

## **The Comparative Effects of Cooperative and Competitive Learning on Speaking Ability and Self-Confidence of EFL Learners\***

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### **Abstract**

The present study aimed at investigating the comparative effects of cooperative and competitive learning on English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking ability and self-confidence. Moreover, EFL learners' attitude towards cooperative and competitive learning procedures were explored. To these ends, from among 140 male intermediate EFL learners, 90 learners were selected on the basis of a sample Preliminary English Test (PET) results and were assigned into three 30-learner cooperative, competitive and control groups. The speaking section of a sample PET test and Academic Confidence Scale (Sander & Sanders, 2006) were administered to the three groups to measure their speaking proficiency and self-confidence level before the treatment. As the treatment, the first experimental group members were primarily engaged in cooperative learning, the second experimental group members were engaged in competitive learning, and the control group received regular teacher-fronted instruction. At the end of the treatment, the speaking section of another sample PET and Academic Confidence Scale were re-administered as the posttests. Additionally, 10 EFL learners were randomly selected from each experimental group and seated for a semi-structured interview. The statistical analyses revealed that while both cooperative and competitive learning procedures had significant within-group effects on the learners' speaking ability, the impact on academic self-confidence was significant only for cooperative learning procedure. Moreover, between-groups comparisons verified that the impact of cooperative learning on speaking ability and self-confidence of EFL learners was statistically superior to the other procedures. In addition, content analysis of the interview data showed that the majority of EFL learners believed that cooperative learning helps them develop their own ideas in greater depth, enhance their participation and creativity in speaking, improve self-confidence and reduce anxiety; on the other hand, the respondents in competitive group mainly believed that competitive learning led to their increased anxiety and reduced self-confidence.

**Keywords:** *Cooperative learning, competitive learning, speaking ability, self-confidence, EFL learners.*

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## **Introduction**

Language learning process, put simply, comprises mastering different language skills, a prominent one of which is speaking. For most people, the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language, as speech is the most unique aspect and need of human communication (Celce-Murcia, 2001) and when it comes to second or foreign language (SL/FL) pedagogy, teaching speaking skill has been one of the most challenging and arduous tasks due to the multidimensional nature of the skill and the multitude of the factors which affect its development, and production.

As Brown (1994) aptly asserted, foreign language learners cannot express themselves or speak the language easily and effortlessly without some degree of self-confidence. This psychological attribute is defined as individuals' belief in their own strengths and capabilities and having the courage to take action concerning their abilities, values, and objectives (White, 2009). Self-confident learners tend to study harder, are more passionate, have higher enthusiasm, and do not simply quit when they face problems and troubles (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005); on the other hand, the learners with low self-confidence are less motivated and not capable of having a good start in foreign language learning (Bong, 2002).

Apart from various individual cognitive, affective and psychological factors that influence language learning (Karbakhsh & Ahmadi Safa, 2020), the role of teaching and learning orientations and strategies cannot be ignored in this regard. One of the most influential orientations to improving different language skills and learner-related variables is the theory and practice of competitive learning vis-à-vis cooperative learning (Marashi & Dibah, 2013). Deutsch, Coleman, and Marcus (2006) stated that, "competition induces and is induced by use of the tactics of coercion, threat, or deception" (p. 31), while cooperation happens when learners work together to complete shared learning objectives (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). According to Garfield (2013), cooperative learning refers to a group of instructional strategies in which small groups of language learners, of different levels of

capability, work together and help each other to complete different academic tasks and improve their understanding of a subject.

In an attempt to study the differential cognitive and affective impacts of cooperative and competitive learning on EFL learners' speaking skill development and self-confidence, this study investigated the comparative effects of these strategies on intermediate EFL learners' speaking ability and self-confidence. Moreover, efforts were made to explore EFL learners' attitude towards cooperative and competitive learning strategies.

### **Review of the Related Literature**

- **Speaking Ability**

Speaking is defined as a process in which speakers “generate concepts, translate them into linguistic units and articulate them spontaneously” (Taguchi, 2007, p. 449). In such a complicated process which is a major instance of communicative use of language, different factors including ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness and adaptability should be taken into account (Taylor, 2003). Given the point that in addition to the factors mentioned, when it comes to second or foreign language speaking, the typology and the number of factors which might affect this process are even more, it is quite evident that teaching and learning how to speak in a second or foreign language (SL/FL) is more complicated.

Nunan (2003) features speaking as the most difficult skill to acquire while learning a second language and provides two reasons for the involved difficulty: (1) speaking occurs in real time and speakers are often supposed to speak without long and unnatural hesitation, and (2) because of the first reason, speakers do not have the necessary time to edit and revise what they intend to say. In addition, as Ellis (2004) maintains, speakers of second or foreign language will have to be able to speak in a range of different genres and situations, and they will have to be able to use a range of conversational repair strategies which all make the skill a complicated one.

