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# GENDER DIFFERENCES AND THE EFFECTS OF THINK-PAIR-SHARE STRATEGY ON SPEAKING PERFORMANCE OF ESL STUDENTS

GUGANESWARY A/P VELLAYAN



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**DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE IN  
EDUCATION  
(RESEARCH MODE)**

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

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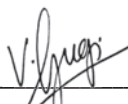
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12 September 2023

Date

  
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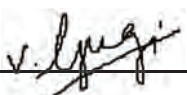
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## ABSTRACT

Excellent speaking skill is crucial to endure in a highly competitive world. If English as Second Language (ESL) students have a good command of English language proficiency, a better future awaits them locally and internationally. Thus, this study investigated the gender differences and the effects of *the Think-Pair-Share* (TPS) strategy on the speaking performance of Malaysian Chinese ESL students. A mixed-method research design was used to study the Form Four ESL students at a Chinese Independent High School (CIHS). Forty ESL students, comprised of 20 male and 20 female students, participated in this study. A pretest and posttest were conducted on the control and experimental groups before and after implementing *the think-pair-share* strategy in the English Communication classroom. The students' participation was observed through video recording and recorded in field notes. Next, a semi-structured interview was conducted with five students from the experimental group. The data collected were analyzed through descriptive analysis and thematic analysis. The first finding showed that the *think-pair-share* strategy positively improved ESL students' speaking skills. Second, there was no significant difference between the male and female ESL students' oral task assessment scores and performance. Third, the ESL students positively perceived the *think-pair-share* strategy used to improve their speaking skills. This study highlighted obstacles faced by Chinese Independent High school ESL students and the feedback achieved through the *think-pair-share* strategy. This study would benefit the students, teachers, school management and policymakers, and other researchers to conduct more research on speaking skills in Malaysian ESL students. In conclusion, implementing *the think-pair-share* strategy has contributed conclusively to improve ESL students' speaking skills.





## PERBEZAAN JANTINA DAN KESAN STRATEGI THINK-PAIR-SHARE TERHADAP PRESTASI BERTUTUR PELAJAR ESL

### ABSTRAK

Kemahiran bertutur yang cemerlang amat penting untuk bertahan di dunia yang sangat kompetitif ini. Jika, pelajar yang belajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa kedua (ESL) mempunyai penguasaan bahasa Inggeris yang baik, masa depan yang cerah menanti mereka di peringkat tempatan dan antarabangsa. Justeru, kajian ini menyiasat perbezaan jantina dan kesan strategi *Think-Pair-Share* (TPS) terhadap prestasi pertuturan pelajar ESL Cina Malaysia. Reka bentuk penyelidikan gabungan digunakan untuk mengkaji pelajar ESL Tingkatan Empat di Sekolah Tinggi Persendirian Cina (CIHS). Seramai 40 pelajar yang terdiri daripada 20 pelajar lelaki dan 20 pelajar perempuan telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Proses pra-ujian dan pasca-ujian dijalankan di kumpulan kawalan dan kumpulan eksperimen sebelum dan selepas pelaksanaan strategi *think-pair-share* di kelas Komunikasi Bahasa Inggeris. Penglibatan pelajar diperhatikan melalui rakaman video dan direkodkan dalam nota lapangan. Seterusnya, temuduga separa berstruktur telah dijalankan dengan lima pelajar dari kumpulan eksperimen. Data yang diperolehi dianalisis menggunakan kaedah analisis deskripsi and analisis tematik. Dapatan kajian pertama menunjukkan bahawa strategi *think-pair-share* mempunyai kesan positif terhadap peningkatan bertutur pelajar ESL. Kedua, tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara markah dan prestasi penilaian tugas lisan pelajar ESL lelaki and perempuan. Ketiga, pelajar ESL mempunyai persepsi positif terhadap strategi *think-pair-share* yang digunakan untuk meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur mereka. Kajian ini membentangkan halangan yang dihadapi oleh pelajar ESL Sekolah Tinggi Persendirian Cina maklum balas yang dicapai melalui strategi *think-pair-share*. Kajian ini juga akan memberi manfaat kepada pelajar, guru, pengurusan sekolah, penggubal dasar dan penyelidik lain untuk menjalankan lebih banyak penyelidikan mengenai kemahiran bertutur ke atas pelajar ESL Malaysia. Kesimpulannya, pelaksanaan strategi *think-pair-share* telah menyumbang secara muktamad dari segi meningkatkan kemahiran bertutur pelajar ESL.





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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BALLI	Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CIHS	Chinese Independent High School
Covid-19	Coronavirus 2019
ESL	English as Second Language
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
KSSM	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah ( <i>Standards-Based Curriculum for Secondary Schools</i> )
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LLS	Language Learning Strategies
MOE	Ministry of Education
SBELC	Standards-Based English Language Curriculum
SILL	Strategies Inventory of Language Learning
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SOW	Schemes of Work
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia

SPSS            Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences

TPS            Think-Pair-Share

UK            United Kingdom

UPSI           Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

UTHM        Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction



This chapter discusses the fundamental structure of this study. A detailed description of this entire study is presented in this section. The introduction session includes the (1) background of the study, (2) problem statement, (3) research objectives, (4) research questions, (5) hypotheses of the study, (6) conceptual framework, (7) significance of the study, (8) limitations of the study, and (9) definitions of terms.

