Original Papers

Developing Middle School Students' Speaking Skills According to the EFL Outdoor Practice of Speaking Theory (The OPOS Theory)

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Abstract

This study explores the development of middle school students' speaking skills in English as a foreign language (EFL), by exposure to a new teaching method, the Outdoor Practice of Speaking (OPOS) method. The speaking skills were practiced through speech activities and implemented outdoors and in public. This method was tested as a mixed-method case study via an intervention program to explore its effect on speech anxiety and speech competence in EFL. Study participants were 65 Israeli 14-year-old middle school girls from two different state-religious schools in the north of Israel: 32 students in the intervention group and 33 in the control group. The findings illustrate a significant difference (p < .01) in students' performance in all categories of speech (vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and coherence), as well as a significant improvement in score distribution. This improvement indicates the effectiveness of the OPOS method, and the desirability of practicing EFL speaking outside the classroom. OPOS offers EFL teachers worldwide a new method for enhancing students' learning skills which can help them cope with their EFL anxiety and improve their spoken production. It can also be applied to older students with appropriate modifications.

Keywords

English as a foreign language (EFL), foreign language anxiety, Outdoor Practice of Speaking (OPOS), formative assessment, cooperative learning, Project-Based Learning (PBL)

1. Introduction

The initial problem and gap in knowledge underlying this research stemmed from the fact that although "Israeli English Foreign Language (EFL) learners start studying English in the 4th grade (age 8-9) and continue until their graduation from high school at the age of 18, they still experience language anxiety

when using the English language" (Shoseyov-Kupferman 2020, p. 145).

Israel's National English Curriculum perceives EFL first and foremost as an international language, essential for Hebrew and Arabic speakers (the two dominant populations in Israel). Moreover, the curriculum sets the goal of teaching 3200 words by the end of the 9th grade (age 15), and 5400 words by graduation from high school (age 18). The curriculum also provides Israeli English teachers with a variety of in-class activities for the practice and assessment of oral social communication (Shoseyov-Kupferman, 2019). Nevertheless, many students experience speech anxiety and avoid speaking English even after graduating from high school. Furthermore, looking at this issue from a global perspective, EFL students undoubtedly experience speech anxiety (Al-Bzour, 2017; Bygate, 1987; Horwitz et al., 1986).

1.1 Research Aims

This research aimed to: a) examine the effect of a new teaching method on speech anxiety and speech competence of middle school EFL students (8th graders); b) conduct quantitative research to collect data about the speech anxiety levels among middle school students (8th graders), from two different schools, at the start, middle and end of the school year. Accordingly, the main research questions were formulated as follows:

1) How does the new teaching method affect the level of speech anxiety of 8th grade EFL students?

2) How does the new teaching method affect the level of speech competence of 8th grade EFL students?

2. Literature Review

The assumptions that underpin the new teaching method and the idea of enabling EFL students to practice English in outdoor locations are grounded in the following well-known theories:

A) The psychological theory, conceived by Chomsky (2007/1975-79) engages in the innate hypothesis and the need to provide a speech community for EFL learners. In this community, learners can use the representations and options offered by their linguistic structures for the purpose of activating their Universal Grammar (UG) device. According to Chomsky (1986), this device comprises a set of given biological constraints, which exists in every person, enabling them to manage their extensive knowledge of the language. It converts every experience into knowledge of one language or another.

B) The Empiricism theory (Dewey, 1938) advocates that a relationship between actual experience and education is necessary. Dewey's basic assumption (1916;1938) was that, in order to accomplish education, it must be based on the individuals' actual life-experiences, for their benefit and for that of society. Dewey posits two main principles: continuity and interaction, which are closely connected and promote the value of educational experiences. These experiences are designed to encourage students' freedom of thought and exercise of their intelligence, correlating with the freedom of movement. Thus, thinking means experience (Dewey, 1938). These theories have led to the recognition of the need for a new method that allows students to actively practice their EFL speech in natural settings, on the school

premises, or within the surrounding community, fostering pride, meaningfulness, and authenticity.

C) Similarly, Vygotsky (1978/1930-34) argues that L2 learners actually skip the stage of "egocentric speech", in which children's inner and external voices both encourage the development of speech. Consequently, it is essential to provide EFL learners with natural and authentic opportunities for "struggling" and using their problem-solving skills for language development. Vygotsky's social constructivist learning theory focused on methods and processes, rather than on the outcomes and products only. According to Vygotsky's the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory (1978/1930-34), learning will occur through problem solving, and cooperative learning, under the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with more capable peers. This theory seems to be the framework of the Problem-Based Learning method that underpins the OPOS discussed in this article.

