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GROUP WORK IN EFL: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ORAL PERFORMANCE AND SELF-PERCEPTION

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Abstract: This study explored the potential impact of group work on the oral performance and self-perception of intermediate high school students learning English as a foreign language. Sixteen participants completed individual and group picture description tasks, with their oral performances recorded and analysed. Self-perception and oral output were assessed through pre- and post-task questionnaires. The findings tentatively suggest that group work may be associated with improvements in oral performance, with three out of four groups producing comparatively stronger output in the group task. Patterns in self-perception accuracy were also observed, with students appearing to show greater alignment between their self-assessments and actual performance in the group setting. Common linguistic errors, such as subject-verb agreement and first-language interference, appeared to be less frequent in group recordings, though this comparison should be treated with caution, given the methodological differences between the two tasks. These preliminary findings suggest that collaborative learning may have the potential to support linguistic accuracy and fluency, and could positively influence students' self-perception while reducing foreign language anxiety. The study offers tentative evidence for the possible value of incorporating group work in English language teaching, though larger and more controlled studies are needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Keywords: *self-perception, group work, oral performance, English language teaching, collaborative learning, linguistic analysis, fluency, accuracy*

1 Introduction

Group work has long been recognised as a valuable pedagogical tool in English language learning, particularly for developing communicative competence and fostering collaborative skills (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; Johnson et al., 2014; Long & Porter, 1985). Research has suggested that collaborative tasks provide learners with more opportunities to engage in meaningful interaction, negotiate meaning, and practice language in authentic contexts (Long & Porter, 1985; McDonough, 2004; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). These benefits have made group work a widely used approach in communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning frameworks (Cranton, 1996; Kasim, 2015; Long, 2015). However, while the general advantages of group work in foreign language acquisition are comparatively well documented, its specific impact on learners' self-perception and oral performance remains underexplored, particularly among intermediate-level high school learners in European EFL contexts.

In addition to promoting interaction, group work has been linked to reducing foreign language anxiety (FLA), a major barrier to oral language use (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 2017). Studies have shown that a supportive group environment can alleviate students' fear of making mistakes, allowing them to communicate more confidently and potentially boosting their motivation alongside task engagement (Ha Thi Yen Nhi et al., 2022; Horwitz et al., 1986; Tóth, 2007). Despite these findings, limited research has examined how group work influences students' accuracy in self-assessment — that is, whether students' perceptions of their linguistic performance align with their actual output when working collaboratively versus individually. Addressing this gap is important, as accurate self-perception is closely tied to learner autonomy and motivation (Ellis, 2003; Pajares, 1996).

This study aims to contribute to this area by investigating the potential impact of group work on both oral performance and self-perception among intermediate high school students learning English as a foreign language in Hungary. Specifically, the study examines whether collaborative activities may lead to improved linguistic accuracy and fluency, and whether learners' self-assessments are more aligned with their actual performance in group settings compared to individual tasks. By analysing students' oral production and self-perceptions through pre- and post-task questionnaires, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how group work may be used to improve language outcomes in ELT classrooms.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: Does group work lead to improved linguistic accuracy and fluency in oral performance compared to individual tasks among intermediate high school EFL learners?

RQ2: Are learners' self-assessments more closely aligned with their actual oral performance in group settings compared to individual tasks?

RQ3: What attitudes do learners hold toward group work, and how might these relate to their oral performance and self-perception?

2 Theoretical Background

Group work is a widely recognised pedagogical technique in English Language Teaching, frequently implemented for its reported benefits. Collaborative learning environments may enhance language acquisition by providing learners with increased opportunities for active language use compared to traditional teacher-centred settings. Research has suggested that students exhibit higher

levels of engagement and motivation when participating in group work (Brown, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Johnson et al., 2014; Kasim, 2015; Long, 2015; Maley, 2019; McDonough, 2004; Odehova et al., 2022; Situmorang, 2021; Swain & Lapkin, 2001). Swain's Output Hypothesis (2000) emphasises the importance of language production for language learning, as it requires learners to process language more deeply, thereby encouraging active cognitive engagement. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) also underscores the critical role of social interaction in language acquisition, positing that learners acquire language through meaningful communication with others. Group work is therefore considered an effective tool to foster learner interaction and provide opportunities for active language use.

However, group work is not without its challenges. Pica and Doughty (1985) identified the potential for learners to reinforce one another's linguistic errors during group interactions, while Alfares (2017) noted that anxiety and uneven participation can diminish the overall effectiveness of group activities.

Self-assessment plays an important role in effective language learning, as it enables learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses, allowing for more targeted learning strategies. Ellis (2003) highlights the importance of self-assessment for developing metacognitive awareness, which enables learners to monitor their progress, set realistic goals, and take greater control of their learning journey. Pajares (1996) also links self-assessment with self-efficacy, suggesting that learners who accurately assess their abilities are more likely to develop strong beliefs in their ability to succeed, which in turn may enhance motivation. Kormos and Csizér (2014) argue that learners often struggle to assess their performance accurately, with overconfidence or anxiety influencing their self-perceptions, which are shaped by factors such as prior experiences, personality traits, and feedback from teachers and peers.

