Cooperative Learning to Enhance English Speaking Skills of Primary School Pupils: The Pre-Service Teachers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This survey was conducted to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions and challenges of cooperative learning in Malaysian primary ESL speaking classes. The data for this study were obtained from 120 pre-service teachers at a Teacher Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur. The pre-service teachers involved in this study were selected due to their teaching experiences during practicum. The research instrument used to collect and analyze the data was a four-point Likert scale online questionnaire using Google Form. The findings of this research suggested that the pre-service teachers perceived that cooperative learning could enhance the pupils' speaking skills. This study agreed that the use of cooperative learning may help pupils lower their anxiety level and increase motivation to learn due to a low 'affective filter'. Furthermore, interaction with others through cooperative learning enhances pupils' speaking skills, by helping and guiding one another throughout the learning process. Future research can dive deeper into the perceptions of pre-service teachers in Malaysia, investigate the ways to overcome the challenges of conducting cooperative learning as well as include components like classroom observation and interviews to collect in-depth information about the participants' opinions.

Keywords*: pre-service teachers; cooperative learning; ESL*

INTRODUCTION

Among the ESL learners, speaking is classified as one of the most fundamental but difficult productive skills. It can be defined as a process of exchanging important messages through delivering and receiving the message while communicating with others (Rusli et al., 2018). Some other major determinants of it include the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary plus self-confidence, practices, and exposure to the target language (Azlan et al., 2019). Although the Ministry of Education has taken several approaches to improve ESL pupils' speaking skills such as the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP), LINUS programs and more, low proficiency in the English language among some pupils is still inevitable since it is considered a second language in the Malaysian education context (David et al., 2015).

The education ministry, policy-makers and teachers can put emphasis on implementing cooperative learning to enhance pupils' speaking skills. In many countries, it has been proven that the implementation of cooperative learning improves pupils' learning (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018). Cooperative learning is defined as an instructional method in which learners work in small groups together to complete the assigned task under teachers' guidance and monitoring (Sijali, 2018). Teachers also play a vital role in creating a highly structured and well-organized learning environment to ensure pupils' active participation. Besides, cooperative learning focuses on social inclusion where teachers consider pupils' proficiency levels while dividing them into groups. According to Parnrod and Darasawang (2018), pupils work towards the shared goal while doing group tasks, even though they have different learning styles. Pupils learn from a wider perspective when they discuss different ideas in the group.

Cooperative learning makes each pupil a stronger individual. Pupils learn together so that they can perform higher as individuals. It is also a learner-centered strategy that gives pupils the opportunity to interact with others in the learning process. Pashaie and Khalaji (2014) supported that the pupils develop speaking skills in a non-threatening learning environment as they will feel less anxious. However, one of the common issues is teachers' tendency to use the teacher-centered approach in speaking classes. This is because they are used to this traditional approach and find it the easiest way to teach.

Fakhra et al, (2018) also claimed that Asian learners tend to be passive in language classrooms because they are used to merely listening to the teachers' input rather than engaging in brainstorming for ideas actively. Some pupils who feel bored and lose track during the teaching-learning process remain quiet as they are not motivated to learn. Moreover, there is an increase in proficiency gaps between good and weak pupils (Misbah et al., 2017). Although Malaysian pupils have between 11 to 13 years of learning formal English lessons in schools, the data obtained from the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (2013) shows that 3500,000 pupils in Malaysia failed to meet the minimum English proficiency required. As a result, the teaching method that focuses on a teacher-centered strategy limits the pupils' ability to practice and interact using the language among their peers in the ESL classroom. This situation raises issues concerning the use of cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills.

Pre-service teachers are responsible for producing successful learners in the future thus their perceptions of cooperative learning are vital. Yet, little has been done in Malaysia to investigate the perceptions of ESL pre-service teachers concerning cooperative learning. Besides, there are a few challenges while using cooperative learning such as time-consuming, group conflicts among the pupils plus locus of responsibility and authority (Baloche & Brody, 2017). However, the pre-service teachers' perceptions of the extent to which the above challenges can also influence the Malaysian primary pupils' speaking classes remained unclear. Thus, this research aims to investigate Malaysian pre-service teachers' perceptions and challenges of cooperative learning in enhancing Malaysian pupils' speaking skills. The specific objective of this research is to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of how the use of cooperative learning enhances pupils' speaking skills in Malaysian primary ESL speaking classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2013, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was introduced by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). It then started to be implemented in 2016 until now. One of the ultimate purposes of this is to ensure every Malaysian pupil is proficient in English and able to communicate well with others using the English language. It also aims to cultivate a more learner-centered learning environment whereby