#### 1.2 Background of the Study

Excellent speaking skill is crucial to endure in a highly competitive world. In the era of globalization, the English language is considered one of the highest modes of





communication used by people around the world; thus, it is undeniable that having a high proficiency level in speaking the English language plays a crucial role (Akhter et al., 2020; Al Hosni, 2014; Alrabai, 2022; Cahyani, 2018; Phan & Lan, 2021; Ihsan, 2016; Kadamovna, 2021; Kamaliah et al., 2018; Lim, 2013; Lucena & San Jose, 2016; Mak, 2011; Manurung, 2017; Maulani et al., 2019; Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Mudra, 2016; Raba, 2017; Rusli, 2018; Retnowati & Ngadiso, 2018). In Malaysia, the English language is taught in schools starting from primary to higher education (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018; Ooi et al., 2021).

In this globalized era, the English language is one of the significant lingua franca being recognized and accepted by many countries, and Malaysia is not an exception. Malaysia consists of three major communities – Malay, Chinese and Indian. Since Malaysia is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country, all three communities are connected by communicating in the national language, Bahasa Melayu. Almost every Malaysian can communicate well in Bahasa Melayu; thus, there is no room for the English language to be given prominent attention, especially in rural areas. Comparably, Singh et al. (2020) also claimed that even though the English language is a mandatory subject to be taught in schools in Malaysia, the influence of the first language has thwarted the students from communicating in English. Therefore, in Malaysia, the English language is taught as a second language in the Malaysian Education context. Even though children in Malaysia have been exposed to the English language at a very early stage, their command of the English Language is still unsatisfactory (Yih et al., 2017). Thus,





ESL students who want to master the English language are required to liaise in the language through speaking as it aids students to be successful in any part of the world (Kamaliah et al., 2018).

In the Malaysian education context, the English language is considered one of the most critical subjects, which is also a mandatory subject for ESL students, where English is taught as a second language for students from primary to tertiary education. The syllabus and Schemes of Work (SOW) have been designed to aid English language teachers in executing effective teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2013). Subsequently, according to the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), the operational proficiency in English is far lower compared to Bahasa Melayu. Only 28% achieved a minimum credit in the 2011 SPM English paper against Cambridge 1119 standards. Among the top five issues faced by Malaysian employers since 2006, low English language proficiency among new graduates is extremely critical (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025). By looking into this matter, improving students' English language proficiency will be our government's top priority. Subsequently, according to the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), the government urged young Malaysians to possess enough knowledge, critical and creative thinking skills, leadership skills, and, most importantly, the speaking skill to communicate worldwide to be the best.

Consequently, Phan and Lan (2021) claimed that anyone who wishes to improve their language proficiency must first master their speaking skills, especially in English, as





it plays a crucial role. According to Maulani et al. (2019), speaking is one of the essential skills that one needs to be mastered as it helps to communicate and share information, convey thoughts and feelings, and construct a social relationship. It means that with an excellent speaking aptitude, proper communication will occur. Comparably, according to Ooi et al. (2021), speaking is a process that involves two parties, where one party act as a speaker and the other party act as a listener.

Subsequently, in order for the listener to understand the context of the conversation, a speaker should speak eloquently with excellent English language proficiency, which is the ultimate goal for any student who learns English as a Second Language. Nevertheless, it is alarming that innumerable undergraduates are unemployed in Malaysia due to low proficiency in English speaking ability (Jobstreet.com, 2015) since speaking is a fundamental and crucial skill needed in life as it plays a vital role in schools as well as in the working life in furtherance to be successful in many dimension of life. One causal factor contributing to this state is ineffective teaching strategies imposed in English language communication classrooms (Maulani et al., 2019). This problem is because the EFL students speaking skills still need to improve.

Educators are working hard to cater to the socio-economic needs of the nation to produce quality human resources. Even though teaching and learning English is mandatory from the primary level, the consequence still needs improvement as the young graduates who have completed their higher education can barely speak fluently in the English



language. Poor English language proficiency has challenged the graduates' worth of employment as the corporate world has always desired to employ those graduates who can communicate and converse well in the English language proficiency (Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020). Hence, Mudra (2016) insisted that EFL students should be mainly taught the importance and purpose of learning English as a foreign language in an English Language Teaching (ELT) class. Thus, by looking at the current scenario in Malaysia, ESL students need to be considerate and start learning the English language for future endeavors.

