

The Effect of Task Based Language Teaching on Students' WTC and Speaking Ability through Paired-Work vs. Cooperative Instructions

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Abstract

This study concerned with the effect of cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions on EFL learners' speaking ability and willingness to communicate. To this end, sixty male intermediate learners in a language school participated in a quasi-experimental study for 12 sessions. The participants were assigned to cooperative group (N=30) and paired-work group (N=30). After making sure about the homogeneity of the two groups, WTC questionnaire and the PET speaking test were administered to both groups as a pretest. The instructions used in this study were all adapted from Task-based Language Teaching. At the end of the experiment, the same WTC questionnaire and the PET speaking test were again administered as the posttest. Then the researcher compared the results of pre-test and post-test scores to see whether the application of the tasks had affected the learners' WTC and speaking ability. According to the statistical mean scores gained from pre and post test scores, it was found that not only cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions could both enhance the learners' speaking ability, but also their willingness to communicate was increased. Also, independent samples *t*-test revealed that cooperative task-based instruction is more effective than paired-work task-based instruction on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Teacher and syllabus designers may benefit from the findings of this study. Teachers can develop group works to remove the learners' reluctance to participate in the speaking activities and syllabus designers can also focus on more motivational communicative tasks to enhance the pupils' chance of participation.

Key words: Cooperative instruction, Paired-work instruction, Speaking ability, Task based language teaching, Willingness to communicate

Introduction

Speaking is probably the most important skill that everyone has to qualify in once he wants to learn a foreign language. Moreover, it is the most difficult of the four skills both for the students to gain proficiency in and also for the teachers to enhance the students' speaking ability (Hedge, 2008). Throughout the history of language teaching, however, there have been different views towards this skill whose common goal was nothing but to enable the students to communicate. Furthermore, "the observable nature of speaking as a productive skill motivates learners to further indulge in the process of SLA" (Rashtchi & Keyvanfar, 2007, p. 135). Hence, speaking has always been in the center of attention. The focus of this attention

however has gradually increased in accordance with the needs, requirements and necessities of the modern life. This trend could easily be discerned in the EFL classroom course books published in the past few years.

According to Tarone (2005), speaking is the most difficult skill to acquire. However, motivating the students to start speaking and taking part in the communicative activities of the class would not be as easy as it sounds and without practicing this skill (speaking) one would not be able to learn how to speak. In other words, since speaking proficiency can be improved through experiential processes, the more silent a student the later will he start qualifying as a good speaker of the target language. Therefore, the question is how to motivate the learners to communicate and how to increase their willingness to speak and communicate in the second language. WTC has been a major goal for the researchers of the foreign languages. For instance, Brown (2002) referred to the lack of WTC as shyness.

For Su-Ja Kang (2004), WTC is one of the most important issues in EFL learning and instruction especially due to the rising emphasis on communication. Zakahi and McCroskey (1989) also deemed WTC as an important factor due to the communicative nature of any language. Moreover, Olsen and Kagan (1992) believed that WTC is an important part of becoming a proficient speaker of the target language which in effect is the final goal of most language learners. Thus communication and communicative approaches and methods have always been more emphasized and recommended in this arena, of which TBLT could be regarded as one of the most salient.

Task Based Language Teaching and Learning has always been in the limelight ever since it was proposed in response to the language theories which had a rather structural view towards language learning such as GTM and audiolingualism. Unlike the methods that existed before it, TBLT looked at second language learning just like the first language acquisition basing it on communicative tasks and exercises rather than structural ones, namely grammar and vocabulary exercises. According to East (2012), TBLT is basically a change of focus from teachers into learners. All the tasks given to the learners are intended to ensure their qualification in speaking and enable them to communicate effectively in the second language which is the ultimate goal of this method. Ramirez (1995) regarded this method as the one that intends to produce native like speakers of the language with high accuracy. Rahimpour (2008) also counted it as an effective way of learning a language. One of the important ways through which the students become better motivated to communicate with each other and help one another to learn the material in a better way is called cooperative learning.