In order to effectively handle the difficulties involved in teaching and learning how to speak a foreign or second language, a wide range of theoretical and empirical suggestions are introduced by both theoreticians and practitioners. Among many others, Shumin (2002) suggests that learners should develop short, interactional exchanges in which they are required to make short utterances. It will make them able to become more engaged in small talk in the target language. Interviews, debates and problem-solving techniques are very effective strategies in developing speaking skills especially if they are conducted correctly by teachers. Such techniques can prepare learners for real life communication in an EFL environment. From another point of view, Hedge (2008) suggests that if learners want to be able to speak fluently in a second or foreign language like English, they need to be able to pronounce phonemes correctly, use appropriate stress and intonation pattern and speak in connected speech.

- **Self-Confidence**

The term 'confidence' originates from the Latin word 'confidentia' meaning 'to have faith' and 'to trust'" (Lland, 2013, p.11) and self-confidence is defined as individuals' recognition of their own capabilities, loving themselves and being conscious of their own sentiments and emotions (Hambly, 1997). Self-confidence is feeling well on account of developing positive sentiments (Mutluer, 2006). As Preston (2001) stated, when learners have faith in in their capabilities, they will simplify their learning and undertake the task without any interventions which might impede their performance. Self-confidence basically controls all of the tasks learners do and in all aspects, particularly the achievements which they greatly desire to obtain (Kakepoto, Habil, Omar & Said, 2012). Confident learners always have particular objectives to attain and simultaneously they trust their capabilities and understand well how to achieve their objectives. They also develop a strong feeling and understanding that they can accomplish them (Murray, 2006; Tracy, 2008).

According to Gilbert and Procter (2006), high self-confidence may be positively associated with language learners' oral performance. It is

also held that confidence is an indispensable feature of any good performance, which naturally motivates presenters to communicate their thoughts successfully (Kakepoto, et al., 2012). Additionally, Hale (2004) maintained that highly self-confident learners believe that they can easily overcome difficulties and problems that impede their oral performance. On the other hand, people with low self-confidence require others' gratefulness and approval, recognize themselves as ineffective and useless, and believe that they cannot resolve the difficulties of daily life (Nelson-Laird, 2005), similarly, learners with low confidence do not have faith in themselves and find it difficult to attain their objectives (Wright, 2008).

- **Cooperative Learning (CL)**

Cooperative learning is defined as “instructional programs in which learners work in small groups to help one another master academic content” (Slavin, 1994, p. 73). The main applications of CL certainly happened in schools which had merely one-room, wherein one teacher was required to teach different learners with a range of abilities and skills (Stevens, 2003). CL is also believed to be appropriate for all content areas and all grade levels (Abrami, Poulsen, & Chambers, 2004). It leads to the learners’ promotion of their cognition through consideration of other’s opinions, expressions, and explanations (Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2003). Gwyn-Paquette and Tochon (2003) also maintain that adopting CL in EFL teaching context lowers the learners’ affective filter as when the learners work together in groups, they are less intimidated when they perceive that other group members struggle as hard as they do to generate a sentence or words to make themselves understood. Breneiser, Monetti and Adams (2012) acknowledged the merits of cooperative learning in learning contexts maintaining that it tends to stimulate a type of interdependence that occurs in real-life workplaces allowing individuals to work together to achieve a positive result. They also concluded that CL improves learner engagement and leads to the development of their academic and social skills.

- **Competitive Learning**

Competitive settings are basically the ones wherein learners work against each other in order to attain an objective that merely one or a few can achieve. As stated by Lin (1997), competitive learning requires the learners to act against each other to attain the desired objective which is the ultimate learning. It is noteworthy that this sort of objective structure asks the learners to contest against each other and it leaves the learners with a win-lose condition (Lin, 1997). It is believed that competitive classroom activities might be suitable if all learners have a chance of success, and once a team approach is applied instead of individually based activities (Good & Brophy, 2008). Moreover, competitive learning in the class will prepare learners for further competitions in their real lives outside school. The rationale behind this idea is that if all classroom activities and tasks are cooperative, learners might become excessively dependent on their fellow learners when completing academic activities and tasks and might be incapable of performing in competitive or individual settings in the future (Good & Brophy, 2008).

Although scholars have been relatively aware of the beneficiary aspects of competitive learning, they have listed its disadvantages as well. According to Good and Brophy (2008), there are numerous ways wherein classroom competition might negatively influence learners' improvement and learning. For instance, if learners become thoughtful about losing or winning the competitive task or activity, they might lose sight of significant educational aims and content. From the learner's point of view, performance or the competition itself takes preference over learning. Additionally, as pointed out by Good and Brophy (2008), inherent in the competition practice is the inevitability for learners to lose. If the same learners lose several times regardless of their best struggles, they might come to perceive the world as partial and are possible to give up once confronted with challenging academic activities and tasks, as they have learned that failure will be the anticipated result no matter how hard they try to get ahead.

