Think-Pair-Share: An Active Learning Strategy to Enhance EFL Learners' Oral Communication Skills

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Abstract

Mastering communication skills has become a requirement to integrate with global societies that have adopted English as a lingua franca for communication. However, given the obstacles Omani students face, including a limited vocabulary, a mass of grammatical errors, and an inability to construct correct sentences, teaching oral communication skills cannot be considered a facile task. Therefore, the primary purpose of conducting this study was to investigate the effect of the Think-Pair-Share strategy (TPS), an active learning strategy, on Omani EFL high school learners' oral communication skills. Moreover, it aimed to survey the target sample's opinions on the usefulness of the TPS strategy. The current study targeted two groups of 10th-grade students enrolled in Al-Rubaie' Al-Najaria for Girls School (9–12). The 60 students participating in this study were divided into two groups with an equal number of students: 30 students in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. An oral communication test, a questionnaire, and a TPS teaching manual were used to obtain data. Additionally, the TPS treatment was carried out in 12 sessions held over a month-and-a-half. As for data analysis, independent samples t-tests, paired-samples t-tests, and one-way multivariate analysis of variance tests were used. The findings showed that the strategy did not contribute to achieving a significant difference between the means of the experimental and control groups, except in one sub-skill, which was pronunciation. Although the results were not completely in favour of the experimental group, the participating students expressed positive opinions about the benefit they gained from the strategy in developing their oral communication skills.

Keywords: The think-pair-share strategy; oral communication skills; oral communication sub-skills; cooperation; critical thinking

1. Introduction

Oral communication is an interactive process that contributes to fulfilling several communicative functions. Rahman (2010) stated that developing oral communication skills is an essential process because it helps people express their feelings, share their opinions and beliefs, and exchange information with different parties. The researcher also explained that the term 'process' means that oral communication takes place in continuous and dynamic steps, which leads to developing relationships between the people involved in the interaction. However, oral communication's importance is not just limited to social relationships but also includes the industrial, scientific, and educational fields. According to Nakamura and Valens (2001), the remarkable economic growth that the world is witnessing has increased the labour market's demands. Therefore, people need to develop their English oral communication skills so that they can keep pace with the intense economic competition that the world is facing.

Mastering oral communication skills is a need that all students should strive to meet to adapt to a demanding world. Prabavathi and Nagasubramani (2018) defined oral communication as a means of transmitting information and messages through verbal and visual aids between two parties, namely, the sender and the receiver. However, Raba (2017) argued that mastering oral communication skills is not an easy task. Students must make great efforts to master some aspects of the language such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Al-Mahrooqi (2012) elaborated on the process required to master oral communication skills. The author explained that teaching oral communication is a priority because it includes 'more than a mere knowledge of grammar and vocabulary' (p. 125). It involves the capacity to put thoughts into words more accurately and appropriately. It also requires an effort to enhance the language skills needed to produce comprehensible sentences. Goh (2007) explained that learners should be equipped with four main speaking skills to be able to communicate effectively. The first are phonological skills that enable students to pronounce and combine consonants and vowels correctly. They also help them identify words' intonations and stress, facilitating their use of language in communication. The second are speech function skills, micro-skills that help students achieve certain communicative functions (e.g. to greet, to agree, to complain, to offer a reason, to clarify) (p. 5). The third are interactive management skills or macro-skills that are concerned with the direct and spontaneous communication that can happen daily (e.g. daily discussions, negotiation of meaning, starting, and ending conversations). The fourth are extended discourse organisation skills derived from the former skills and used to enable students to communicate in extended conversations outside the classroom (e.g. narrative, [and] procedural) (p. 5).

Given the importance of oral communication skills, researchers have suggested some teaching strategies that help students develop them (Elenein, 2019; Kennedy, 2007; Mustikawati, Susilowati et al., 2018; Raba, 2017). One important collaborative teaching strategy that has an

influence on students' oral communication skills is the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) strategy, which was 'developed by Professor Frank Lyman and his colleagues at the University of Maryland in 1981' (Marzano & Pickering, 2005, as cited in Kaddoura, 2013, p. 4). This strategy has three main phases: think, pair, and share. The first phase requires students to think about a topic or a question posed by the teacher. In the second phase, students are asked to discuss their ideas with their peers until they come up with the optimal answer. In the last phase, each pair is asked to share their answer with the class (Hamdan, 2017). Given the characteristics of the work that is assigned to students to accomplish through the implementation of the different phases of the TPS strategy, it becomes clear that it is a cooperative learning strategy. According to Singh et al. (2020), cooperative learning strategies create an enthusiastic and positive learning environment, facilitating classroom discussions. Additionally, cooperative learning provides students with an opportunity to rely on their knowledge and skills, especially their communication and leadership skills, to achieve the learning outcomes.

The TPS strategy also enhances students' critical thinking skills and increases their self-confidence through cooperative activities. These activities are designed in a way that triggers students' critical thinking skills. They promote interaction among students and support their accountability (Kagan, 2001, as cited in Kaddoura, 2013). Furthermore, Nwaukwa and Okolocha (2020) argued that using the TPS strategy ensures that all students are involved in the classroom discussions. Students who do not feel like conducting discussions with the whole class are allowed to collaborate with a smaller group, which increases their enthusiasm and confidence.

In Oman, students still face difficulties developing their language skills, especially communicative ones. According to Al Hosni (2014), developing students' oral communication skills is an important requirement; however, some Omani teachers neglect it because they tend to focus on teaching other skills, especially grammar. Another reason Omani teachers neglect this skill is their desire to finish all the curriculum units on time (Al-Sheryani, 2020). Additionally, Al-Mahrooqi (2012) claimed that Omani students suffer from a 'low proficiency in the language and a lack of communicative ability' (p. 125). These are attributed to an English curriculum that is not equipped with the appropriate communicative activities and strategies. At the same time, there are other linguistic and psychological factors that lead to the difficulties Omani students face while learning to communicate through the target language. Al Hosni (2014) found that one of the linguistic difficulties students face is their inability to construct a correct sentence. They cannot find the appropriate words to express their thoughts and feelings. As a result, students prefer to speak their mother tongue even during daily discussions that require simple language, such as discussing the rubrics of activities. Moreover, Omani students sometimes refuse to speak English for fear of making mistakes in front of their peers. Indeed, Omani students face difficulties in developing their oral communication skills, especially because they are not given the opportunity to practise the language in real-life situations outside of school (Al-Sheryani, 2020).

Based on the above, it is clear that oral communication skill teaching needs to bring in effective teaching strategies that enhance students' self-confidence and enable them to practise the language inside and outside the school. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the TPS strategy on developing the oral communication skills of grade 10 students in Oman. Additionally, it seeks to survey students' opinions about the TPS strategy's influence on their oral communication skills. This influence has not yet been investigated. Consequently, this study will also contribute to the Omani literature. It is hoped that this study will positively affect the quality of the oral communication strategies Omani teachers use.

