IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH THINK–PAIR–SHARE: AN EIGHT-WEEK ACTION RESEARCH STUDY WITH A1–A2 EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills for learners of English as a foreign language, particularly at elementary levels. Students may have basic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but often experience difficulties expressing their ideas orally, maintaining fluency, and speaking confidently. This action research study investigates the effectiveness of the Think–Pair–Share (TPS) technique in improving the speaking skills of elementary-level English learners. The participants were 20 students aged 18 with English proficiency ranging from A1 to A2. The intervention was conducted over eight weeks using g47/eneral speaking topics appropriate for the learners' level. A pre-test and post-test design was employed to examine changes in students' speaking performance. Before the intervention, 13 students scored 3 out of 5 and 7 students scored 2 out of 5, resulting in a mean score of 2.65. Following the eight-week implementation of Think–Pair–Share, 9 students achieved 5 out of 5 and 11 students achieved 4 out of 5, resulting in a mean score of 4.45. The mean score therefore increased by 1.80 points, representing a 67.9% relative improvement. The findings indicate a substantial positive change in students' speaking performance following the implementation of Think–Pair–Share. The study suggests that TPS can be an effective and practical learner-centred technique for increasing speaking opportunities and supporting oral communication among A1–A2 EFL learners.

Keywords: speaking skills, Think–Pair–Share, EFL learners, A1–A2 learners, speaking performance, cooperative learning, oral communication.

Introduction

Speaking is a fundamental language skill that enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, feelings, and information. For learners of English as a foreign language, developing speaking ability is particularly important because successful language learning requires learners not only to understand English but also to use it for meaningful communication.

However, speaking is often difficult for students at elementary levels. Learners at A1–A2 levels may know basic vocabulary and grammatical structures but still hesitate when they are asked to speak. They may have difficulty organizing their ideas, finding appropriate words, constructing sentences quickly, and maintaining a conversation. Fear of making mistakes can further reduce their willingness to participate.

Another challenge is the limited amount of speaking time available to individual learners during traditional classroom activities. In a class of 20 students, asking students to answer questions individually may result in only a small number of learners receiving substantial speaking practice. More confident students may participate frequently, while less confident students remain silent.

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For this reason, communicative and cooperative learning techniques can play an important role in English language classrooms. One such technique is Think–Pair–Share (TPS).

Think–Pair–Share is a cooperative learning technique consisting of three stages. During the first stage, Think, students individually consider a question or topic and organize their ideas. During the second stage, Pair, students discuss their ideas with a partner. During the final stage, Share, students share their ideas with the whole class or a larger group.

The technique is particularly appropriate for beginner learners because it provides preparation time before public speaking. Instead of immediately answering a question in front of 20 classmates, students first have an opportunity to think and practise their answer with one partner. This can reduce speaking anxiety and increase confidence.

Think–Pair–Share can also increase the amount of student talking time. During pair work, all students can speak simultaneously rather than waiting for their turn to answer the teacher. Consequently, the technique can create more opportunities for meaningful oral communication.

The present study therefore investigates the implementation of Think–Pair–Share over an eight-week period with a group of 20 eighteen-year-old A1–A2 English learners.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

- investigate the effectiveness of Think–Pair–Share in developing A1–A2 learners' speaking skills;
- examine changes in students' speaking performance before and after an eight-week intervention;
- determine the extent of improvement in students' speaking assessment scores;
- explore the potential of TPS as a practical classroom technique for elementary EFL learners.

Research Question

To what extent does the Think–Pair–Share technique improve the speaking performance of A1–A2 English learners over an eight-week period?

Methods

Research Design

The study employed a classroom-based action research design using a pre-test and post-test approach. The study was conducted over eight weeks to investigate whether regular implementation of Think–Pair–Share could improve the speaking performance of elementary English learners.

The research consisted of three stages:

1. Pre-test: students' initial speaking performance was assessed before the intervention.
2. Eight-week intervention: Think–Pair–Share was incorporated into regular speaking activities.
3. Post-test: students' speaking performance was assessed at the end of the eight-week intervention.

The pre-test and post-test scores were compared to determine the extent of improvement.

Participants

The participants were 20 students aged 18 studying English as a foreign language. Their proficiency level ranged from A1 to A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

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The participants formed one intact classroom group. Before the intervention, the students demonstrated difficulties in oral communication, including limited fluency, hesitation, restricted vocabulary, and lack of confidence when speaking English.

Speaking Assessment

A general speaking assessment was administered before and after the eight-week intervention. Rather than focusing on one specific topic, the assessment used general speaking topics appropriate for A1–A2 learners. These topics required students to talk about familiar aspects of everyday life, personal experiences, preferences, routines, people, places, and future plans. The assessment used a five-point scale, with 1 representing very limited performance and 5 representing very strong performance for the learners' level.

Students were assessed according to their ability to:

- express basic ideas;
- use appropriate vocabulary;
- construct understandable sentences;
- speak with reasonable fluency;
- communicate their meaning clearly.

Eight-Week Intervention

The Think–Pair–Share technique was incorporated into speaking activities throughout the eight-week intervention. The topics were varied to give learners opportunities to speak about different familiar and meaningful subjects.

Examples of general speaking topics included:

- My family
- My daily routine
- My hobbies
- My favorite food
- My favorite place
- My friends
- My free time
- My city
- My future plans
- My favorite film or book
- Technology in everyday life
- Healthy lifestyle
- Education

The topics were adapted to the A1–A2 proficiency level.

Stage 1: Think

The teacher introduced a speaking question or topic. Students were given approximately 1–2 minutes to think individually and organize their ideas. Students could write keywords or short notes to help them remember important vocabulary and ideas.