Furthermore, the ontogenetic stage, during which the entire language is acquired, differs from one individual to another. Yet, it is important to remember that the ability to acquire foreign, relatively accent-free utterances, as well as the syntactic system, ends approximately at the age of six or seven (Weisler & Milekic, 2000). The same applies to the grammar of the language. Most features are learned in first language (L1) up to the age of six years, while some more complex structures may be learned later (Hartshorne et al., 2018; Stubbs 1986). As for vocabulary acquisition, the empirical literature illustrates that this is a rapid process that transpires in childhood, slowing down later in life, when new words are connected to old ones (Harely, 2006; Stubbs, 1986; Weisler & Milekic, 2000). Moreover, Weisler and Milekic (2000) affirm that vocabulary acquisition is based on meaning, which is associated with experiences and concepts that transcend the boundaries of the linguistic system.

2.1 Project-Based Learning (PBL)

The OPOS method follows most stages of the PBL method, with the added value of practicing speech in EFL in outdoor settings. PBL represents active learning, while its products are based on understanding (Harpaz, 2008). Markham (2011) introduces PBL as a method that integrates knowing and doing, and its process is different from any other activity or project. PBL is based on knowledge of elements in the curriculum, enabling learners to address authentic problems. In PBL, students focus on a problem or a challenge. They look for information and acquire knowledge, while working in groups in order to cope with their challenge, presenting their work to an audience at the end of the project. A detailed assessment of content and skills is planned, and learners receive feedback on their project. The cooperative learning part in PBL is grounded in the belief that learners construct their knowledge by collaborating with others (Palincsar, 1998). This engages them in learning and raises their intrinsic motivation by making them feel they control their lives (Jacobs, 2015).

2.2 Communication Apprehension (CA) and Second Language Anxiety

In order to apply the OPOS method, one must be aware of hindrances in the process of communication that is a basic component of this method. Communication Apprehension was defined by McCroskey (1984) as "a broadly-based anxiety related to oral communication" (p. 13). In addition, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as an instrument that measures

Communication Apprehension (CA), test anxiety, and the fear of negative evaluation. By using this instrument, the researchers found that second language learning involved risk taking, as well as complex and non-spontaneous mental operations necessary for the purpose of communication. This is a challenge individuals have to face, one that may lead to fear and even panic. Horwitz et al. (1986) concluded that the problem of anxiety affects second language learning. They defined this kind of anxiety as a specific complex anxiety of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors, associated with classroom language learning that stems from the uniqueness of the language learning process. As for gender differences, Çakici (2011) maintains that they are minor and changeable in language use. Hence, there are no major gender-based differences in children's first language acquisition.

2.3 Outdoor Education (OE)

Outdoor Education is based on activities outside the classroom. Gertel (2013) asserts that the outdoor and experimental approaches have been rooted in educational philosophy and distant history since the 16th century. At that time, people set standards for exploring different phenomena related to nature and the essence of the world. They did it by applying higher-order thinking skills, such as abstraction and generalization, rather than basing themselves on intuition. According to Gertel, it is unfortunate that 400 years have passed, and people still have not found how to incorporate the OE theory into public education systems. The OPOS method is based on an inquiry of learning materials and the practice of speaking outdoors.

OE can also be viewed as a place-based approach to education. According to the definition of Smith (2007), this is "an approach to curriculum development and school-community relations that draws upon local cultural, environmental, economic and political concerns" (p.1). In other words, in this approach attention is paid to both social and natural environments. Smith proposes five dimensions involving cultural and historical exploration of local sites that may have community value but might also have been ignored: environmental monitoring; familiarizing people with specific sites, real-world problem solving, entrepreneurship, and involvement in public processes. However, the OPOS method not only aims to break through the boundaries between the classroom and the community, as suggested by Smith (2007), but also takes greater educational advantage of authentic site-specific settings, by introducing practice of oral EFL in addition to expanding knowledge of local culture and history. The focus of the OPOS format of OE is thus on pedagogical achievement in foreign or second language acquisition, rather than on environmental studies.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This research was conducted in two different schools in the north of Israel. Thirty-two girls in the 8th grade from "School 1" were the intervention group, and 33 girls in the 8th grade from a different school, "School 2", were the control group.

