

The Use of Cooperative Learning for Enhancing the English Speaking Skills of National High School Students in Myanmar

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Received: March 16, 2024

Revised: May 14, 2024

Accepted: May 23, 2024

Abstract: The objectives of this mixed-methods study are as follows: (1) to compare the English-speaking skills of National High School (NHS) students in Myanmar before and after using cooperative learning; and (2) to explore the satisfaction of students towards the use of CL. The study was conducted in one of the NHS in Myanmar, 30 students were purposefully selected from the entire NHS as research participants. The participants underwent treatment with four different CL methods: Think-Pair-Share, Numbered Heads Together, Three-Step Interview, and Mix-Freeze Pair over a period of one month. The research instruments included lesson plans, an English-speaking test (pretest and posttest), a satisfaction questionnaire, and a focus group discussion. The quantitative data were analyzed using paired sample statistics t-test ($p \leq .05$ level of significance), mean, and standard deviation, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The results of the English-speaking test showed a mean of 8.60 for the pretest and 12.56 for the posttest, with a mean difference of 3.96 (24.75%), an increase from 53.75% to 78.5% of the total score. The obtained (p) value of 0.001 indicated the effectiveness of CL in enhancing the English-speaking skills of NHS students. Moreover, the results from the students' satisfaction questionnaire revealed that all the items received the highest or high level of satisfaction. The qualitative data gathered from the focus group discussion indicated that the participants expressed satisfaction with the use of CL, which motivated them to study more and enhance their English-speaking skills. Thus, the findings provide teachers in Myanmar with an alternative technique for teaching English speaking skills.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, English speaking skills, NHS students, Students' satisfaction

Introduction

English is a prominent communication language in the world and important for the future (Robinson, 2023). It is an official language in 60 countries and plays a significant role in numerous fields such as communication, education, business, entertainment and medicine (Barančíková & Zerzová, 2015). Proficiency in English leads to greater achievement in accessing information. Many international meetings and business enterprise meetings are held in English and bestselling books, daily news, magazines, movies, and music are produced in English (Subhapota, 2023). Myanmar has focused on enhancing its English proficiency to participate in international meetings and create opportunities for its citizens. Therefore, it mandates English as a compulsory subject in schools (Soe, 2015).

The English language has a tremendous impact in Myanmar. English is taught from primary to higher education. Its first English curriculum, was developed in the 1820s under British administration, aimed to improve literacy, communication, and civilization (Fuqua & Jacques, 1992). The English curriculum underwent multiple major reforms and the present curriculum emphasizes English competencies that align with the 21st-century skills to enabling students to apply the skills in their daily social interactions and future learning (Allen, 2018). The current English Curriculum textbook focuses on reading, vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, and writing (Ministry of Education, 2019).

However, as noted by Pannasami, Kanokkamalade & Pintrymool (2020), Myanmar students still lacked proficiency in English and considered it as the most challenging subject in school. Both the students and the teachers face challenges and difficulties in terms of

teaching and learning English (Faez & Valeo, 2012), including lower self-confidence, boredom, and reluctance to practice dialogue (Nurdini, 2018). Additionally, students with limited vocabulary and those who speak a mother tongue other than English discourage and lose interest in learning the language. The teaching strategy used may also be incompatible with the learning environment, leading to a loss of interest (Bahrani & Soltani, 2012). Carrier (2005) stated that success in teaching a language means teaching learners to be able to speak the language. Similarly, students and teachers at National High School, a school for internally displaced children on the Thai-Burma border faced the same issue. However, even English is a major subject from primary up to high school students struggle to improve their English language proficiency, their English-speaking skills still fall short and find themselves nowhere in learning English (Pannasami, Kanokkamalade, & Pintrymool, 2020).