The impacts of cooperative and competitive learning on different aspects of language learning have been at the researchers' focus of attention for long. For instance, Kolawole (2007) investigated the effects of the competitive and cooperative learning on Nigerian learners' academic performance. The results of the study showed that the participants in the cooperative learning group outperformed their counterparts in the competitive learning group. Jebson (2012) studied the impact of CL on the secondary school learners' educational performance and showed that the applied CL approach has a significant effect on learners' performance in secondary school. Sachs, Candlin, and Rose (2003) aimed to identify the possible effects of cooperative strategies on ESL/EFL learners' language learning in Hong Kong. The findings of their investigation revealed that cooperative learning had no significant effect on the oral performance of ESL/EFL learners. In another study, Gaith (2003) investigated the effect of cooperative learning on academic self-esteem, reading improvement and reducing the sense of school alienation of ESL learners. The results verified the positive effects of CL on reading proficiency of the EFL learners, though the findings indicated that there was no significant difference between the control group and the cooperative learning group in the sense of school alienation and academic self-esteem. Nebesniak (2007) explored the benefits of CL and how such cooperation can be improved in a structured CL environment. As to the findings, it was found that learners' confidence level and their learning process were improved through the implementation of the CL method.

Against the backdrop of the brief reviewed literature, it is evident that the study of the differential impacts of competitive and cooperative learning and teaching strategies on cognitive and affective aspects of second or foreign language development yet seems to be justified. Furthermore, given the fact that the speaking ability of second or foreign language learners makes the showcase of their proficiency and its development is intensely desired by both the learners and the teachers, the current study aims to comparatively explore the differential impacts of cooperative and competitive strategies on the

EFL learners speaking ability development and academic confidence. To this purpose, the following research questions were formulated.

### **Research Questions**

- RQ<sub>1</sub>: Does cooperative learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability development?
- RQ<sub>2</sub>: Does competitive learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability development?
- RQ<sub>3</sub>: Does cooperative learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' self-confidence improvement?
- RQ<sub>4</sub>: Does competitive learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' self-confidence improvement?
- RQ<sub>5</sub>: Do cooperative and competitive learning significantly differentiate intermediate EFL learners' speaking ability development?
- RQ<sub>6</sub>: Do cooperative and competitive learning significantly differentiate intermediate EFL learners' self-confidence improvement?
- RQ<sub>7</sub>: What are EFL learners' attitudes towards the efficacy of cooperative learning for the development of their English speaking skill?
- RQ<sub>8</sub>: What are EFL learners' attitudes towards the efficacy of competitive learning for the development of their English speaking skill?

### **Method**

#### *Participants*

The participants, selected based on convenience sampling procedure, were 90 intermediate EFL learners learning English at different language institutions in Hamedan. They were selected out of 140 available male EFL learners based on their scores on a sample PET test. Their age ranged from 16 to 23 years. The participants were assigned into two experimental groups, i.e., cooperative and competitive, and a



control group, each consisting 30 EFL learners. Moreover, out of 60 participants in both experimental groups, 20 learners (i.e., 10 EFL learners per each experimental group), were randomly selected to participate in a semi-structured interview. The informed consent of all 90 participants was obtained prior to the outset of the study.

### *Instruments*

- Preliminary English Test (PET)

A sample PET was administered to the available 140 EFL learners for the participant-selection purpose. PET is a standardized Cambridge ESOL test designed for intermediate level English language learners and examines if the test takers are able to use every day spoken and written English (Quintana, 2003).

- Pre and Post Speaking Tests

The participants' scores on the speaking section of the sample PET test was used as their speaking pretest scores. An analytic speaking scale developed by Cambridge as “General Mark Schemes for Speaking” was adopted to rate the speaking section of the PET test in this study. Two examiners rated the participants' speaking performance and inter-rater reliability was found to be  $r = 0.81$ . After the conduct of the treatment, the participants received the speaking section of another sample PET as their speaking posttest. The correlation coefficient of the two sets of scores given by both raters to the speaking posttest was significantly high ( $r = 0.92$ )

- Academic Confidence Scale (ACS)

To measure the participants' confidence levels before and after treatment, Academic Confidence Scale (ACS), developed by Sander and Sanders (2006), was administered. This instrument includes 24 five point Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*Not at all confident*) to 5 (*Very confident*). The administration of the scale takes approximately 20 minutes. The total scores range from 24 to 120. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of ACS was estimated to be 0.88 in the original study (Sander & Sanders, 2006); however, the scale was piloted with 63 learners and a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted. The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.62, above the

recommended value of 0.60, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $X^2(276) = 717.056, P=0.00 < 0.05$ ). The communalities were all above 0.4. Additionally, using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the ACS in the pilot study was re-estimated and found to be 0.79.

- Semi-Structured Interview

To elicit EFL learners' attitude towards cooperative and competitive learning, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 20 EFL learners, selected randomly from the 60 EFL learners of the two experimental groups (i.e., 10 EFL learners per each). The participants were requested to disclose their attitudes towards the cooperative and competitive learning strategies. The interview questions were expert-viewed by two experts in the field for validity purposes. The interviews were conducted by the researchers and in Persian. Each interview took approximately five minutes.