pupils can interact and practice with each other to enhance their speaking skills. One of the 21st-century skills, namely collaboration, also encourages learning cooperatively. It helps pupils to value others' contributions, resolve conflicts, guide others, and work together as a team in the classroom. Teachers should also know their roles in cooperative learning among pupils to ensure learning effectiveness (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) emphasized that learning is a social process and learning is the origin of human intelligence in society or culture. The social interaction plays a vital role in one's cognitive development. When a child interacts with people, he acquires knowledge as the first step. Later, the child assimilates and internalizes this knowledge by adding his personal value to it (Turuk, 2008). Vygotsky also argued that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The "zone" is an area of exploration where pupils are cognitively prepared, however, it requires guidance and social interaction to fully develop. As such, a teacher or peers who are more proficient, known as the More Knowledgeable Others (MKO), play a fundamental role in providing the learner with "scaffolding". This supports the pupil's progressing understanding of knowledge domains or the development of complex skills. Hence, it is said cooperative learning is one of the strategies for supporting learners' intellectual knowledge, skills and facilitating intentional learning (Swain et al., 2015).

According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (2003), the affective variables that affect language learning include motivation, attitude, anxiety and self-confidence. They are considered mental blocks that prevent language learners from receiving comprehensible input and which disrupt the language acquisition process (Ismail & Al Allaq, 2019). Using cooperative learning in the classroom is loaded with student-to-student interactions and each one of these interactions provides comprehensible input. Krashen (2003) also suggested that when learners are in a less anxious environment, they tend to be motivated and have a high confidence level while learning the language. As such cooperative learning provides a less anxiety-producing context for learners to discuss, create and think in a group, rather than in a whole class context. Thus, it is believed that a cooperative learning environment reduces anxiety and provides more opportunities for pupils to produce language. Pupils will also be braver in

communicating with others which will enhance their speaking skills at the same time (Ismail & Al Allaq, 2019).

Altun and Meena (2020) did quasi-experimental research to investigate the effect of cooperative learning strategies based on multiple intelligence on enhancing EFL learners' communication skills. The researcher respondents in this study include 48 students at Tishk International University, Iraq. The findings of the study have also shown that cooperative learning has a highly significant effect on improving learners' speaking and communication skills. According to the results, the experimental group performed better in the speaking test compared to the control group when cooperative learning was used with the experimental group. It is believed that learners improve their learning skills when they cooperate and assist each other based on common goals and learning objectives in small groups.

Singh et al. (2020) conducted an action research that aimed to improve weak ESL learners' speaking abilities using a cooperative learning strategy. A total of 24 Malaysian ESL secondary school students participated in the study. The researchers also included teachers' reflective entries and focus group interviews with ESL learners for the data collection. The results showed evidence that the use of cooperative learning improves learners' speaking abilities. Besides, it also proved that cooperative learning has provided a huge impact in boosting learners' confidence levels while speaking in English.

Generally, the previous studies illustrate that the implementation of cooperative learning is effective in enhancing pupils' speaking skills. However, research related to cooperative learning in enhancing speaking skills among Malaysian primary school pupils is insufficient. There is also a lack of research that focuses on pre-service teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning to enhance pupils' speaking skills. Therefore, this research is designed to find out how the use of cooperative learning enhances Malaysian pupils' speaking skills through the aspects of motivation, self-esteem, and interaction as well as the challenges while conducting it from the Malaysian pre-service teachers' perceptions. Figure 1 shows the synthesis of a selected literature review concerning the overview of this research.

Figure 1
Synthesis of Selected Research on Cooperative Learning
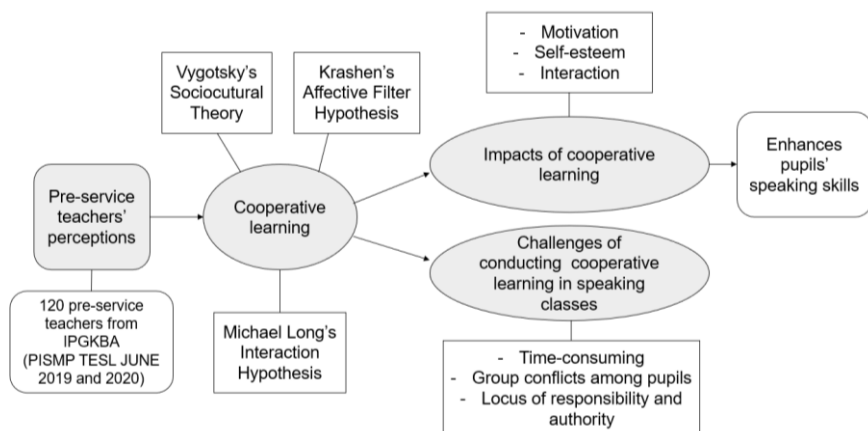
From the pre-service teachers' perspective, it is observed that cooperative learning most probably will encourage interaction and communication among pupils (e.g., Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory) and weaken the pupils' affective filter (Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis). It can foster pupils' interaction at all levels and helps one another to learn.