Bem's Self-Perception Theory (1972) proposes that individuals come to understand their own attitudes and abilities not primarily through introspection, but by observing their own behaviour and inferring internal states from it. Mohebi and Bailey (2020) examined the application of Bem's theory in educational contexts, arguing that learners' self-beliefs are not stable internal states but are continuously reconstructed through the observable evidence of their own participation in learning activities, underscoring the relevance of understanding self-assessment in language classrooms.

Group cohesion and interaction strategies play a significant role in the success of group work. Studies suggest that positive group dynamics can enhance learner motivation and performance. When learners feel connected and supported by their peers, they are more likely to participate actively, which can lead to improved language skills. Group cohesion may also reduce feelings of anxiety and isolation, which are common barriers to language learning. When learners perceive their group as a safe and encouraging space, they are more

willing to engage in communicative activities and experiment with new language structures (Chang, 2010; Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; Odehova et al., 2022; Poehner, 2009; Situmorang, 2021).

Group work's motivational impact depends on the quality of group interactions. Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) found that group activities can boost motivation in a positive, cooperative environment, but poor group dynamics — such as disengagement or uncooperative behavior from group members — can result in frustration and reduced motivation.

Code-switching, the practice of alternating between languages in conversation, is a common phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual contexts, including foreign language classrooms. While it can facilitate comprehension and communication, excessive reliance on the first language during group work can impede target language practice and development (Hancock, 1997; Narayan, 2023; Poplack, 1980; Sert, 2005).

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) refers to an individual's readiness to engage in communicative interactions in the target language. MacIntyre et al. (1998) conceptualise WTC as a dynamic construct influenced by multiple factors, such as linguistic self-confidence, perceived competence, and the social environment. Learners with high WTC are more likely to take advantage of communicative opportunities, initiate conversations, and actively participate in discussions, all of which are considered important for language development (Kruk, 2022; Lee & Lee, 2020).

In order to assess the impact of group work on learners' spoken output, it is necessary to establish the dimensions along which oral performance will be analysed in this study. Drawing on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) framework, one of the most widely used frameworks for evaluating spoken language production in SLA research (Housen & Kuiken, 2009; Révész et al., 2016; Skehan, 1998), oral performance in this study is examined across four dimensions: grammatical accuracy, fluency, vocabulary range, and pronunciation. Fluency is understood as the ability to produce spoken language smoothly and with minimal hesitation, and is closely associated with automaticity in language processing (Skehan, 1998). Grammatical accuracy refers to the degree to which learners' output conforms to target language norms, while lexical range captures the variety and sophistication of vocabulary deployed in production (Nation, 2001). Pronunciation is assessed in terms of intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy, consistent with contemporary ELT approaches that prioritise communicative effectiveness over conformity to a native speaker norm (Council of Europe, 2020; Jenkins, 2000). These four dimensions provide the analytical framework through which the oral recordings collected in this study are subsequently examined.

3 Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the potential impact of group work on oral performance and self-perception among intermediate high school learners of English as a foreign language. Mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of research phenomena (Dörnyei, 2003; Riazi & Farsani, 2024). The quantitative dimension involved frequency counts of grammatical errors, hesitations, and pronunciation difficulties, while the qualitative dimension drew on thematic analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses and observational field notes. The rationale for combining both approaches was to capture both the measurable aspects of oral performance and the more nuanced dimensions of learner attitudes and self-perception.

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design in which participants completed an individual oral production task followed by a group oral production task on the same topic. This within-subjects comparison allowed for an examination of differences in linguistic output and self-perception across the two conditions. It is acknowledged that this design is subject to order effects and that participants' familiarity with the topic during the second task may have influenced the findings; these limitations are discussed further in Section 6.

3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of sixteen second-year high school students (aged 16) enrolled in an advanced English class at a Hungarian high school. All students had been studying English for approximately five years and had been classmates throughout this period, meaning they were familiar with one another before the study. Their proficiency level corresponded to an upper-intermediate level (B1+ – B2 on the CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). Participants completed a CEFR-based placement test at the beginning of the term, and their results were used to assess their true proficiency levels. This test is administered annually to provide feedback to the students and teachers as well.

These students were familiar with collaborative learning, having worked in groups throughout their language studies. The participants were selected using convenience sampling, as the researcher had established access to this particular class. While convenience sampling limits the generalizability of findings, it is a commonly employed strategy in small-scale classroom research (Dörnyei, 2003).

3.2 Research Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data: two questionnaires and an observation guide. The decision to use questionnaires rather than interviews was informed by practical constraints — namely, the need to collect data from all 16 participants simultaneously following each task. Questionnaires are a well-established tool for collecting data efficiently in second language research and are particularly suited to capturing self-reported attitudes and perceptions in larger groups (Dörnyei, 2003). It is acknowledged, however, that interviews would have allowed for deeper exploration of individual experiences, and future research should consider incorporating them.