Cooperative Learning has been defined as working together as a group on a common task in which everyone has to help the other members of the team to perform their share of the task in order to achieve a certain goal. According to Roger and Johnson (1998), in cooperative learning every individual has to have a certain sense of cooperation, commitment and responsibility to help the whole group in order to achieve a common goal. In other words, in cooperative learning the strong points of every learner makes up for the weak points of the other members of the group and the success of the group will mean that everyone will enjoy the feeling of victory (Woolfolk, 2001). Cohen and Willis (1985) also believed that cooperative learning would benefit the students in different ways: a strong social system that encourages respect among the members resulting in a cozy and warm environment inside the class where every student feels comfortable and safe to communicate. Learners are also able to help one another improve their learning through paired- work activities.

According to Phipps (1999), in paired-work groups, the two members work with each other without the help of a teacher to achieve a certain goal. Tsui (1995) believed that the biggest benefit of such groups is the feeling of freedom that learners experience without worrying about being corrected by the teacher. The lack of fear of making more complicated sentences which will lead to a higher self-confidence for the learners while participating in class activities. Another upside of the pair work activities is that the pupils will have more time communicating with each other in the second language while in class activities this opportunity has to be shared among the whole members of the class. Nevertheless, a lot of students tend to remain silent and not to take part in the communicative activities of the class. A lot of them tend to resort to L1 in the pair work or group work activities due to the lack of necessary communicative skills. Also when they are outside the classroom, they do not speak in the target language with their peers or their instructors because they lack sufficient self-confidence or simply find it unnecessary or even absurd to speak in L2 while not in class (Tarone, 2005).

As a result of this, their speaking proficiency does not promote as fast as it should. Thus the more the learners speak in L2, the faster and the better they will be able to communicate in the target language. Therefore, motivating the learners to communicate in the target language is of utmost importance. Although lots of research has been done in this field, there has been no case of studies done on heightening the learners' willingness to communicate through paired-work vs cooperative learning both being implemented through task based language teaching. Consequently, this research could be beneficial to a number of people in different educational fields. Teachers, syllabus designers and even students are the ones who can benefit from this study. In order to fulfill the purposes of the study, the following questions were addressed:

1. Does cooperative task-based instruction have any significant effect on the EFL learners' WTC?
2. Does paired-work task-based instruction have any significant effect on the EFL learners' WTC?
3. Is there any significant difference between the effect of cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction on the EFL learners' WTC?
4. Does cooperative task-based instruction have any significant effect on the EFL learners' speaking ability?
5. Does paired-work task-based instruction have any significant effect on the EFL learners' speaking ability?
6. Is there any significant difference between the effect of cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction on the EFL learners' speaking ability?

Method

Design

This study utilized a quasi-experimental pretest and posttest group design with non-random assignment of the participants into two experimental groups (cooperative group and paired-work group). There were two independent variables, namely, cooperative task-based

instruction and paired-work task based instruction, and there were two dependent variables which were the willingness to communicate and speaking ability. The rationale for considering this study as a quasi-experimental design is that two experimental groups had to be selected (not randomized), due to the fact that random selection and assignment of these groups were not feasible.

Participants

Sixty male intermediate students studying English at a foreign language institute in Tehran (Iran) took part in this study. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 25 years old. Their mother tongue was Persian. According to the results of the Nelsen proficiency test, these participants were at the same level (intermediate) of English language proficiency. They were assigned to two groups, each of which included thirty subjects.

Assessments and Measures

The following measures were used in the present study:

Nelson Test

This test incorporated four parts: reading comprehension, cloze passage, vocabulary, and pronunciation. All parts were in the form of multiple-choice questions. There were 50 items and the time allotted was 45 minutes. In a pilot study, the reliability index for Nelson test was measured 0.91 via KR-21.

Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire

This instrument measures a person's willingness to initiate communication. The face validity of the instrument is strong, and results of extensive research indicate the predictive validity of the instrument. Alpha reliability estimates for this instrument have ranged from .85 to well above .90. It's a likert-type questionnaire made by McCroskey (1992). In this questionnaire, the participants of the study were asked to indicate the percentage (0 = Never to 100 = Always) of times they would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Of the 20 items on the instrument, 8 were used to distract attention from the scored items. The other twelve items generated a total score, 4 context-type scores, and 3 receiver-type scores. The sub-scores generate lower reliability estimates, but generally high enough to be used in research studies. The reliability of this questionnaire was calculated in a pilot study and it showed high reliability about 0.84 Cronbach's Alpha.