METHODOLOGY

This empirical research aimed to explore the pre-service teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning and its challenges in Malaysian primary ESL speaking classes. The researcher used a quantitative method by distributing an online questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale to 120 pre-service teachers, who have practicum experiences, at a Teacher Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur.

Sampling Design

A probability sampling method, namely simple random sampling was used in selecting the respondents for this research. The researcher chose 120 pre-service TESL teachers (more than 70% of the total population) randomly from the Teacher Training Institute, despite their gender and races, as the research respondents. According to the table for determining

sample size of a known population by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sampling Method, when the total population size was 170, the sample size should be 118. Hence, the sample size of 120 respondents was considered sufficient in this research as the total population size is 163 pre-service TESL teachers. The 120 pre-service teachers at the Teacher Training Institute were chosen as the research respondents as they have teaching experiences during their practicum. Their insights and perceptions of using cooperative learning would be useful to this research.

Research instrument

The questionnaire was adapted and modified based on the research questionnaires created by Thanh (2011) as well as Ghufron and Ermawati (2018) on teachers' and students' perceptions of cooperative learning. In this research, an online questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale was used. The questionnaire was created on an online platform namely Google Form. This questionnaire comprises three sections. Section A (7 questions) seeks to gather the research respondents' background profiles, Section B (14 questions) includes the impacts of cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills from the pre-service teachers' perspectives, whereas Section C (15 questions) consists of the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes. In these sections of the questionnaire, the respondents were requested to answer all the questions and choose either 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' or 'strongly agree' from the four-point Likert scale which represents their perceptions of cooperative learning.

Pilot study

A pilot study helps researchers to be more confident in the research instruments that will be used for data collection (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Creswell and Creswell (2018) have also mentioned that a pilot study is vital to establish the content validity of scores on an instrument. It also provides an initial evaluation of the internal consistency of the items for further improvement on the questions, format, and instructions. In this study, the researcher conducted a pilot study to test the practicality and reliability of the research instrument designed namely the four-point Likert scale questionnaire. A total of 20 teacher trainees were selected to be involved in this pilot study. Every respondent that was involved in the pilot study was

under the same circumstances as the actual study. In the pilot study, the research reflected and listed down a few weaknesses spotted in the research procedures, language, and content. The survey questionnaire was revised by experts appointed and necessary changes were made by the researcher.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data collection process was carried out in several stages. Firstly, the researcher consulted and received approval from the supervisor at the International Languages Teacher Training Institute regarding the topics chosen before carrying out the pilot study and actual research. After that, the researcher conducted a pilot study with 20 respondents a few weeks before the real study. This is to determine the validity and reliability of the research instrument, which is the questionnaire. From there, the researcher made some modifications based on the suggestions given by the respondents in the pilot study. Later, the researcher submitted a permission letter to obtain permission from the Director of the institution before distributing the questionnaire. This ensured that research ethics would not be neglected in this research. Next, the questionnaire was sent to the respondents through a Google Form link. All the respondents were required to answer all the questions in the questionnaire within a week to ensure time reliability. The IBM SPSS version 26.0 statistical software was used by the researcher in analyzing the data using descriptive statistics. The researcher calculated the percentage, mean and standard deviation for each research question in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on Table 1, the 120 pre-service teachers in the study are categorized by the following profiles: 20% male, 80% female, and 50% respectively for PISMP TESL 2019 and 2020, 82% Malay, 12% Chinese, 4% Indian and 2% Bidayuh. Although it is ideal to have a split of 60/60 pre-service teachers in terms of gender and race to increase the reliability of the findings, it is impossible to do so because of the unequal distribution of the programs. Hence, this study will not further discuss gender and race distribution as a factor affecting the findings.

Table 1
Respondents by gender, program, and race

Respondent's Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	23	20
	Female	97	80
Program	PISMP TESL 2019	60	50
	PISMP TESL 2020	60	50
Race	Malay	98	82
	Chinese	14	12
	Indian	5	4
	Bidayuh	3	2

Based on Table 2, 98% of respondents know what cooperative learning is while 99% of respondents have learned about cooperative learning. Besides, 100% of respondents think that cooperative learning is good. Hence, it can be concluded that most of the respondents have positive perceptions of cooperative learning due to a high percentage of respondents who have chosen 'Yes' for these three items in the questionnaire.