Questionnaire I was administered after the individual task and gathered insights into students' attitudes toward speaking exercises, their perceived difficulty of the task, and their self-assessed performance. It included a combination of categorical items, ordinal (Likert-scale) items, and open-ended prompts. Questionnaire II was administered following the group task and explored how group dynamics influenced task completion and how students perceived their linguistic performance in a collaborative setting. Both questionnaires are provided in full in *Appendix A* and *Appendix B*, respectively.

Both questionnaires were administered in English rather than in the participants' first language (Hungarian). This decision was informed by two considerations. First, as upper-intermediate learners with approximately five years of English study, participants were deemed to have sufficient proficiency to understand and respond to questionnaire items in the target language without significant comprehension difficulties. Second, administering the questionnaires in English maintained consistency with the language of the tasks and avoided any potential shift in participants' reflective thinking when switching to their first language.

It is acknowledged, however, that some participants may have been better able to articulate nuanced reflections on their performance in Hungarian, and this represents a limitation of the instrument design.

The observation guide was used during the group task to record notes on group dynamics, including patterns of participation, instances of code-switching, and levels of engagement. Observation categories were established in advance based on existing literature on group dynamics in EFL classrooms (Alfares, 2017; Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997), and the guide is provided in *Appendix C*.

3.3 Tasks, Data Collection, and Analysis

The study was conducted in several phases. During the preparation phase, a relevant and engaging topic for the oral exercises was selected to maximise

learner involvement. The image used depicted the topic “Internet and social media,” which was expected to be familiar and interesting to the students, facilitating the production of rich data.

The same picture and topic were used for both tasks. This was a deliberate methodological choice: using identical stimulus material ensured that differences in linguistic output between conditions could not be attributed to variations in topic difficulty or image complexity. The image was selected for its capacity to elicit a broad range of vocabulary and ideas, reducing the likelihood that participants would simply reproduce the same content in both tasks. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that completing the individual task first meant that participants had prior exposure to the topic by the time of the group task. This familiarity effect cannot be fully controlled for in the present design, and may have contributed independently to any improvements in fluency or lexical range observed in the group condition.

During the individual task phase, each participant was asked to describe said picture related to the topic at home. They were given three minutes to produce a spoken monologue and submit a voice recording of their performance by email. After completing the individual task, participants filled out Questionnaire I, designed to assess their attitudes towards the speaking exercise, their perceived difficulty of the task, and their self-perception of their performance.

For the group task phase, the 16 participants were randomly divided by the teacher into four groups, each comprising four students. In their groups, they discussed the same topic and picture. Each group collaboratively generated and organised ideas before one member — selected as the Speaker by the group themselves — recorded the group’s output, which had to last three minutes. Following the group task, participants completed Questionnaire II, which assessed their attitudes toward group work, compared it to the individual task, and evaluated their perceived performance in the group setting.

During the data collection phase, the voice recordings from both individual and group tasks were collected and transcribed for analysis. These recordings provided qualitative data on the students’ oral performance. Observations made during the group task provided additional context on group dynamics and task engagement, including notes on how students interacted within their groups, their use of the target language, instances of code-switching, and levels of motivation and participation.

The data analysis was conducted manually, employing a systematic approach to ensure depth and consistency.

1. Open-Ended Questionnaire Responses: Responses to the open-ended questions from both questionnaires were analysed by identifying recurring themes. To achieve this, the data were colour-coded: similar responses

were grouped under main thematic categories, including attitudes toward group work, task difficulty, and perceived performance. This thematic coding allowed for a qualitative exploration of participants' reflections and attitudes.

2. Transcription and Error Coding: The transcriptions of the voice recordings were analysed using a detailed manual coding process to assess various aspects of linguistic performance. Grammatical errors, including issues with subject-verb agreement and tense usage, were identified and colour-coded for easier categorization. Instances of hesitations and pauses, such as the use of filler words like “um” and “uh,” as well as extended pauses, were highlighted to evaluate fluency. Vocabulary use was also examined to determine whether students relied on repetitive or limited vocabulary or demonstrated a more varied and advanced lexical range.

Performances were then rated against CEFR descriptors for the B1–B2 levels, aligning with the participants' upper-intermediate proficiency. Each participant's oral performance was evaluated based on several key criteria: range and accuracy were assessed by examining the variety and correctness of grammatical structures and vocabulary; fluency was measured by the ability to speak smoothly with minimal hesitation; pronunciation was evaluated in terms of clarity and intelligibility; and coherence was analysed based on the logical organisation of ideas throughout the spoken task.