The study answers the following questions:

1. To what extent does the TPS strategy affect Omani EFL students' oral communication skills?

2. What are grade 10 students' opinions on the effect of the TPS strategy on their oral communication skills?

2. Literature Review

Oral communication is an 'indispensable life skill' (p. 127) that people relied on to communicate before resorting to writing (Aliyu, 2017). Rahman (2010) stated that oral communication plays an effective and articulate role in any language because it is the common method of communication among humans. It is also 'a unique and learned rhetorical skill' (p. 3) because it depends on a deep comprehension of produced words and the way they are produced. Ali (2018) elaborated on this interactive skill's different dimensions, explaining that oral communication is a mutual process in which interaction is exchanged between the speaker and the listener. Therefore, it includes productive and receptive skills represented in speaking and comprehension of the perceived speech.

Thus, mastering oral communication depends on two basic language skills, namely, speaking and listening. Researchers have confirmed that 'listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9%' (p. 977) of overall human communication (Mendelsohn, 1994, as cited in Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Teachers should list these two skills as a priority because they enhance students' oral communication skills, which they will need to fit in the globalisation era.

However, acquiring these skills to achieve effective communication requires thorough knowledge and comprehension of the language and its components. Steinberg (2007) argued that listening is not just mere hearing; rather it is a dynamic procedure that involves processing the signals that the brain receives from the speaker, understanding them, and then coherently responding to them. Developing speaking skills is also a demanding process. De Vera and De Vera (2018) explained that comprehension of any speech depends on the people involved in the conversation, their personal experiences, the environment around them, and their interaction's purpose.

2.1 Developing Successful Oral Communication Skills

Rahman (2010) asserted that developing oral communication as a dynamic skill requires tremendous effort because its success and failure depend on several factors. Other than the language used in communication, any oral communication's success depends on body language,

attentive listening, eye contact, and rhetorical accuracy. Additionally, Prabavathi and Nagasubramani (2018) argued that effective oral communication depends on the mutual respect between the two communicating parties and their ability to carry out direct interaction without an intermediary party. From this, it can be concluded that the speaker's and listener's styles and the flexibility of the interaction between the two parties play a pivotal role in enhancing oral communication skills.

To train students to develop successful oral communication skills, teachers must prepare appropriate teaching strategies and methods that motivate effective classroom interactions and discussions. Gutiérrez Gutiérrez (2005) emphasised the need to use real-life situations that foster reality-based communication between the students. Through real-life situations, students can practise all aspects of the spoken language, including 'grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics, [and] pragmatics' (p. 84). Moreover, creating a cheerful learning environment is necessary because it motivates students to discuss and share their ideas comfortably without the fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates.

EFL students, however, experience different circumstances than the ones native speakers do; therefore, different linguistic, social, economic, and psychological factors may affect their development of oral communication skills. Shehata (2004, as cited in AlSaleem, 2018) focused on some of the linguistic factors that affect the success of EFL students' oral communication skills. The researcher stated that EFL students should use gestures and signs to express opinions and feelings. They should also constantly pronounce letters correctly and construct sentences appropriately. To elaborate on the main elements of the development of EFL students' oral communication skills, this study used the oral communication guidelines provided by the Omani Curriculum Standards Framework (2016) and the Student Assessment Handbook for English Grades (5–10) (2018). According to the standards and outcomes described in both documents, the main criteria that students should focus on while developing their oral communication skills are accuracy and fluency.

In the modern era of English teaching, there has been a tendency to move from a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach. This shift in focus on students as an essential element in the educational process also led to the adoption of new teaching methods that suited the ideologies of the student-centred approach. One of these methods is communicative language learning (CLL), which helps students share their ideas and beliefs in the target language (Alamri, 2018). According to Dincer et al. (2012), the CLL method is related to two speaking approaches: the fluency-oriented approach and the accuracy-oriented approach. The first approach confirms that pronunciation and grammar errors should be ignored, especially in language acquisition's early stages. This approach promotes the ideas of the natural approach, which holds that errors are natural and are indicative of students' learning. Therefore, correcting them may negatively affect students' language development.

The speaking and oral communication outcomes mentioned in the Omani Curriculum Standards Framework (2016) and the Student Assessment Handbook for English Grades (5–10) (2018) highly emphasised the fluency-oriented approach. Generally, the outcomes focused on enabling students to respond to various texts, present interesting and understandable topics, and use communication strategies effectively, especially eye contact and a clear voice. Meanwhile, the Student Assessment Handbook for English Grades (5–10) (2018) highlighted the accuracy-oriented approach, which is concerned with producing a language that is free of errors (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). According to the document, students are required to distinguish between informal and formal language, utilise grammar and vocabulary appropriately and 'pronounce English intelligibly' (p. 75). However, differentiating between the two terms, namely, fluency and accuracy, does not mean treating them separately; they must be dealt with evenly to improve students' oral communication skills.

2.2 Theories Related to the TPS Strategy

This strategy is associated with social interdependence theory, which emphasises achieving cooperative goals that cab increase students' enthusiasm and achievements. To elaborate, this theory argues that when goals are established cooperatively, students' motivation rises. As a result, students achieve the goals of the whole group, not just their own (Cockerill et al., 2018). Correspondingly, the TPS strategy's second phase emphasises cooperative learning's positive impact: enabling students to share their ideas effectively.

As cited in Budiman (2017), Skinner's behavioural learning theory shares some characteristics with the TPS strategy as well. Skinner believed that students' behaviour can be shaped through response and stimulus. Additionally, behaviourism explains that teachers are supposed to control the educational environment and the stimulus by rewarding students who achieve the desired outcomes and punishing 'students who are not able to show the change of meaning' (102). Similarly, cooperative learning believes that students should be given incentives to encourage them to help each other and to work hard to achieve the group's goals (Sharma & Saarsar, 2018). Thus, TPS strategy is behaviourist in some ways because it is based on guiding students towards achieving common cooperative objectives.

2.3 Challenges to Oral Communication Development

Learning to speak tactfully to deliver a message or information and having the ability to absorb any spoken text are necessary skills in human interaction. However, mastering these skills can be a complex task for some students, which can discourage them from striving to develop their oral communication skills appropriately. Yook and Atkins-Sayre (2012) claimed that one of the challenges students face, which leads to weak oral communication skills, is teachers' focus on elocution or public presentations. Instead of focusing on the prerequisites of the process of speaking, they focus on oral presentations as the sole learning outcome. The researchers also explained that asking students to make public presentations without giving them feedback or directions to use oral communication strategies will negatively affect their proficiency level when they join different universities. Additionally, Al Hosni (2014) found that teachers' strategies and beliefs regarding speaking, which is an essential productive skill in oral communication, do not help students practise the target language in the classroom. It became clear to the researcher that teachers' priority is to teach the curriculum in the allotted time and not to

develop students' productive skills.

Some researchers discussed the psychological and linguistic aspects that hinder students, particularly EFL students, from developing their oral communication skills (Al Hosni, 2014; Ambarwati, 2018; Khan, 2007). As Khan (2007) stated, word pronunciation differences are a challenge that students must overcome. Students face this challenge because their mother tongue's morphology and phonology are different from those in English. Therefore, students must comprehend the rules to pronounce compound letters correctly. Furthermore, word choice is a challenge that affects oral communication's quality. For example, students may use incorrect collocation, such as a powerful coffee or a chill room, because they depend on translation. Another linguistic problem that students may face when developing their productive skills is their tendency to use their mother tongue. This is because they have difficulty finding the appropriate vocabulary to express their feelings (Al Hosni, 2014). Their sentences thus become meaningless or carry erroneous meanings. Learners 'sound bookish in their utterances such as my sister's marriage ceremony will be held 3rd April' (Khan, 2007, p. 8).

