disagree and strongly disagree, respectively, to work together.

As for Statement 2, 'I do not like asking other students for help in speaking class', the students need other students' help in the speaking class. So for the second statement, 30% of samples are neutral about this statement. They are not sure about how they feel about this statement. While 26.7% of the samples have the same result, they agree and strongly disagree about this statement, and 16.7% disagree.

In the third statement on 'I would rather work alone in speaking class', the students need to cooperate with other students to learn better. So, about 26.7% of samples disagree with working alone in speaking class for the third statement. It proves that students need help in speaking class. So, 20% neutral, 13.3% agree, 6.7% disagree, and 3.3% strongly disagree about the statement.

This was followed by Statement 4, 'I like participating in speaking class discussion', the OPS-English programme involves students discussing and working in groups. Therefore, the students need to participate in speaking class discussion. So, for this statement, there is a balance response given by the samples. 33.3% of the samples agree, 30% neutral, 23.3% strongly agree, and 13.3% disagree about this statement.

The fifth statement on 'Working with other students helps me stay on task', the students are hard to focus and pay attention in speaking class. Therefore, they tend to ignore and avoid speaking in English. So, from the study, it is pretty surprising to know that 40% of the samples agree that working in groups helps them stay on task and pay more attention to works, and 26.7% strongly agree. On the other hand, 13.3% of the samples were neutral and disagreed, and 6.7% strongly disagreed.

In addition, Statement 6, 'I help others stay on task when we are speaking together, in OPS-English programme, the students need to speak in English and work in groups. So, the students need each other to finish their tasks. However, 43.3% of the samples were neutral for this sixth statement, while 30% disagreed. 13.3% agree, and 10% strongly disagree. Therefore, a minimum percentage of 3.3% of them strongly agree that they help others stay on task when speaking together.

Moreover, Statement 7, 'In speaking class I like explaining things to other students, the students need to speak and explain things to other students based on the topic given in front of the class. For this statement, the data shows that the samples give a balanced result. 33.3% of the samples disagree, 23.3% strongly disagree, and 20% neutral in explaining things to other students in English class. While only 13.3% agree and 10% strongly agree. This may be due to a lack of self-confidence and motivation to speak in English or a lack of English vocabulary.

For the eighth statement, 'When I discuss with other students, I understand it better, 30% of the samples are neutral. While 26.7% agree and 23.3% strongly agree with the statement. 13.3% strongly disagree, and 6.7% disagree. Thus, there is a balance response given by the samples. It proves that half of the samples understand better when they are working in their groups.

From the study, Statement 9, 'I like when other students participate in discussion about something,' shows 36.7% and 23.3% of the samples are agreed and strongly agree that they feel good when they discuss something with their friends. So, maybe, they can learn something together. Meanwhile, 16.7% disagree, 13.3% neutral, and 10% strongly disagree about this statement.

The samples' balance response for this tenth statement, 'Discussing with other students help me learn. The OPS-English programme requires the students to speak and learn in groups. So, for this statement, 33.3% strongly agree that discussing in groups makes them learn. 26.7% of the samples neutral, and 16.7% agree and disagree with the statement. A minimum percentage of 6.7% of them strongly disagree.

At the age of thirteen, the students have many ideas, but they have no platform to express them. So, in the OPS-English programme, it gives chances for the students to express their ideas freely. So, for Statement 11, 'Other students encourage me to express ideas', it is pretty surprising that 56.7% of the samples agree with the statement. 20% and 10% of the samples neutral and disagree; meanwhile, 6.7% strongly disagree.

For this final statement, 'I feel more like asking questions when working in a small group', only 3.3% stated they strongly disagree about the statement. Whereas 46.7% agree, 23.3% strongly agree, 20% neutral, and 6.7% disagree. It proves that working in groups makes the students ask more questions about something they do not know. Maybe the students feel more comfortable working with their friends.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

As a whole, the findings of the study show that the researcher successfully carries out the research. Based on the result, there are significant scores between the pre-speaking test result and post-speaking test result. So, it shows that the OPS-English programme is effective in enhancing ESL students' speaking skills. Meanwhile, it shows that the students feel neutral with the programme for the students' attitudes toward the programme. The following chapter will discuss the effectiveness of using the OPS-English programme to enhance ESL students' speaking skills and attitudes toward it.

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