Therefore, the *think-pair-share* (TPS) strategy has been approached to improve ESL students' communication skills. Apparently, Prasetya (2019) claimed that the *think-pair-share* strategy is an effective teaching method to be implemented in every EFL classroom. Phan and Lan (2021) affirmed that the *think-pair-share* strategy is an innovative method to engage students to participate more actively in an English-speaking environment. Consequently, in the *think-pair-share* strategy, students are not only learning from their teachers but also their teammates as they participate actively and creatively in the pedagogy process (Galceran, 2019; Phan & Lan, 2021; Manurung, 2017; Maulani et al., 2019; Prasetya, 2019; Retnowati & Ngadiso, 2018; Yanti, 2017). Since working in groups contributes significant outcomes in a very influential and friendly environment, many researchers have studied the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy in ESL teaching (Benjelloun, 2021; Bunaya & Basikin, 2018; Cahyani, 2018; Eshan et al., 2020; Phan & Lan, 2021); Pérez & Altamirano Carvajal, 2022; Ma'arif & Ashlihah, 2017; Manurung,



2017; Maulani et al., 2019; Prasetya, 2019; Raba, 2017; Retnowati & Ngadiso, 2018; Sahetapy, 2021; Singh et al., 2020; Yanti, 2017). Interestingly, all these researchers have one agreement in common that is; the *think-pair-share* strategy has a significant impact on ESL students' speaking skills in order to master the English language. Even though implementing the *think-pair-share* strategy is no longer teacher-centered teaching, the teachers still have control of managing the classroom in the teaching and learning process. In fact, teachers will have more time and space to invigilate and observe the students. Hence, the *think-pair-share* strategy is an effective strategy for students and educators.

However, there are always debates going on among ESL academicians about whether gender plays a significant role in order to investigate the students' learning differences and acceptance between male and female students in adapting to a new teaching strategy introduced in English communication classrooms. For instance, Mahmud and Nur (2020) found that gender differences play an important part in English language teaching in Indonesian English communication classrooms. Similarly, Al-Shibel (2021) found that many researchers recently are more interested in exploring the contrasting subject to understand male and female students' behaviorisms as it helps educators to identify the differences that would lead the students to excel in English teaching classrooms. Debreli and Demirkan (2015) claimed that despite much research on learning English as a foreign language (EFL), speaking anxiety among EFL students, especially regarding gender and language proficiency, is still considered rare.







On the contrary, according to Riasati (2018), there is no difference between male and female students' willingness to speak in English in communication classrooms. Mudra (2016) also insisted that there is no significant gender difference between male and female EFL students in acceptance of English as a foreign language. Similarly, Debreli and Demirkan (2015) and Raba (2017) also found no significant difference between gender and EFL/ESL students' speaking skills. However, Hamdan (2017) argued that there is a significant difference between the male and female students' speaking skills, and they affirmed that the female students' progress was comparatively better than the male students in ESL classrooms. To some extent, Mudra (2016) also agreed that female EFL students have the perception that they understand English better than male EFL students. This finding parallels Mahmud & Nur (2020) that, rationally, men talk about 'things' like politics, business, sports, cars, etc. However, women talk about their feeling towards the 'things' like relationships, people, and interest in maintaining the status quo. Similarly, Al-Shibel (2021) also claims that female EFL students preferred working in pairs more than male students. Since there are different opinions on gender influence on students' speaking skills, a thorough investigation is needed in order to understand this fine line between the findings obtained by the researchers.

Having said that, eventually, in this research, teachers also play a crucial role as mediators who will conduct the *think-pair-share* strategy effectively to the ESL students. With a well-versed facilitator who knows how to implement the *think-pair-share* strategy in the classroom, it is possible to persuade ESL learners to communicate in a team.





Nevertheless, Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) claim that teachers need to be more friendly, making the EFL students feel uncomfortable interacting with English speaking ability. Consequently, they rarely speak with their peers in the English language. Likewise, Gillies (2016) also emphasizes that teachers must realize that they play a significant role in encouraging their students to interact with each other in group discussions. This statement will foster positive relationships and teamwork and cultivate a sense of responsibility among the students to become good multitaskers and decision-makers.

Furthermore, McLeish (2009) believes that students actively involved in the classroom learning experience would see a tremendous breakthrough in their academic achievement. Similarly, Yanti (2017) believed that proper guidance and clear instructions given by teachers would undoubtedly improve students' interest and confidence in speaking English. On the contrary, Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) claimed that even though there are many methods to develop EFL students' speaking ability, ESL teachers are not implementing these methods into their teaching and learning process, making it difficult for the EFL students to develop their speaking proficiency. Without teachers' bona fide expertise in ESL teaching, the embracement of English language speaking skills would definitely end in vain. Hence, Prasetya (2019) concluded that implementing the *think-pair-share* strategy in English-speaking classrooms is easy for students and teachers. It has been proven that the effectiveness of the think-pair-share strategy gives paramount importance to student-centered learning. This is because choosing the right teaching strategy can help the students develop their ability to speak in English confidently.





Maulani et al. (2019) claimed that in the traditional teaching method, the students rely on textbooks and memorisation techniques which hinders the students' speaking activities since this strategy needs to have the capacity to encourage the students to speak English confidently. Hence, the traditional teaching strategy is no more suitable for teaching speaking in ESL classrooms as the students speaking performance is deteriorating drastically. Consequently, instead of continuing with the traditional teaching method, it is advisable to implement student-centered learning, which has more endurance in academic achievement than exam-oriented learning (McLeish, 2009).