Many psychological factors also harm the developmental process of students' productive oral communication skills. Tension, shyness, excessive narcissism, and inhibition (Khan, 2007) can prevent students from communicating with others, especially in public places. Al Hosni (2014) elaborated on the effect of inhibition and confirmed that Omani students in particular have low self-esteem, which is why they prefer not to engage in classroom discussions. They do not want to make any mistakes that would embarrass them in front of their peers. Similarly, Ambarwati (2018) argued that students tend not to practise speaking a foreign language in the classroom to avoid humiliation.

Discussing the challenges students face while developing their oral communication skills also requires delving into their listening problems. Renukadevi (2014) confirmed that students' lack of interest in increasing their vocabulary negatively affects their understanding of oral speeches. Additionally, students may have difficulty understanding some dialects or accents because they insist on communicating in a certain dialect. This leads to confusion, making it difficult to understand some words and intonations. Above all, providing a quiet place is a challenge because any disturbance or noise may distract students. Indeed, listening is not like other skills because it requires student to focus on every detail of the audio text.

Nevertheless, the above challenges can be overcome by training teachers to use oral communication methods and strategies, which will contribute to solving the linguistic and psychological problems students face.

2.4 Oral Communication Strategies

Students need communication strategies to deal with communication problems or difficulties. Moreover, students use these strategies to communicate with those who do not come from the same linguistic and socioeconomic background. They also use them to negotiate the meanings of unclear words and phrases, which helps maintain the flow of any conversation (Nakatani, 2010). Given the importance of developing oral communication skills, some strategies have been suggested to develop students' speaking skills. These are productive skills that require great accuracy and fluency to master. Oxford (1990, as cited in Wahyuni, 2013), for example, suggested two types of language learning strategies that help improve students' speaking skills: direct and indirect. The first type can be further classified into 'memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies' (p. 19), and the second type can be further classified into affective, metacognitive, and social strategies.

Listening is also taught through various active strategies that attract students' attention and increase their interaction. There are two types of listening strategies: top-down and bottom-up. The top-down approach depends entirely on students who use their previous knowledge of the topic and the language used in interactions to understand what was heard. Examples of this type of strategy are activities that require students to provide summaries, explanations, or suggestions for a particular topic. As for the bottom-up approach, it depends on audio text. Students analyse and interpret information provided to them via their linguistic knowledge, which enables them to identify the sounds, letters, and grammar of the language (Renukadevi, 2014).

The above strategies are important for the development of students' oral communication skills; however, the focus of the current study will be on one collaborative learning strategy, namely, the TPS strategy.

2.5 The TPS Strategy

The TPS strategy, which was first 'developed by Prof. Frank Lyman in 1981' (Sharma & Saarsar, 2018, p. 94), is an effective cooperative learning technique that motivates students to participate in classroom activities. It also promotes critical thinking and stimulates classroom discussions, regardless of group size (Sampsel, 2013). Through groups, students can reach the highest levels of enthusiasm, activated by students' interactions, sportsmanship, and mutual motivation (Sumarni, 2016). Lyman (1987, as cited in Usman, 2015) explained the pivotal role played by this strategy. The author stated that the TPS strategy is designed to promote students' critical thinking skills by presenting them with interesting and controversial topics so that they can formulate and share their creative ideas with their peers. The topic or question presented to students must demand them to analyse, interpret, and evaluate a certain issue or concern. Besides, the TPS strategy provides an opportunity for students to express their thoughts and feelings and eventually be themselves (Sumarni, 2016). The TPS strategy is student centred because it focuses on activating students' participatory role in the classroom by stimulating their intellectual and cooperative skills. Teachers' role is limited to providing assistance and guidance to facilitate students' work (Aeni, 2020).

The name of the strategy is derived from the characteristics of the three phases it contains: think, pair, and share. During these phases, the teacher prepares a topic or question for discussion, and then students work individually to think about it at a specific time. Next, they discuss their answers and ideas with their partners, and finally, they share their final answers with the whole class (Cahyani, 2018).

2.5.1 Phases of the TPS Strategy

Prasetiya (2019) clarified that students' task in the first phase is to work alone and think critically about a particular topic or problem. The ideas that students form are based on their memories and experiences, which increases the quality of their answers. This phase also gives students a particular time to think about a topic; therefore, they feel comfortable sharing their ideas with their classmates and the number of their mistakes will be reduced. Above all, this phase enhances students' critical thinking skills, significantly affecting their academic, social, and emotional success. Further, teachers benefit from this phase because they find the time to check students' understanding of the problem presented to them.

In the second phase, students pair up with their peers to discuss the issue presented by the teacher. This phase enables students to build their knowledge by sharing their ideas and clearing misunderstandings. In the final phase, the teacher asks students to share their final answers with everyone. This stage is essential for evaluating students' work and giving them feedback. It also allows students to assess themselves and others.

2.5.2 Advantages of the TPS Strategy

Implementing the TPS strategy in the classroom benefits both students and teachers, especially because it promotes cooperative learning. According to Li and Lam (2013), cooperative learning is 'a student-centered [and] instructor-facilitated instructional strategy' (p. 1) that makes students accountable for their learning and the learning of their groups' members. Through cooperative learning, students can discuss any problem, complete any task, and achieve the expected outcomes. Therefore, Cloud (2014) suggested using cooperative learning instructions, which help students acquire social skills by interacting with others. This in turn contributes to enhancing leadership and lifelong learning skills. Furthermore, Meena (2020) argued that during cooperative learning activities, students speak to their group members to discuss their ideas and listen to others' input and analyse and comprehend them. This develops their oral communication skills. Similarly, Prasetiya (2019) asserted that discussions resulting from the second phase of the TPS strategy help students interact orally and express their opinions. As a result, learners resolve ambiguities in unclear topics and develop their pronunciation.

Another feature of this strategy, which can be directly observed in the first phase, is it enhances students' critical thinking skills. The topic or problem raised in the first phase should demand the application of analytical and interpretive abilities that lead to the development of students' critical thinking skills. Additionally, the TPS strategy creates a democratic learning environment, which helps students make arguments and respond to them. As a result, students enhance their critical thinking and oral communication skills through effective interactions and arguments (Yanti & Rufinus, 2017). Muhammadiyeva et al. (2020) stated that critical thinking is a debated skill that is 'used in problem-solving, determining probable outcomes, formulating inferences, and making decisions' (p. 62). Critical thinking enables students to develop their presentation skills because it helps them think systematically. This leads to them expressing their thoughts and feelings clearly. However, critical thinking does not mean teaching students to think harder but to think better, providing them with effective productive skills.

The TPS strategy also has a positive effect on students' feelings and attitudes. Cahyani (2018) pointed out that the strategy guides students to listen to and respect others' voices and beliefs. It also affects students' self-esteem positively because it gives them the confidence to share their answers in front of everyone without hesitation. Therefore, this strategy can be used to eliminate students' inhibition, influencing their presentation and interaction abilities. Lyman (1981, as cited in Apriyanti & Ayu, 2020) confirmed that the TPS strategy ensures that all students are involved in classroom activities by giving them the opportunity to think about their answers before sharing them with everyone. Further, this strategy is suitable for all class sizes and student styles.