According to Suwannatrat, Thumawongsa & Chumpavan (2022), teaching methods were the main barrier to English proficiency among students. The traditional teaching methods heavily relied on textbooks, which require students to simply memorize what is being taught to pass exams, with a lack of exposure to real life practice found to be a source of ineffective learning. Nalliveettil & Alidmat (2013) also confirmed that when language teachers solely depend on textbooks for teaching, the teaching and learning process becomes unproductive. Moreover, according to Tanveer (2007), the major obstacles to students learning English are inadequate speaking skills and teachers behaving insensitively towards students who are speaking the language. Furthermore, he pointed out that this issue was exacerbated because pointing out student mistakes is often considered insensitive or a source of embarrassment. According to MacIntyre (1995), the fear of making mistakes contributes to a lack of progress in speaking English resulting in a diminished interest and motivation for learning the language and a subsequent lack of confidence in speaking. According to Theobald (2006), improving interest and motivation in learning is crucial for enhancing students' language skills.

Additionally, the language environment plays a significant role in the development of learning a language. Howard (2007) says it is important for teachers to create a friendly environment where students feel safe to make mistakes and learn from them to improve their speaking skills. Making sure students are actively involved in practicing their English speaking is key for them to enhance their English-speaking skills. However, not all teachers have the right tools to create an English-only environment. Therefore, numerous researchers have endeavored to study effective methods to enhance students' English-speaking skills. Many studies have shown the significant effectiveness of cooperative learning methods in this regard.

Cooperative learning is an active learning method that involves students working in small groups to help each other master academic content (Slavin & Cooper, 1999). It engages students with different language skills in working together on specific tasks or projects (Fathman & Kessler, 1992). This interactive experience helps students achieve shared learning goals (Johnson et al., 1991). The method is highly effective in teaching English speaking skills (Kagan, 1994) as it fosters interdependence among group members. Students can assist each other in correcting pronunciation, learning from others, and promoting individual effort (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). This method shifts from teacher-centered learning to more student-centered learning, ensuring that students participated in group discussions and engage in peer conversations to progress in their English speaking. Overall, cooperative learning represents a paradigm shift in educational learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). In other words, cooperative learning serves as a foundation for active learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2017) where students actively construct knowledge in groups

rather than merely absorbing information (Shih, et al., 2002). The goal of cooperative learning is not for individual students to pass exams; it is about helping one another succeed academically (Slavin, 1990).

A study conducted by Kandasamy & Habil (2018) found that cooperative learning helped students improve their speaking skills by allowing them to speak confidently and express themselves. Moreover, it developed interpersonal skills, helped students retain new ideas, and fosters the ability to develop solutions independently. Students also enjoyed the experience of cooperative learning, particularly during their English class sessions. Additionally, Siriphot & Hamcumpai (2020), who investigated the effectiveness of cooperative learning on students' speaking self-efficacy using six different cooperative learning methods, discovered that students' speaking self-efficacy improved at all levels, and they received positive feedback on the usage of cooperative learning activities to enhance their speaking efficacy.

Furthermore, a study by Lucena & Jose (2016) found that cooperative learning enhanced students' speaking skills by encouraging communication and self-expression throughout the teaching sessions. This method, particularly beneficial for shy and nervous, students improved their self-esteem by allowing them to share their views and opinions on class-related issues, ultimately contributing to the group's success. Other studies by Asrifan (2016) on the effectiveness of think-pair-share in improving students' speaking skills discovered significant achievement by students who used think-pair-share compared to those who did not, leading to increased interest in learning English. Maryanti et al. (2018) investigated the effect of numbered heads together on students' speaking skills to determine the impact of numbered heads together on students' spoken text speaking skills. The results showed that numbered heads together improved pair work for teaching speaking.

Additionally, a study on the cooperative learning approach was conducted by Ratnawati et al. (2018) to enhance students' speaking skills using a three-step interview and numbered heads together with the English class level of the Nissan Fortuna English Course in Kudus. The study discovered that a three-step interview and numbered heads together are effective at improving the speaking skills of students with different levels of motivation, enhancing the speaking skills of both high- and low-motivated students. This study demonstrated that a three-step interview and numbered heads together can be utilized as approaches to improve students' speaking skills, regardless of their motivational level.

All of the research findings described above showed that cooperative learning methods are effective in a variety of teaching and learning areas, notably in speaking skills. So, the first author carried out this study to explore more about the effectiveness of cooperative learning for enhancing English speaking skills of students of NHS in Myanmar and how satisfied the students are with the use of it. In order to produce quality and trustworthy results for this study the researcher deployed mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative research approach. The pretest was administered prior to implementing cooperative learning, whereas the posttest, students' satisfaction questionnaire, and focus group discussion were conducted following the implementation.