To address the potential for subjectivity in manual coding, a colleague reviewed and verified the coding categories and their application, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

4 Results and Main Findings

4.1 Individual Participant Performance Overview

Table 1 presents background information and individual task performance data for all 16 participants, with each assigned a pseudonym to protect anonymity. The table includes proficiency level, group membership, recording length, and the presence or absence of key error types and hesitation rates in the individual task, providing a baseline against which group performance can be compared in Section 4.4.

Examining individual profiles, a general tendency can be observed whereby higher proficiency students produced fewer error types and lower hesitation rates. S13, the highest proficiency participant, made no errors of any kind and achieved the lowest hesitation rate in the cohort (3 per minute), while S16,

also a strong performer, recorded only 1 hesitation per minute with no tense, L1, or pronunciation errors. At the other end of the spectrum, S9 exhibited the highest hesitation rate (10 per minute) alongside SVA errors, L1 interference, and pronunciation difficulties, suggesting considerable difficulty with individual oral production.

However, the relationship between proficiency and error frequency was not entirely straightforward. S4, rated at B2+, showed no grammatical or L1 errors yet exhibited pronunciation difficulties, while S8 (B2) produced errors across multiple categories with a hesitation rate of 8 per minute, performing more similarly to lower proficiency peers. These individual variations highlight the importance of examining participant-level data rather than relying solely on group-level aggregates, as proficiency level alone does not fully account for differences in oral performance.

Pseudonym	Gender	Proficiency	Group	Rec. Length	SVA Error	Tense Error	L1 Interference	Hesitations / min	Pronunciation issue
S1	F	B2	I	2:58	Yes	No	No	4	No
S2	M	B1+	I	3:02	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	Yes
S3	F	B2	I	3:05	Yes	Yes	No	5	No
S4	M	B2+	I	2:55	No	No	No	5	Yes
S5	F	B2	II	3:00	Yes	Yes	Yes	6	No
S6	F	B2	II	3:10	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	No
S7	M	B2	II	2:50	Yes	No	No	6	No
S8	F	B2	II	3:05	Yes	Yes	Yes	8	Yes
S9	M	B1+	III	2:45	Yes	Yes	Yes	10	No
S10	M	B2+	III	3:00	Yes	No	Yes	6	Yes
S11	M	B2	III	2:52	Yes	No	No	5	No
S12	M	B2	III	3:08	Yes	Yes	No	5	Yes
S13	F	B2+/ C1	IV	2:55	No	No	No	3	No
S14	M	B2	IV	3:00	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	No
S15	F	B2+	IV	3:02	No	No	No	4	No
S16	M	B2	IV	2:58	Yes	No	No	1	No

Table 1. Initial recording data

4.2 Attitudes Towards Speaking Exercises

The pre-task questionnaire revealed a range of attitudes toward speaking exercises, with responses categorized as positive, neutral, or negative (Table 2). Half of the participants (50%) expressed a positive attitude, citing fluency improvement, critical thinking, and self-expression as key benefits. A quarter (25%) reported neutral feelings, viewing speaking tasks as a routine part of language learning. The remaining 25% expressed negative attitudes, primarily due to anxiety and fear of making mistakes. These patterns are consistent with existing research on the impact of FLA on oral performance, highlighting the potential need for supportive classroom strategies to encourage participation.

Attitude	Number of Students (N=16)	Percentage (%)	Main Reasons
Positive	8	50%	Improves fluency, critical thinking, self-expression
Neutral	4	25%	Speaking tasks are just part of learning, no strong feelings
Negative	4	25%	Anxiety, fear of mistakes, concerns about grammar

Table 2. Attitudes toward speaking exercises (reasons are participant-reported, based on open-ended questionnaire responses)

4.3 Individual Task Performance

Participants completed an individual picture description task, producing recordings that varied in linguistic accuracy, fluency, and vocabulary usage. Table 3 summarizes the most common grammatical errors identified across participants. Subject-verb agreement was the most prevalent issue, with 75% of students making errors such as “people uses social media” and “everyone have a phone,” though the frequency of such errors varied across individuals.

Additionally, 50% struggled with verb tense consistency, often mixing present and past tenses. First-language interference affected 43.75% of participants, leading to direct translations from Hungarian, such as “on their photos” instead of “in their photos.”

Error Type	Number of Students (n=16)	Percentage (%)	Example Errors
Subject-Verb Agreement	12	75%	“People uses social media”, “Everyone have a phone”
Verb Tense Consistency	8	50%	“Last year, my friend post pictures online”
First-Language Interference	7	43.75%	“On their photos” (instead of “In their photos”)

Table 3. Grammatical errors in individual task

Fluency issues were also notable in individual performances, as shown in Table 4. On average, students paused or hesitated approximately seven times per minute, frequently using fillers such as “um” and “uh,” though there was considerable variation among participants. Extended pauses exceeding 20 seconds were recorded in cases where students struggled to organise their thoughts.