#### *Data Collection Procedure*

- Pre-Treatment Stage

First of all, to identify the required number of homogeneous learners, a sample PET test was administered to 140 EFL learners, within the age range of 16-23, who were selected based on convenience sampling. Based on the test results, out of 140, 90 EFL learners, whose score fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean, were chosen to take part in the study. Afterwards, the identified participants were generally informed of the project and their informed consent to participate in the study was obtained, next the assignment of the intact groups which included the identified participants to either one of the two experimental strategies and a single placebo treatment was done randomly. It is worth mentioning that to form each single study group, which was decided to include 30 identified participants, depending on the number of class takers in each intact institutional class two or three intact classes were considered as a single study group. All the groups attended their classes three times a week for five weeks (15 90 minute sessions). Three units (i.e., unit 7 (*Problem Solving*), unit 8 (*Behavior*), and unit 9 (*Material World*) of *Touchstone 4* (McCarthy, McCarten &

Sandiford 2014), were taught as the course main material during the term. The participants' scores of the speaking section of PET were considered as their pretest scores. In addition, the ACS as a measure of their self-confidence level was administered to all 90 participants before the treatment.

- Treatment Stage

**Experimental Group 1** (Cooperative learning): During the course, the participants were instructed through cooperative learning techniques i.e., think-pair-share, roundtable, and three-step-interview (Lyman, 1981). Think-Pair-Share is a learning technique which consists of three steps, namely, 'Thinking Step', 'Pairing Step', and 'Sharing Step'. The learners were given a topic; they were asked to think about it for about few minutes and organize their thoughts through brainstorming and formulating ideas. Then they were required to talk about the given topic in pairs or sometimes in groups of three or four. Each member in all groups was supposed to exchange his ideas on the topic with the other members of the group. Then each group was required to have a representative, who was changed on a session basis, so that each member of the group could have an equal chance of cooperating to reproduce the main ideas discussed in their group, and also within the whole class. Finally, the representatives of each group were requested to share their ideas with the whole class. In the roundtable technique, the participants in the cooperative group passed a piece of paper around, each adding an item in response to the topic or question provided by the teacher based on the criteria the teacher had described. After the piece of paper was passed on, the next learner continued adding ideas to what had already been written on it, and this process went on until all learners had an opportunity to have their say. For example, the teacher/researcher wrote an incomplete sentence of "if I had enough money, I would....." on the whiteboard and asked the participants to complete it by writing on a piece of paper and after that pass the paper to other learners in the group. The groups were given ten minutes to complete the task, and after that EFL learners were asked to share their sentences with the whole class. Finally, EFL learners discussed their

viewpoints in the class. Another technique was Three-Step Interview, in which each individual in the cooperative group had to both produce and receive information. That is to say, in the first two steps of this technique, learners interacted in pairs, interviewing each other about a particular subject. Afterwards, in the final step, learners took turns sharing what they had learned from their partners with the other members of their group.

**Experimental Group 2** (Competitive learning): The participants were divided into different subgroups of three or four EFL learners each. Members of each subgroup were taught to compete with each other and also try to outperform others in any given task. Although the learners in the competitive group were divided into groups, they knew that they were evaluated based on their individual outcomes and efforts. In all of the activities of the competitive learning groups, each learner was only accountable for his own tasks and activities though he worked in the group. All the time and during the process of performing all the speaking tasks and activities, the learners were encouraged to make their ultimate efforts to be the best among the group members and compete against each other. Being “the best” typically required the learners to be quicker and also more accurate in comparison with their group and classmates. Each time a learner managed to reply a question or complete a task before the other learners and with precision, a positive mark was given to him, and the class was informed that these positive marks would be counted at the end of the term and would naturally affect their class participation final scores.

**Control Group:** The participants worked on the same topics but they did not receive any cooperative or competitive learning based instruction, instead they received teacher-fronted instruction which is characterized by the teacher’s speaking most of the time, directing activities, and perpetually delivering judgment on the performance of learners. Here, the teacher provided accurate input and also offered corrective feedback on learners' responses. The teacher monitored all responses and could apply his full forms-focused control over the learners’ language production. Overall, to the extent possible, the

implementation of any kind of interactive or competitive activities was avoided. The learners were allowed to refer merely to the teacher whenever they encountered any problem.

- Post Treatment Stage

At the end of the study, the speaking section of another sample PET was administered to participants of the three groups to measure their enhanced level of speaking ability. Moreover, , the ACS was re-administered to the participants of the three study groups. Finally, from among those learners who had expressed their informed consent, 10 EFL were selected randomly from each experimental group and interviewed by the researchers. Each interview took approximately five to seven minutes.

### Results

The data obtained from the pre and post tests and two administrations of ACS were analyzed using SPSS software. Paired-samples t-test, Kruskal Wallis test, and one-way ANOVA were the statistical tests applied to analyze the data. Moreover, as for the semi-structured interview data, the audio files were transcribed and the interviewees' ideas were categorized by exposing them to content and theme analyses. Next, the most recurring themes were extracted and quantitized.