The quantitative data collected during the pretest and posttest were analyzed and interpreted using an inferential statistics t-test at the (p) level of significance. Similarly, the quantitative data acquired via the students' satisfaction questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software to determine the mean and standard deviation. The mean score for each item and part was then calculated and interpreted. Additionally, the qualitative data collected from the focus group discussion was analyzed with thematic analysis.

In this study, the researcher aimed to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning by addressing the following research questions: (1) Would the use of cooperative learning enhance the English-speaking skills of National High School Students?; and (2) What is the level of students' satisfaction towards the use of cooperative learning to improve English speaking skills at National High School? The objectives of this study were as follows: (1) to compare the English-speaking skills of NHS students before and after the implementation of cooperative learning; and (2) to explore students' satisfaction with the use of cooperative learning at NHS. Consequently, the findings may provide English teachers with an alternative and effective teaching method.

Research methodology

This study used mixed research methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative, in accordance with the research objectives and research questions. The researchers collected data from English speaking test (pretest and posttest) to compare the English speaking skills of NHS students before and after the use of cooperative learning and collected data from students' satisfaction questionnaire and focus group discussion to explore students' satisfaction towards the use of cooperative learning. To this end, English speaking test and students' satisfaction questionnaire for quantitative data, and focus group discussion for qualitative data were used.

Research Participants: The target population was comprised of 46 students from NHS in Myanmar. The researchers used purposive sampling to select 30 students, 16 boys and 14 girls, with varying learning skills and from varied backgrounds. All research participants were approached and informed about the study.

Research Instruments: Research instruments are tools used to collect, measure, and analyze data from participants in studies on a particular subject of interest (Zohrabi, 2013). In this study, the researcher used lesson plans, English speaking test (pre- and post-test), students' satisfaction questionnaire, and focus group discussion to collect data. In addition, the researcher used an English-speaking test scoring criteria to measure students' English-speaking skills.

Lesson Plans: The researcher developed four lesson plans on topics such as myself, my family, my friend, and my favorite person. For each lesson plan, the researcher taught for two periods per week, each lasting 90 minutes, for a total of four weeks. Each lesson was divided into three sections: The Think-Pair-Share method for the introduction of the lesson; the Numbered Heads Together and Three-Step Interview methods for lesson implementation; and the Mix Freeze Pair method for lesson conclusion and lesson assessment.

English Speaking Test (Pretest and Posttest): The test focused on the four topics. Each participant randomly drew one topic and gave a free talk for three minutes. Also, they were scored using English speaking test scoring criteria that emphasized vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and grammar. The total score was 16 points.

Students' Satisfaction Questionnaire: A five-point Likert scale students' satisfaction questionnaire was created to explore students' satisfaction toward the use of CL methods. The questionnaire comprised 15 items and was divided into three parts: 1) interest and motivation; 2) student participation; and 3) effectiveness of CL methods. To avoid any ambiguity, the questionnaire was bilingual, in English and Shan language, the native language of the students. The questionnaire was distributed to 30 participants in the study.

The mean score ranges were interpreted as follows: Highest (5 - 4.01), High (4 - 3.01), Moderate (3 - 2.01), Low (2 - 1.01), and Lowest (≤ 1).

Focus Group Discussion: Additionally, a focus group discussion was designed to elicit more detailed information from participants. It also concentrated on three areas: 1) interest and motivation; 2) student participation; and 3) effectiveness of CL methods. Each part consisted of two prompted questions. To provide precise information, participants were allowed to respond in either English or their first language.

Validity: The research instruments were designed and sent to three experts for validation, one from the United States of America and two from Shan State, Myanmar. The validity of instruments was checked using the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) index, which ranges from -1 to +1. A rating of +1 indicates alignment with learning objectives, while a rating of 0 indicates neutrality or uncertainty. A rating of -1 indicates items do not meet objectives. The accuracy and acceptability of the test item value were between 0.67 and 1.00. In this study, all the instruments were validated and rated +1 by the validators. The total score of IOC was higher than 0.67. As a result, it demonstrated that all the instruments used in this study were congruent and valid.