By investigating the pertinence of the think-pair-share strategy among ESL learners, Phan and Lan (2021), discovered that the students understand the idea of collaborative learning as overall where they agree that cooperative tasks are essential in the ESL classroom. The reason for this is that an eloquent and impressive speaker can voice out the thoughts in his or her mind to the community; therefore, students must accomplish excellent communicative proficiency in speaking skills (Akhter et al., 2020; Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2014; Kadamovna, 2021; Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020). In addition, from the observation done by the teachers, when the students learn with their teammates, they experience less nervousness, and it is believed that the students are more open to their peers and ready to conceive compared to the teachers (Celik, 2013).



### 1.3 Problem Statement

In Malaysia, the English language is taught to students from kindergarten to higher level education as per the Ministry of Education context that emphasizes four essential language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Among the four skills, listening and speaking skills are done infrequently in the classroom during English Language lessons as the teachers focus more on reading and writing skills to fulfill the syllabus set by the Ministry of Education (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018). This less exposure to the English language has created negative perceptions among ESL students that learning the English language is extremely difficult to learn; thus, they refuse to speak in English (Singh et al., 2020).

Consequently, when the students step into the working environment, they need to communicate better because of their low proficiency level in English language speaking skills due to insufficient speaking skills practice in schools (Rusli, 2018). Therefore, many complaints have been received from employers in all areas of work on employees' low proficiency in English language speaking skills (Kandasamy & Habil, 2018; Rusli, 2018). Even though teaching speaking skills to ESL students seems to be quite complicated (Singh et al., 2020) compared to writing, listening and reading skills (Maulani et al., 2019; Yanti, 2017), to prepare students with higher level of speaking skills is one of the main obstacles in English language teaching (Akhter et al., 2020; Kadamovna, 2021; Kandasamy & Habil, 2018; Maulani et al., 2019; Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020). This is supported by Phan



and Lan (2021), that the students have good language proficiency in other language skills such as reading, listening, and writing skills; however, when it comes to speaking skills, the students are reluctant to communicate with other students due to the insufficiency of speaking skills, and also of the students being apprehensive. Moreover, when students need to speak in English, it is much more challenging.

However, English as a second language (ESL) contributes an essential part of teaching-learning pedagogy in the classrooms (Ihsan, 2016). Hence, English language teachers who teach English as a second or foreign language are still studying and analysing the importance of the language in order to establish an effective English language teaching strategy (Mahmud & Nur, 2020). Consequently, according to McLeish (2009, p. 4), “the implementation of student-centered learning strategies would enhance student understanding and facilitate greater retention.” Implementing student-centered learning activities in the classroom will escalate the cognizance that will encourage the students to have a sense of belongingness.

In Malaysia, English is taught as a second important language which is a compulsory subject being taught from Standard One to Form Five; however, adolescent students in Malaysia still find it difficult to master English language proficiency as they face many obstacles since the ESL students are not practicing speaking in English language (Darus & Ching, 2009; Lim, 2013; Singh et al., 2020). Thereby, the education system in Malaysia is still striving to opt for an effective teaching strategy that can stimulate ESL



students to learn the language and enlighten themselves with language learning ability through active classroom engagement in pedagogy conscientiously.

Student-centered learning can become a tool for teachers to handle pedagogy in education in both traditional and innovative ways (Slavin, 1996). Hence, according to Johnson and Johnson (2017), in an excellent classroom environment, students learn to work cooperatively with other teammates with full enjoyment and independently on the common goal to be applied in the classroom as determined by the teacher. Based on the researcher's observation, since the ESL students in this research come from a secondary Chinese Independent High school background, even when the English language has been translated, students find it difficult to speak as they cannot arrange the sentences by phrases and vocabularies without changing the meaning of the content. Moreover, it is much more challenging for teachers to encourage the students to speak in English when dealing with weak ESL students.

Good command of the English language is significant to be successful in today's highly competitive and demanding world because most international communications are in the English language (Akhter et al., 2020; Kadamovna, 2021; Manurung, 2017; Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020). However, looking at the high demand for the English language persuades ESL students to force themselves to learn the English language in terms of mastering speaking skills. Regardless of much successful student-centered learning research done on academic achievement, social behavior, and affective guidance, many



ESL educators find it difficult to implement this strategy as a mode of instruction in the classroom (Akhter et al., 2020; Phan & Lan, 2021; Ma'arif & Ashlihah, 2017). This is parallel with Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) that although the education syllabus has been changed innumerable times along with many workshops provided to EFL teachers through seminars, conferences, and training, the development of English speaking proficiency still meets the dead end. Subsequently, according to Ooi et al. (2021), there are many obstacles faced by Malaysian ESL students, such as lack of vital knowledge, lack of vocabulary, low confidence level with high anxiety in speaking circumstances, lack of exposure to English language and lack of practice in English language speaking environment in their entire lives. All these drawbacks are due to insufficient knowledge of English, such as grammar accuracy, language learning strategies, and the support of teachers and school management to encourage ESL students to speak in English.