PET Speaking Test

It consists of four parts. In part 1, each candidate interacts with the interlocutor, and it takes 2-3 minutes. In part 2, the candidates interact with each other. Making and responding to suggestions, discussing alternatives, making recommendations and negotiating agreement. Part 3 is the extended turn, and the candidates respond to photographs and manage discourse in a longer turn. And finally part 4 is a general conversation, and candidates talk about their likes/dislikes, preferences, experiences, habits, etc. A PET proficiency test including; 35 items in 5 sections for reading comprehension, 7 items in 3 sections for writing, 25 items in 4 sections for listening, 25 items in 4 sections for speaking. Also, in speaking test, the researcher scored the participants' speaking test based on Weir's (1993) Analytic Speaking Criteria ranging from 0 to 20. Based on this checklist and the scale, speaking should be scored on the basis of five factors: vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation and interactional strategies.

These rating were then weighed and added up to determine a final score. Moreover, the reliability value for speaking pre-test and post-test turned out to be 0.82 and 0.83 respectively using Pearson correlation coefficient (inter-rater reliability) between two raters in the pilot tests.

Procedure

In the first phase, the researcher selected 60 intermediate level students who studied English language at Sadat Institute. After choosing the sample, the students were divided into two groups, one to be taught by cooperative instructions and the other by paired-work instruction. The researcher employed convenient sampling in this research. So the Nelson test was given to the students of both cooperative and paired-work groups to ensure that both groups were at the same level of English language proficiency. After taking the test, independent sample t-test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference ($t(58) = .85, p = .39, p > .05$) in the Nelson scores for the cooperative ($\bar{x} = 32.87$) and paired-work ($\bar{x} = 33.93$) groups. It was concluded that the students in the cooperative and paired-work groups were approximately at the same level (intermediate) of English language proficiency. To measure the students' degree of willingness to communicate, the researcher handed out the WTC questionnaires to participants of each group as the pretest before the beginning of the treatment. They were asked to indicate the percentage (0 = Never to 100 = Always) of times they would choose to communicate in each type of situation.

Additionally, to determine the participants' speaking ability, a PET proficiency test was given to both groups. All members of both groups participated in the test. In order to be objective in rating the speaking ability, checklist of speaking proficiency rating was used. Scoring was based on Weir's (1993) Analytic Speaking Criteria ranging from 0 to 20. In each part, based on the criteria in the checklist of speaking proficiency, interviewee's performance was rated separately on scales that pertain to interactional strategies, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and pronunciation. These rating were then weighed and added up to determine a final score. It is worth mentioning that all the conversations were tape-recorded so that the two raters had sufficient amount of time to score the speaking ability of the learners. Both raters were experienced teachers with more than 10 years of experience in teaching different levels of English course books in New-interchange, Cambridge English for students and Top Notch in different English Language Learning institutes in Tehran.

After the pretest, the researcher performed twelve sessions as instructional phase in order to enhance the speaking ability and WTC of the participants. The instructions which were used in this study were adapted from TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching). Cooperative instruction was implemented with the experimental group and before the start of the treatment they were divided into six groups. During all the sessions lessons were practiced as authentic and meaningful speaking related tasks. In the paired-work group the same lessons and tasks were covered except for the fact that the students worked in pairs. Cooperative and paired work instructions were practiced during all sessions. To measure the effectiveness of treatment, the same WTC questionnaires and the PET speaking test were administered again as the post-test to participants. Then the researcher compared the results of each participant's pre-test and post-test to see whether the application of the tasks had affected the learners' WTC and speaking ability.

Results

Reliability Statistics

As Table 1 shows, the reliability index for Nelson test including 50 items was measured 0.91 via KR-21. Moreover, the reliability value for speaking test turned out to be 0.82 using Pearson correlation coefficient (inter-rater reliability) between two raters. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability for willingness to communicate questionnaire comprising 20 items was assessed 0.84. Therefore, all three instruments used in this study have acceptable reliability value.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics of the Instruments

Instrument	No. of items	Reliability Method	Reliability Index
Nelson	50	KR-21	0.91
Speaking Pre-test	1	Inter-rater	0.82
Speaking Post-test	1	Inter-rater	0.83
Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire	20	Cronbach's Alpha	0.84

