An Analysis of Selective Student Participation in English as a Foreign Language Learning: A Qualitative Study on the Stage-Dependent Efficacy of Think-Pair-Share

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Abstract

This study explores student participation (SP) paradoxes during the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) process in an eleventh-grade EFL setting. Despite TPS's reputation for engagement, observations at SMA N 1 Talang Kelapa revealed inconsistent participation levels. Using a descriptive qualitative design, student involvement was tracked across seven indicators. Findings indicate that participation is phase-dependent: the Pairing phase saw robust, universal engagement, whereas the Thinking phase was marked by cognitive passivity. The Sharing phase highlighted significant socio-affective barriers, with students relying on teacher intervention or peer copying due to performance anxiety. These results suggest that while TPS excels in collaborative rehearsal, it falters during stages requiring individual accountability and higher-order thinking.

Keywords: student participation, think-pair-share

Introduction

The mastery of the English language transcends mere academic formality; it constitutes a critical and compulsory skill set necessary for navigating the professional world in the era of globalization. Within the educational structure of Indonesia, English is a mandatory subject studied at all levels, including Senior High School. To adequately prepare students for the increasing demands of the future, educational environments must prioritize the development of maximized student abilities, necessitating a profound shift towards active learning.

Student participation (SP) is recognized as a cornerstone of effective pedagogy. It refers to the entirety of active mental and physical activities executed by students during instructional processes. Scholarly consensus holds that learning outcomes are optimized when students are actively involved, contributing their energy and thoughts to activities that foster comprehension (Weaver and Qi in Ohashi, 2016). Students who actively engage in the learning process demonstrably learn more than their passive counterparts. Furthermore, success in foreign language acquisition is highly dependent on the active role of the learners, as it necessitates consistent practice of the language in various contexts (Librianty and Sumantri, 2014). SP indicators span verbal activities, such as questioning, answering, and providing responses, as well

as non-verbal forms of engagement, including listening, physical movement, and body language cues like nodding, glancing, and smiling (Usman, 2022; Ellis et al. in Librianty and Sumantri, 2014).

To effectively foster active student engagement and manage the diversity of participation styles, teachers are required to employ a variety of strategic techniques. Cooperative discussion activities, such as the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) technique, developed by Frank Lyman, serve as a valuable mechanism for this purpose. TPS is designed to encourage structured patterns of interaction between students working in small groups, thus cultivating an environment conducive to rich classroom discussion.

The theoretical strength of the TPS model lies in its capacity to increase student involvement. By mandating individual reflection time before transitioning to low-stakes peer discussion, TPS ensures that all students, even those typically reserved or quieter, gain an opportunity to articulate their thoughts and contribute their ideas, thereby moving towards maximal participation (Huda in Khodijah et al., 2016). The three fundamental steps—Think, Pair, Share—are intended to systematically scaffold engagement and ensure accountability at individual, small-group, and whole-class levels.

Despite the pedagogical advantages of the TPS technique and its implementation by the teacher at SMA N 1 Talang Kelapa, preliminary research identified a persistent paradox. Observation of the eleventh-grade class indicated that student participation remained selective and inconsistent. While the technique was in use, only a segment of the student population actively engaged; a significant number of students tended to be silent or displayed behaviors indicative of hesitation.

Specifically, the reluctance manifested as slow responses to teacher questions and expressions of hesitancy when attempting to volunteer an answer, such as tentative hand-raising gestures. Although some students managed to convey opinions during discussions, others consistently chose to remain silent. This general lack of maximized participation was not merely a classroom dynamic; it directly correlated with poor academic performance, resulting in students' daily grades failing to meet predetermined standards.

The persistence of passive behavior despite the deployment of a specific intervention designed to mitigate this very issue suggests that general instruction and encouragement are insufficient; rather, the structural execution of the TPS phases requires detailed scrutiny. The critical research gap, therefore, lies in conducting a micro-analysis to identify which specific component of the TPS sequence—Think, Pair, or Share—acts as the primary barrier to robust and equitable participation in the context of EFL reading comprehension. By isolating behavior across these stages, the study moves beyond general analyses of student participation (Elia, 2017) to a deeper understanding of pedagogical efficacy and structural limitations.

This descriptive qualitative study is governed by the following research question, derived directly from the observed phenomenon:How is the students' participation in the process of teaching and learning English by using Think-Pair-Share in the eleventh grade of SMAN 1 Talang Kelapa?.