3.2 Research Instruments

All participants had to respond to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) in its translated Hebrew version, as well as take an English 100-word test. The School Cultivation Measure and the score of each school in the English National Test statistics compared both groups. They indicated that the control group students were better than the intervention group students in the following parameters: parents' education, level of family's income, school location, and the parents' country of immigration. However, both schools attained the same results in the English National test within the framework of the School Effectiveness and Growth Indices. The research population of the qualitative part comprised ten Israeli middle school girls at the age of 14 from School 1. These participants were 10 out of 32 students from the intervention group who also took part in the quantitative research.

3.3 Research Design

This research is a case study conducted according to the mixed methods approach, where quantitative data collection and analysis were followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to explain and elaborate the impact of the OPOS method on EFL students' speech competence and anxiety level. This research consists of seven parts divided into three stages. Table No. 1 illustrates these procedures.

Table 1. Research Procedure

Intervention Stages	Parts	Aim	Research Instruments	Research Population	Data Analysis
Stage 1 – Pre-intervention – Establishing a baseline January	Part 1 Quantitative Research	Comparing intervention and control groups according to 11 confounding variables	Questionnaire of confounding variables	65 Israeli 8th-grade EFL students	Statistical evaluation
	Part 2 Quantitative research	Measuring reliability of the Hebrew FLCAS	FLCAS	65 Israeli 8th-grade EFL students	Statistical evaluation
	Part 3 Quantitative research	Comparing intervention and control group, before	FLCAS + An English 100-word test	65 Israeli 8th-grade EFL students	Statistical evaluation according to the Generalized

		introduction of OPOS method – January		Estimating Equations model
Stage 2 – Implementation of the intervention program – March	Part 4 Quantitative research + Qualitative research	Comparing intervention group and control group: March Collecting data from students' recordings of project 1	The FLCAS + An English 100-word test + Recordings of intervention group students for analysis in part 7	65 Israeli 8th-grade EFL students	Statistical evaluation according to the GEE model
Stage 3 – Post intervention program – June	Part 5 Quantitative research	Comparing intervention group and control group	The FLAS + An English 100-word test	65 Israeli 8th-grade EFL students	Statistical evaluation according to the GEE model
	Part 6 Quantitative research	Comparing intervention and control groups according to control variables	Questionnaire of confounding variables (now as control variables)	65 Israeli 8th-grade EFL students	Statistical evaluation according to the GEE model
	Part 7 Qualitative research	Comparing recordings of Speech 1 & Speech 2; examining OPOS effect on speech competence	Recordings of 10 students in the intervention group + An English 100-word test	10 Israeli 8th-grade EFL students	Content analysis of recordings

3.4 Research Hypotheses

1) The anxiety level of the intervention group will significantly and linearly decrease, while the anxiety level of the control group will decrease more moderately.

2. The new method will improve the intervention group's scores in the English 100-word test.

3. The new method will illustrate a significant difference in EFL speech competence among the intervention program participants.

3.5 The OPOS Method

The intervention offered by the OPOS method is a flexibly designed program that can be adapted to students' changing learning needs. OPOS focuses mainly on assessment for learning (formative assessment), rather than on summative assessment of learning (Stiggins, 2002). It is based on two different projects, designed according to the PBL methodology discussed above, with the additional component of practicing speaking in EFL outdoors. The OE component refers to any location outside the classroom setting. It relates not only to places in nature, but also to ones on the school premises or in the surrounding community, where students can practice speaking English actively with pride, meaningfulness, and authenticity.

In the initial study of the OPOS method, the first project required students to act as representatives at a fair they organized to raise awareness of the need to protect a place of particular importance in the nearby northern region of the country. Students had to decide who to invite to the fair: their parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and the head of the local council. The fair took place on the school premises, outside the classrooms. Each group of students was assigned to decorate a different counter, at which they presented their learning products and learning outcomes relating to the place they wished to protect or cultivate. The students showed the present condition of the place, compared to its potential. The group members state their arguments, trying to convince the public of the of taking action. The students' speeches were recorded by their teacher.

In the second project, the final product consists of playing the role of tour guides to students from a different class or a different school. In the initial study, this took place on a trail on the northern plateau, where a famous and esteemed figure in Israel's history performed his mission. The story of this person was recounted in English at different points along the trail. These speeches were also recorded by their teacher.

Although both projects of the intervention engaged in different topics and have different outcomes, they share a similar work sequence as mentioned above. Group work is an integral part of both projects, and all students have a chance to express themselves in different ways and on different levels. The outline applied in the initial study can be generalized, as shown below, and applied to a variety of topics (see Appendix A).