The first research question of this study aimed at exploring the usefulness of cooperative task-based instruction on the EFL learners' speaking ability. And the second research question concerned with the effectiveness of paired-work task-based instruction on the EFL learners' speaking ability. Paired samples *t*-test was utilized to examine these two research questions. The related descriptive statistics (Table 2) were prepared before explaining the results of *t*-test. Note that two raters scored the recorded speech of the students on the speaking pre-test and the average of the two raters' scores was computed for the main analysis.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Scores in the Cooperative and Paired-work Groups (Average of the two Raters; Scores out of 20)

Group	Time	Mean	<i>N</i>	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cooperative	Post-test	15.467	30	1.4735	.2690
	Pre-test	13.933	30	1.5742	.2874

Paired-work	Post-test	15.967	30	1.5588	.2846
	Pre-test	14.267	30	1.9286	.3521

Table 2 displays the mean and standard deviation of the post-test speaking scores ($\bar{x} = 15.46$, $SD = 1.47$) and pre-test scores ($\bar{x} = 13.93$, $SD = 1.57$) in the cooperative group who have received cooperative task-based instruction. Moreover, the table represents the mean and standard deviation of the post-test speaking scores ($\bar{x} = 15.96$, $SD = 1.55$) and pre-test scores ($\bar{x} = 14.26$, $SD = 1.92$) in the paired-work group who have experienced paired-work task-based instruction. The results of paired samples *t*-test comparing the pre-test and post-test speaking measures in the two groups of cooperative and paired-work are set forth in Table 3.

Table 3

Paired Samples Test for Pre-test and Post-test of Speaking Ability in Two Groups

Group	Gained Score	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
Cooperative	1.533	1.473	.983	2.083	5.700	29	.000
Paired-work	1.700	1.330	1.203	2.196	7.001	29	.000

According to Table 3, paired samples *t*-test results indicated that there was a statistically significant increase ($t(29) = 5.70$, $p = .000$, $p < .05$) in speaking scores from pre-test ($\bar{x} = 13.93$) to post-test ($\bar{x} = 15.46$) in the cooperative group. In fact, the gained score in speaking score was 1.53 (out of 20) with a .95% confidence interval ranging from .98 to 2.08. Accordingly, the first null hypothesis of the study that proposes, “Cooperative task-based instruction has no significant effect on improving the EFL learners' speaking ability” was rejected and therefore it was claimed that cooperative task-based instruction affects the EFL learners' speaking ability (see Figure 1). Equally, as Table 3 shows, paired samples *t*-test detected a statistically significant increase ($t(29) = 7.00$, $p = .000$, $p < .05$) in speaking measures from pre-test ($\bar{x} = 14.26$) to post-test ($\bar{x} = 15.96$) in the paired-work group. The gained score was 1.70 (out of 20) with a .95% confidence interval ranging from 1.20 to 2.19. Consequently, the second null hypothesis of the current study that states, “Paired-work task-based instruction has no significant effect on improving the EFL learners' speaking ability” was **rejected** and therefore it was claimed that paired-work task-based instruction develops the EFL learners' speaking ability (see Figure 2).

The aim of the third research question of this study was to investigate if there is a significant difference between the effect of cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction on the EFL learners' speaking ability. The researcher conducted independent sample *t*-test (Table 4) to answer the third research question.

Table 4

Independent Samples T-test for Speaking Ability (Pre-test)

Levene's Test for Variances				T-test for Means			
Factor	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	
Equal variances assumed	1.671	.201	.733	58	.466	.333	
Equal variances not assumed			.733	55.763	.466	.333	

A quick glance at Table 4 hands on that the equality of variance assumption was met as the significance level associated with Leven's test (.20) exceeded the selected significance level (.05) for this research. Also, the table notifies that the *t*-value and the significance level ($t(58) = .73, p = .46, p > .05$) are indicative of no statistically significant difference in speaking ability scores for the cooperative ($\bar{x} = 13.93$) and paired-work ($\bar{x} = 14.26$) groups on the pre-test, in which the *t*-observed (.73) was less than the *t*-critical (2.00). So, the researcher found that the students in the two groups were at the same level of speaking ability before the course commenced. Additionally, the researcher carried out another independent *t*-test (Table 5) comparing cooperative and paired-work groups' speaking scores on the post-test.