Table 2
Respondents' perception of cooperative learning

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you know what cooperative learning is?	Yes	118	98
	No	2	2
Have you learned about cooperative learning?	Yes	119	99
	No	1	1
Do you think cooperative learning is good?	Yes	120	100
	No	0	0

Figure 2 represents the frequency of using cooperative learning by the respondents in the classroom. Based on Figure 2, 'rarely (1-2 times a week)' gained the highest percentage of pre-service teachers (82%) whereas 'never (0 times a week)' obtained the lowest percentage of pre-service teachers (3%). This indicates that among the 120 respondents, more than half of them, which is a total of 98 respondents (82%) rarely used

cooperative learning while only 4 respondents (3%) never used cooperative learning in the classroom. As for the frequency namely 'often (more than 3 times a week)', there were 18 respondents (15%) who have chosen it as their answer for the frequency of using cooperative learning.

Figure 2
Frequency of using cooperative learning
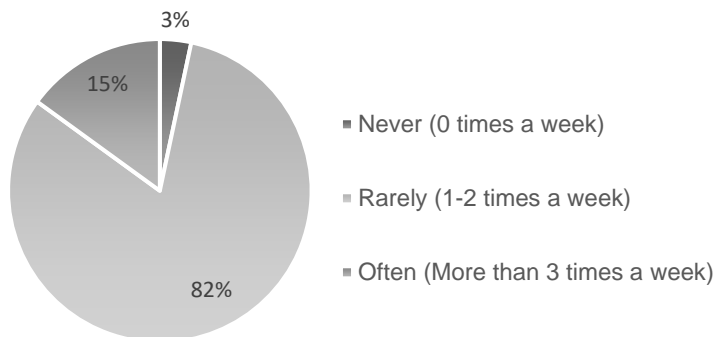
Impacts of cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills

This section answers the first research question: How does the use of cooperative learning enhance pupils' speaking skills? There are three dimensions with a total of 14 items in this section namely motivation (5 items), self-esteem (4 items) and interaction (5 items). In this study, the respondents choose either '1 - Strongly disagree (SD)', '2 - Disagree (D)', '3 - Agree (A)', or '4 - Strongly Agree (SA)' based on the 4-point Likert scale in the questionnaire.

The results in Table 3 show that the respondents agreed that cooperative learning enhances pupils' speaking skills through motivation, self-esteem, and interaction (Average mean=3.68, Average standard deviation= 0.534). For the first dimension namely motivation, the total of 5 items in motivation earned an average mean score of 3.60 and an average standard deviation of 0.594. However, Statement 1 gained the highest mean (3.72) while Statement 3 obtained the lowest mean (3.50) in this dimension. This shows that the pre-service teachers think that cooperative learning motivates pupils to attend all the speaking sessions in their classes. This

statement aids in enhancing pupils' speaking skills the most compared with the other statements included in this dimension.

Table 3
Impacts of cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills

Dimensions & Items	SD N (%)	D N (%)	A N (%)	SA N (%)	Mean	S.D.
Motivation						
1. Using cooperative learning motivates pupils to attend all the speaking sessions in my classes.	0 (0.0)	2 (1.7)	29 (24.2)	89 (74.2)	3.72	.484
2. Using cooperative learning motivates pupils to ask more questions in learning	0 (0.0)	3 (2.5)	36 (30.0)	81 (67.5)	3.65	.529
3. Using cooperative learning motivates pupils to send at least 3 drafts of audio recordings for feedback to improve.	2 (1.7)	8 (6.7)	38 (31.7)	72 (60.0)	3.50	.698
4. Using cooperative learning motivates pupils to strictly follow the rules in speaking classes.	0 (0.0)	8 (6.7)	40 (33.3)	72 (60.0)	3.53	.621
5. Using cooperative learning motivates pupils to set at least 2 individual goals to enhance their speaking skills.	0 (0.0)	8 (6.7)	34 (28.3)	78 (65.0)	3.58	.616
Average					3.60	.594
Self-Esteem						
6. Using cooperative learning makes each pupil have a confident body posture while speaking.	0 (0.0)	6 (5.0)	33 (27.5)	81 (67.5)	3.63	.581
7. Using cooperative learning makes pupils have eye contact with others while speaking.	0 (0.0)	2 (1.7)	33 (27.5)	85 (70.8)	3.69	.499
8. Using cooperative learning makes pupils speak fluently at an appropriate pace.	0 (0.0)	3 (2.5)	31 (25.8)	86 (71.7)	3.69	.515