Language discourses are always seen as the first drawback to making any second language successful (Alharbi, 2008). Therefore, the researcher has opted for the *think-pair-share* strategy to be incorporated into this study to improve ESL students speaking skills. However, few studies have been done on improving speaking skills for ESL students at the Chinese Independent High school level using the *think-pair-share* strategy. Although many cooperative learning strategies are available to help ESL students' speaking skills, the *think-pair-share* strategy is believed to encourage students' involvement in group work because the nature of this strategy works through peer interacting, listening, and sharing and ensuring students' active participation (Raba, 2017). Hence it has motivated the







researcher to incorporate the *think-pair-share* strategy assessment factor to examine the students' speaking skills. Even though the teachers have applied various methods to encourage the students to speak in class, it was still in vain as it mainly relied on the traditional teaching method, and the educators are unable to apply innovative and reciprocally active participation from students due to the ancient method of teaching practice; hence, this predicament has persuaded Phan and Lan (2021) to opt the *think-pair-share* strategy as they strongly believe that it is an apt learning strategy to create a new English speaking environment. Thus, a proper teaching strategy to develop speaking skills has yet to be encountered; thus, this opens the door for researchers to explore this area for further studies (Raba, 2017).



In order to understand the existing problems that have averted the success of mastering foreign languages, is to study the differences and the variables. Consequently, Al-Shibel (2021) claimed that many researchers concluded that variables such as motivation, attitudes, and personality contribute immensely to acquiring a second or foreign language. Gender is also a different learning variable that should be added, as it has been proven that the learning differences between male and female students are not the same. However, the gender variable has not been explored thoroughly enough in the dimension of second or foreign language learning; thus, a detailed investigation is needed to have a deeper insight into gender differences to help ESL students master English. Al-Shibel (2021) also insisted that gender differences can be seen clearly even in the interaction between male and female students, especially when working in a group.







Accordingly, the students' attitudes while working in pairs or groups can affect the students' performance by interacting in English. As a matter of fact, speaking encourages oral communication between a speaker and a listener in order to transfer information from one person to another (Kamaliah *et al.*, 2018), and this eventually can improve students' speaking skills through the *think-pair-share* strategy, where the *think-pair-share* strategy allows all students to speak confidently since they can learn and teach each other (Maulani *et al.*, 2019).

Ooi *et al.* (2021) proclaimed that lower secondary school students in Malaysia need to become more familiar with organizing and using a particular skill to accomplish a task assigned effectively and efficiently in schools when these students have the opportunities to improve their English speaking ability. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the gender differences and the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy to improve ESL students' speaking performance in upper secondary ESL students in the Malaysian education context. The study intends to find out to what extent the *think-pair-share* strategy and gender differences could assist ESL students in improving their speaking skills in their English communication class.

#### 1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are summarized as follows:





1. To determine the effect of *think-pair-share* strategy on ESL students' speaking skills in control and experimental group.
2. To determine the effect of *think-pair-share* strategy between male and female ESL students' speaking performance in the experimental group.
3. To find out ESL students' views on the *think-pair-share* strategy used to improve speaking skills in experimental group.

## 1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the research questions to be answered are:



1. Is there a significant difference on the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy on ESL students' speaking skills in control and experimental group?
2. a) Do the male and female ESL students' scores differ in the usage of the *think-pair-share* strategy in experimental group?  
b) Do the male and female ESL students' performance differ in speaking skills in the *think-pair-share* strategy in experimental group?
3. What are ESL students' views on the *think-pair-share* strategy used in experimental group?



## 1.6 Hypotheses of the Study

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. There is no significant difference on the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy on ESL students' speaking skills in control and experimental group.
2. a) There is no significant difference between the male and female ESL students' scores in the usage of the *think-pair-share* strategy in experimental group.  
b) There is no significant difference between the male and female ESL students' performance in speaking skills in the usage of the *think-pair-share* strategy in experimental group.

## 1.7 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is basically derived from the theoretical framework that supports the rationality of a study (Kumar, 2011) which means that the conceptual framework is the main foundation of a research problem in a study. Hence, by referring to The Vygotskian Perspective on Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Doolittle, 1995) and Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, 2008, 2009, 2017; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2013), a conceptual framework is designed to have more clarity on the current research. Figure 1.1 shows the relationship between the independent variable and



dependent variable to determine the gender differences and the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy on the speaking performance of ESL students. The independent variable is the *think-pair-share* strategy, the dependent variable is the student's speaking skills, and the moderating variable is gender differences. The foundation of cooperative learning is built through social interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), and it helps the researcher to interrelate with the current research on the *think-pair-share* strategy.

A quintessential conceptual framework is pivotal to carrying out the study by considering the research methods. Therefore, Figure 1.1 explains the research design used in this study together with the sample of the population selected in the experimental group.