The resulting analysis holds substantial significance. Theoretically, the findings offer valuable input concerning reliable methods for determining the specific level of student

participation and provide empirical conclusions for future researchers studying TPS in EFL settings. Practically, the detailed findings are intended to offer teachers actionable reflections and reviews regarding student participation when employing structured techniques, thereby serving as motivation to overcome low engagement. Ultimately, the study aims to catalyze a change in student behavior, encouraging them to participate actively in their own learning processes.

Conceptualizing Student Participation (SP) in the EFL Context

SP in the EFL Landscape

In the EFL context, active participation is vital; language acquisition requires constant practice to develop critical thinking and lesson mastery. This involvement is multidimensional, encompassing both observable verbal and non-verbal actions.

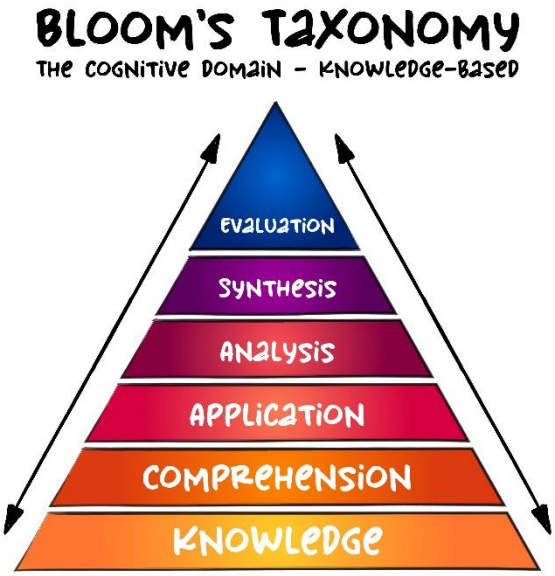

Figure 1 Bloom's Taxonomy

Multidimensional Indicators

Researchers have identified several measurable indicators to track this engagement:

- **Behavioral & Verbal (Lo, 2010):** Cooperation, asking and answering questions, providing responses, and performing tasks in front of the class.
- **Cognitive & Emotional (Majid & Arief, 2015):** Understanding explanations, proving answers with facts, initiating problem-solving ideas, and synthesizing thematic connections.
- **Oral vs. Non-Oral (Puspita,2021):** Distinguishes between active verbal sharing and non-verbal cues like eye contact, nodding, and hand-raising.

For this study, the indicators—involvement, response, group work, sharing ideas, discussion, and answering questions—are specifically tailored to capture these behaviors within the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) framework.

Internal and External Factors Governing Participation

The decision to participate or remain passive is shaped by intrinsic individual attributes and extrinsic environmental conditions.

Internal Student Factors

Foremost is personality. Students with high self-efficacy—confidence in their ability to perform—demonstrate superior engagement and curiosity (Yusof et al., 2012). Conversely, low self-efficacy or high anxiety often predicts decreased participation. Cognitive readiness is equally vital; involvement requires adequate knowledge of themes and facts (Sudjana in Hartini, 2022). The depth of this understanding determines a student's ability to engage in complex analysis or synthesis.

External and Environmental Factors

The pedagogical environment is heavily influenced by the instructor's traits. Supportive, approachable teachers who provide positive non-verbal reinforcement motivate active participation (Yusof et al., 2012). Furthermore, a non-threatening psychosocial environment encourages students to voice opinions safely (Sudjana in Hartini, 2022). Open-minded peers and effectively selected learning media further act as essential communication channels that stimulate thought and engagement (Sumanti et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework of Cooperative Learning (CL)

Defining CL and Its Essential Elements

Cooperative learning is a structured approach where students work in heterogeneous small groups to master material (Wijaya, 2021). Unlike unstructured group work, effective CL relies on five critical components:

1. **Positive Interdependence:** Relying on one another for success.
2. **Individual and Group Accountability:** Responsibility for personal and collective learning.
3. **Promotive Interaction:** Face-to-face communication and mutual help.
4. **Interpersonal and Small Group Skills:** Necessary teamwork abilities.
5. **Group Processing:** Reflection on group effectiveness.

TPS as a Structured Cooperative Strategy

The Think-Pair-Share (TPS) technique (Lyman, 1981) provides a formal structure for cognitive processing and peer discussion (Haryati, 2017).