The impact of this strategy is not limited to students but extends to teachers as well. By implementing it, teachers can create an interactive educational atmosphere that contributes to engaging all students in the educational process. This strategy also facilitates students' assessment during pair work (Cahyani, 2018). This strategy gives teachers the opportunity to monitor the classroom by adopting the student-centered approach and designing creative learning activities and materials (Afrilliani, 2018). Above all, teachers can meet all their students' needs by choosing the appropriate problems and questions that suit their learning levels (Cahyani, 2018).

3. Method

This section addresses the characteristics of the current study, including the research design, population, sample, research variables, and instruments. The steps for collecting and analysing the data to answer the research questions are discussed in this section's last two sections.

3.1 Research Design

This was a quasi-experimental quantitative study where pre-post-tests were applied to two groups of 10th graders to investigate the effect of the TPS strategy on their oral communication skills. The participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. The cooperating teacher taught the control group according to the conventional instructions used in teaching oral communication skills, which mainly depend on individual work and direct questions. The same teacher taught the experimental group, but this time through TPS instructions, which are based on asking students to work cooperatively to answer a particular question that stimulates their critical thinking abilities. The treatment in this study lasted for a month-and-a-half and was applied during the second semester of the academic year 2021–2022. Additionally, the experimental group was exposed to 12 sessions of the TPS strategy.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study population consisted of grade 10 students in Oman. The Annual Educational Statistics Book 2020/2021 announced that the total number of schools in Al Batinah South Governorate was 138, including 42 male schools and 27 female schools. The total number of male and female students was about 43,984 and 42,675, respectively. As for the target sample, it was chosen non-randomly to study the impact of the TPS strategy on grade 10 students' oral communication skills. In detail, the sample included two sections of grade 10 students from Al-Rubaie' Al-Najaria for Girls School (9–12). This particular school was chosen because of its closeness to the researcher's residence and because the Directorate of Education in Al Batinah South Governorate nominated it. Furthermore, it was distinguished by the high academic levels of its students and the cooperation of its administrative and teaching staff. Each section included 30 female students aged between 15 and 16.

3.3 Research Variables

The independent variable in the study was the TPS strategy, whereas the dependent variable was grade 10 students' oral communication skills.

3.4 Instruments and Design

3.4.1 Oral Communication Test

This quasi-experimental study utilised two quantitative instruments to examine the effect of the TPS strategy on grade 10 students' oral communication skills. To answer the first research question, the study used a pre-test and a post-test. The test was adapted from Cambridge English Qualifications: A2 Key for Schools (Cambridge Assessment English, 2020). It contained two sections with different questions, objectives, and timings. The first section focused on asking direct questions about personal and factual details related to students. Students were expected to respond to the nine questions in this part in only 3 to 4 minutes. The second section, meanwhile, contained 11 questions that required students to express their preferences and give reasons for their choices. It also contained visual aids for some hobbies that guided students to answer the questions more precisely. This section took a long time because students were expected to answer the questions within 5 to 6 minutes.

To check the validity of the test, it was sent to 13 teaching and language specialists who assessed its clarity and appropriateness to the Omani context. The researcher provided the specialists with a table of specifications, which described the instructional objectives, each section's timing, the number of items in each section, and the levels of thinking. After piloting the test with 20 grade 10 students from Al Niwar bin Malik for Basic Education School (5–10), its reliability coefficient was measured through inter-rater reliability with Cohen's Kappa, and it turned out to be 0.767. This particular test was used primarily to evaluate students' overall performance and not individual items. To obtain data, two teachers cooperated to assess participating students. Later, Cohen's Kappa was run to ensure that the scores given by the correctors agreed and that there was no significant difference between them.

Cambridge English Qualifications: A2 Key for Schools also explained the criteria that should be followed to assess students' performance in the speaking test. The same criteria were adopted in this study, but some minor modifications were made for the Omani context and for the discussions that were raised in this study, especially those related to assessing oral communication skills. The assessment rubric focused on two main characteristics of effective oral communication development: accuracy and fluency. More specifically, oral communication accuracy focused on three categories: pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. The first category contained three elements that measured students' skills in producing appropriate language. The second and third categories included one sentence to measure students' performance in their use of vocabulary and grammar. The other criterion that the evaluation form focused on was oral communication fluency, which contained two items for evaluating the performance of 10th-grade students. Moreover, the assessment rubric contained five bands; therefore, the highest mark that the students could score was five, and the lowest was 0. Five experts validated the assessment rubric to ensure its clarity and appropriateness in evaluating grade 10 students' oral communication abilities.

3.4.2 The Questionnaire

The second research question was answered through an adapted questionnaire, which Ma'arif and Ashlihah (2017) originally developed. The original, unmodified version of the questionnaire contained only 10 statements. The researcher made some changes in some statements' ordering and wording in the original questionnaire to match the levels of grade 10 students in the Sultanate of Oman. The researcher also added other statements to the questionnaire to investigate students' opinions on other effects of the TPS strategy on their oral communication skills, especially the ones discussed in this study's theoretical part. The final version of the questionnaire, which used a 5-point Likert Scale, contained 16 statements that tested students' degree of agreement or disagreement concerning the TPS strategy's usefulness. To check its face validity, the questionnaire was sent to 13 teaching and linguistic experts. The experts checked each statement's clarity and relevance, and the researcher considered their suggestions before adopting the questionnaire's final version. The questionnaire's reliability was computed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and it turned out to be .720. The questionnaire was written in Arabic and English to ensure that students comprehended all the statements. Additionally, the questionnaire included instructions for filling it in correctly and a definition of the TPS strategy to remind students of its nature and effectiveness. To analyse the questionnaire data, the scale shown in Table 1 was used. It was adapted from Alqatawenh (2018). The scale determined the usefulness level of the TPS strategy in developing students' oral communication skills. The scale was described numerically so that 5 represented 'Strongly Agree', 4 represented 'Agree', 3 represented 'Neutral', 2 represented 'Disagree', and 1 represented 'Strongly Disagree'.

Table 1. Scale for Interpreting Participants' Opinions about the TPS Strategy's Usefulness

Scale Value	Interpretations
1–2.33	Low Usefulness
2.34–3.67	Moderate Usefulness
3.68–5	High Usefulness

3.4.3 The Teaching Manual

In addition to the previous instruments, the researcher developed a teaching manual that demonstrated the process of using the TPS strategy. The teacher's guide touched on some aspects related to the TPS strategy's effective implementation. Moreover, it began with an introduction to the importance of developing students' oral communication skills, which were reinforced by using optimal strategies, including the TPS strategy. After that, the researcher discussed the definitions of the TPS strategy and oral communication skills to make sure that the teacher comprehended the study variables. The most fundamental part included in the teaching manual was the explanation of the implementation procedures. This part clarified the role entrusted to students and the teacher in each phase of the strategy. The teaching manual discussed the advantages of the TPS strategy, students' and the teacher's responsibilities in the TPS sessions, and some tips for the teachers to implement the TPS strategy effectively.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The following procedures were followed to collect data for this study:

1. Before the actual implementation of the strategy, the researcher organised a workshop to train the teacher who taught the experimental and control groups. During the training session, the paramount topics addressed by the researcher in the teaching manual were discussed, especially those related to the TPS strategy's optimal application. Additionally, the teacher was able to practise implementing the strategy in the presence of the English department's teachers, who played the students' role. Training the teacher was an opportunity to clarify unclear matters and answer raised inquiries.
2. At the beginning of the second semester, a pre-test was carried out on both the experimental and control groups. The administration took two days to assess all the participating students fairly. Both the experimental and the control groups took the same speaking test. The test, which took 10 minutes, contained two parts: warm-up and real oral interaction. Prior to the test, teachers' consent to record the students were taken to ensure accurate assessment. Further, the researcher and another teacher evaluated students' performance to ensure a fair evaluation.