9. Using cooperative learning makes pupils speak at an appropriate volume.	0 (0.0)	3 (2.5)	36 (30.0)	81 (67.5)	3.65	.529
Average					3.67	.532
Interaction						
10. Using cooperative learning encourages pupils to work together as a team with their group members.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	18 (15.0)	102 (85.0)	3.85	.359
11. Using cooperative learning encourages pupils to contribute during discussions with their group members at all levels.	0 (0.0)	2 (1.7)	25 (20.8)	93 (77.5)	3.76	.467
12. Using cooperative learning encourages pupils to listen to their group members' ideas.	0 (0.0)	5 (4.2)	19 (15.8)	96 (80.0)	3.76	.518
13. Using cooperative learning encourages pupils to give positive feedback to their group members for improvement.	0 (0.0)	5 (4.2)	25 (20.8)	90 (75.0)	3.71	.541
14. Using cooperative learning encourages pupils to use empathy statements while interacting with others.	0 (0.0)	1 (0.8)	25 (20.8)	94 (78.3)	3.78	.439
Average					3.77	.469
Total Average					**3.68**	**.534**

For the second dimension, specifically self-esteem, the total of 4 items resulted in an average mean score of 3.67 and an average standard deviation of 0.532. Items 7 and 8 have the same mean score (3.69), which is also the highest among all 4 statements included in this dimension. This indicates that the pre-service teachers agreed more on using cooperative learning to make pupils make eye contact and speak fluently at an appropriate pace while speaking with others.

As for the third dimension, namely interaction, the total of 5 items in it reported an average mean of 3.77 and an average standard deviation of 0.469. The highest mean score (3.85) was given to Statement 10 whereas Statement 13 had the lowest mean score (3.71) in this dimension. This shows that the pre-service teachers agreed the most on using cooperative

learning to encourage pupils to work together as a team with their group members. At the same time, both Statements 11 and 12 gained a mean score of 3.76 respectively.

It can be concluded that the pre-service teachers agreed with the statements and acknowledged that cooperative learning increases pupils' motivation, self-esteem and interaction with others which aids in enhancing their speaking skills. Among the three dimensions, the average mean for interaction in cooperative learning was the highest among the other two dimensions found in cooperative learning (motivation= 3.60, self-esteem= 3.67, interaction= 3.77). This result indicates that the pre-service teachers perceive interaction with others plays the most vital role compared to motivation and self-esteem while using cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills.

The internal reliability of study participant response to survey items on the research instrument was conducted using Cronbach's alpha statistical technique. The overall internal reliability level achieved in the study was considered good as Cronbach's alpha value (0.893) was greater than 0.8. As suggested by Cohen and others (2018), items that have Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.8 can be concluded as highly reliable.

Based on Table 4, the reliability for each dimension in Section B passed the test. This is because Cronbach's alpha value for each dimension was greater than 0.7 which is 0.810 for dimension 1 (motivation), 0.745 for dimension 2 (self-esteem) and 0.765 for dimension 3 (interaction). This means that dimension 1 is considered highly reliable while both dimensions 2 and 3 are concluded as reliable. As for the item-total correlation, it can be recorded that the item-total correlation for each item in Section B was greater than 0.4. According to Ladhari (2010), values 0.4 and above indicate very good discrimination of the items. This results that the items in Section B provide empirical evidence that the item is measuring the same construct measured by the other items included, which leads to items that are considered reliable for this study.

Table 4
Reliability Analysis on the Impacts of Cooperative Learning

Dimensions	Item No.	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Motivation	1	.637	.810
	2	.573	
	3	.602	
	4	.541	
	5	.670	
Self-esteem	6	.530	.745
	7	.554	
	8	.524	
	9	.552	
Interaction	10	.405	.765
	11	.588	
	12	.494	
	13	.551	
	14	.662	

Challenges of conducting cooperative learning in the primary ESL speaking classes

This section answers the second research question: What are the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in Malaysian primary ESL speaking classes? Based on the results shown in Table 5, the respondents agreed that time-consuming and group conflicts among pupils are the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in the classroom. Nevertheless, the respondents disagreed that locus of responsibility and authority is one of the challenges of conducting cooperative learning. This results in a total average mean score of 3.03 and an average standard deviation of 0.676. For the first dimension in Section C, namely Time-consuming, the total of 5 items earned an average mean score of 3.61 and an average standard deviation of 0.575. Statement 1 obtained the highest mean (3.70) while Statement 4 has the lowest mean (3.53) in this dimension. This depicts that the pre-service teachers perceived cooperative learning requires a lot of preparation for cooperative activities in speaking classes as the most prominent statement compared to the other statements in this dimension.