The instruments used are also exhibited: speaking skills test, classroom observation, and semi-structured interview. Finally, the data obtained are analyzed to determine the effect of the *think-pair-share* strategy on improving ESL students' speaking skills. Thus, developing a conceptual framework is crucial for this study's investigation as it acts as a main ingredient to ensure that all the main issues have been fully covered toward the completion of this study.



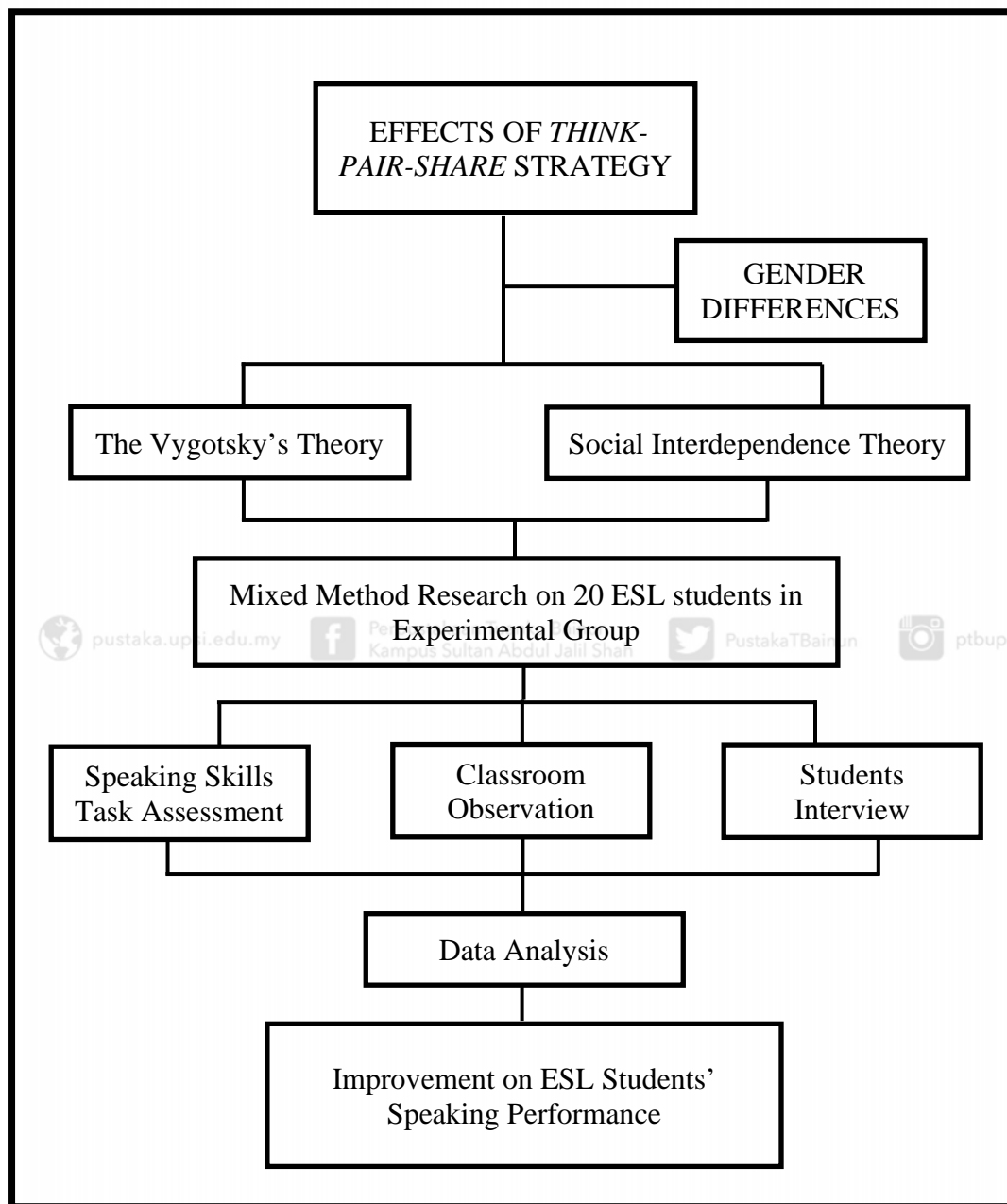


Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework Determining the Gender Differences and the Effects of *Think-Pair-Share* Strategy on Speaking Performance of ESL Students



## 1.8 Significance of the Study

As an unquestionable common understanding that there is a direct association between the *think-pair-share* strategy in improving students speaking skills, thus this research is expected to contribute to a better understanding of ESL students' English language proficiency, especially in terms of speaking ability. Therefore, this research intends to examine the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy and gender differences to improve Chinese Independent High school ESL students' speaking performance. The study may also stimulate more interest and lead to more investigations with findings that can help improve the students' English language speaking proficiency, contributing to academic achievement. The *think-pair-share* strategy promotes a collaborative learning environment where the students can learn and share their thoughts with classmates, eventually improving their speaking skills. This is in line with Prasetya (2019), who has applied the *think-pair-share* strategy in teaching speaking. This teaching strategy allows the students to accomplish the tasks assigned by the teacher by working in pairs or within a group.