Table 5

Independent Samples T-test for Speaking (Post-test)

Levene's Test for Variances				T-test for Means			
Factor	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	
Equal variances assumed	.397	.531	1.277	58	.207	.5000	
Equal variances not assumed			1.277	57.817	.207	.5000	

As appeared in Table 5, the significance level for Leven's test (.53) was below .05 indicating that our data favored the assumption of equality of variances. Besides, as observable in Table 5, the results of independent *t*-test showed that there was no statistically significant difference ($t(58) = 1.27, p = .20, p > .05$) in speaking scores for cooperative ($\bar{x} = 15.46$) and paired-work ($\bar{x} = 15.96$) groups on the post-test. Moreover, *t*-value (1.27) was smaller than the *t*-critical (1.98). Hence, the third null hypothesis of the study that states, "There is no significant difference between cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction to enhance Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability" was **retained**, and it was declared that there is no significant difference between cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction to enhance Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. A line chart is prepared to graphically manifest the results (Figure 1). As the figure shows, the means of speaking ability for the two groups of cooperative and paired-work rises sharply from pre-test to post-test. Besides, Figure 1 demonstrates that the means of speaking ability for the students in the two groups of cooperative and paired-work are almost the same on both pre-test and post-test.

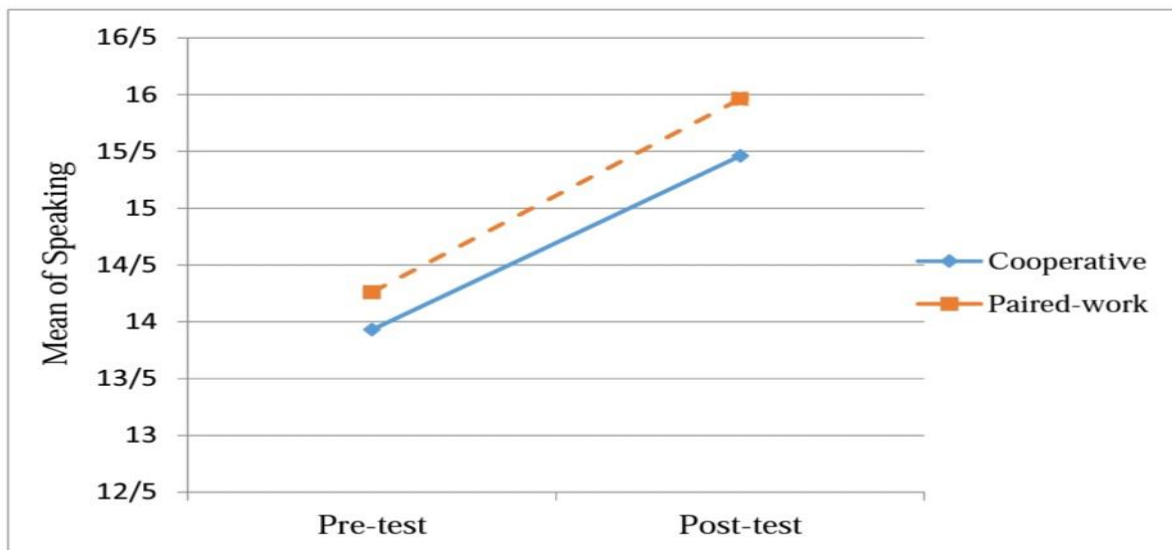


Figure 1

Two Groups' Means of Speaking Ability (Pre-test & Post-test)

The fourth research question dealt with the impact of cooperative task-based instruction on the EFL learners' willingness to communicate. In addition, the fifth research question was about the influence of paired-work task-based instruction on the EFL learners' willingness to communicate. With the purpose of investigating these research questions, paired samples *t*-test was used. Before discussing the results of *t*-test, the related descriptive statistics (Table 6) is presented. It should be mentioned here that two raters scored the recorded speech of the students on the speaking post-test and the main analysis was done with the average of the two raters' scores.