Table 5
Challenges of Conducting the Cooperative Learning (CL)

Dimension & Items	Mean	S.D.
Time-Consuming	3.70	.528
1. CL requires a lot of preparation for cooperative activities in speaking classes.		
2. CL requires a lot of planning for cooperative activities in speaking classes.	3.60	.525
3. CL requires more time for pupils to discuss with their group members to complete the speaking tasks.	3.66	.494
4. CL is time-consuming as I need to spend more time building positive working conditions among pupils in the groups.	3.53	.607
5. CL is time-consuming as I need to spend more time giving feedback on the way pupils work in teams.	3.55	.696
Average	3.61	.575
Group Conflicts among Pupils	3.46	.647
6. CL causes group conflicts due to different learning speeds of different proficiency levels among the pupils.		
7. CL causes group conflicts due to different learning styles among the pupils.	3.38	.699
8. CL causes pupils who do not have group work skills to stay quiet.	3.47	.660
9. CL causes pupils of different proficiency levels to complain about unfairness due to passengers in the group.	3.41	.728
10. CL tends to cause pupils' unwillingness to share their ideas in group discussions as they do not want to be overtaken by others.	3.31	.776
Average	3.41	.704
Locus of Responsibility and Authority	1.91	.767
11. I find it hard to accept not being at the centre of interactions in speaking classes.		
12. I find it hard to accept not knowing everything that is built through the cooperative groups in speaking classes.	2.01	.716
13. I find it hard to trust my pupils that they are likely to learn together effectively in speaking classes.	2.05	.765
14. I find it hard to let my pupils work independently with their groups without my direct supervision.	2.22	.688
15. I am not used to merely observing instead of teaching the cooperative groups in speaking classes.	2.20	.751
Average	2.18	.738
Total Average	**3.03**	**.676**

For the second dimension, Group conflicts among pupils, the total of 5 items resulted in an average mean score of 3.41 and an average standard deviation of 0.704. Based on Table 5, Statement 8 gained the highest mean score of 3.47 while Statement 10 obtained the lowest (3.31). This displays that the pre-service teachers agreed that cooperative learning causes pupils who do not have group work skills to stay quiet is the most prominent statement compared to the other statements in this dimension.

As for the third dimension, Locus of responsibility and authority, the total of 5 items in it reported an average mean of 2.18 and an average standard deviation of 0.738. According to the results, the pre-service teachers disagreed that locus of responsibility and authority is not a challenge in conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes. This can be seen where most of the pre-service teachers have chosen 1 'strongly disagree' and 2 'disagree' in the questionnaire. Nonetheless, Statement 14 gained the highest mean score (2.22) whereas Statement 11 obtained the lowest mean score (1.91) in this dimension. This shows that the pre-service teachers disagreed the most that they find it hard to accept not being at the centre of interactions in speaking classes.

It can be deduced that the pre-service teachers agreed with the statements and acknowledged that time-consuming and group conflicts among pupils are the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in Malaysian primary ESL speaking classes. However, the average mean for time-consuming (3.61) was higher than the average mean for group conflicts among pupils (3.41). This result stipulates that the pre-service teachers perceive time-consuming as a more distinguished challenge compared to group conflicts among pupils while conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes. On the contrary, the pre-service teachers disagreed that locus of responsibility and authority is one of the challenges to conducting cooperative learning in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms. This can be proven as the average mean score is the lowest (2.18) compared to the other two dimensions in Section C.

Based on the reliability test results, the Cronbach's alpha for 15 questions in this section (Section C) is 0.782. The Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7 suggests that the test items have acceptable reliability. Based on Table 6, the reliability for each dimension in Section C had passed the test. This is because the Cronbach's alpha value for each dimension was

greater than 0.7 which is 0.782 for dimension 1 (time-consuming), 0.843 for dimension 2 (group conflicts among pupils) and 0.892 for dimension 3 (locus of responsibility and authority). This depicts that dimension 1 is considered reliable while both dimensions 2 and 3 are concluded as highly reliable. As for the item-total correlation, it can be deduced that the item-total correlation for each item in Section C was greater than 0.4, which is considered reliable and has very good discrimination as the item measures the same construct measured by the other items included.

DISCUSSIONS

This study is to investigate Malaysian pre-service teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills which include its impacts plus the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in Malaysian primary speaking classes.