Reliability: To assess the reliability of the students' satisfaction questionnaire, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Additionally, each students' satisfaction questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results suggested that the scale was acceptable, with a score of 0.74 for the students' satisfaction questionnaire.

Data Collection: To conduct the study, firstly, the researcher sought the authorization from the Director of the Education Commission, the school principal, and the English class teacher and was granted permission to conduct the study. Secondly, for ethical considerations, 30 students were approached and informed about the study. Then, the consent form was signed to participate in the study. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were ensured. Thirdly, the researcher administered a pretest to study and analyze the English-speaking skills of students before teaching. After that, four weeks of experimental teaching was conducted for four weeks using CL methods following the lesson plans. A posttest was then administered and a questionnaire was handed out for students to complete to assess the students' satisfaction. Finally, the focus group discussion was held to assess students' satisfaction with the use of CL methods.

Data Analysis: To address the first research question, "Would the use of cooperative learning enhance the English-speaking skills of National High School Students?", the overall scores from the English-speaking tests (pretest and posttest) were subjected to paired sample t-tests (t-tests for dependent samples) using statistical analysis, which included calculating the mean and standard deviation (SD) through SPSS software.

For the second research question regarding "What is the level of students' satisfaction towards the use of cooperative learning to improve English speaking skills at National High School?", data collected from the students' satisfaction questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS program to determine the mean and SD. The overall mean score for each component was interpreted based on five levels of satisfaction. Additionally, responses from focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, translated, and analyzed to obtain further insights.

Research results

This study was conducted with NHS students in Myanmar to enhance their English-speaking skills using cooperative learning methods. The objectives were to compare the English-speaking skills of participants before and after the use of CL and to further explore their satisfaction. The lessons were taught for two periods a week of a total of four weeks with the thirty participants. The quantitative data were collected from pretest and posttest and from the students' satisfaction questionnaire, while qualitative data were gathered from the focus group discussion.

Analysis of English-speaking test: To compare the English-speaking skills of participants before and after the use of CL, the data collected from the English-speaking test (pretest and posttest) were analyzed using a paired sample t-test based on the mean, standard deviation, and significance (p) value. Figure 1 below illustrates the improvements of individual students in pretest and posttest scores among the thirty research participants. The blue bars represent pretest scores, while the orange bars represent posttest scores. The posttest scores of all participants increased, suggesting the effectiveness of using CL to enhance the English-speaking skills of NHS students in Myanmar.

In addition, the mean pretest and posttest scores, which are 8.6 and 12.56, respectively. The mean score on the posttest was higher than the pretest. When compared to the pretest mean score, the posttest mean score is 3.96 points higher. An increase from 53.75% to 78.5% of the total score. As a result, each individual participant made an improvement and scored higher on the posttest.

Furthermore, Table 1 below shows that the posttest mean score was greater than the pretest mean score. The pretest mean was 8.60, with a standard deviation of 3.04, while the posttest mean was 12.56, with a standard deviation of 2.45. The posttest mean score was 3.96 points higher than the pretest mean score. The obtained significant (p) value was 0.001, showing that the sample group improved significantly on the posttest. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the use of CL was effective in enhancing English speaking skills of NHS students in Myanmar.

Table 1. Paired Sample Statistics of the Pretest and Posttest

Group	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference	t	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD			
Participants (n=30)	8.60	3.04	12.56	2.45	3.96	-18.28**	.001

Analysis of Students' Satisfaction Questionnaire: The students' satisfaction questionnaire comprised 15 items which were divided into three parts: 1) interest and motivation; 2) student participation; and 3) effectiveness of CL methods. These were used to explore students' satisfaction towards the use of CL. The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using the SPSS program to determine the mean and standard deviation. The mean score of each item and each part was interpreted as follows: 5-4.01 as the highest level, 4-3.01 as a high level, 3-2.01 as a moderate level, 2-1.01 as a low level, and ≤ 1 as the lowest level.