3.5.1 The OPOS Method Outline

a)   The teacher assigns one of the students as a project manager.

b)   Students are divided into groups.

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c)   The teacher presents the general project and its essential question. The topic should relate to different values in students' lives.

d)   For each essential question, students are given specific tasks.

e)   The students decide on the final product with the teacher.

f)   Students are given assessment rubrics in advance.

g)   Group members decide on a sub-topic, and report to the project manager.

h)   Students search for information about their topic (books, Internet sites, interviews, AI, etc.), and submit the sources to the teacher for approval.

i)   Students read and extract important facts from the sources and show them to the teacher for approval before moving forward.

j)   Students write, revise, finalize their work, and submit it to their teacher for corrections and approval.

k)   In the first project, students must compare and contrast the condition of the place they want to protect or cultivate based on what they have read or know from visiting it with how they think this should be achieved.

l)   While working, students prepare a list of new vocabulary they have encountered.

m)   Group members brainstorm their next task. First, students prepare a properly formatted formal letter to convince the local council head of the importance of their project. Students must decide what is important and relevant and what is not, using arguments from their previous materials.

n)   The students and their teacher compile a list of 50-60 new lexical items they have acquired and have chosen to study for a level test. Students can take the test as many times as they want, until they are satisfied with their scores.

o)   Students prepare an argumentative paragraph with appropriate connectors according to the facts they have written before as examples to support their arguments, submitting it to the teacher for corrections and approval.

p)   Students transform the written material into speech activities and start practicing their speaking in groups.

q)   Students listen to their group members' feedback about their coherence, pace, vocabulary, body language, and tone of voice.

r)   Finally, students present their speech to other groups and to the teacher, getting their feedback. They are also required to give their feedback to others. This takes place in the classroom.

s)   Students start presenting their speech outdoors, in public.

t)   In some projects, students might have to organize the outdoor setting, add decorations, and/or external aids for the presentation of their speech to the public. In other projects, they might also need to prepare different items for an outdoor walk on a trail, such as: parents' approval, food, microphones, camera, etc.

u)   After organizing the new knowledge acquired through their work, students present their speech in

public. They can do it by playing the role of tour guides to other students. Alternatively, they present their speech to their parents while setting up a fair and acting as representatives who wish to raise awareness of a specific value/need. Furthermore, students can record themselves and upload their recordings to the school website or use any other idea that enables the presentation of their outcomes to other people.

v)   Students reflect on their work in writing.

w)   The final assessment of students' attainments is based on the portfolio each student has to submit to the teacher at the end of the project. This portfolio has to include all parts of the project, approved by the teacher and organized according to the stages of the project.

3.5.2 OPOS Aims and Principles

The main aim of the OPOS method is to provide EFL students the opportunity to practice speaking in English in an outdoor setting. This aim is divided into three overlapping main principles with different objectives for each principle.

The first principle is the practice of speaking in EFL in an outdoor setting about a topic of high value to students' lives. Students are expected to practice their speech in class and outdoors, give feedback to their classmates, get their feedback, and revise accordingly. They acquire new words and grammatical structures in context, stimulating their innate ability to use a new language. Finally, they are expected to produce a coherent speech outdoors, in public.

The second principle is based on the practice of skills. Students practice how to look for information from different sources, extract relevant facts, compare and contrast, summarize, write a formal letter, write an argumentative passage based on the choice of strong versus weak arguments, and be able to transform the written material into a speaking activity to be presented in public. The practice of skills on authentic tasks with real-life purposes exposes students to real-life learning.

The third principle is based on the individuals' advantages of working according to the new method that enriches students' knowledge through self-inquiry and peer-learning. This improves collaborative learning and can increase the sense of self-efficacy as independent, confident learners who can overcome and cope with difficulties. This ability enhances students' growth into the global world and helps them become competent and confident English speakers who contribute to society.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods and Research Instruments

Both the intervention and the control group responded to the FLCAS in its translated Hebrew version. The 33 items of the questionnaire were divided into four categories of causes of foreign language classroom anxiety: communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, as well as general anxiety that was added especially for this research. The questionnaire was administered every 2-3 months to all 65 research participants as a repeated measure analysis, for the purpose of checking the differences in students' speech anxiety throughout the year. All students were also required to pass an English 100-word test (hereinafter, "students' grades") three times. Each time the test was based on the Israeli Revised English Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2013), Band II list,

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consisting of 3200 words Israeli students have to learn by the end of 9th grade. Moreover, 11 confounding variables were examined according to an additional questionnaire, checking the differences and similarities between both groups. The confounding variables were: exposure to English through the teacher talk, exposure to English through watching movies on computer or TV, text messaging, listening to songs, English lessons, students' perception of the importance of studying English, students' self-efficacy, fear of speaking Hebrew in public, students' final score in English, Hebrew and math in the previous school year, education level of parents, students' perception of practicing English outside the classroom to overcome their fear of speaking in English. Data collected from all three sources were analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS program.