- **Think:** Students engage in at least three minutes of silent, individual reflection on a prompt (Bouchard, 2005).
- **Pair:** Students discuss ideas with a neighbor to refine responses, which builds confidence through low-stakes practice (Barkley et al., 2014).
- **Share:** Selected pairs present conclusions to the class, clarifying positions or explaining disagreements.

The Nuance and Critique of the TPS Share Component

The Debate on Whole-Class Sharing

While individual reflection (Think) and low-stakes discussion (Pair) are widely praised, the "Share" component is contentious. Critics argue that public sharing can undermine previous benefits. Speaking before the class—especially via random calling—can induce significant anxiety, leading to panic and a fear of public failure that negates the safety of the "Pair" stage. Additionally, the "Share" phase often fails to represent the full range of student thinking, as a subset of students may dominate the session, leading to inequity in whose ideas shape the classroom understanding.

Anxiety, Dependency, and Higher-Order Thinking Gaps

Student hesitation during the "Share" phase suggests that public performance acts as a powerful affective filter. Preparation in the "Pair" phase is often insufficient to overcome deep-seated anxiety regarding high-stakes accountability.

Moreover, summarizing findings requires higher-order cognitive skills like synthesis (Barkley et al., 2014). If students have not mastered these, the pressure of the "Share" phase exacerbates cognitive difficulty, resulting in confusion or over-reliance on the instructor. In high-anxiety contexts, it is argued that instructional goals may be better met by focusing solely on "Think" and "Pair" to eliminate psychological threats.

Method

Research Design and Rationale

This investigation employed a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative research yields data in the form of spoken or written words from informants and observable behavior, avoiding a primary emphasis on numerical analysis (Sugiyono, 2013; Margono, 2007). The selection of this method was driven by the research objective: to generate a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the existing phenomenon—namely, the observed behaviors and characteristics of student participation—as they naturally occurred during the application of the TPS technique. The design allowed the researcher to provide a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of how students manifested involvement across the structured learning environment.

Informants and Context

The informants for this study were the 32 students constituting class XI IPS I at SMAN 1 Talang Kelapa. The justification for selecting this specific class was the consistent finding, derived from preliminary observations, that the English teacher regularly incorporated the Think-Pair-Share technique into the curriculum. The class, therefore, provided an appropriate setting to analyze student responses to this specific pedagogical intervention.

Instrumentation and Validation

The principal method for data collection utilized systematic observation, conducted via a standardized observation checklist. Observation is defined as the process of systematically recording the behavioral symptoms displayed by the object of research (Margono, 2007).

The observation checklist was derived directly from established literature on student participation indicators (Lo, 2010; Majid and Arief, 2015) and tailored to the three phases of the TPS technique. The instrument focused on nine specific aspects of student activity, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and physical involvement: involvement, thinking (emotional engagement), giving a response, pair up/group work, sharing ideas, discussion, answering questions, and working in front of the class. The finalized instrument was validated by a panel of experts, including two university lecturers and a practicing English teacher, confirming its appropriateness for collecting reliable behavioral data.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was executed through direct, frank observation in the field across two distinct teaching and learning sessions, conducted between January 30th and February 2nd 2024. Frank observation involves the researcher openly stating their purpose—data collection—to the participants.

During these sessions, the researcher served as an independent observer, systematically recording student behaviors using the checklist. Crucially, the observations were supplemented by video recordings captured via a cellphone camera. This documentation provided real, verifiable evidence of student activity, allowing for subsequent detailed analysis and serving as a mechanism to support the credibility of the primary checklist data. The procedure focused specifically on capturing classroom interactions and student behavior as the teacher applied the sequential steps of the TPS strategy.

Data Analysis Techniques

The qualitative analysis of the collected data employed a three-step technique consistent with the framework established by Miles and Huberman (1994) :

1. **Data Reduction:** This phase involved systematically selecting, classifying, and focusing the raw observation notes, field records, and video data. The researcher isolated key behavioral indicators and coded the data based on its relevance to student participation across the Think, Pair, and Share phases, effectively reducing the extensive field notes to manageable, targeted information.
2. **Data Displays:** The selected data were then presented in a cohesive, comprehensible format. Utilizing narrative description, words, and sentences, the researcher created analytical summaries and comparative tables (analogous to quantitative models but filled with descriptive words) to facilitate understanding and simplify the complex behavioral patterns observed.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Final conclusions were drawn by synthesizing the data displays and critically comparing findings across the two observation meetings. To ensure the reliability of the conclusions, a verification process was undertaken, where conclusions were triangulated against the descriptive data and corroborated using the photographic and video documentation.