The mean, SD, and levels of satisfaction for each item and the overall satisfaction of the three parts obtained through the study. It was found that for part I, the participants rated item 3 "CL strategies make learning English speaking active and more enjoyable." as the

highest with a mean score of 4.40 ($SD = 0.67$). For part II, the participants rated item 7 "All CL strategies that the teacher used for teaching encourage us to participate in the learning." as the highest, with a mean score of 4.46 ($SD = 0.50$). For part III, item 15, "CL teaching strategies encourage me to speak English," was rated as the highest with a mean score of 4.23 ($SD = 0.62$).

The overall rating of the mean score for each part was high or highest, respectively, as follows: Part I: Interest and Motivation was 4.11 ($SD = 0.71$) which indicated the highest level. Part II: Student Participation was 4.09 ($SD = 0.69$) which indicated the highest level. For part III: The effectiveness of CL methods was 3.65 ($SD = 0.71$) which indicated a high level. The result showed that students had positive satisfaction with the use of CL.

Discussion

The study found that students at NHS in Myanmar enhanced their English-speaking skills through cooperative learning methods, and their satisfaction with the method was positive. They enjoyed learning with cooperative learning strategies and expressed a desire to use them in future lessons, as follows:

The study significantly demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing the English-speaking skills of NHS students in Myanmar. Posttest performance was significantly higher than pretest performance, indicating the effectiveness of cooperative learning methods. The posttest mean score (12.56) was higher than the pretest mean score (8.60) with a mean difference of 3.96. The obtained significant (p) value was 0.001 and it clearly indicates that the sample group improved significantly on the posttest.

The methods used in this study encouraged students to express themselves during lessons, a finding similar to Lucena & Jose (2016) study. They also provided opportunities for shy and nervous students to talk and improve their English-speaking skills. This finding aligns with a study by Maryanti et al. (2018) which found that after using the CL method, students' English-speaking skills significantly increased. Overall, cooperative learning strategies significantly enhance students' English-speaking skills.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, all students performed better on the posttest than on the pretest, indicating that the CL methods used in this study, such as think-pair-share, three-step interview, numbered head together, and mix freeze pair, enhanced students' English-speaking skills. These methods foster collaborative learning environments, increasing students' confidence in speaking and improving their English-speaking skills. They involve grouping students, boosting their confidence in speaking, and enhancing their English-speaking skills. This is consistent with findings from Annisa et al. (2023). This finding is also in line with the findings of Hendriani (2018), that English-speaking skills, which said students' English-speaking skills were also enhanced through a three-step interview as it encouraged students to ask questions and share knowledge. Another CL method, like numbered head together, ensured the active involvement of all students in group work and provided opportunities for practicing English speaking skills. This is supported by Hidayati's study in 2022. Additionally, CL methods, such as mix freeze pair, encourage movement in the classroom and enhance English speaking practice in pairs. Overall, cooperative learning fosters student expression and contributes to the improvement of their speaking skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). As a result, their findings confirmed that the achievement of students demonstrated in this study indicated the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing students' English-speaking skills.

A satisfaction questionnaire was conducted to explore students' satisfaction with cooperative learning after its implementation. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items, categorized into interest and motivation, student participation, and the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing English speaking skills. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale. The findings were analyzed using the SPSS program, and the results were as follows:

The statistics for Part I on students' interest and motivation showed the highest level of satisfaction with an overall mean score of 4.11 (SD = 0.71). According to the findings, students found the methods interesting and motivating. They even mentioned that cooperative learning methods kept them active and alert at all times. The methods created a learning environment for them where they could have fun practicing their English and motivated them to express and share their knowledge. This finding is consistent with a prior study conducted by Nursyamsi & Corebima (2016) that discovered that cooperative learning promotes interest and improves communication skills. It is also consistent with the finding of M. Al-Tamimi & Attamimi (2014) that students who learned with cooperative learning show greater interest in learning and achieve higher academic performance than those who do not.