The first and second projects constituted the baseline for the OPOS method. Hence, in order to examine the effect of the method and the improvement in students' speech competence from the first to the second project, the researcher transcribed the speech recordings of ten 14-year-old girls from the intervention group. Each student engaged in two different speech activities, one for each project (defined as Speech 1 and Speech 2). After thoroughly reading back and forth all transcribed texts, eight different themes were identified. Then, different parts from each student's project were categorized, and the data underwent quantitative content analysis.

All speech activities from both projects were classified into the same categories, but at different points of time. each speech activity in each theme was examined on two levels: level 1- intermediate and level 2 - advanced (see Appendix B). Then, the mean score of all ten students' performances in Speech 1 was compared to the mean score of the students' performance in Speech 2. The answers were coded "0" for the low level and "1" for the high level, and a McNemar test (McNemar, 1947) was applied to analyze the differences between the speeches.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings Obtained for Research Question 1

Prior to the modeling of students' performance over time, the researcher compared the performance of the intervention and control groups in the English 100-word test, at the first time point, before the intervention. The researcher found that the performance of the intervention group students was almost twice as good as their control group counterparts (55 versus 34 on a scale of 0 to 100 in the word test). In most other confounding variables, there was no difference between the groups.

Next, to address research questions 1 and 2, all students took the 100-word test and responded to the FLCAS. The results were quantitively analyzed. The comparison between the groups was performed by a Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) (Hardin & Hilbe, 2013). This model illustrated whether the two groups improved similarly or differed in their performance across the three-time points with regard to their anxiety levels and the English 100-word test. The GEE model was performed twice. The first run included time and group's main effects and the interaction effect between these two effects. The second run added those confounding variables which were suspected to affect the GEE model results.

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Table 2 depicts the GEE model results without the control of the confounders.

Table 2. Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) Results for Unconditional Group and Time Effects

	Group			Time				Group X Time						
	Wald	Cont.	Inter.	Wald	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Wald	Cont. Time 1	Cont. Time 2	Cont. Time 3	Inter. Time 1	Inter. Time 2	Inter. Time 3
Students' scores	16.82***	31.10[a]	55.07[b]	79.20***	44.49[b]	33.75[a]	51.01[c]	7.46*	33.23[b]	24.69[a]	36.75[b]	55.75[b]	42.89[a]	64.89[c]
		(4.48)	(3.78)		(2.98)	(3.23)	(3.13)		(4.73)	(4.55)	(4.52)	(3.65)	(4.42)	(4.29)
CA	0.48	2.66	2.56	6.08*	2.77[b]	2.55[ab]	2.51[a]	1.18	2.78	2.59	2.63	2.76	2.50	2.40
		(0.13)	(0.08)		(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)		(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Test anxiety	0.59	2.62	2.53	9.60**	2.72[b]	2.53[ab]	2.48[a]	1.49	2.72	2.57	2.58	2.73	2.49	2.38
		(0.10)	(0.07)		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)		(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
Fear of negative evaluation	2.26	2.52	2.75	1.88	2.70	2.67	2.54	0.40	2.54	2.56	2.46	2.85	2.78	2.62
		(0.11)	(0.11)		(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)		(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.17)
General anxiety	0.003	2.62	2.61	5.64	2.73	2.58	2.53	1.03	2.69	2.58	2.58	2.77	2.58	2.49
		(0.10)	(0.08)		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)		(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)

* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$; Latin letters for marginal mean ranking, a the lowest; Cont.=control group, Inter.=intervention group; SD in brackets.

The research findings indicated that the score in the English 100-word test differed between the control group and intervention group beyond the time effect (Wald = 16.82, $p < .001$). Time had an effect on the students' scores beyond their group affiliation (Wald = 79.20, $p < .001$). In the intervention group, the last score was higher on average than the first score, which was higher than the second score (c,b,a). However, the average of the first and last scores of the control group were similar. For the four-factor scores of anxieties, neither an interaction effect nor a group effect was found. The time effect beyond the groups showed that in CA and test anxiety there was a decrease from the first to the last score (b) versus (a). On the other hand, as far as the mean score was concerned, there was no difference between the last and the first score (ab). Neither time nor group effects were found in the fear of negative evaluation and general anxiety scores.