Table 6 shows the mean and standard deviation of willingness to communicate scores on the post-test ($\bar{x} = 61.81, SD = 12.97$) and pre-test scores ($\bar{x} = 46.70, SD = 8.03$) in the cooperative group. In addition, the table display the mean and standard deviation of the post-test willingness to communicate scores ($\bar{x} = 49.04, SD = 10.50$) and pre-test scores ($\bar{x} = 44.32,$

$SD = 12.40$) in the paired-work group who have experienced. Table 7 manifested the results of paired samples t -test for comparing the pre-test and post-test willingness to communicate measures in each group.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Willingness to Communicate Scores in the Cooperative and Paired-work Groups

Group	Time	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cooperative	Post-test	61.810	30	12.972	2.368
	Pre-test	46.700	30	8.039	1.467
Paired-work	Post-test	49.045	30	10.506	1.918
	Pre-test	44.328	30	12.400	2.263

As a glance at Table 7 shows, paired samples t -test found a statistically significant increase ($t(29) = 9.14, p = .000, p < .05$) in willingness to communicate scores from pre-test ($\bar{x} = 46.70, SD = 8.03$) to post-test ($\bar{x} = 61.81, SD = 12.97$) in the cooperative group. Moreover, the table clarifies that the gained score in willingness to communicate was 15.11 (out of 100) with a .95% confidence interval ranging from 11.73 to 18.48. Therefore, the fourth null hypothesis that reads, “Cooperative task-based instruction has no significant effect on improving the EFL learners' willingness to communicate” is **rejected** and the researcher could claim that cooperative task-based instruction influences the EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

Table 7

Paired Samples Test for Pre-test and Post-test of Willingness to Communicate in Two Groups

Group	Gained Score	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
Cooperative	15.110	9.049	11.730	18.489	9.146	29	.000
Paired-work	4.716	5.359	2.715	6.718	4.820	29	.000

Equally, t -test (Table 7) indicated that there was a statistically significant increase ($t(29) = 4.82, p = .000, p < .05$) in willingness to communicate measures from pre-test ($\bar{x} = 44.32, SD = 12.40$) to post-test ($\bar{x} = 49.04, SD = 10.50$) in the paired-work group. The results showed that the gained score was 4.71 (out of 100) with a .95% confidence interval ranging from 2.71 to 6.71. Thus, the fifth null hypothesis that says, “Paired-work task-based

instruction has no significant effect on improving the EFL learners' willingness to communicate" was rejected and it was claimed that paired-work task-based instruction enhances the EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

The purpose of the sixth research question was to see if there is a significant difference between the effect of cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction on the EFL learners' willingness to communicate. To do so, independent sample *t*-test was employed. The results of independent samples *t*-test for comparing the willingness to communicate scores in the two groups on the pre-test are laid out in Table 8.

Table 8

Independent Samples T-test for Willingness to Communicate (Pre-test)

Levene's Test for Variances				T-test for Means			
Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	
Equal variances assumed	5.335	.024	.879	58	.383	2.371	
Equal variances not assumed			.879	49.718	.384	2.371	

As evident from Table 8, the equality of variances assumption was met since the significance level for Leven's test (.10) was greater than than.05. Also, as represented in Table 8, independent *t*-test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference ($t(58) = .87, p = .38, p > .05$) in willingness to communicate scores for the cooperative ($\bar{x} = 46.70$) and paired-work ($\bar{x} = 44.32$) groups on the pre-test, and the *t*-value was less than the *t*-critical of 2.00. Therefore, it could be discovered that the students in the two groups had the same level of willingness to communicate at the outset of the course. Further, another independent *t*-test (Table 9) was run to compare cooperative and paired-work groups' willingness to communicate scores on the post-test.

Table 9

Independent Samples T-test for Willingness to Communicate (Post-test)

Levene's Test for Variances				T-test for Means			
Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	
Equal variances assumed	.962	.331	4.188	58	.000	12.76500	

Equal variances not assumed	4.188	55.601	.000	12.76500
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Table 9 demonstrates that the significance level of .33 associated with Leven’s test is lower than .05 revealing that the assumption of equal of variances is met. Also, on the basis of Table 9, independent *t*-test detected a statistically significant difference ($t(58) = 4.18, p = .000, p < .05$) in willingness to communicate measures for cooperative ($\bar{x} = 61.81$) and paired-work ($\bar{x} = 49.04$) groups on the post-test, with the *t*-value of 4.18 higher than the *t*-critical of 2.00. Subsequently, the sixth null hypothesis that mentions, “There is no significant difference between cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction to enhance Iranian EFL learners’ willingness to communicate” was rejected, and therefore it was claimed that cooperative task-based instruction is more effective than paired-work task-based instruction on enhancing Iranian EFL learners’ willingness to communicate. Figure 2 shows the results of the two groups’ willingness to communicate scores both on the pre-test and post-test in graphically. The figure manifests that there is almost a steeped rise from pre-test to post-test in both groups. Furthermore, as observable from the figure, on the post-test, the students in the cooperative group have repressed considerably higher level of willingness to communicate than those in the paired-work group, in the condition that the two groups revealed the same willingness to communicate level at the beginning of the study.