The statistical data from Part II showed positive results for student participation with a mean score of 4.09 (SD = 0.69), indicating the highest level of satisfaction. According to the findings, the methods encouraged students to participate in learning and were beneficial for enhancing their English-speaking skills. Moreover, the methods provided students with opportunities to speak in the classroom. Students said that they learn better when they get involved and participate. Furthermore, engaging students in the learning process not only makes learning more effective but also provides opportunities for them to practice speaking English with their peers while participating in class activities. Previous research by Ismail, Bungsu & Shahrill (2023) which asserted that cooperative learning enhanced student participation, confirmed these findings.

The statistical data for Part III on the effectiveness of CL showed a high level with an overall mean score of 3.65 (SD = 0.71). The findings indicated that the methods were effective in enhancing their English-speaking skills mainly because they encouraged students to speak in English resulting in a significant enhancement of their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The methods also boosted students' confidence in communicating in English both with their peers in the class and outside of the class. This finding aligns with both Pattanpitchet (2011) study, which demonstrated that cooperative learning enhanced students' English-speaking skills and inspired continued learning outside of class, and Namaziandost et al.'s (2020) research, which similarly found significant improvements in English speaking skills following the use of cooperative learning methods. Overall, the findings of this study highlighted the effectiveness of CL methods and students' satisfaction after using them.

The majority of students strongly agreed that regularly using cooperative learning methods would significantly improve their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and overall English-speaking skills. This is in corroborating findings similar to those by Nievecela & Ortega (2019). Moreover, students expressed that cooperative learning enhanced their confidence and self-esteem and enabling them to study independently outside the classroom. This is consistent with Kim & Choi's (2023) findings that said that cooperative learning methods allow students to speak openly and freely without fear of shame. Furthermore, this finding also in accordance with the findings of Namaziandost et al. (2020) that said students who learned through cooperative learning exhibited improved speaking fluency and learning motivation significantly more than those who learned individually. Based on the findings of

the study's participants and previous research, the study concluded that cooperative learning was the effective method for enhancing the English-speaking skill of NHS students in Myanmar.

The aims of the study were to compare the English-speaking skills of NHS students in Myanmar before and after using CL and to explore their satisfaction. The findings demonstrated that cooperative learning significantly enhanced NHS students' English-speaking skills with their satisfaction reaching the highest level of positive satisfaction. Consequently, the study recommends that English teachers fully leverage this method in both regular English-speaking classes and other classroom lessons. The success of CL in improving English speaking skills suggests its potential application to other language skills, encompassing reading, writing, and listening. In alignment with these findings, the researcher proposes conducting similar research with a larger sample size, diverse student levels, and schools from various locations in Myanmar. While this study focused on four topics from the school English textbook (myself, my family, my friend, and my favorite person), future research could explore additional subjects from the English textbook. Lastly, the researcher suggests that future studies may investigate the effectiveness of CL in various language skills, such as reading comprehension, listening skills, and writing skills.

Conclusion

According to the findings of the English-speaking test, the students' satisfaction questionnaire and the focus group discussion, it is possible to conclude that CL plays a key role in enhancing English speaking skills of NHS students in Myanmar. The results of the English-speaking test (pretest and posttest) showed that NHS students in Myanmar enhanced their English-speaking skills after the implementation of the CL methods. The responses from both the students' satisfaction questionnaire and the focus group discussion indicated positive satisfaction towards CL methods. It is clearly shown that CL is an effective method for enhancing students' English-speaking skills and it made the learning environment of English-speaking interesting, fun, and enjoyable. Moreover, it increases students' motivation and confidence in speaking English and making learning English speaking a lot easier. Additionally, it increased students' participation in class activities that encourage and allow them to communicate with their learning partners for enhancing their English-speaking skills. Lastly, it has helped students become independent and accountable learners who continuously learn and improve themselves in and outside of the classroom.

In conclusion, the findings affirm the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing English speaking skills among NHS students in Myanmar. As educators seek innovative approaches, integrating cooperative learning methods can contribute significantly to creating dynamic and engaging language classrooms. Looking ahead, further research could explore the longitudinal impact of cooperative learning on various language skills. English teachers are encouraged to consider implementing these methods in their classrooms, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment that empowers students to become confident and proficient speakers of the English language.

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