Moreover, the findings illustrated that research hypothesis 1 was refuted. The anxiety level of the intervention group did not significantly and linearly decrease, compared to the anxiety level of the control group, which was expected to decrease more moderately. However, CA and test anxiety decreased in both groups.

Research hypothesis 2 was corroborated. The scores of the intervention group students in the English 100-word tests improved significantly, compared to those of the control group students. This probably indicated that the OPOS method had an effect on the increase of students' vocabulary which was the first finding of their improved speech. The second finding was derived from the fact that the GEE results were similar to the results of the unconditional model. This implied that no confounding effects were added to the group and time effects. There were no external effects on the results of the English factor score throughout the research, except for self-efficacy, which increased in both groups. That is, the method significantly improved students' scores in the English 100-word test.

4.2 Qualitative Findings Obtained from Research Question 2

The qualitative part 7 of the research sought to examine the effect of the OPOS method on EFL students' speech competence, as well as investigating research question 3. Hence, the data of the transcribed recordings underwent quantitative content analysis. Table 3 illustrates a significant difference in students' performance between Speech 1 and Speech 2.

Table 3. McNemar's Test Results for Each Measure and Overall Total Score

	Speech 1	Speech 2	McNemar test *p*-value
Benchmark	.80	.80	1.00
Enabling Skill	.80	.90	1.00
Vocabulary Use	.30	1.00	.016*
Sentence Structure	.30	1.00	.016*
Coherence	.20	1.00	.008**
Grammar	.10	.80	.039*
Number of words	1.00	1.00	.250
Time of speech	.60	1.00	.125
Total Score	3.80	7.50	.004**
	(*SD*=1.69)	(*SD*=0.71)	

Percentage of correct answers in columns; *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$; $N = 10$.

There were significant differences between all 10 participants in their speech performances from the first to the second project with regard to vocabulary use, sentence structure, grammar and coherence of speech. No significant difference was found in the mean result for the number of words and time of

speech between Speech 1 and Speech 2. However, all 10 participants' total score for all eight themes in Speech 1 was 3.80 ($SD = 1.69$), while in Speech 2, their total score for all themes was 7.50 ($SD = 0.71$). This indicated a significant difference ($p < .01$) in students' performance in all eight categories and a significant improvement in scores distribution. The SD in Speech 2 was significantly higher than in Speech 1, namely most results of Speech 2 were the same and much higher than in the first project.

The findings obtained relevant to research hypotheses 2 and 3, and the effect of the OPOS method, indicated a significant improvement in students' speech activities from the first project to the second project in their overall performance in all eight categories in general. Moreover, the findings illustrated that the students significantly improved their vocabulary and their ability to construct complex sentences. They were more coherent in their speech and applied a higher level of grammar structures. This implied that the intervention program based on the OPOS method demonstrated a significant effect on the improvement of EFL students' speech competence, responding to research question 2.

5. Discussion

The research results showed no significant difference between the groups regarding the score for general anxiety level. Nevertheless, we found a significant increase in the achievements of the intervention group students, demonstrated by their results in the English 100-word test and their speech competence. The intervention group students were challenged by working on topics with high value to their lives and their speech practices were the final products of two projects implemented outdoors. However, due to the workload and the demands of each project, as well as the need to present their speaking abilities to the public, their anxiety levels did not significantly and linearly decrease as expected. On the other hand, the control group students were probably not sufficiently challenged. Consequently, they did not exert efforts and had no reason to feel anxious or different than they had felt at the beginning of the year. Moreover, they probably did not have sufficient or appropriate practice for enhancing their vocabulary knowledge. Thus, they did not demonstrate any increase in their vocabulary acquisition in six months. This did not imply that they had not learned anything. Rather, it illustrated that there was no proper implementation of the material or the new vocabulary they had acquired.

Similarly, Dewey (1938) explains that every experience is a moving force when contact and communication are involved. Dewey does not discuss the issue of anxiety that one may feel during the different experiences. However, he argues that educators are responsible for examining and judging the effectiveness and moving force of each experience according to the educators' insights, making sure that every experience allows students to be ready for the future. This study assumed that, in the future, students would be required to cope with pressure and make progress, despite certain levels of anxiety. In other words, as long as students demonstrate enhancement and motivation to take part in different activities, and anxiety does not undermine their learning and progress in EFL, educators should not be afraid to challenge their students. They should provide the students with new and different activities, such as the practice of speaking outdoors in order to promote their speech competence.