Even though numerous studies have been done worldwide on the effects of student-centered learning among ESL learners (Akhter et al., 2020; Alharbi, 2008; Azizinezhad et al., 2013; Bunaya & Basikin, 2018; Cahyani, 2018; Celik et al., 2013; Gonzales & Torres, 2016; Hsu & Chang, 2017; Phan & Lan, 2021; Kadamovna, 2021; Kandasamy & Habil, 2018; Laguador, 2014; Liang, 2002; Lucena & San Jose, 2016; McLeish, 2009; Ning &





Hornby, 2014; Ooi et al., 2021; Prasetya, 2019; Retnowati & Ngadiso, 2018; Singh et al., 2020; Yanti, 2017), not many studies have been carried out to find out the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy and gender differences to improve Chinese Independent High School ESL students' speaking skills effectively, some educators and educational institutions often feel triumphant if the student's academic grades improve without taking into consideration the quality of education, whether it is learned through meaningful learning or just by rote learning, which may be the fundamental problem in the teaching-learning process nowadays (Amedu, 2017). Comparably, the pedagogy nowadays is more teacher-centered learning rather than student-centered, as the teachers are dominating the teaching-learning process by providing materials for the students and forcing them to memorize them exactly without students being able to learn the skills of modification according to their needs to be used in their daily life (Kamaliah et al., 2018).

Consequently, even Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) insisted that even their national syllabus encourages teachers to implement pair work in order to stimulate the students to converse in the English language. Evidently, in this case, the *think-pair-share* strategy will not only help ESL students improve their speaking skills in the classroom environment, but it is also a stepping stone for them to enter the workforce to secure a job in the future by exposing their best communicative skills. On the contrary, Kadamovna (2021) insisted that EFL students need to master English speaking skills not only for career growth but also to augment an individual's personal life as it is not only meant for job hunting. It simply means that possessing a high command of English





language proficiency just to secure a better job whilst ignoring the ultimate purpose of learning the English language is considered pointless.

Students are considered to have a high proficiency in the English language when they can apply both written and verbal communication; thus, speaking skill plays an essential role that needs much consideration in language pedagogy (Kamaliah et al., 2018). Perhaps, it is not uncommon for Chinese Schools to have high demand among the Chinese community in order to preserve their mother tongue (Lim, 2013; Low, 2015); however, to compete in this globalized world, English language proficiency is a must for them to sustain among other non-Chinese speaking society. Thus, the school policymakers started focusing more on English language teaching in the classroom (Santhiram & Tan, 2007). This is supported by Ooi et al. (2021), who insisted that the policymakers, school management, and ESL teachers to cater students with a conducive and friendly environment for the students to practice speaking the English language comfortably.

Moreover, students whose mother tongue is not English or who are not proficient in English are facing difficulties entering a university in their country or worldwide. Some research has to be done in this area as there are not much research has been done on improving ESL students' speaking performance through the *think-pair-share* strategy in Chinese Independent High schools in Malaysia. In China, Ning and Hornby (2014) found that implementing student-centered learning in secondary school ESL students was more difficult than in higher education ESL students. This is because secondary school ESL







students are unable to move forward from exam-oriented to practical learning through a cooperative learning strategy. This inclination gives little attention and motivation to research the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy and gender differences to improve ESL students' speaking performance.

Besides, the significance of this study is that teachers, schools, and policymakers would have enough knowledge to use the *think-pair-share* strategy that could improve ESL students' ability to converse confidently. However, even though the students take all the necessary actions to improve their speaking skills, parents and teachers should also play their roles to be responsible and knowledgeable about the teaching strategies as it may help to speed up ESL students' progression in improving their speaking skills in learning English as a second or foreign language more effectively and efficiently (Ooi et al., 2021). According to Gillies and Boyle (2011), even though teachers have switched to student-centered learning on students' overall academic achievements, research shows that the teachers face many obstacles in executing this teaching strategy. Phan and Lan (2021) also insisted that teachers should utilise learning strategies to persuade students to acquire knowledge and other interpersonal skills. In teaching speaking, teachers should train the students, despite gender differences, possess a meaningful conversation by asking quality questions and answering them creatively, thoughtfully, and meaningfully. In Malaysia, speaking eloquently and fluently is crucial in portraying their social status to compete and compete in the globalized world. Subsequently, Mahmud and Nur (2020) also claimed that investigating gender differences in communication is best done in English language





teaching. Therefore, it is undeniable that over the decades, student-centered learning has evolved and spread worldwide to improve the pedagogical system in any educational institution. Unfortunately, the fact is that there are not many effective learning strategies for ESL students to improve their communication skills.

Compared to the traditional way of teaching, the *think-pair-share* strategy gives more exposure for students to interact, communicate and share their ideas actively (Cahyani, 2018; Phan & Lan, 2021; Manurung, 2017; Maulani et al., 2019; Prasetya, 2019; Raba, 2017). Subsequently, another aim of this study is the teachers, schools, and policymakers who could get the chance to assess the student's performance in speaking skills through the *think-pair-share* strategy and could establish effective and relevant teaching-learning strategies for the students in general. Simultaneously, this study would also give an inclination on gender influence on ESL students' speaking skills and whether there is any notable difference between the male and female students.