Table 2 illustrates the independent-samples t-test that was conducted to compare the scores of the oral communication pre-test for the experimental and control groups.

Table 2. Independent-Samples T-test for the Experimental and Control Groups' Pre-test Scores

	Group	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*t*-value	*p*
Pre-test	Experimental	30	3.05	1.48	.098	.922
	Control	30	3.02	1.13		

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the experimental and control group's pre-test scores. Before implementing the TPS strategy, there was no statistically significant difference in the experimental group's (M = 3.05, SD = 1.48) and control group's (M = 3.02, SD = 1.13; t (58) = .098, p > .05) scores. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .033, 95% CI = -.648 to .715) was very small. From the previous statistics, it is clear that students' oral communication level in both the control and experimental groups was almost identical. The means of the two groups were roughly similar before implementing the TPS strategy.

To scrutinise the pre-test dependent variables, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency, the present study used a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) that determined the effect of the independent variables, in both the experimental and control groups, on the dependent sub-skills. Table 3 presents a description of the means and standard deviations recorded in each sub-skill of the pre-test.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Pre-test Dependent Variables

Pre-Test Sub-skills	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Pronunciation	3.43	1.41	3.33	1.03
Vocabulary	2.9	1.58	2.9	1.16
Grammar	2.83	1.58	2.73	1.14
Fluency	3.03	1.49	3.1	1.16

The comparison between all the pre-test sub-skills showed that pronunciation and grammar scored the highest and the lowest means. To illustrate, the experimental group scored the highest mean in pronunciation (M = 3.43) and the lowest in grammar (M = 2.83). Similarly, and close to congruence, the control group recorded the highest mean in pronunciation (M = 3.33) and the lowest in grammar (M = 2.73). Moreover, both groups obtained an identical mean score in vocabulary (M = 2.9).

Table 4 shows the value of the Wilks' lambda statistic test that measured the differences between the means of the experimental and control groups for the four dependent variables.

Table 4. Wilks' Lambda Statistics for the Pre-test Dependent Variables

Effect	Value	*df*	*p*	Partial Eta Squared
Wilks' Lambda	.961	4	.691	.039

The test illustrated that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups for students' oral communication sub-skills, F (4, 55) = .56, $p > .05$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.961$, partial $\eta 2 = .04$.

3. The third step to collect data was treatment. The experimental group was taught by the trained teacher who adopted the TPS strategy instructions to evaluate the strategy's effect on students' oral communication skills. This treatment lasted for 6 weeks and 12 sessions. During the strategy sessions, students were taught several tasks that were in line with the 10th-grade curriculum's objectives. Some of these activities were modified from students' class book and skills book to conform to the TPS strategy instructions. The researcher designed the other activities. Therefore, to ensure their clarity and suitability, eight experts checked them. While planning the strategy lessons, the researcher clarified the three phases that students must follow during the strategy's implementation. Students were instructed to first think of the question or issue that the teacher posed on their own. After that, students were asked to move to the second phase, which required them to discuss the ideas they had reached in the first stage with their peers. In the last phase, students were instructed to present their ideas appropriately. The teacher's role was limited to providing guidance to students and observing their performance. The teacher also provided feedback to students after they presented their ideas to help them develop accuracy and fluency in their oral communication skills. As for the control group, the same teacher taught them to avoid bias. However, her teaching instructions differed from this group because she followed the conventional methods of teaching. The researcher's role during this stage was to attend the lessons, observe the progress of the implementation of the three phases, and provide the teacher with guidance if needed.
4. After applying the TPS strategy for a month-and-a-half, the 10th-grade students enrolled in the experimental group filled in a questionnaire that surveyed their opinions about using the TPS strategy to develop their oral communication skills. The data collected from students' responses enabled the researcher to answer the second research question.
5. After the treatment, the experimental and control groups took the post-test. Similar to the pre-test, the post-test was carried out in two days. A teacher from the English department helped evaluate students' performance in the administered oral communication test. Teachers' consent was also obtained to record students' performance in the post-test. Students' performance records allowed both the researcher and the other examiner to verify the grade owed to the students in case of any doubt.

3.6 Plan for Data Analysis and Findings

The collected data were analysed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. To examine the differences between the pre-post-test results of the two groups, independent-samples t-tests were used. Additionally, paired-samples t-tests were employed to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-test results of the experimental group on the one hand and the control group on the other. A one-way MANOVA was carried out on the experimental and control groups to identify the mean differences between all the sub-skills included in the oral communication test. As for students' opinions, they were analysed through the mean score and standard deviation of each questionnaire item.

4. Results

This study sought to investigate two significant aspects, namely, the effect of the TPS strategy on grade 10 students' oral communication skills and the opinions of the target sample regarding the expected influence of the strategy on the development of their oral communication skills. In this section, the two research questions posed in the current study are answered.

4.1 Answering the First Question

The current study used pre-post-tests to answer the first research question: 'To what extent does the TPS strategy impact Omani EFL students' oral communication skills?' To analyse the data collected from the pre-post-tests, three statistical tests were used: independent-samples t-tests, paired-samples t-tests, and one-way MANOVA tests. Table 5 illustrates the experimental group's paired-samples t-test that compared the pre-test results before using the TPS strategy and the post-test results after using the strategy.

Table 5. Paired-Samples T-test for the Experimental Group's Pre- and Post-test Scores

Test	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-value	*p*
Pre-test	30	3.05	1.48		
				-6.18	p<0.05
Post-test	30	3.98	1.03		

Table 5 shows a significant increase in the scores of the experimental group from the pre-test (M = 3.05, SD = 1.48) to the post-test (M = 3.98, SD = 1.03), t (29) = -6.18, p = .000. The eta squared statistics (.57) pointed to a large effect size, which meant that implementing the TPS strategy had a positive impact on the development of students' oral communication skills.

Another paired- samples t-test was conducted to compare the scores obtained by the control group in the pre- and post-tests (Table 6).

Table 6. Paired- Samples T-test for the Control Group's Pre- and Post-test Scores

Test	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-value	*p*
Pre-test	30	3.02	1.33		
				-4.45	p< 0.05
Post-test	30	3.53	1.16		

Similar to the results of the experimental group, the statistical data confirmed that the scores of the control group witnessed a noticeable increase from the pre-test (M = 3.02, SD = 1.33) to the post-test (M = 3.53, SD = 1.16), t (29) = -4.45, p = .000. The eta squared statistics (.41) also indicated a large effect size. The experimental and control groups' post-test scores were also compared through an independent-samples t-test (Table 7).