Furthermore, all 10 students' speech activities in the second project were based on a significantly higher level of vocabulary use. The students demonstrated an increase in the scope of vocabulary and in the level of vocabulary use in context, enabling them to formulate more complex and coherent sentences. This was in spite of the fact that the second project's tasks were more demanding and complex than those of the first project. In the second project, students were already familiar with group work on a project and solving problems to make progress. Moreover, they had a clearer understanding of what was expected. Consequently, although they were still anxious about speaking, it did not prevent them from taking part in the second project and improving their speech activities. They did it by enriching their vocabulary while working on the different assignments that were also based on the acquisition of a higher level of vocabulary. Throughout their work, they were looking for new words to express their ideas. They implemented these ideas when writing a formal letter. This finding manifested the "picking up" process presented by Krashen (1982) in his acquisition-learning hypothesis, according to which second language acquisition is similar to first language acquisition. He further maintained that it was based on unconscious learning, where learners were only aware of the fact that they communicated, rather than of the process.

5.1 Improved Coherence in Students' Speech

The intervention group students practiced their speech in class and outdoors with their classmates and in front of their teachers. They were constantly receiving other people's feedback to prepare themselves for speaking in public. The students were exposed to difficulties other students encountered in understanding their speech and had several opportunities to improve their speech coherence. Their aim was to demonstrate a high level of coherence in their speech activities, so that their listeners would not have to fill in gaps. In particular, the coherence of the speech activities presented in the second project encompassed the following three criteria: connectedness (cohesion), consistency, and relevance (Reinhart, 1980). All sentences of the second speech activities were appropriately connected with the previous sentence semantically and pragmatically, and they were all relevant to the topic discussed and presented.

Furthermore, the increase in all 10 participants' mean score and score distribution between the first and second project summarized the contribution of the new teaching method to the improvement of students' speech activities.

5.2 Conclusions

A new theory for the improvement of EFL learners' speaking competence has been conceived by the researcher of this study. The OPOS theory is based on EFL learners' practice of speaking outside the classroom, outdoors, while collaborating with their peers on two different projects. The topics of these projects are interchangeable with any other notion or idea and designed to engage EFL learners in outdoor activities as part of the process of foreign language acquisition. The principles of the intervention program exposed learners to experiences that entailed a process of thinking, while practicing and implementing the foreign language. At the same time, it activated their innate ability, the

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Universal Grammar (UG) device, for improving their EFL speech competence within a short period of time.

Figure. 1 presents an interactive model, incorporating all the intervention program components that affected the improvement of EFL students' speech competence: outdoor practice of speech, topics of social needs/values relevant to students' lives, cooperative learning, and formative assessment.
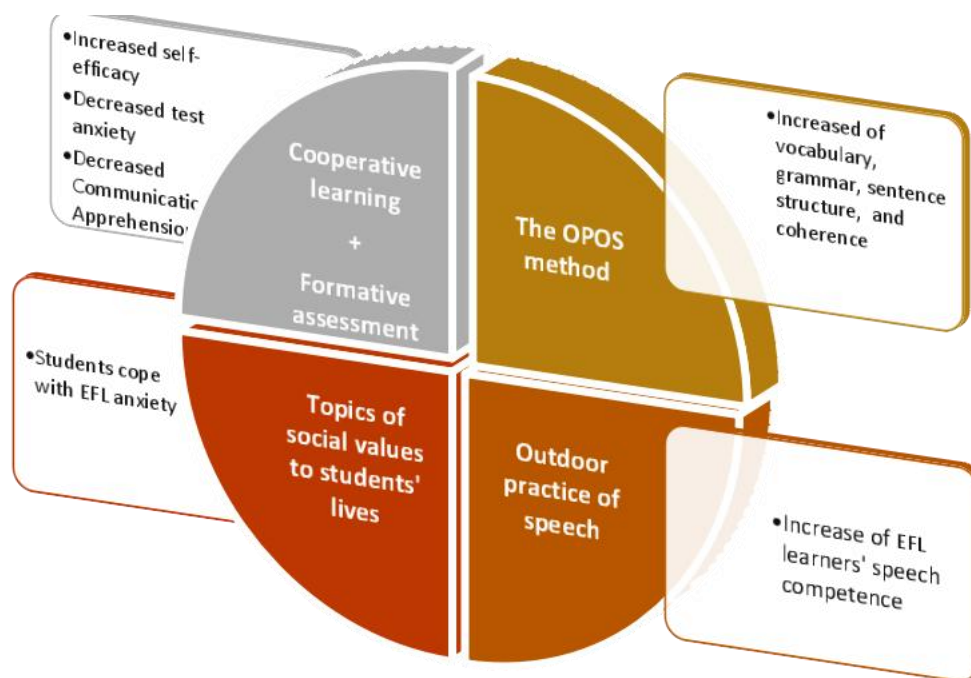
Figure 1. A Model for Improving EFL Learners' Speech Competence