Fluency Issue	Average Frequency per Student	Common Observations
Pauses and Hesitations	7 per minute	Filled pauses (“um,” “uh”), long silent pauses
Extended Pauses	1 instance > 20 seconds	Struggling to find words, delayed speech

Table 4. Fluency issues in individual task

Pronunciation difficulties were also observed, particularly with English sounds that do not exist in Hungarian. Five students (31.25%) mispronounced the /θ/ sound in “think” as /t/ or /d/ (e.g., “tink” or “dink”). These same five students also mispronounced the /ð/ sound in “with” as /v/ (e.g., “vıt” instead of “wıð”), affecting intelligibility (Table 5).

Mispronounced Sound	Number of Students (n=16)	Percentage (%)	Example Errors
/θ/ → /t/ or /d/ (“think”)	5	31.25%	“tink”, “dink”
/ð/ → /v/ (“with”)	5	31.25%	“vıt” instead of “wıð”

Table 5. Pronunciation difficulties in individual task

4.4 Group Task Performance

Group work appeared to be associated with a reduction in grammatical errors, though it should be noted that several group recordings were considerably shorter than the individual task recordings, which may have reduced the likelihood of errors occurring. Only 50% of the groups (2 out of 4) made subject-verb agreement errors, compared to 75% of individuals in the previous task. For example, Group I made only two minor grammatical errors, such as “advantages about” instead of “advantages of,” in their 2-minute and 12-second recording. These patterns tentatively suggest that collaborative discussion may allow peers to monitor and self-correct, potentially contributing to improved accuracy.

Error Type	Number of Groups (N=4)	Percentage (%)	Example Errors
Subject-Verb Agreement	2	50%	“she have”, “They posts”
Other Minor Errors	1	25%	“advantages about” instead of “advantages of”

Table 6. Grammatical accuracy in group task

Fluency also appeared to improve across most groups, as depicted in Table 7. The average number of pauses dropped from approximately 7 per minute in individual tasks to 4 per minute in group tasks, though this comparison should be treated with caution given the differing conditions of the two tasks.

Fluency Improvement	Individual Task	Group Task	Observation
Pauses per Minute	7 per minute	4 per minute	Reduction in hesitations
Smooth Transitions	Limited	Improved	Speakers transitioned more fluidly

Table 7. Fluency improvements in group task

Group work appeared to encourage a broader range of vocabulary, as seen in Table 8. In individual tasks, many students relied on basic and repetitive words such as “use,” “post,” and “give.” During group work, however, several Speakers incorporated more advanced vocabulary. For instance, Group IV introduced terms like “algorithms,” “engagement,” and “influence,” which were largely absent from their individual tasks, suggesting a possible peer influence on lexical choice.

Vocabulary Use	Individual Task	Group Task	Observation
Basic/Repetitive Words	“use” “post” “give”	Limited	Common reliance on basic words
Complex Words Introduced	Limited	“algorithms”, “engagement”, “influence”	Peer influence broadened vocabulary

Table 8. Vocabulary use in group task

Table 9 summarizes patterns in self-perception accuracy between individual and group tasks. In the individual task, 43% of students (7 participants) appeared to underestimate their performance, believing they had made more grammatical errors than were actually recorded. For instance, one participant remarked, “I think I made a lot of mistakes, especially with grammar.” During the group task, 75% of students (12 participants) reported feeling that their performance had improved, with self-assessments more closely aligning with their actual output. These patterns tentatively suggest that group work may foster a more supportive environment, allowing students to develop a more realistic perception of their linguistic abilities.

Task Type	Underestimated Performance	Felt Performance Improved	Observation
Individual Task	43% (7 students)	N/A	Students believed they made more grammatical errors than they actually did.
Group Task	12.5% (2 students)	75% (12 students)	Self-assessments were more aligned with actual performance.

Table 9. Self-assessment accuracy in individual vs. group tasks

Table 10 (next page) presents patterns in anxiety levels between the two task types. Group tasks appeared to be associated with lower levels of anxiety. While 25% of students (4 participants) reported experiencing high anxiety during the individual task, only one student (6.25%) expressed similar anxiety in the group task. One participant explained, “In the group task, I didn’t feel as nervous because I knew I wasn’t alone. If I got stuck, someone could help me.” Another commented, “In groups, it is a lot better. I don’t have to speak alone.”

Unlike other areas where improvements were observed, pronunciation did not show noticeable change. The same five students who exhibited pronunciation difficulties in the individual task continued to make the same errors in the group task, suggesting that fossilized phonological errors may not be easily addressed through short-term peer interaction alone.

Task Type	High Anxiety Levels	Observation
Individual Task	25% (4 students)	Students felt more anxious speaking alone.
Group Task	6.25% (1 student)	Anxiety decreased with peer support, leading to greater fluency.

Table 10. Foreign language anxiety in individual vs. group tasks

4.5 Group Dynamics and Performance

Table 11 presents the composition and performance overview of each group, including group members, the designated Speaker, recording length, error counts, hesitation rates, code-switching patterns, and overall cohesion. When read alongside Table 1, these data allow for a cross-referencing of individual and group performance, providing a more nuanced picture of the factors that may have shaped each group’s output.