Table 6
Reliability Analysis on the Challenges of Conducting Cooperative Learning

Dimensions	Item No.	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Time-consuming	1	.696	.782
	2	.453	
	3	.496	
	4	.538	
	5	.635	
Group conflicts among pupils	6	.601	.843
	7	.679	
	8	.551	
	9	.700	
	10	.715	
Locus of responsibility and authority	11	.725	.892
	12	.717	
	13	.687	
	14	.809	
	15	.751	

Impacts of Cooperative Learning in Enhancing Pupils' Speaking Skills

Concerning the findings in the previous section, the statements in Section B of the questionnaire were meant to answer the first research question. The mean score for all the statements in Section B of the questionnaire was between 3.50 and 3.85. According to Pritha (2020), the scale range is calculated by subtracting the lowest value from the highest value. Hence, it can be calculated that a mean of 3.25 to 4.00 stands for 'strongly agree' on a 4-point Likert scale. This indicates that most of the pre-service teachers have positive perceptions by strongly agreeing with the impacts of cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills which increases pupils' motivation, self-esteem, and interaction with others in the classroom. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis were used as a basis to support the discussion. Based on Vygotsky's theory and Long's hypothesis, guidance and social interaction are of utmost importance in enhancing pupils' learning. With these, pupils have the chance to communicate and learn from each other through the use of cooperative learning. This also helps in enhancing their speaking skills throughout social interactions. As for Krashen's hypothesis, it focuses more on the affective filters that will affect pupils' learning such as motivation, self-esteem and others. As long as the pupils are in a comfortable and low-anxiety learning environment, it assists in enhancing their learning processes.

i. Motivation

The first five statements in Section B of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the impact of cooperative learning in enhancing pupils' speaking skills in relation to motivation and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. The average mean score of 3.60 indicated that most of the pre-service teachers strongly agreed that the use of cooperative learning has motivated their pupils to enhance their speaking skills in the classroom. As mentioned in Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, when learners are in a less anxious environment, they tend to be motivated while learning the language. Cooperative learning provides a less-anxiety-producing context for learners to discuss in pairs or groups. Hence, this ensures pupils feel more relaxed and comfortable in speaking classes they are interested in and have the urge to learn.

It is also in accordance with the experimental research conducted by Namaziandost et al. (2019) with a group of Iranian Intermediate EFL learners. Based on the data collected by the researchers, it was proven that the experimental group, which was taught using the cooperative learning approach improved motivation more than the control group instructed by traditional methods. The positive connection between cooperative learning and motivation may be primarily attributed to the ability of cooperative learning, which is able to facilitate a non-threatening and supportive learning atmosphere in the classes. This causes students to find it fun and enjoyable to learn, hence motivated to attend and achieve goals in speaking classes. This can be supported by the data collected in this survey, where most of the pre-service teachers strongly agreed that cooperative learning motivates pupils to attend speaking sessions in their classes (mean = 3.72) and set at least 2 individual goals to enhance their speaking skills (mean = 3.58). Moreover, it is mentioned that the students were motivated to improve when they found out that their personal progression is vital to their peers. As the pupils work together in their groups, the weaker learners will be more motivated when they receive help from the more competent learners. This is because they feel more positively related to others and are thus motivated to accomplish more in the group. Besides, empowering students and boosting their autonomy in learning may also have been conducive to increasing their motivation which leads to enhancing their speaking skills.

ii. Self-esteem

Statements 6 to 9 in Section B of the questionnaire aimed to investigate whether cooperative learning has an impact on increasing pupils' self-esteem which helps in enhancing their speaking skills. The average mean score of 3.67 in this dimension deduced that most of the pre-service teachers strongly agreed that cooperative learning increases pupils' self-esteem to enhance their speaking skills. This dimension is also related to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. As one of the affective variables that affect language learning focused by Krashen's hypothesis is self-esteem, it is mentioned that when pupils are learning in a comfortable and relaxed environment, their self-esteem will increase which aids in their learning.

According to the data collected in this survey, most of the pre-service teachers agreed that cooperative learning indeed increases pupils' self-esteem by making pupils make eye contact with others and speak fluently at an appropriate pace while speaking with other pupils in the classroom. This can be implied when both Statements 7 and 8 have the highest mean score of 3.69 respectively. Eye contact is vital when speaking or listening to others to ensure effective communication. Some pupils, especially those who have lower proficiency levels and self-esteem would avoid eye contact as they do not have the confidence to speak and interact with others. In cooperative learning, a sense of inclusion in the learning environment is widely recognized as pupils will be divided into groups with mixed proficiency levels among their peers. This ensures a comfortable learning environment for each pupil in the classroom which encourages them to be more engaged during speaking classes. Hence, having the opportunities to communicate in a small group with group members they are comfortable with makes them learn to maintain eye contact while communicating with others, at the same time increasing their self-esteem.

iii. Interaction

Statements 10 to 15 in Section B of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the perceptions of pre-service teachers on whether cooperative learning enhances pupils' speaking skills by increasing their interaction with others. An average mean score of 3.77 suggested that most of the pre-service teachers strongly agreed with this dimension, indicating that cooperative learning increases the interaction among pupils which aids in enhancing their speaking skills. On top of that, this dimension gained the highest mean score (3.77) compared to the other two dimensions. This implies that interaction played the most major role in cooperative learning to enhance pupils' speaking skills from the pre-service teachers' perceptions.