The descriptive statistics of the participants' scores on both speaking and ACS pre and posttests appear below in Table 1.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics of the participants' pre, and post speaking test and self-confidence scores*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cooperative group (Speaking)	Pre	1.61	30	1.16	.21
	Post	3.45	30	1.14	.20
Competitive group (Speaking)	Pre	1.61	30	1.11	.20
	Post	2.26	30	1.03	.18

Control group (Speaking)	Pre	1.58	30	.84	.15
	Post	1.60	30	.74	.13
Cooperative group (Self-confidence)	Before	87.53	30	9.76	1.78
	After	96	30	7.90	1.44
Competitive group (Self-confidence)	Before	86.40	30	9.59	1.75
	After	89.96	30	10.34	1.88
Control group (Self-confidence)	Before	82.00	30	12.12	2.21
	After	82.53	30	9.50	1.73

To answer the first research question, i.e., *does cooperative learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability development?*, and second research question, i.e., *does competitive learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability development?*, Paired-Samples t-tests were run on the two groups' speaking pre and posttest, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Paired samples t-test for the difference between participants' speaking ability in the CL and competitive groups*

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
CL	Pre -	-1.83	.60	.11	-2.05	-1.60	-16.55	29	.00
	Posttest								
Competitive	Pre -	-.65	1.16	.21	-1.08	-.21	-3.04	29	.00
	Posttest								

As is illustrated in Table 2, there was a significant difference between the participants' speaking pretest and posttest in CL group regarding their speaking ability ( $t(29) = -16.55, p=0.00 < 0.05$ ). In other words, EFL learners in the CL group had a better speaking ability in

their posttest ( $M= 3.45$ ,  $SD= 1.14$ ) compared with their pretest ( $M= 1.61$ ,  $SD= 1.16$ ) verifying the significance of the development occurred as a result of the treatment.

As is demonstrated in Table 2, there was a significant difference between the competitive learning group participants' speaking ability pre and posttest ( $t(29) = -3.04$ ,  $p=0.00 < 0.05$ ) as well. In other words, EFL learners in the competitive learning group had also a better speaking ability in their posttest ( $M= 2.26$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) than their pretest ( $M= 1.61$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ).

To answer the third research question, i.e., *does cooperative learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' self-confidence improvement?*, and fourth research question, i.e., *does competitive learning have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' self-confidence improvement?*, Paired-Samples t-tests were run on the participants' self-confidence scores before and after the treatment, the results of which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Paired samples t-tests for the difference between participants' self-confidence in the CL and competitive groups*

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
CL	Pre - Posttest	-8.46	13.70	2.50	-13.58	-3.34	-3.38	29	.00
Competitive	Pre - Posttest	-3.56	13.84	2.52	-8.73	1.60	-1.41	29	.16

As is shown in Table 3, there was a significant difference between the participants' self-confidence scores before and after treatment in CL group ( $t(29) = -3.38$ ,  $p=0.00 < 0.05$ ). In other words, EFL learners in the CL group had a higher self-confidence level after the treatment ( $M=$

96, SD = 7.90) compared to their before the treatment level (M= 87.53, SD = 9.76).

As is shown in Table 3, there was no significant difference between the participants' self-confidence scores before and after treatment in competitive learning group ( $t(29) = -1.41, p=0.16 > 0.05$ ). This piece of result confirms lack of any improvement in the competitive group learners' self-confidence level during the study treatment period.

To answer the fifth research question, i.e., *do cooperative and competitive learning significantly differentiate intermediate EFL learners' speaking ability development?* the researchers initially opted for running a one-way ANOVA analysis; however, the homogeneity of variances assumption needed to be checked first (Table 4).

Table 4

*Test of homogeneity of variances of the three groups (1)*

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
5.44	2	87	.00

As is shown in Table 4, the Levene's test magnitude turned out to be significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the variances were not almost homogenous. According to Pallant (2013, p. 262), when the assumption of homogeneity of variances is not met, the aforementioned assumption needs to be checked using Welch or Brown-Forsythe tests (Table 5).

Table 5

*Robust tests of equality of means*

	Statistic <sup>a</sup>	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	27.80	2	55.86	.00
Brown-Forsythe	27.36	2	78.70	.00

a. Asymptotically F distributed.

As is indicated in Table 5, both Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests results were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), thus the variances were not found to be equal. Consequently, due to the violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances, the fifth research question had to be answered through Kruskal Wallis test which is the non-parametric alternative to the one-way ANOVA.



Table 6

*The table of ranks for the speaking posttest scores of the groups*

	Group	N	Mean Rank
Posttest-Speaking	Cooperative	30	65.88
	Competitive	30	43.30
	Control	30	27.32
	Total	90	

As is evident in Table 6, the mean rank of the CL group's speaking ability was 65.88, while the mean rank of the competitive learning group's speaking ability was 43.30. Additionally, the mean rank of the control group's speaking ability was 27.32.

Table 7

*Kruskal Wallis test on speaking of the groups after the treatment*

	Posttest-Speaking
Chi-Square	33.98
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.00

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Group

According to Table 7, Kruskal Wallis test results indicated that at the 0.05 level of significance, there was a significant difference between the mean rank of the CL group (65.88), competitive learning group (43.30) and the control group (27.32) on the speaking test ( $X^2(2)=33.98$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). This piece of result definitively verifies the superior impact of cooperative learning on the speaking ability development of EFL learners; however, the results might also indicate that the competitive learning was the second effective procedure among the three studied procedures.