Group	Members	Speaker	Rec. Length	SVA Errors	Other Errors	Hesitations /min	Code-switching	Group Cohesion
I	S1, S2, S3, S4	S1	2:12	0	2 (minor)	4	Occasional	Moderate
II	S5, S6, S7, S8	S6	0:54	1	0	3	None	High
III	S9, S10, S11, S12	S10	0:55	2	2 (L1 interference)	5	Frequent	Poor
IV	S13, S14, S15, S16	S13	2:54	0	2 (minor)	2	None	High

Table 11. Group composition and performance overview

Examining the data across both tables, several patterns emerge. Group IV had the strongest overall individual profiles, with S13 as Speaker, the highest proficiency participant in the entire cohort, which likely contributed to their strongest group output. By contrast, Group III's individual profiles were the most varied in terms of error frequency, with S9 showing the highest hesitation rate in the cohort (10/min) and both S9 and S10 exhibiting L1 interference — patterns that appear to be reflected in the group's final output. Groups I and II showed more mixed individual profiles, with one comparatively weaker member in each group (S2 in Group I; S8 in Group II), yet both groups produced comparatively cleaner output than their individual data might suggest, tentatively pointing to a possible peer support effect. It is worth noting that since only the Speaker's voice was captured in each group recording, the individual profiles of non-Speaker members may not be fully reflected in the group output data.

4.5.1 Group I: Moderate Cohesion and Shared Responsibility

Group I (S1, S2, S3, S4; Speaker: S1) submitted a recording lasting 2 minutes and 12 seconds. Each member participated, but the degree of involvement varied. S1, as the designated Speaker, took the lead in organising ideas and was responsible for correcting some of the group's minor grammatical errors. The other members contributed ideas but were less vocal in providing corrections or suggestions. Group I occasionally relied on code-switching to clarify complex points, briefly switching to Hungarian when discussing the advantages of social media before returning to English. This helped them maintain the flow of the discussion, but may have limited their full engagement with the target language.

4.5.2 Group II: High Cohesion with Advanced Members Leading

Group II (S5, S6, S7, S8; Speaker: S6) produced a recording lasting 54 seconds, notably shorter than the expected three minutes, but their performance was marked by high cohesion and effective collaboration. All members were engaged in the task, though one member was less advanced than the other three. The more advanced members provided a strong foundation for the group's linguistic performance, contributing more extensively to the task. This group avoided code-switching entirely, conducting their entire output in English, which may reflect strong language proficiency and a commitment to practising the target language. It should be noted, however, that the brevity of the recording limits conclusions about the group's overall fluency and accuracy.

4.5.3 Group III: Low Cohesion and Unequal Participation

Group III (S9, S10, S11, S12; Speaker: S10) produced a recording of only 55 seconds, considerably below the required length. Their performance was

characterised by low cohesion and unequal participation, significantly affecting the quality of output. Group III was the only all-male group, and whether gender composition played a role in the observed dynamics remains an open question that future research might explore more systematically. One member assumed the majority of the responsibility while others exhibited lower levels of engagement, as reflected in one participant's post-task response: "I felt like I was doing most of the work, while the others were distracted or talking about other things." The limited focus and engagement among participants contributed to the disorganisation of the final recording. Group III frequently relied on code-switching, particularly during the idea generation phase. While this helped them organise their thoughts initially, it ultimately appeared to hinder their ability to fully express their ideas in English, as the transition back to English was less smooth. Code-switching also contributed to L1 interference in the final recording, where phrases like "in the Internet" appeared due to direct translation from Hungarian.

4.5.4 Group IV: Strong Cohesion and Effective Collaboration

Group IV (S13, S14, S15, S16; Speaker: S13) produced the most successful recording, lasting 2 minutes and 54 seconds. Their strong group cohesion and equal participation contributed to a notably well-organised final performance. Every member contributed to the task, taking turns to speak and share ideas. One member noted in the post-task questionnaire, "We all added ideas, it was cool." Group IV did not rely on code-switching, which may reflect a high level of proficiency and confidence, particularly in the use of more complex sentence structures and vocabulary.

5 Discussion

5.1 Potentially Enhanced Oral Production in Group Work

The findings of this study tentatively align with key Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. The patterns of improvement in oral performance observed in group tasks are consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which posits that learning may be enhanced through social interaction. Swain's Output Hypothesis (2000) further provides a possible explanation, suggesting that verbalising ideas forces learners to process language more deeply, potentially improving fluency and accuracy. Students appeared to demonstrate comparatively higher fluency, coherence, and linguistic accuracy when working in collaborative settings, which may support existing research emphasising the importance of interaction and peer support in language performance (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; Long & Porter, 1985; Xu & Kou, 2017).