Results and Discussion

The findings present a meticulous analysis of student participation across the structured framework of the TPS technique. The material addressed during the observations was: Online School Registration, requiring students to read a newspaper text to identify and synthesize five positive and five negative impacts of online school registration. The data reveals that participation levels are highly non-uniform, shifting dramatically between individual and collaborative phases.

Phase I: The Thinking Step and the Manifestation of Passivity

The "Think" stage was intended to serve as a period of individual reflection and cognitive preparation. However, the data reveals a persistent pattern of low affective and cognitive engagement during this phase across both observed sessions.

Indicators of Involvement and Emotional Affect

During the initial phase of Meeting 1, students exhibited a notable "flat affect," characterized by indifferent facial expressions and a lack of visible motivation to engage with the text. Behavioral indicators of involvement were largely non-positive; rather than reading, several students were observed engaging in off-task conversations or physically moving from their assigned seats. By Meeting 2, the behavioral profile shifted from overt disruption to a form of "passive compliance," where students spent the majority of the allotted time simply flipping through the pages of their *Bahasa Inggris* textbooks without making notes or highlighting key passages.

The observation of these behavioral cues suggests a critical deficit in cognitive processing. The absence of active-listening indicators—such as eye contact with the teacher during instructions or focused attention on the reading material—indicated that the "Thinking" time was not utilized for its intended purpose of internalizing the problem or formulating initial hypotheses. Instead, the students appeared to be in a state of cognitive stasis, waiting for the subsequent collaborative phase to provide the necessary intellectual momentum.

Individual Accountability and Spontaneous Response

Individual accountability, a core pillar of the TPS model, was found to be minimal during the Thinking step. The data indicates that students were highly reluctant to volunteer spontaneous answers when the teacher initiated the transition to group work. In both meetings, verbal participation was limited to low-risk, closed-ended responses, such as "yes" or "no," which did not require significant cognitive effort or public vulnerability. When confronted with open-ended questions requiring the synthesis of the text's content, students exhibited a long delay in response time, often requiring the teacher to directly appoint a student to solicit an answer. This reliance on teacher intervention confirms that most learners entered the lesson without the cognitive priming necessary to commit to an independent interpretation of the material.

Phase II: The Pairing Step as the Peak of Collaborative Interaction

In a dramatic shift from the inertia of the Thinking phase, the "Pairing" stage represented the highest level of student engagement across all measured qualitative indicators. This transition

suggests that the social structure of the classroom acts as a primary moderator of learner participation.

Structural Formation and Universal Compliance

The formation of pairs was characterized by universal and rapid compliance. Following the teacher's instruction to collaborate with seatmates, all students immediately formed working dyads. This structural engagement was maintained consistently throughout both observed meetings, with no instances of students opting out of the collaborative task. The ease with which these groups formed suggests a high level of social cohesion and a preference for peer-mediated over teacher-led instruction.

Promotive Interaction and Collaborative Mechanics

The qualitative depth of the Pairing step was evidenced by the prevalence of "promotive interaction," where students actively supported one another's understanding. The classroom atmosphere, previously silent or disruptive, became filled with focused, low-volume discussion. A critical behavioral pattern identified was "co-dictation": students were observed working in a tandem where one partner acted as the scribe while the other provided a continuous stream of intellectual contribution, fact-checking the reading material and negotiating the wording of their answers. This collaborative synergy allowed students to combine their fragmented individual understandings into a more cohesive synthesis of the positive and negative impacts of the online registration system. The high levels of universal participation in this phase demonstrate that the dyadic structure successfully creates a "safe rehearsal space" that mitigates the anxiety of the foreign language environment.

Phase III: The Sharing Step and the Emergence of Cognitive Dependency

The final phase of the TPS sequence, requiring students to present their group's findings to the whole class, revealed a significant breakdown in cognitive synthesis and analytical independence.

Cognitive Synthesis and Conclusion Drawing

The transition from the fluid discussions of the Pairing phase to the formalized output of the Sharing phase was marked by demonstrable struggle. Students found it difficult to distill their collaborative notes into a concise, conclusive summary for public report. This difficulty resulted in a pattern of "Dependent Cognitive Synthesis," where students relied heavily on external sources to complete the task.