To answer the sixth research question, i.e., *do cooperative and competitive learning significantly differentiate intermediate EFL learners' self-confidence?*, one-way ANOVA was run on the cooperative, competitive and control groups' self-confidence post-treatment scores. Prior to the conduct of the main analysis, the

homogeneity of variances of the three groups was also checked the results of which are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Test of homogeneity of variances of the three groups (2)*

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.09	2	87	.13

As is shown in Table 8, the Levene's test result value was above the 0.05 significance level, hence it could be concluded that there were no significant differences between the variances. As a result, one-way ANOVA was safely run on the data and the results of which are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

*One-way ANAAA of the three groups' self-confidence level after the treatment*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2958.68	2	1479.34	17.07	.00
Within Groups	7536.96	87	86.63		
Total	10495.65	89			

As is presented in Table 9, the cooperative, competitive and control groups' self-confidence differed significantly from each other in their post treatment performance, ( $F(2, 87) = 17.07, p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). In order to identify the exact location of differences, a Scheffe post hoc test was run (Table 10).

Table 10

*Multiple comparisons between groups (Scheffe post hoc test)*

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Cooperative	Competitive	6.03	2.40	.04	.04	12.01
	Control	14.00	2.40	.00	8.01	19.98

Competitive	Cooperative	-6.03	2.40	.04	-12.01	-.04
	Control	7.96	2.40	.00	1.98	13.95
Control	Cooperative	-14.00	2.40	.00	-19.98	-8.01
	Competitive	-7.96	2.40	.00	-13.95	-1.98

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As is evident in Table 10, the cooperative and competitive groups performed significantly differently from the control group. Additionally, cooperative and competitive groups did perform significantly differently from each other. Consulting the descriptive statistics of the groups, it could be safely concluded that CL had the most significant positive effect on the EFL learners' self-confidence improvement compared to the other two procedures. In addition, even competitive learning is statistically verified to be preferred over teacher fronted instruction in its effects on the EFL learners' self-confidence.

- Interview Results

Having transcribed the cooperative learning group interviewees' responses to the semi-structured interview questions, content analysis was conducted on the obtained data on the basis of which the most recurring themes of the answers were identified, subjected to frequency analysis, quantitized and lastly tabulated (Table 11) in an attempt to answer research question seven, i.e., *What are EFL learners' attitudes towards the efficacy of cooperative learning for the development of their English speaking skill?*

Table 11  
*EFL learners' attitudes on CL*

No.	Theme	Frequency	Percentage
1	CL strategies help EFL learners develop their own ideas and notions in greater	9	90

	depth and consequently, enhance their participation and creativity in speaking		
2	CL strategies reduce anxiety and improve confidence since learners interact with each other in smaller groups rather than the whole class	8	80
3	CL strategies create motivating and amusing learning atmosphere	6	60
4	CL strategies help EFL learners exploit the full knowledge, experience, and visions of all learners in a group	5	50
5	CL strategies make the tasks and activities more meaningful and applicable	4	40

Similarly, the competitive group's interview data were analyzed in an attempt to answer research question eight, i.e., *What are EFL learners' attitudes towards the efficacy of competitive learning for the development of their English speaking skill*, and the results are tabulated in Table 12.

Table 12  
*EFL learners' attitudes on competitive learning*

No.	Theme	Frequency	Percentage
1	Competition enhances anxiety and creates a stressful environment	8	80
2	Competition reduces self-confidence since learners do not perform well under pressure	7	70
3	Competition causes self-improvement due to the fact that learners see competition as a chance to make themselves better through the winning process	4	40

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4	Competition creates an atmosphere where language learners do their own best to push each other to go beyond their own limits	3	30
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### **Discussion**

This study aimed at exploring the comparative effects of cooperative versus competitive learning on EFL learners' speaking ability development and their academic self-confidence. The results revealed that CL had a significant positive effect on the speaking ability development of the learners. A possible reason for this finding could be the fact that CL encourages learners to interact with their peers along with their teachers (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) which leads to the improvement of their speaking ability. Cooperative learning is considered in ELT as "a way of promoting communicative interaction in the classroom" and "is seen as an extension of the principles of Communicative Language Teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 193). Moreover, as aptly pointed out by Marashi and Baygzadeh (2010), cooperative learning "puts communicative approach into action" and "helps to improve the learners' overall achievement of the target language" (p 92). Moreover, in the case of CL, language learners have the opportunity to create positive interdependence by offering task-related assistance and encouraging one another's contributions to their group, which as a result leads to the development of social skills in general and speaking ability in particular (Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2003). Furthermore, CL helps less expert or novice language learners to work in a team including other more expert or more proficient language learners (Holt, Chips, & Wallace, 1991). The dynamic nature of CL not only provides a helpful setting for learning new content and acquiring English language skills, but also helps to nurture friendships and social development (Holt, et al., 1991). The findings of the present study in this regard are in line with those of Marashi and Baygzadeh (2010), who reported that CL had a significant effect on EFL learners' overall achievement. Moreover, the results are in line with those of Ghorbani and Keshavarzi (2015) who reported that CL had a significant

positive effect on overall achievement and the development of different language skills of EFL learners. However, the findings are not in agreement with those of Sachs, et al., (2003), who reported that CL had no significant effect on the oral performance of ESL/EFL learners.