The cross-referenced data from Tables 1 and 11 offer some tentative insight into the mechanisms behind these patterns. Groups I and IV, which produced

the longest and most accurate recordings, also contained the most proficient Speakers (S1 and S13) and showed comparatively stronger individual profiles overall. By contrast, Group III — whose members included the highest individual hesitation rate in the cohort (S9, 10/min) and multiple instances of L1 interference — produced the weakest group output, suggesting that individual proficiency may set a ceiling on what group interaction alone can achieve. Interestingly, Groups I and II both contained one comparatively weaker member (S2 and S8), yet their group outputs were cleaner than those members' individual profiles might have predicted, tentatively suggesting a possible peer scaffolding effect consistent with Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development. However, these interpretations are speculative and should be treated with considerable caution, given the small sample size and the methodological limitations of the study.

5.2 Self-Perception and Performance

While there appeared to be a general pattern of alignment between self-perception and actual performance, several students either overestimated or underestimated their abilities. This suggests that self-assessment may be influenced by factors such as anxiety, prior experiences, and confidence levels. The observed patterns in group dynamics may also have played a role — for instance, the low cohesion and unequal participation in Group III may have made accurate self-assessment more difficult for its members, while the supportive environment in Group IV may have facilitated more realistic self-evaluation. In group tasks overall, students appeared to demonstrate more accurate self-assessments, possibly due to the collaborative environment reducing pressure and allowing for peer validation (Kormos & Csizér, 2014).

These preliminary patterns tentatively highlight the potential value of integrating regular formative feedback in ELT classrooms to help students develop more accurate self-evaluation skills, which may be important for fostering learner autonomy and sustained motivation (Ellis, 2003; Pajares, 1996). Teachers might consider supporting this by incorporating structured self-assessment exercises and guided peer feedback into their lessons.

5.3 Possible Implications for ELT Practice

The findings of this study tentatively suggest that incorporating group work into ELT curricula may have the potential to enhance oral proficiency. Group work may provide learners with authentic contexts for language use and opportunities for real-time peer feedback, both of which could be important for developing speaking skills in a foreign language. Research has suggested that collaborative learning environments can create more interaction-rich settings where learners are encouraged to negotiate meaning, clarify ideas, and engage in deeper cognitive processing of the target language (Storch, 2013; Swain & Lapkin, 2001).

The contrasting outcomes of Groups III and IV in this study may offer a tentative practical insight: group composition and cohesion appear to matter considerably. Group IV, which combined strong individual proficiency, high cohesion, and equal participation, produced the most successful outcome, while Group III, which lacked cohesion and had more uneven individual profiles, struggled despite having a relatively proficient Speaker. This tentatively suggests that teachers might benefit from considering not only proficiency levels but also interpersonal dynamics and participation patterns when forming groups, though this conclusion requires further empirical support before strong recommendations can be made (Alfares, 2017; Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; Palmer & Britten, 2002).

To maximise the potential benefits of group work, teachers might also consider creating a low-anxiety classroom environment. FLA is a well-documented barrier to language acquisition, often causing learners to avoid speaking or take fewer risks in their language use (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz et al., 1986). Group work may have the potential to reduce FLA, thereby making oral tasks seem less daunting, as tentatively suggested by the reduction in self-reported high anxiety from 25% in the individual task to 6.25% in the group task in this study. Teachers might take steps to create a supportive classroom environment by using positive reinforcement, offering constructive feedback, and encouraging risk-taking in language use. Establishing group norms that emphasise collaboration rather than competition may also be beneficial (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Additionally, self-assessment skill development may be worthwhile for promoting learner autonomy. Research suggests that learners who are capable of accurately assessing their own performance may be better equipped to set realistic goals and make adjustments to their learning strategies (Ellis, 2003; Pajares, 1996). The patterns observed in this study tentatively suggest that group work may not only be associated with improved oral performance but could also help learners reflect on their abilities in a more realistic manner, possibly due to peer feedback and shared responsibility. These preliminary findings are broadly consistent with existing research on the benefits of collaborative learning, though larger and more controlled studies are needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

6 Limitations

The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size, consisting of sixteen students from a single high school in Hungary. Although this provided a manageable cohort for detailed analysis, it inherently limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider larger, more diverse samples drawn from various educational contexts and geographical regions to enhance the external validity and applicability of the results.

The research design presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, both tasks used the same picture and topic, meaning that participants were more familiar with the content during the group task. This familiarity effect may have contributed to apparent improvements in fluency and accuracy independently of the collaborative nature of the task. Second, the individual task was conducted as a home recording without an interlocutor, while the group task was interactive and conducted in class. These are fundamentally different communicative conditions, and direct comparisons between them should therefore be treated with considerable caution. Third, only the Speaker's voice was captured in the group recordings, meaning that the oral performance of the remaining group members is not directly reflected in the data. Finally, the brevity of the group recordings for Groups II and III (54 and 55 seconds, against the required three minutes) reduces the opportunity to observe linguistic patterns and may affect the reliability of comparisons with individual task data.