Table 7. Independent-Samples T-test for the Experimental and Control Groups' Post-test Scores

	Group	*N*	*M*	*SD*	t-value	*p*
	Experimental	30	3.98	1.03		
Post-test					1.590	.117
	Control	30	3.53	1.16		

There was no statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the control group (M = 3.53, SD = 1.16) and the experimental group (M = 3.98, SD = 1.03; t (58) = 1.59, p > 0.05). The magnitude of the difference in the means (means difference = .450, 95% *CI*: -.117 to 1.02) was small, which meant that the effect of the TPS strategy on the experimental group did not lead to a change that outpaced the progress experienced by the control group, which was not exposed to the same TPS treatment.

However, the focus in the previous results was kept on students' overall performance without delving into the details of the sub-skills associated with oral communication skills. Therefore, the current study used a one-way MANOVA test to measure the differences between the experimental and control groups in their performance in all the dependent variables: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency (Table 8).

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for the Post-test Dependent Variables

Post-test Sub-skills	Experimental Group		Control Croup	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Pronunciation	4.37	.81	3.67	1.24
Vocabulary	3.83	1.15	3.53	1.22
Grammar	3.8	1.13	3.33	1.27
Fluency	3.9	1.16	3.6	1.25

In general, it is clear from Table 8 that the scores of the two groups increased in all the post-test sub-skills. The control and experimental group's highest means were recorded in pronunciation (experimental group M = 4.37, control group M = 3.67) and lowest means were recorded in grammar (experimental group M = 3.8, control group M = 3.6). It was clear from both groups' oral communication sub-skill scores that their strength lay in pronunciation skills. The sub-skill that students needed to exert more effort in was grammar.

To investigate the differences between the means of the experimental and control groups for pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency, Wilks' lambda statistic test was used (Table 9).

Table 9. Wilks' Lambda Statistics for the Post-test Dependent Variables

Effect	Value	*df*	*p*	Partial Eta Squared
Wilks' Lambda	.826	4	.03	.174

Wilks' lambda statistic test indicated a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups for their performance in the post-test, F (4, 55) = 2.9, p =.03; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.826$, partial $\eta 2 = .174$. Nevertheless, the test results did not show the dependent variable or variables in which the mean scores were significantly different between the two groups. Therefore, the obtained means in each dependent variable were measured separately through Bonferroni correction, which was used to reduce the possibility of committing Type I errors (Table 10).

Table 10. The Significance Levels of the Oral Communication Post-test Dependent Variables

Oral Communication Areas	Variance Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pronunciation	Group	7.35	7.35	6.69*	.012	.104
	Error	63.63	1.09			
Vocabulary	Group	1.35	1.35	.96	.331	.016
	Error	81.63	1.41			
Grammar	Group	3.27	3.27	2.27	.137	.038
	Error	83.47	1.44			
Fluency	Group	1.35	1.35	.933	.338	.016
	Error	83.9	1.45			

$p < 0.05$

Table 10 showed that both the experimental and control groups recorded statistically significant mean differences in pronunciation, F (1, 58) = 6.67; p = .012; partial $\eta 2$ = .104. This indicated a large effect size favouring the experimental group, which scored a higher mean score as

illustrated in Table 7. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in vocabulary (F (1, 58) = .96; p> 0.05; partial η2 = .016), grammar (F (1, 58) = 2.27; p> 0.05; partial η2 = .038), and fluency (F (1, 58) = .933; p> 0.05; partial η2 = .016). The effect size in the three dependent variables was small.

4.2 Answering the Second Question

The current study used a modified questionnaire that matched grade 10 students' levels to answer the second research question, 'What are grade 10 students' opinions on the effect of the TPS strategy on their oral communication skills?' The questionnaire, which included 16 statements, covered four dimensions: oral communication skills, oral communication sub-skills, students' motivation and satisfaction, and learning gain. Table 11 displays the general description of the questionnaire dimensions' means and standard deviations.

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics for the Questionnaire's Four Dimensions

Dimension	*M*	*SD*
Students' motivation and satisfaction	4.14	.789
Oral communication sub-skills	4.11	.923
Oral communication skills	4.07	.949
Learning gain	3.94	.832
Overall	4.07	.873

The adopted questionnaire measured the degree of students' agreement or disagreement regarding the impact of the TPS strategy on their oral communication skills. It used a 5-point Likert Scale that contained five response options: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. This study used the scale in Table 1 to analyse the questionnaire data. Overall, the participants reported that the TPS strategy was highly useful in enhancing their oral communication performance (M = 4.07, SD = .873). It is clear from Table 11 that, in general, the students expressed positive opinions in all dimensions of the questionnaire. The highest obtained mean scores were reported in oral communication sub-skills and students' motivation and satisfaction (M = 4.1), whereas the lowest mean scores were reported in the learning gain dimension (M = 3.94).

For analysis purposes, the questionnaire was divided into four tables, 12, 13, 14, and 15, presenting the mean and standard deviation of each questionnaire item in the four dimensions.

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics for the Experimental Group's Responses in the Oral Communication Skills Dimension

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
1. The TPS strategy prompts me to listen carefully to my classmates' opinions to understand them better.	4.30	.915	High
2. The TPS strategy helps me develop both my speaking and listening skills.	4.03	1.03	High
3. Implementing the TPS strategy helps me negotiate the meanings of unclear words and concepts.	4.00	.982	High
4. The TPS strategy gives me the skills to communicate in real-life situations.	3.93	.868	High
Overall	4.07	.949	High

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics for the Experimental Group's Responses in the Oral Communication Sub-Skills Dimension

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
1. The TPS strategy helps me develop my critical thinking abilities.	4.28	1.013	High
2. With the TPS strategy, I can use the right language, especially for communication.	4.16	.746	High
3. The TPS strategy helps me develop my English vocabulary.	3.89	1.01	High
Overall	4.11	.923	High

Table 14. Descriptive Statistics for the Experimental Group's Responses in the Motivation and Satisfaction Dimension

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
1. Using the TPS strategy encourages me to practice speaking.	4.43	.568	High
2. The TPS strategy is interesting.	4.43	.774	High
3. Through the TPS strategy, I can speak English enthusiastically.	3.83	.592	High
4. The TPS strategy helps me speak English more confidently.			
5. I have the courage to speak my mind when I work collaboratively with my classmates.	3.73	.980	High
	4.28	1.01	High
Overall	4.14	.789	High

Table 15. Descriptive Statistics for the Experimental Group's Responses in the Learning Gain Dimension

Item	*M*	*SD*	Level
1. The TPS strategy makes me respect my classmates' opinions.	4.33	.922	High
2. The use of the TPS strategy facilitates comprehension of the learning materials.	3.93	.593	High
3. The TPS strategy helps me understand the learning activities in a short period.	3.90	.661	High
4. I feel that my opinions are more appreciated when implementing the TPS strategy.	3.58	1.150	Moderate
Overall	3.94	.832	High

The recorded means of all the questionnaire dimensions illustrated that the participating students reported a high usefulness level in all the questionnaire items except for item 4, which was in the learning gain dimension (Table 15). More important, none of the participants reported a weak usefulness level for the strategy. After examining the details of the reported means and standard deviations, the researcher found that the lowest obtained mean was 3.58 (Table 15), whereas the highest was 4.43 (Table 14). Meanwhile, the lowest obtained standard deviation was .568 (Table 14), whereas the highest was 1.150 (Table 15). It was also clear from the questionnaire data that the majority of students' responses fell between a mean ranging from 3.8 to 4.4. Thus, it can be concluded that the students had positive opinions about the effect of the TPS strategy on all the questionnaire dimensions: oral communication skills, oral communication sub-skills, students' motivation and satisfaction, and learning gain.