Subsequently, this study will benefit the teachers in the teaching-learning process in the classroom. It would encourage all language teachers to be good role models for the students by implementing cooperative teaching-learning methodology in the classroom that paves the way for students to increase their academic performance because most of the latest technology and scientific reports are in the English language. This study helps policymakers to modify the curriculum needs of Malaysian schools. Through a *think-pair-*



*share* strategy, they will replenish the schools with new measuring success plans to enhance the student's English language speaking proficiency.

This research investigates the effect of the *think-pair-share* strategy and gender differences on ESL students' speaking skills in Chinese Independent High School students whose mother tongue is not English language. According to Ning and Hornby (2014), ESL students who enroll in student-centered learning have more chances to manage each other, take risks and feel unity among themselves compared to the ESL students subjected to traditional teacher-centered learning in the classroom. The reality is that even though English language proficiency is significant, English is still considered a second language in the Malaysian education context (David et al., 2015; Ooi et al., 2021). Hence, through this study, the policymakers would get a clear picture of the effects of the *think-pair-share* strategy and gender differences on the speaking performance of ESL students.

## 1.9 Limitations of the Study

Although the *think-pair-share* strategy has been widely accepted, implemented, and recommended for language teaching and learning, some limitations of the current study need to be considered before generalizing the findings. This study will be conducted at one of the renowned secondary Chinese Independent High School ESL students in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in the academic year 2020/2021. This study is limited to certain factors



that involve the limited number of teachers in the *think-pair-share* strategy background, teachers' and ESL students' understanding of the strategy, gender differences, and perception of the *think-pair-share* strategy. Firstly, the samples of respondents are only restricted to two classes of the entire Form Four ESL students consisting of 20 students in each class. The bigger the sample size, the greater the evidence that could be obtained. Next, the teachers' current evaluation methods are sometimes biased toward students; thus, the evaluation methods need to be taken into account in this study. Thirdly, the time constraint is another limitation identified in this study. Due to the pandemic, the survey length has been shortened to only six weeks to avoid unnecessary crises between parents and school management by considering the students' safety and welfare.



## 1.10 Definition of Terms

### 1.10.1 *Think-Pair-Share* Strategy

The *think-pair-share* strategy is developed by Frank Lyman from the University of Maryland (Lyman, 1987; Slavin, 1995; Phan & Lan, 2021; Manurung, 2017; Maulani et al., 2019; Raba, 2017). The *think-pair-share* strategy is a three-step process: 1) think, 2) pair, and 3) share. The *think-pair-share* strategy is believed to encourage the students to interact, listen and share information through active participation in various fields (Benjelloun, 2021; Eshan et al., 2020; Phan & Lan, 2021; Lascano Pérez & Altamirano Carvajal, 2022; Manurung, 2017; Maulani et al., 2019; Prasetya, 2019; Raba, 2017). In



the context of this study, the *think-pair-share* strategy is one of the cooperative learning strategies that will be implemented on form 4 Chinese Independent High School ESL students in order to improve their speaking skills.

### 1.10.2 Speaking Skills

Speaking plays an essential role in life (Akhter et al., 2020; Cahyani, 2018; Kadamovna, 2021; Kamaliah *et al.*, 2018; Manurung, 2017; Maulani et al., 2019; Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Prasetya, 2019; Raba, 2017; Rusli, 2018). According to Kamaliah *et al.* (2018), speaking is an instrument for oral communication that delivers the purpose of communication. Speaking is an interactive process involving producing, receiving, and analyzing the information from both parties. Speaking is an act of making oral sounds to express our thoughts and feelings through communication. Speaking skills in this study means delivering and receiving communication effectively. In language teaching and learning, there are four skills involved – reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Akhter et al., 2020; Phan & Lan, 2021; Maulani et al., 2019; Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Mudra, 2016; Kamaliah *et al.*, 2018; Ooi et al., 2021; Yanti, 2017). Therefore, in this research, “speaking” refers to one of those four skills, that is, speaking skills. This speaking skill is evaluated based on the five grading criteria: (1) appropriateness, (2) vocabulary, (3) grammar, (4) intelligibility, and (5) fluency.



## 1.11 Summary

In a nutshell, this chapter focuses on the current problem faced by Malaysian students in order to improve their speaking skills in the English language. Debates have been ceaselessly on the low English language proficiency among our ESL students without coming to an end to this problem. Therefore, a proper teaching strategy must be implemented according to the modern education system to cater to our students' need to master the English language. In this chapter, the researcher concluded that the proficiency in speaking the English language is still very low among Chinese students; hence they must be taught speaking skills; however, teaching English is not an easy matter as there are many obstacles needed to be faced by both ESL teachers and students. Therefore, this study obtained the *think-pair-share* strategy and gender differences to determine the effects on ESL students' speaking skills.