The research design primarily focused on the immediate outcomes of group work in relation to oral production skills, self-perception accuracy, and student attitudes. While these short-term insights contribute valuable knowledge, they do not capture the long-term effects of group work on language acquisition. Longitudinal studies, which track learners' progress over extended periods, are needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sustained impact of group work.

The linguistic analysis in this study emphasised grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and pronunciation. Future investigations could expand this scope to include additional aspects of language performance, such as pragmatic competence and discourse strategies, which are also important in real-world communicative contexts. Another limitation is that the analysis relied on manual coding, which, while thorough, may introduce subjective interpretation. Although a colleague reviewed and verified the coding categories, independent co-coding with formal inter-rater reliability measures would further strengthen the validity of the findings, and future studies should incorporate this. Incorporating automated linguistic analysis tools could also provide a more standardised assessment of oral performance trends.

Also, it should be acknowledged that administering the questionnaires in English, while consistent with the communicative context of the study, may have limited the depth of some participants' open-ended responses, as they may have been better able to articulate nuanced reflections on their performance in their first language.

Finally, observation bias may have influenced the results, as participants were aware of being recorded, which could have affected their natural speech patterns and interactions.

7 Conclusion

This study investigated the potential impact of group work on the oral production skills, self-perception accuracy, and language performance of high school students learning English as a foreign language. Through a mixed-methods approach that included individual and group tasks, questionnaires, voice recordings, and teacher observations, the research explored possible patterns of benefit associated with collaborative learning in ELT classrooms. The preliminary findings tentatively suggest that group work may be associated with improvements in fluency, coherence, and linguistic accuracy compared to individual tasks, though these patterns should be interpreted with considerable caution given the small sample size and the methodological limitations outlined in Section 6.

The supportive and interactive nature of group work appeared to be associated with reduced anxiety and a more relaxed environment for language use for most participants. Some patterns in self-perception accuracy were also observed, with students' self-assessments appearing more closely aligned with actual output during group tasks, though discrepancies were noted among some individuals. These tentative findings emphasise the possible value of incorporating regular, constructive feedback to help learners develop more accurate self-evaluation skills. Cross-referencing individual and group performance data also tentatively suggests that group composition and the proficiency of the designated Speaker may play a role in shaping group outcomes, with stronger individual profiles appearing to be associated with more successful group performances, though this observation requires further empirical investigation.

In conclusion, this small-scale exploratory study offers preliminary evidence that may contribute to the growing body of literature on group work in EFL contexts. If replicated and confirmed in larger, more rigorously controlled studies, these findings could lend further support to the case for integrating group work activities into the ELT curriculum as one possible means of providing opportunities for authentic language use and peer interaction. Future research might also explore the role of group composition and Speaker selection more systematically, as these factors appear to warrant closer attention. Group work may also have the potential to help some learners manage language anxiety and enhance their willingness to communicate, though the extent to which these benefits generalise beyond this context remains to be established through future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire 1

I like/don't mind/dislike speaking exercises because.....

I like/don't mind/ dislike photo description because.....

I found this task easy/difficult to complete because.....

I could/could not talk about this topic successfully.

The most difficult part(s) of the task was/were:

- talking for 3 minutes
- collecting ideas
- presenting ideas in a logical order
- use of language-vocabulary
- use of language-grammar
- staying calm and relaxed

The easiest part(s) of the task was/were:

- speaking for 3 minutes
- collecting ideas
- use of language-vocabulary
- use of language-grammar
- staying calm and relaxed

I am satisfied/dissatisfied with my production because.....

I think I should improve my vocabulary / grammar / confidence / pronunciation / fluency.

Appendix B

Questionnaire 2

I generally like/don't mind/ dislike working in groups because.....

I liked/disliked completing the task in groups because.....

I found it easier/harder to complete the task in groups then individually because.....

The most difficult part(s) of the task was/were:

- talking for 3 minutes
- collecting ideas
- presenting ideas in a logical order
- use of language-vocabulary
- use of language-grammar
- staying calm and relaxed

The easiest part(s) of the task was/were:

- speaking for 3 minutes
- collecting ideas
- use of language-vocabulary
- use of language-grammar
- staying calm and relaxed

I am satisfied/dissatisfied with our production because.....

I think that our production was better/the same/worse than while I completed the task alone

The reason for this is.....

While working in this group I felt.....

Overall, I prefer working individually/in groups because....

While doing this exercise in groups, I feel like

- my grammar was better/worse
- my vocabulary was better/worse
- our coherence was better/worse
- I could/could not present my ideas successfully

Appendix C

Questions for observations

The following questions guided observations during the group task, informed by existing literature on group dynamics in EFL classrooms (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997; Alfares, 2017).

1. Do participants switch to their first language during the task? If yes, at what points and how frequently?
2. How do group members interact with each other?
3. How cohesive does the group appear? Are there signs of unequal dynamics?
4. Are all members engaged with the task throughout? Is there any off-task behaviour?
5. Are all members participating equally, or does one member dominate?