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussion of the Pre-Post-Tests Results

The statistics discussed in the previous section showed that both the experimental and control groups witnessed development in their oral communication skills at the treatment period's end. The control group's progress, which was observed through the post-test scores, was expected because its learning plan was implemented in full. The post-test scores of the experimental group, which experienced learning through the TPS strategy, increased significantly as well. However, when both groups' overall performance in the post-test was compared, the results showed that the learning gains achieved by the experimental group did not outperform those of the control group. Clearly, the present study's results did not match the findings of other international studies. However, those studies assessed students' overall performance without exploring sub-skills.

Other quantitative studies, including Mustikawati et al. (2018), Supraba (2018), Alipour and Barjesteh (2017), Ambarwati (2018), and Misria et al. (2019), which adopted pre-and post-tests as data collection tools, found a remarkable superiority in the experimental group after implementing the TPS strategy. Mustikawati et al. (2018), for example, found that the TPS strategy developed the experimental group's oral communication skills. Similarly, Supraba (2018) and Ambarwati (2018) found a noticeable impact of the TPS strategy on students' speaking skills, which they determined based on the significant difference between the post-test results of the experimental and control groups.

Additionally, Alipour and Barjesteh (2017) conducted a study on Iranian students of approximately the same age as the target sample in the current study. After the treatment, descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-test were used to measure the differences between the post-test results of the experimental and control groups. The results recorded a noticeable difference in favour of the experimental group, with a mean difference of 3.87. Misria et al. (2019) investigated the impact of the TPS strategy on second graders. The type of test used in their study was similar to that used in the current study, which targeted the language used to express personal opinions. The results revealed a significant difference between the means of the pre- and post-tests for the experimental group, which confirmed the positive effect of the TPS strategy on students' speaking skills.

The studies discussed in the previous paragraphs investigated the effect of the TPS strategy on oral communication skills in general. There are also other cognitive gains that the strategy contributes to enhancing, including students' critical thinking skills, achievement, grammar, and vocabulary. Kaddoura (2013) concluded that the TPS strategy contributes to developing students' critical thinking skills. Additionally, the TPS strategy has proven to have a positive effect on students' achievement (Hamdan, 2017) and vocabulary mastery (Syahrir et al., 2021). All the sub-skills discussed in previous studies were integral parts of oral communication skills classes. It was clear from the results of these studies that they were also not in line with those of the current study, especially when students' overall performance was taken into consideration.

However, the present study did not only investigate students' overall performance but rather delved into the sub-skills associated with oral communication, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. After examining the mean scores of the two groups in each sub-skill separately, it became clear that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups in pronunciation. This sub-skill might have been particularly developed because of the second and third stages of the TPS strategy, which involve discussing and appropriately presenting students' arguments. When students listen to their peers, they learn the correct pronunciation of words, especially the basic ones used in everyday conversations. Thus, because the post-test was related to the daily hobbies practised by the students, they were able to correctly pronounce the words they used to hear in the classroom. However, the remaining skills, including vocabulary, grammar, and fluency, did not show improvements that favoured the experimental group. Therefore, the subsequent paragraphs will be devoted to interpreting the results obtained after implementing the TPS strategy with Omani EFL learners.

The results of the current study were mainly attributed to three factors: the learning environment, students' engagement with the strategy, and the timing of implementing the strategy. The world, especially the education sector, has witnessed pivotal changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Omani students, like students in neighbouring countries, had to change their learning environment more than once as they moved from the face-to-face learning mode to fully online learning and then blended learning. In 2021, they returned to face-to-face learning in schools while adhering to precautionary measures. These quick transfers, which left one gap year, might have negatively affected students' academic levels in general. Indeed, the cooperating teacher in the present study and the teachers of the English department at the school confirmed that students' levels after the gap year were not satisfactory. Similarly, Kremen and Tsitsikashvili (2021) argued that the gap year left adult students feeling confused because of the influence of their parents, friends, or teachers. Adolescent students may have lost interest in learning. From this, it can be concluded that the psychological and socioeconomic issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic might have caused a drop in students' levels. Implementing the TPS strategy did not yield the desired results because students' academic levels need

intensive remedial plans that contribute to high skill mastery. These remedial plans might restore students' self-confidence, making their engagement with cooperative learning strategies more noticeable.

The second reason the results did not favour the experimental group was students' engagement with the strategy. The TPS strategy, as discussed in the theoretical part, is a cooperative learning strategy that relies on students' collaboration so that they can achieve the desired objectives (Felder & Brent, 2007). However, given what students have been through during the COVID-19 pandemic and the adoption of individualised learning, getting used to cooperative strategies has become stressful. Thus, students need to practise cooperative learning strategies more effectively while comprehending the contents of all the courses, not just the English language courses, to recover the essence and importance of these types of strategies and to interact with them positively. Additionally, one of the protocols to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in schools was to wear masks, which means that students were not able to read their peers' facial expressions. According to Buck et al. (1972), expression of emotions is related to the use of nonverbal language. The researchers also emphasised that a person's ability to receive or send facial expressions is a pivotal factor in any successful communication. For any communication to succeed, all parties must be able to read each other's facial expressions. In the current study, students' communication was done verbally and through eye contact because the other parts of their faces were covered by masks. Masks were an obstacle students found difficult to navigate.

One of the main characteristics of the TPS strategy that the students benefited from in the first stage was critical thinking skills. However, critical thinking skills are not among those skills that Omani students acquire smoothly. According to Al-Kindi and AL-Mekhlafi (2017), Omani students face difficulties acquiring critical thinking skills because of their textbooks, which include limited critical thinking activities; because of teachers' books, which lack appropriate instructions to activate critical thinking strategies; because of large size classes; and because of a lack of training opportunities to teach these particular skills. Similarly, the researcher of the present study noticed that some of the students participating in it did not allow themselves to practise critical thinking properly. During the implementation of the pre-and post-tests, some students did not give themselves the opportunity to think and responded with 'I don't know' when asked to explain their preferences regarding some hobbies. It was clear from these conclusions that the first stage of the strategy was not easy for students because they lacked the essential cognitive skills to apply it.

Regarding the timing of the strategy's implementation, it was implemented during the second semester of the academic year 2021–2022, which is known to be shorter than the first semester. Because of the limited time, students and teachers found it challenging to cover all the curriculum themes and assigned tasks on time. If the strategy had been applied at a different time, the probability of achieving better results would have been greater, especially because the students would have become better at using cooperative learning strategies and critical thinking skills.