This study also sought to explore whether competitive learning had any significant effect on EFL learners' speaking ability development. The results showed that competitive learning had a significant positive effect on the speaking ability development of EFL learners. In other words, this finding indicates that one way to improve the speaking ability of EFL learners is using different techniques of competitive learning in speaking courses. One possible justification for the findings could be the fact that competitive classrooms create a setting where learners try to do their best which ultimately leads them to push each other to exceed their own boundaries. Ultimately, this push might bring about better speaking performance (Montasseri & Razmjoo, 2015). This might remind the role of peer scaffolding for the learners development of Zone of Proximal development. In other words competition is being introduced as an indirect peer pressure to go beyond one's limits. Another possible reason for the findings might be the fact that thanks to the rewards which are basically included in competitive situations, language learners get motivated and consequently try to do their best to demonstrate better performance than their classmates (Oloyede, Adebowale & Ojo, 2012). Additionally, taking part in a competition will lead to self-improvement and learners might perceive competition as an opportunity to make themselves better through the winning process, since throughout the self-improvement process, various actions like altering learning habits, setting objectives, and doing higher quality learning are included. The findings of the study are in agreement with those of Marashi and Dibah (2013), who reported that implementing competitive learning was found to be effective in the improvement of oral proficiency of language learners. It was concluded that "the settings of classes in many cultures (Iran included) do not still support the full cooperative type. Learners are perhaps not ready enough to embrace fully the culture of

cooperativeness without competitiveness” (Marashi & Dibah, 2013, p. 555).

This study also aimed at exploring whether CL and competitive learning had any significant effect on EFL learners’ self-confidence improvement. The results revealed that CL had a significant positive effect on the self-confidence improvement, while competitive learning was found to have no significant effect on EFL learners’ self-confidence improvement. As Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert, (1999) maintained, “anxious learners in second language classes may be afflicted primarily by low self-confidence in speaking the target language” (p. 436). Thus, one reason for the positive effect of CL on language learners’ self-confidence might be the fact that “CL strategy increases the motivation, reduces the stress, and also creates a positive affecting classroom climate” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 13). Moreover, CL techniques provide a setting for EFL learners to generally practice and acquire affective, social and cognitive abilities; consequently, their self-confidence increases and thus EFL learners can gain more control in the process of language learning (Marashi & Khatami, 2017). As stated earlier, competitive learning was found to have no significant effect on EFL learners’ self-confidence improvement. As Good and Brophy (2008) maintained, inherent in the competition practice is the certainty for learners to lose. It is also believed that competitive learning is fruitful and rewarding only once the winner tries to support and help the loser, but it is not beneficial in the case that the winner takes it all (Deutsch, et al., 2006). This point might further justify our previous reference to Vygotskian ZPD and peer scaffolding. Competitive learning led to the improved speaking ability of the EFL learners in this study but it did not help their academic self-confidence improvement. The contrastive effect might indicate that competition can be considered as an effective indirect scaffolding procedure which leads to the development of the learners' ZPD provided that it is done in a supportive atmosphere where as Deutsch, et al., (2006) put it, the winner tries support and help the losers. This competition pattern leads to the development of both the expert peer

and less proficient peers' ZPD, in the other hand, based on the findings of this study, cooperative learning seems to be a direct peer scaffolding procedure which guarantees EFL learners both cognitive and affective development due to the provision of a maximally supportive atmosphere among the peers.

This study also aimed at examining whether there existed any significant differences between the effects of cooperative and competitive learning on EFL learners' speaking ability development. The results revealed that the speaking ability development of the cooperative, competitive and control groups differed significantly from each other after the treatment. Furthermore, the results indicated that the cooperative group significantly outperformed the other two groups, i.e., competitive, and control groups. Thus, it can be argued again that applying CL techniques could provide a practical and friendly atmosphere for EFL learners to develop their speaking ability in a context of meaningful communication. The findings might partially endorse Kagan's (1995) perspective that CL is essentially a way to put the communicative approach into practice. Moreover, Zhou (2002) believed that in a less threatening setting as that of CL, the language learners are capable of demonstrating higher oral classroom participation that is basically associated with their statistically significant language proficiency improvement. The findings are also supportive of Wei's (1997) argument that CL can be regarded as the best instructional format to improve learners' communicative competence in general and speaking ability in particular. Moreover, the results are consistent with those of several other studies (e.g., Ning, 2011; Ning & Hornby, 2010; Pattanpichet, 2011; Talebi & Sobhani, 2012; Yang, 2005) that reported CL had a significant positive effect on speaking ability development of EFL learners.