In Meeting 1, the struggle to form a conclusion was so pervasive that it necessitated direct teacher intervention; the instructor was observed moving between desks, providing structured assistance to help students organize their findings. In Meeting 2, while students avoided seeking teacher aid, they exhibited a different form of dependency by observing and copying the written conclusions of more successful neighboring pairs. This suggests that the final stage of cognitive processing—moving from facts to a synthesized opinion—exceeded the autonomous capacity of the learners under the conditions provided.

Public Performance and Invisible Engagement

The oral component of the Sharing phase was characterized by "Selective Public Performance". Due to the psychological pressure of speaking in front of the class, presentations were often managed through "role-sharing," where both partners shared the reading of the conclusion to mitigate individual exposure. In Meeting 1, only two groups were able to present their full findings due to time constraints and the lengthy processing period required for synthesis.

However, a critical finding emerged regarding the students who were not presenting. These learners exhibited high levels of "non-oral attention," maintaining focus on their peers' presentations and using the shared information to verify and amend their own notes. This indicates that even in the absence of oral participation, students remained engaged in a process of silent validation, suggesting that the "Share" phase serves an essential function in providing a collective benchmark for accuracy, even if only a few students act as the primary vocalizers.

Comparative Qualitative Synthesis of Participation

The following table organizes the observed indicators across the three stages of the TPS cycle to highlight the non-uniformity of engagement.

Tabel 1 TPS Information

TPS Stage	Participation Indicator	Observed Behavioral Traits (Meeting 1 & 2)	Participation Profile
Thinking	Involvement (Emotional, Cognitive, Behavioral)	Flat affect; indifferent expressions; page-flipping; minor peer-chatting or seat-moving.	Low Affective/Cognitive Engagement
Thinking	Giving a Response (Individual Accountability)	Minimal spontaneous answers; preference for closed 'yes/no' responses; slow response time.	Minimal Accountability
Pairing	Pair Up / Group Work (Forming Collaboration)	Universal, rapid pairing with seatmates; immediate task focus.	High Structural Engagement
Pairing	Sharing Ideas / Discussing (Promotive Interaction)	Active co-dictation; low-volume focused conversation; peer support in matching answers.	High Promotive Interaction
Sharing	Answering Questions / Conclusion Drawing	Long delays; struggle to synthesize group notes into a final conclusion; peer copying.	Dependent Cognitive Synthesis

Sharing	Working in Front of Class (Public Performance)	Selective oral presentation; role-sharing during speech; high non-oral attention from the audience.	Selective Public Performance

Discussion

The qualitative evidence clearly establishes that the effectiveness of the Think-Pair-Share technique in this EFL comprehension context is highly selective, succeeding primarily in creating a low-stakes, secure environment for peer collaboration but failing to overcome the socio-affective and cognitive barriers associated with individual and public accountability phases.

Empirical Confirmation of the Pairing Effect: Mitigating Socio-Affective Barriers

The observation that participation flourished universally and robustly during the 'Pairing' step validates the foundational principle of cooperative learning: structured peer interaction effectively bypasses the socio-affective filter. The active sharing of ideas, collaboration on writing, and low-volume discussion confirm that students possess the latent capacity and necessary knowledge to engage with the complex material, provided they are protected from high-stakes public scrutiny.

This successful peer collaboration functions as a safe rehearsal space where students can fact-check, refine language, and resolve uncertainties before external exposure (Guenther, 2024; [9]). This observation strongly suggests that the students' failure to participate spontaneously in other stages is not rooted in an inability to comprehend or communicate, but rather in affective and environmental anxieties, reinforcing the necessity of a supportive, non-threatening environment (Sudjana in Hartini, 2022).

Dual Deficiencies in the Thinking Phase: Cognitive Priming and Self-Efficacy

The pervasive passivity and low cognitive engagement observed during the initial 'Thinking' step suggest a failure in both cognitive preparation and the students' internal motivational framework. The lack of spontaneous response or individual output indicates that students are not adequately prepared or confident (low self-efficacy) to initiate the complex cognitive process required for analysis. This is consistent with scholarly findings that high self-efficacy is crucial for initiating active learning and spontaneous contribution (Yusof et al., 2012).