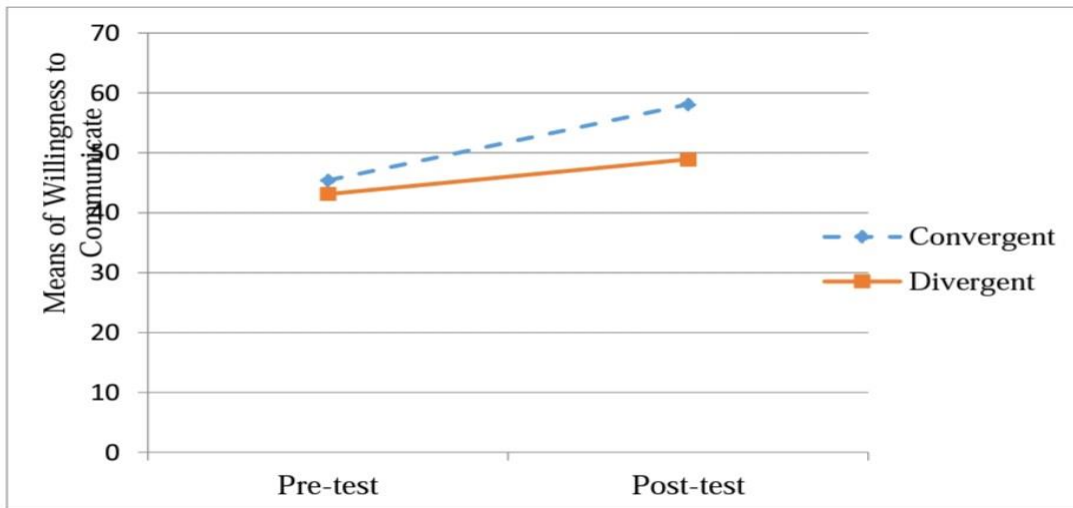


Figure 2

Two Groups’ Means on Willingness to Communicate Post-test

Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions on the EFL learners' speaking ability and willingness to communicate. To answer the questions, first 60 male intermediate level students were conveniently sampled. Then the subjects were randomly assigned to cooperative group and paired-work group, each of which included 30 subjects. To ensure the homogeneity of the participants Nelson proficiency

test was administered. As pre-test, WTC questionnaire and the PET speaking test were administered to two groups before beginning of the treatment. After the pretest, the researcher performed twelve sessions as an instructional phase in order to enhance the speaking ability and WTC of participants. The instruction which was used in this study was adapted from TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching).

In both the cooperative and paired-work groups the same lessons and tasks were covered except for the fact that in cooperative group the participants were divided in to six groups but in paired-work group the participants worked in pairs. To measure the effectiveness of treatment, the WTC questionnaires and the PET speaking test administered again as the post-test to participants. Then the researcher compared the results of pre-test and post-test scores to see whether the application of the tasks had affected the learners' WTC and speaking ability. According to the statistical mean scores gained from pre and post test scores, it was found that not only both the cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions could enhance the learners' speaking ability, but also their willingness to communicate was increased. But regarding the sixth question, the findings gained from independent samples *t*-test revealed that cooperative task-based instruction is more effective than paired-work task-based instruction on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

These findings of the current study lend support to Murad's (2009) study that investigated the effect of task-based language teaching (TBLT) program for improving the speaking ability of Palestinian secondary learners and their attitudes towards English. He statistically proved that the TBLT program improved noticeably the speaking ability of the learners in the experimental group and their attitudes towards English were positively affected.

Elsewhere, Yashima, Zenuk and Shimizu (2004) investigated Japanese adolescent learners' willingness to communicate in English as a second language. Their findings revealed that those learners who had higher scores in willingness to communicate tended to communicate more with their peers and with their teacher, and they asked questions or talked more frequently to teacher outside class.

