

# Using Cooperative Learning Technique to Increase English Language Confidence among Grade 3 Students

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## **Abstract.**

This action research investigates the effectiveness of cooperative learning techniques in enhancing English language confidence among third-grade students. The study involved 124 students aged 8-9 years from four classrooms who participated in an 8-week intervention program implementing various cooperative learning strategies including Think-Pair-Share, Jigsaw, and Numbered Heads Together. Data were collected through pre- and post-confidence surveys, classroom observations, and performance assessments. Results indicated a significant 45% increase in students' self-reported confidence levels when speaking English, with particularly strong improvements in willingness to participate in classroom activities and peer interactions. The findings suggest that cooperative learning techniques create a supportive learning environment that reduces anxiety and promotes active engagement in English language learning.

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning, English language confidence, Elementary education, Action research, Classroom intervention

## **1. Introduction**

English language learning in Thailand's primary education faces significant challenges, particularly in developing students' confidence to use the language actively. Third-grade students, typically aged 8-9 years, are at a critical developmental stage where peer influence and social learning play crucial roles in their educational experience. Despite the emphasis on communicative English teaching in the national curriculum, many students exhibit reluctance to participate in English-speaking activities due to fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and anxiety about peer judgment.

Traditional teacher-centered approaches often fail to address these affective barriers, leaving students passive recipients of language instruction rather than active participants. The problem becomes more pronounced in large classrooms where individual attention is limited and opportunities for meaningful practice are scarce. This situation has led to a generation of students who may possess theoretical knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary but lack the confidence to use the language in real communicative situations.

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

This study seeks to:

- Measure the impact of cooperative learning techniques on students' English language confidence

- Identify effective cooperative learning strategies for elementary English language instruction
- Provide practical recommendations for implementing cooperative learning in primary English classrooms

## 2. Literature Review

Cooperative learning, rooted in social constructivist theories, emphasizes structured peer interaction as a vehicle for learning (Kagan & Kagan, 2015). Unlike competitive or individualistic learning structures, cooperative learning requires students to work together toward shared goals, promoting positive interdependence and individual accountability. Language learning confidence significantly influences students' willingness to communicate and their overall language acquisition success (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperative learning in English language classrooms. Zheng (2021) found that cooperative learning significantly improved both achievement and attitudes toward learning English among elementary students in Asian contexts. Liang et al.'s (2023) systematic review revealed consistent positive effects on language proficiency and learner autonomy. Specific cooperative learning strategies such as Think-Pair-Share, Jigsaw, and Numbered Heads Together have been successfully adapted for language classrooms, providing structured opportunities for practice and peer feedback.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed an action research design with a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative measures of confidence levels with qualitative observations of classroom interactions and student experiences. The action research cycle included planning, implementation, observation, and reflection phases conducted over an 8-week period.

### 3.2 Experimental Group

The experimental group consisted of 124 third-grade students (62 male, 62 female) aged 8-9 years from four classrooms at a public primary school in Bangkok, Thailand. Written informed consent was obtained from parents, and the study received approval from the school's research ethics committee.

### 3.3 Cooperative Learning Intervention

The intervention integrated three primary cooperative learning techniques into the regular English curriculum:

**Table 1: Cooperative Learning Techniques Implemented**

Technique	Description	Frequency
Think-Pair-Share	Students think individually, discuss with a partner, then share with the class	3 times per week

Technique	Description	Frequency
Jigsaw	Students become experts on different topics and teach peers	2 times per week
Numbered Heads Together	Groups discuss questions, random member presents answer	2 times per week

Source: Author's own research

### 3.4 Data Collection

Multiple data sources were employed: (1) English Language Confidence Survey adapted from Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016), administered pre- and post-intervention; (2) Structured classroom observations documenting participation frequency and behavioral indicators; (3) Speaking performance assessments at weeks 0, 4, and 8; (4) Weekly student reflection sessions.

## 4. Results

The English Language Confidence Survey revealed statistically significant improvements across all measured dimensions. The overall confidence score increased from a mean of 2.7 (SD = 0.7) at baseline to 3.9 (SD = 0.6) post-intervention, representing a 45% increase ( $t(123) = 12.87, p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2: Changes in English Language Confidence Levels**

Confidence Dimension	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean
Willingness to Speak	2.5	3.8
Speaking Anxiety (reversed)	2.3	3.7
Self-Perceived Competence	3.1	4.2
<b>Overall Confidence</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.9</b>

Source: Author's own research ( $n = 124$ )

Classroom observations documented substantial behavioral changes. Voluntary participation in whole-class activities increased from an average of 26 students per session (21%) at baseline to 89 students (72%) by week 8. Students demonstrated longer speaking turns, increased use of complete sentences, and greater willingness to self-correct errors. Qualitative analysis revealed consistent themes: reduced fear of mistakes, appreciation for peer support, increased enjoyment of English class, and a sense of belonging to learning teams.

## 5. Discussion

The findings provide robust evidence that cooperative learning techniques significantly enhance English language confidence among third-grade students. The 45% increase in overall confidence scores from 124 students, coupled with observable behavioral changes, suggests

the intervention successfully addressed affective barriers that typically impede young learners' language development.

Several mechanisms explain the observed gains. Structured peer interaction created psychologically safe environments where students could take linguistic risks without fear of embarrassment. Think-Pair-Share particularly allowed rehearsal with supportive partners before public presentation, effectively lowering the affective filter. The positive interdependence fostered by Jigsaw transformed classroom dynamics from competitive to collaborative, enhancing students' sense of competence. Peer scaffolding through heterogeneous grouping enabled more proficient students to support those needing assistance, operationalizing the zone of proximal development.

Practical implications include the importance of teacher preparation through training in cooperative learning methods, heterogeneous grouping strategies, gradual introduction of techniques, balanced accountability systems, and cultural sensitivity. In collectivist cultures like Thailand, group-oriented learning aligns well with cultural values, potentially enhancing effectiveness.

## 6. Conclusion

This action research demonstrates that cooperative learning techniques offer a powerful approach to building English language confidence among third-grade students. The significant improvements in self-reported confidence, observable behavioral changes, and positive student experiences collectively indicate that cooperative learning addresses both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning. For the 124 students who participated, cooperative learning opened pathways to English language confidence they had not previously experienced.

English language education in Thailand stands to benefit substantially from systematic integration of cooperative learning techniques. By transforming classrooms from teacher-centered to student-centered collaborative learning communities, we can address the persistent problem of learner confidence that has long constrained communicative competence. Future research should investigate long-term stability of confidence gains, optimal group composition strategies, and transferability to other language use contexts.

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