Challenges of Conducting Cooperative Learning in Malaysian Primary ESL Speaking Classes

There are a total of 15 statements in this questionnaire in Section C which sought to investigate the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in Malaysian primary ESL speaking classes.

i. Time-consuming

Statements 1 to 5 in Section C of the questionnaire have shown an average mean score of 3.61, indicating that most of the pre-service teachers strongly agreed that the statements in this dimension, namely time-consuming, are one of the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in the classroom. Based on the data collected, Statement 1 obtained the highest mean score of 3.70. This indicates that most of the pre-service teachers strongly agreed that cooperative learning requires a lot of preparation for cooperative activities in speaking classes compared to other statements mentioned in this dimension (time-consuming). As asserted by Lombardi (2018), teachers need to create and prepare additional materials for pupils to suit the cooperative learning activities which cause textbooks to be used only as instructional supplements in the classroom. In addition, teachers usually need to prepare the materials from scratch because there are limited suggestions for group activities.

ii. Group conflicts among pupils

Statements 6 to 10 in Section C of this questionnaire aimed to investigate whether group conflicts among pupils are one of the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes from pre-service teachers' perceptions. Based on the data collected, an average mean of 3.41 shows that most of the pre-service teachers strongly agreed that this dimension (group conflicts among pupils) is one of the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes. Statement 8 gained the highest mean score (3.47) in this dimension, resulting in pre-service teachers perceiving cooperative learning causes pupils who do not have group work skills to stay quiet as the most prominent statement. Lombardi (2018) shared the same opinion that pupils who work better alone may struggle to succeed in a group atmosphere. This is because they are reluctant to work in a group and may be uncertain of the dynamics involved in group work. In relation to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, pupils tend to be demotivated in learning when they are in an uncomfortable classroom environment. This causes them to stay low and quiet throughout the learning process as they are afraid of communicating with others.

iii. Locus of responsibility and authority

Moving on to the third dimension in Section C designed in the questionnaire, Statements 11 to 15 targeted to determine whether the locus of responsibility and authority acts as one of the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes. Appertaining to the data collected in this survey, an average mean of 2.18 shows that most of the pre-service teachers disagreed with this dimension (locus of responsibility and authority) as one of the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes. In fact, a learner-centred approach is deeply encouraged and emphasized in Malaysian primary ESL classrooms. This is because it improves learners' participation, and retention of knowledge fosters cooperative learning and helps pupils to develop problem-solving skills. Likewise, it makes learning more fun and interesting which ensures pupils are engaged with learning (Kaput, 2018). There are a few statements that the pre-service teachers disagreed with in this dimension. However, statement 14 obtained the highest mean score (2.22) in this dimension deduced most of the pre-service teachers disagreed that they find it hard to let their pupils work independently with their groups without direct supervision from them in speaking classes. In traditional speaking classrooms, teachers were bound to control the pupils throughout the activities as they thought that it was their responsibility to do so. Teachers also think that if they do not give direct supervision to the pupils, they will feel lost and refuse to do any speaking activities in the classroom (Anuradha, 2021). Nevertheless, it is believed that pupils nowadays are educated to be creative and innovative individuals in this 21st-century learning (Erdoğan, 2019). It is also true that pre-service teachers in institutes were given input and insights about the learner-centred approach in 21st-century education. That being so, the data collected in this research has validated that with all these inputs along the learning process, pre-service teachers learned to respect and trust their pupils in the classroom.

Contingent on the findings of this research, it is shown that despite the well-established positive impacts of cooperative learning, implementation remains a challenge. However, although most pre-service teachers think that time-consuming and group conflicts among pupils are the challenges of conducting cooperative learning, The pre-service teachers (100%) in this survey agreed that cooperative learning is good for enhancing pupils' speaking skills. This confirmed that pre-service teachers have

positive perceptions of cooperative learning and will use it to enhance pupils' speaking skills notwithstanding the challenges they met while conducting it in speaking classes.

CONCLUSION

The findings were aligned with previous studies and theories that cooperative learning enhances pupils' speaking skills by increasing their motivation and self-esteem, as well as their interaction with others in the classroom. The discussion also explained the challenges of conducting cooperative learning in speaking classes such as time-consuming and group conflicts among pupils. However, it is proven that locus of responsibility and authority is not one of its challenges from the pre-service teachers' perspectives. Moreover, excellent levels of internal reliability of study participant responses to survey items on the research instrument namely the online questionnaire were achieved in the study.

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The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest with any party.

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