The individual time, intended for generating and structuring thought, was instead often used for silent observation or managing internal anxiety. This deficiency highlights the inadequacy of relying solely on implicit internal motivation. To ensure productivity, pedagogical strategies must be employed to enforce individual accountability during this quiet phase, such as requiring students to produce written output (e.g., using a note-taking card system) before moving to the pair discussion. Such visible accountability transforms silent observation into measurable cognitive processing.

The 'Share' Crisis: Anxiety, Dependency, and Higher-Order Thinking Gaps

The 'Sharing' phase presented the greatest breakdown, characterized by severe cognitive strain and affective leakage.

Cognitive Barrier: Conclusion-Drawing Difficulty

The difficulty students experienced in synthesizing the findings from the collaborative stage into a concise, conclusive answer points to a significant gap in their higher-order cognitive skills, specifically the ability to draw connections between complex analytical aspects (Majid and Arief, 2015). The complex task of analyzing a newspaper text to synthesize five positive and five negative impacts required analytical skills that exceeded the students' capacity when coupled with the pressure of public performance. This struggle directly addresses the factor of cognitive knowledge (Sudjana in Hartini, 2022) as a limit on active participation.

Affective Barrier: Public Performance Anxiety

The resulting dependency—either requiring teacher intervention (M1) or resorting to peer copying (M2) —demonstrates that the public component of the 'Share' phase is perceived as excessively high-stakes and psychologically threatening. This observation validates empirical critiques stating that the high-stakes presentation can perpetuate student anxiety and inequity, even nullifying the benefits of the earlier, secure collaborative stages.[2] The pressure to perform publicly exposes the student's cognitive difficulties and induces fear, which may ultimately demotivate active participation in the preceding, preparatory steps.[2] For cohorts demonstrating this level of anxiety, the efficacy of the standard TPS model is challenged, suggesting that alternative structures, perhaps omitting the whole-class report, may be pedagogically superior for promoting secure learning.[3]

Reconciling Contradictions: Contextualizing TPS Efficacy

The comparison between this study's findings and the successful implementation of TPS in EFL speaking classes reported by Kerimov et al. (2021) necessitates a contextual interpretation of the technique's efficacy.

The evidence suggests that TPS is maximally effective when the task involves procedural fluency or lower cognitive load, successfully mitigating the affective barriers inherent in practicing a foreign language. However, when the task demands high cognitive effort, such as complex analytical comprehension and synthesis, the pressure of public performance in the 'Share' stage interacts negatively with the elevated cognitive load, resulting in failure and withdrawal. The task complexity, therefore, acts as a crucial moderator of the pedagogical success of TPS.

Furthermore, the observation that the teacher relied heavily on conventional, printed textbooks aligns with the theory that media choice influences motivational channels (Sumanti et al., 2021). The lack of more stimulating or contemporary media may have failed to generate the necessary curiosity and attention to overcome intrinsic passivity and low self-efficacy.

Conclusion

This descriptive qualitative analysis of student participation in the EFL learning process using the Think-Pair-Share technique confirms a pattern of selective, stage-dependent engagement. Student participation is successfully maximized only in the collaborative Pairing step, where low-stakes peer interaction effectively mitigates socio-affective barriers, leading to universal and robust discussion.

However, maximized participation fails to materialize in the **Thinking step**, characterized by low involvement, slow spontaneous responses, and a failure to achieve individual cognitive priming. Furthermore, the **Sharing step** is severely limited by a high-stakes environment combined with cognitive difficulties in synthesis, resulting in student dependency on external aid (teacher scaffolding or peer copying) to formulate conclusive answers.

The study suggests that the "Pairing" step acts as a socio-affective bridge, yet it is not strong enough to overcome the cognitive inertia of the "Thinking" step or the performance anxiety of the "Sharing" step. The failure of the "Thinking" stage indicates that without explicit guidance, students may view silence as a passive waiting period rather than active cognitive priming. Furthermore, the reliance on external aids during the "Sharing" phase reflects a persistent "safety-first" mindset, where students prioritize linguistic accuracy over the authentic expression of ideas.

In summary, while the TPS technique successfully creates a secure collaborative environment, its standard structure fails to adequately manage the affective burdens and cognitive demands of individual accountability and public performance, confirming that for this cohort, the technique's utility is highly contingent on structural modifications.

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