5.2 Discussion of Students' Responses to the TPS's Usefulness

In contrast to the post-test results, all the data obtained from the questionnaire that evaluated students' opinions regarding the benefits gained from implementing the TPS strategy were positive. From the means that were recorded in all the questionnaire items, it was found that items 1 and 2, which fell within the scope of motivation and satisfaction, scored the highest mean (M = 4.43). The other items (items 3, 4 and 5) that were related to enhancing students' motivation scored high means as well (Table 14). This confirmed that grade 10 students were able to seek the benefits that the strategy provided, especially in aspects related to raising their confidence and enthusiasm.

As for the items that discussed students' opinions about the benefits of the strategy in developing their oral communication skills, including speaking and listening, high means were recorded here as well (Table 12). Items 1, 2, 3 and 4 that shed light on students' speaking and listening skills recorded mean scores above 3.9, which were considered high rates according to the scale that was used to analyse the questionnaire data (Table 1). Students' opinions about the benefits they obtained from applying the TPS strategy proved that they had positive impressions regarding the impact of the TPS strategy on their speaking and listening abilities.

Similarly, the analysed data demonstrated that the students found that the strategy contributed to the development of their oral communication sub-skills (Table 13). With a mean of 4.28, it turned out that the participating students believed that the strategy developed their critical thinking skills, which are articulated skills in the TPS strategy. Another sub-skill that was surveyed through the questionnaire was grammar. It was clear from item 2's mean that the learners believed that the TPS strategy enabled them to use the correct language to communicate with others (M = 4.16). Moreover, in item 3, the students reported that the TPS strategy developed their vocabulary, which is an indispensable component of oral communication (M = 3.89).

Items 1, 2, and 3's means, which were related to the learning gain dimension, were also consistently high (Table 15). The students confirmed that the strategy helped them respect their classmates' opinions (M = 4.33), comprehend the learning materials (M = 3.93), and understand the learning activities in a short time (M = 3.9). These results indicated that the students had positive opinions regarding the impact of the strategy on their linguistic development, especially in the field of oral communication. However, item 4, which surveyed students' opinions concerning their peers' appreciation of their perceptions, scored a moderate mean (M = 3.58). Item 4's mean suggested that the students did not highly believe that their peers appreciated their opinions. They discussed this in detail in the second stage of the strategy (Pairing). The second stage is essential for exchanging ideas that ensure smooth communication among students. Therefore, implementing it inappropriately could have affected students' discussions, relationships, and performance in the last stage.

The results of the current study's questionnaire are in line with the findings of Ma'arif and Ashlihah (2017), the original developers of the questionnaire. In their study, which focused on English language students, the researchers found, through descriptive analyses of their questionnaire data, that 87.03% of the students were enthusiastic about practising English language skills after implementing the TPS

strategy. Correspondingly, Supraba (2018) found that the target students had positive opinions when it came to applying the TPS strategy to develop their speaking skills. After surveying students' opinions about the impact of the TPS strategy on developing their speaking skills, Supraba (2018) concluded that the students believed that the TPS strategy was interesting and useful for teaching speaking skills.

Based on the previously discussed paragraphs, it can be emphasised that the three stages of the TPS strategy aroused students' interest, which reflected positively in their opinions about TPS's impact on their oral communication skills. However, the actual implementation of the TPS strategy did not provide the kind of results that showed the clear and explicit superiority of the experimental group in all the oral communication sub-skills. However, students' initial acceptance of the strategy and their affirmation of its effectiveness may mean the possibility of obtaining better results, especially if it is applied in more appropriate conditions that allow the implementation of cooperative learning strategies.

Teaching through the TPS strategy enables an interactive and active learning environment that enhances students' language skills. However, in the context of Oman, which had its first experience with implementing the TPS strategy, the results were not in line with what was expected because of the stressful educational conditions the students were going through. Therefore, it is necessary for the responsible authorities, whether the educational institutions, the teaching and administrative staff, or parents, to take appropriate measures to deal with the conditions that students face and that have caused a noticeable decline in their academic levels.

5.3 Study Limitations

This study had limitations related to the gender of the targeted sample and the place in which the study was implemented. All the participants in the study were female, so the impact of the TPS strategy on male students was not examined. Further, the study was conducted in Al Batinah South Governorate; therefore, the influence of the TPS strategy on other governorates' students was not investigated as well. Above all, the TPS strategy was implemented in the second semester over a short treatment period.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Impact of the TPS Strategy on Students' Oral Communication

First, this study aimed to investigate the effect of the TPS strategy on the oral communication skills of grade 10 learners. To achieve this objective, the at-hand study used a pre-test and post-test that matched high school students' levels. The results of the tests, obtained from both the experimental and control groups, were analysed by independent samples t-tests, paired-samples t-tests, and one-way MANOVA tests to compare the results of the two groups before and after the treatment. The results showed that only the experimental group achieved a significant learning gain after a month-and-a-half of treatment. That means that despite the development observed at the experimental group's level, it did not surpass what was achieved by the control group, except in pronunciation. Therefore, the study concluded that the strategy did not achieve the desired results (a noticeable change in students' oral communication skills). Nonetheless, the results were not due to the procedures for implementing the strategy nor to the cooperating teacher's interaction with the strategy, but rather to the educational conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, students' non-acceptance of cooperative learning strategies, and the inappropriate timing of the strategy's implementation.

6.2 Students' Opinions about TPS Implementation in Oral Communication Lessons

This study inquired about students' opinions on the benefits of the strategy, especially for their oral communication skills, subskills, motivation, and learning gain. After reviewing students' opinions on the 16 items in the questionnaire, it became clear that they found that the strategy effectively contributed to improving their oral communication skills. In particular, it increased their enthusiasm, self-confidence, and critical thinking abilities. This is a positive indication that the strategy can achieve better results if it is implemented in conditions that allow all three phases to be fully implemented without any shortcomings.

6.3 Research Implications

The fact that this study is a forerunner in investigating the effect of the TPS strategy in the Omani context and that it was applied in unprecedented exceptional circumstances makes it a great addition to the Omani literature. The results should motivate Omani researchers to search for the effectiveness of the TPS strategy on other skills, such as writing and reading. This may yield better results compared to the results of the current study, which focused on a skill whose mastery may be a challenge for some students. At the same time, this study serves the interest of stakeholders, including teachers and curriculum designers. Teachers should recalculate which strategies are appropriate to students' levels after the gap year. They should also remember that strategies, no matter how effective, may fail if they do not fix the academic problems students face after the COVID-19 pandemic. As for curriculum designers, the results of this study may guide them in designing appropriate activities that are compatible with the current levels in Omani public schools. This will entail activating twenty-first-century skills, the most important of which is critical thinking. In addition, the results that were not in favour of the experimental group should indicate to both curriculum designers and teachers that Omani students need remedial plans to improve their declining levels.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the current study's results, the following is recommended:

1. Oral communication activities in class textbooks lack the basic guidelines and instructions that ensure implementation of active learning strategies. Therefore, curriculum designers must consider designing appropriate activities that are compatible with modern strategies, including cooperative learning strategies that guarantee that students will practise oral communication skills.
2. Other essential skills that curriculum designers and teachers should activate when designing and implementing the textbooks' activities are twenty-first-century skills, including critical thinking skills.
3. Educators should also form a community to share their ideas and solutions to ensure the proper implementation of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom.
4. Although integrating English language skills is essential, at least one class should be set up to teach oral communication skills separately because these are neglected skills that need to be carefully practised.

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