Stage 2: Pair

The 20 students were divided into 10 pairs. Each student discussed their ideas with a partner. Students were encouraged to ask simple follow-up questions such as:

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- Why?
- When?
- Where?
- Who with?
- How often?
- What do you like about it?

This encouraged students to produce more than one-word or very short answers.

Stage 3: Share

After the pair discussion, students shared their ideas with the whole class. Because students had already prepared and practiced their responses with a partner, the transition to whole-class speaking was intended to be less stressful. The teacher monitored the activity and provided feedback after the speaking task.

Results

The results demonstrated a substantial improvement in students' speaking performance following the eight-week Think–Pair–Share intervention.

Pre-Test Results

Before the intervention, 13 students (65%) scored 3 out of 5, while 7 students (35%) scored 2 out of 5. The mean pre-test score was: $(13 \times 3 + 7 \times 2) \div 20 = 2.65$. Therefore, the group's mean pre-test score was 2.65/5, equivalent to 53% of the maximum possible score.

Post-Test Results

After eight weeks of Think–Pair–Share activities, 9 students (45%) scored 5 out of 5, while 11 students (55%) scored 4 out of 5. The mean post-test score was: $(9 \times 5 + 11 \times 4) \div 20 = 4.45$. Therefore, the group's mean post-test score was 4.45/5, equivalent to 89% of the maximum possible score.

Table 1. Distribution of Speaking Scores Before and After the Intervention

Score	Pre-test	Percentage	Post-test	Percentage
5/5	0	0%	9	45%
4/5	0	0%	11	55%
3/5	13	65%	0	0%
2/5	7	35%	0	0%
Total	20	100%	20	100%

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Scores

Assessment	Mean score	Percentage of maximum
Pre-test	2.65/5	53%
Post-test	4.45/5	89%
Improvement	+1.80	+36 percentage points

The mean score increased by 1.80 points, from 2.65 to 4.45. The relative improvement was: $(4.45 - 2.65) \div 2.65 \times 100 = 67.9\%$. Thus, the mean speaking score increased by approximately 67.9% relative to the initial mean score.

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A particularly notable finding was the change in the overall distribution of students' scores. In the pre-test, 100% of students scored between 2 and 3. In the post-test, 100% of students scored between 4 and 5. Furthermore, 45% of students achieved the maximum score of 5/5 in the post-test.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate a substantial improvement in the speaking performance of the 20 A1–A2 learners after the eight-week implementation of Think–Pair–Share. The mean score increased from 2.65/5 to 4.45/5, representing an increase of 1.80 points and a relative improvement of 67.9%.

The change in score distribution is particularly significant. Before the intervention, students' scores were concentrated at 2 and 3. After the intervention, all students achieved scores of 4 or 5. This suggests that the learners demonstrated considerable progress in their ability to perform the general speaking tasks used in the assessment. One possible explanation for this improvement is the increased amount of oral practice provided by Think–Pair–Share. In a class of 20 students, whole-class speaking activities can provide limited opportunities for individual participation. By dividing the class into 10 pairs, students were able to practise speaking simultaneously.

The Think stage may have been particularly beneficial for A1–A2 learners. Elementary learners often need time to recall vocabulary and construct basic sentences. The opportunity to prepare ideas before speaking may have reduced hesitation and enabled students to produce more organized responses.

The Pair stage created a supportive environment for speaking practice. Students could test their ideas and language with one partner before speaking to the entire class. This gradual progression may have reduced the psychological pressure associated with public speaking.

The Share stage provided an opportunity for students to transfer their prepared language into whole-class communication. As the technique was used repeatedly over eight weeks, students had multiple opportunities to practice this process.

The use of general speaking topics may also have contributed to the effectiveness of the intervention. Familiar topics such as family, hobbies, food, routines, friends, travel, and future plans are relevant to students' everyday lives and can therefore make it easier for elementary learners to generate ideas.

However, several limitations should be considered. First, the study involved only 20 students from one classroom. Second, there was no control group. Therefore, it cannot be concluded with complete certainty that Think–Pair–Share alone caused the improvement. Other factors, including regular English instruction, repeated exposure to speaking tasks, and increased familiarity with English, may also have contributed.

Another limitation is the use of a five-point assessment scale. Although it clearly demonstrated the overall change in performance, a more detailed rubric could provide more information about specific aspects of speaking, such as fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction.

Nevertheless, the findings provide encouraging classroom-based evidence that regular Think–Pair–Share activities can support the development of speaking performance among A1–A2 EFL learners.

Conclusion

This eight-week action research study investigated the effectiveness of Think–Pair–Share in improving the speaking performance of 20 eighteen-year-old A1–A2 English learners. The results

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showed a clear improvement in students' speaking scores. The mean score increased from 2.65/5 in the pre-test to 4.45/5 in the post-test, representing a 1.80-point increase and a 67.9% relative improvement.

Before the intervention, 65% of students scored 3 and 35% scored 2. After eight weeks, 55% of students scored 4 and 45% achieved the maximum score of 5. Therefore, all 20 students moved into the upper range of the assessment scale.

The findings suggest that Think–Pair–Share can be an effective and practical technique for increasing speaking opportunities and supporting oral communication among A1–A2 learners. The combination of individual preparation, peer interaction, and whole-class sharing provides a structured progression that can make speaking activities more accessible to elementary learners.

Teachers working with beginner and elementary EFL learners can incorporate Think–Pair–Share into lessons using familiar, general speaking topics. Regular implementation can provide students with repeated opportunities to organize ideas, interact with peers, and communicate in English. Future research should include larger groups, longer intervention periods, more detailed speaking rubrics, and control or comparison groups to provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of Think–Pair–Share.

In conclusion, Think–Pair–Share represents a simple, flexible, and learner-centered approach that can contribute positively to the development of English speaking skills.

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