The findings align with the view that enhancing students' speech competence consisted of maximizing their exposure to active cooperative learning of topics with high value to their lives, resulting in speech activities that would be practiced and presented outdoors. Thus, this research proposes that EFL teachers wherever they may be can apply the OPOS method to enhance their students' learning skills which would, in turn, help them cope with their EFL anxiety and improve their speaking.

Furthermore, an additional factor of general anxiety was added to the FLCAS which was originally divided into three main factors: test anxiety, CA, and fear of negative evaluation. The aim was to measure the sum of all three other factors and obtain a general anxiety level score. Indeed, despite the decrease in test anxiety and CA, the general score of anxiety among EFL learners remained the same. However, this did not prevent learners from producing their speeches outdoors, in public.

5.3 Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this research stemmed from the fact that it was conducted only in the north of Israel. Furthermore, the research population consisted of 14-year-old girls. Hence, the same research could be conducted with other age and gender groups in other locations to further confirm the findings of the

current study.

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Appendix A : Samples of Possible OPOS Projects to Activate EFL Students

• Students can act as representatives in a fair to raise awareness of the need to save tropical rainforests or any other social and environmental issues.

• Students can interview and film or record people from their community about a specific topic and present their findings.

• Students can organize a protest about a topic of value to their lives and speak to present their positions.

• Students can write, design, and distribute brochures and speak to tourists to convince them to visit special places.

Appendix B

The Distinction Between Level 1 and Level 2 of the Eight Themes

Categories	Level 1 (Intermediate level)	Level 2 (Advanced level)
		*This level includes level 1 competence
Can-do	*Learners interact fluently using	*Learners interact fluently using appropriate register for a

statements	appropriate register for a limited range of social contexts. *Learners use appropriate vocabulary and accurate grammar for this level. *Learners express and elaborate on personal wishes and opinions. *Learners interact for a variety of purposes, such as …. complimenting and giving advice. *Learners organize and present ideas and information orally and in writing about general topics, matching register and text type to purpose and audience.	limited range of social contexts. *Learners use appropriate vocabulary and accurate grammar for this level. *Learners express ideas and opinions, providing in-depth explanations. *Learners interact for a wide variety of purposes, such as persuading, discussing and group decision-making. *Demonstrating awareness of context, audience and purpose.
Enabling skills	*Elicit important facts from a text. *Describe and explain about places and casual relationships between events. * Summarize and Organize material. * Practice their speech in front of others and adjust it according to their feedback. *Understand the value of and need for the topic and feel engaged.	*Summarize material. Organize material in a chronological order. *Compare and contrast between different situations and draw conclusions. *Practice their speech in front of others and adjust it according to their feedback. *Make connections between events. *Try understanding the history of the topic. *Understand the value of and need for the topic and feel engaged. *Learners have to be thoroughly familiar with the material.
Vocabulary	*Words from Band II	*Words from Band III
Sentence Structure	*Subject-verb-object *Affirmative *Negative *There is, There are *Compound sentence structure *Relative adverbs – where, when, why	*Use complex sentence structure in order to express, for example, conditions, wishes. *Use complex sentence structure that includes a variety of grammatical structures. *Relative clauses – who, that, which *First conditional *Time clauses (since, while, until)

	* Using connectors such as: and, but, because, also.	*Using connectors such as however, in spite, nonetheless, whereas etc.
Coherence	*Speaker's activities were presented cohesively on the semantic level and attained only some level of coherence.	*Listener does not have to fill in any gap in order to understand the speech activities as comprehensible output.
Grammar	*Future, Past simple, Present simple *Gerunds *Modals and semi-modals (can/could, able to, must/have to, should, may/might) *Stative verbs *Used to +verb	*Future perfect, Past perfect, Present perfect *Modal perfect *Passive *Past perfect progressive *Present simple progressive
Number of words per minute of speech	20-36	37- 70
Time	Up to 10 seconds	Up to 28 seconds