This study also aimed at examining whether there existed any significant differences between the effect of cooperative and competitive learning on EFL learners' self-confidence improvement. The results indicated that the self-confidence improvement level of the cooperative, competitive and control groups differed significantly from



each other after the treatment. Additionally, the results showed that the cooperative group significantly outperformed the other two groups. Accordingly, it can be claimed that CL instruction can provide a friendly and constructive atmosphere for EFL learners which in turn could lead to improving their self-confidence. CL can change the classroom settings in a way that learners can explicitly express themselves without apprehension or fear of making mistakes, which can result in improved self-confidence (Tunçel, 2015). According to Bandura (2006), there is a strong relationship between learners' self-confidence and the social groups they are in. Individuals are motivated to think like the social group they are in. The findings verify Goodwin's (2007) argument that in CL group, language learners are trained on how to interact with their classmates and how to improve their contribution in school and society and consequently improve their own self-confidence level. Marashi and Khatami (2017, p.53) contend that CL helps language learners to learn "how to build social relationship, how to deal with various opinions and viewpoints, how to solve different problems and how to stand different conflicts". Similar results were reported by Heydari, Zarei, and Zainalipour (2013). (2013), who reported that CL had a significant positive effect on the self-confidence of female EFL learners.

This study also intended to identify EFL learners' attitudes towards the efficacy of cooperative learning for the development of their English speaking skill. As the interview findings indicated, the majority of the respondents believed that CL strategies help EFL learners develop their own ideas in greater depth and consequently improve their motivation to speak creatively. The findings in this respect are supported by those of Zahedi and Tabatabaei (2012) who reported that CL improves motivation of the participants to communicate and speak in target language. Moreover, 80 percent of the respondents stated that CL strategies reduce anxiety and improve confidence since learners interact with each other in smaller groups rather than the whole class. The findings in this respect further confirm that CL helps to the enhancement of EFL learners' self-confidence. Furthermore, 60 percent

of the interviewees believed that CL strategies create motivating and amusing learning atmosphere. Also, half of the interviewees believed CL strategies help EFL learners exploit the full knowledge, experience, and vision of all other learners of a group. Finally, 40 percent of the respondents stated that CL strategies make the tasks and activities more meaningful and applicable. The findings in this regard are in line with those of John and Meera (2014), who found that CL strategy was fruitful in making activities more applicable and improving the creative thinking skills of secondary school students. Evidently, on the basis of both quantitative and qualitative results of this study, cooperative learning provides the learners with a chance to develop a constructive atmosphere within which both individual members' ZPD and the whole Group's Zone of Proximal Development (GZPD) develop and the affective filters of the group members are efficiently lowered as a result of the created atmosphere.

The study also explored EFL learners' attitudes towards the efficacy of competitive learning for the development of their English speaking skill. According to the findings, the majority of the respondents believed that competition improves anxiety and creates a stressful environment. Consistent with this piece of finding, Johnson and Johnson (1991) discussed that competitive learning cultivates high levels of anxiety and stress. Furthermore, 70 percent of the respondents stated that competition reduces self-confidence since learners do not perform well under pressure, which is also supported by Johnson and Johnson (1991) who argued that competitive learning increases the participants' lack of confidence. Forty percent of the interviewees argued that competition causes self-improvement due to the fact that learners see competition as a chance to make themselves better through the winning process. Likewise, 30 percent of the learners believed that competition creates an atmosphere where language learners do their own best to push each other to go beyond their own limits. However, as aptly pointed out by Good and Brophy (2008), in some cases competition might negatively affect learners' improvement, and learning. In some cases, it is possible that competition itself is given

preference over learning, thus applying competitive learning should be done with utmost caution and care (Good & Brophy, 2008). Due to the nature of competition, competitive learning is sometimes criticized on the grounds that it can lead to increased levels of depression and stress, and consequently, learners might not feel secure in the class and have a preference to keep silent instead of contributing (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). Additionally, competitive learning brings about high levels of nervousness, selfishness, insecurity, and violence (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study gave credit to the effectiveness of CL in improving both speaking ability and self-confidence of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the helpfulness of competitive learning in improving speaking ability of EFL learners was confirmed; however, it was concluded that competitive learning had no significant effect on EFL learners' self-confidence improvement. Finally, EFL learners were mostly found to have positive attitude towards the efficacy of cooperative learning for the development of their English speaking skill, and negative attitude towards competitive learning. Based on the findings, some implications for EFL teachers, learners are drawn. EFL teachers might be benefited in their practice to improve EFL learners speaking ability using both cooperative and competitive learning; however, attempts need to be made when using competitive learning strategy to foster a positive and friendly atmosphere in the classroom so that the winners of competition do support the losers. Additionally, as CL was found effective for the enhancement of the EFL learners' self-confidence, EFL teachers are especially recommended to apply cooperative learning strategy in lower proficiency levels as the participants in such settings are even more sensitive to affective factors and the application of cooperative learning strategy leads to their increased self-confidence and lesser amount of negative feelings, stress and anxiety.

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