This study is also in line with Sae-Ong 's (2010) study that examined the use of task-based learning and group work incorporating in the development of English speaking. The participants were 40. They were randomly sampled. The instruments used for collecting data were seven lesson plans, a pre-post speaking test, a teacher's observation form, learners' self-assessment forms, and group work assessment and etc. After the study, the researcher found that the English speaking ability of Students was significantly higher at the .05 level.

Conclusion

The present study aimed at probing the effectiveness of cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions on the EFL learners' speaking ability and willingness to communicate. Carrying out this research, it was concluded that both cooperative task-based and paired-work task-based instruction influence the EFL learners' speaking ability. However, the researcher of the present study came to the conclusion that the cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction improves the Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability almost equally. Furthermore, the researcher concluded that both cooperative and paired-work task-based instruction enhance the EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Meanwhile, it was concluded that the

cooperative task-based instruction is more efficient than paired-work task-based instruction to develop Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate.

Nowadays it is believed that language learning is synonymous with mastering at speaking skill. Brown and Yule (1983) assert that most of the language learners consider speaking skills as the criteria for knowing a language. Students assess their progress in learning a second language based on the extent of their effective participation in spoken communicative activities. In fact, speaking is regarded as an extremely important means of communication. To address this, most of the material developers attempt to incorporate tasks for improving students' speaking ability in commercial course books (Barron, 2003). In other words, since teaching effective speaking has been a long challenge in English language classes, researchers and educators have always sought to develop strategies to reinforce learning of the four language skills and speaking skill in particular.

Regarding the present study, the researcher benefited from task-based instruction that puts tasks as the core unit of the methodological focus. Therefore, two kinds of task-based instruction, cooperative and paired-work were introduced for planning and teaching of speaking skills. In other words, the researcher assessed the effect of cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions on the EFL learners' speaking ability and their willingness to communicate. The major conclusions of the study can be summarized as follows: 1. Significant increase in speaking ability of both the cooperative and paired-work groups was observed, 2. It was concluded that there is no significant difference between cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions to enhance Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability, 3. Based on the gained results, the subjects in both the cooperative and paired-work groups showed willingness to communicate, but it was determined by the mean-comparison that the subjects in cooperative group showed more willingness to communicate than those of the paired-work group, 4. Finally, since meaningful differences were observed in pre and post test scores due to the treatment effect, it is concluded that the subjects took advantages of the task-based instruction.

Accordingly, English teachers, language learners and material developers can use the findings of this study. Teachers and syllabus designers may benefit from the findings of the study when constructing educational programs to make a more effective teaching-learning environment in schools and institutions. In other words, the results of the study may concentrate the material developers' attention on placing special task-based activities sections in speaking materials. In addition, since the cooperative and paired-work activities are prepared based on task-based instruction, learners need to be involved in oral interaction to complete tasks. In fact, the learning process should be student-centered. This changes the role of teacher from an authority figure to a discussion organizer, helper, facilitator and language advisor.

In interpretation of the result of the study, the following limitations should be kept in mind: 1. As the language school was not able to offer me any male courses during the requested hours, the researcher was obliged to work with male students only, 2. It was not possible to make sure if learners would answer the questions of the WTC questionnaire honestly. This problem was completely out of the researcher's control, 3. Although students were supposed to participate all the sessions, there were the ones who did not do so.

Other researchers who are interested in the subject of speaking skill can replicate this study taking one of the following suggestions in the future studies: 1. This study was done with intermediate EFL learners. Other researches need to be conducted focusing on other levels of

proficiency, 2. It is proposed to investigate the role of cooperative and paired-work task-based instructions in other language skills (writing, listening, and reading), 3. Future studies may assess the usefulness of similar tasks on different speaking genres, 4. The number of subjects was 60 students. Future studies can be conducted with larger sample size of participants, 5. The participants who took part in this study were males. Since gender plays an important role in second language learning investigations, therefore other studies need to be conducted with males in different educational settings, 6. The participants of the present study were the learners who are studying at a foreign language institute in Tehran (Iran). More researches can be performed on the learners of foreign language institutes in all cities of Iran and comparing them would be beneficial, 7. Further studies can be conducted on the university students.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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