

The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning Method on Grammar Trait Achievement of EFL Learners

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Abstract:

Grammar is the main aspect of writing skill. So teaching grammar to EFL learners is important as it provides them with greater depth of understanding. The integration of cooperative learning method has become an increasingly popular educational technique to improve the learner's language proficiency. This study aims to investigate whether the cooperative learning method is more effective and useful than the traditional instruction approach to teach grammar. This is an experimental quantitative study. The study included one control and one experimental group. In total, 60 EFL learners participated in the study. They were male and female university English language learners studying English Language in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Language, Mustapha Stambouli Mascara University. Following a workshop on the introduction of cooperative learning method, while the experimental group was exposed to cooperative learning technique. Whereas, the control group was taught by the traditional instruction approach. Tests were employed to gather data. The findings of the tests revealed significant differences between the control group and the experimental group taking in consideration the learner's grammar achievement. The results of this research suggested that cooperative learning had positive effects and impacts on EFL learners grammatical achievement.

Keywords: cooperative learning, writing, grammar, EFL learners.

ملخص:

يعتبر الصرف اهم مكون لمهارة الكتابة، فتدريس الصرف لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية ضروري لأنه يتيح لهم الفهم الاعمق، فاصبح ادماج طريقة التعلم التعاوني يزداد شعوبية كطريقة في التعليم لإتقان الكفاءة اللغوية لدى الطلاب، تأتي هذه الدراسة لبحث مدى فعالية ومردودية طريقة التعلم التعاوني مقارنة بالتعلم التقليدي لتدريس الصرف. هذه دراسة تجريبية وتضم مجموعة ملاحظة او مراقبة الى جانب الفوج تحت التجربة، الكل يشكل 60 تلميذ لدارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية كمشركين في هذه البحث، العينة تضم طلبة وطالبات جامعيين يدرسون شعبة الإنجليزية في قسم اللغة والادب الإنجليزي، بكلية الآداب واللغات بجامعة مصطفى اسطمبولي بمعسكر، استخدم الباحث طريقة التعلم التعاوني لتدريس المجموعة تحت التجربة، في حين المجموعة الملاحظة درست بالطريقة التقليدية، استخدم الباحث طريقة الاختبار لجمع المعلومات، وقد عكست نتائج البحث النتائج المهمة بين الفوج المراقب والفوج تحت الملاحظة اخذين بعين الاعتبار كفاءة الطلاب في الصرف، اما حواصل البحث توصلت الى ان التعلم التعاوني له اثار إيجابية وتأثير على الكفاءة الاعرابية لدى دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم التعاوني، الكتابة، الصرف، طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية.

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1.Introduction:

The Ministry of National Education in Algeria has Language English to be taught in all middle and secondary schools as a foreign language.

The focus on cooperative learning as an innovative teaching and learning method is fast gaining a great importance in teaching language in general and writing skills in details. In cooperative learning situation, EFL learners work together to maximize their own and each other's learning small groups (Johnson, 1991).

While the mastery of the writing skills is important, not only among the EFL learners, but also to everyone. Several methods are employed by English teachers around the world in teaching writing in EFL classroom. among the strategies that are deemed to suit the teaching of writing is the employment of cooperative learning method.

Therefore, the integration of cooperative learning methods in teaching/ learning process has become increasingly popular in recent years as educational technique. So it requires learners to work together in groups to achieve a common and shared goals. It increases the opportunities of student-student interaction in a supportive and safe environment.

Implementing cooperative learning method in the writing process approach :

Many researchers over the world are studying the applications of cooperative learning method for helping learners work together more effectively (Kagan, 2002).

Cooperative learning method is not only just putting the learners together in groups and asking them to work on the activity given, but its elements at the same time help learners and teachers understand on what is involved in helping the learners to get their goals.

2.1.Definition of Cooperative Learning Method :

However, many researchers have defined cooperative learning in the different ways :

Cooperation means working together to have common and shared goals. Within cooperative situations, learners seek results that are usefull for all members of a team . So they work cooperatively to maximize their own and each others' learning (Shafqat Ali Khan, 2015).

Cooperative learning method refers to a systematic instructional method in which learners work together in small groups to accomplish shared learning goals (Slavin, 1995).

Therefore, teaching English grammar throught group work activities played a positive role in improving the learning achievement, the four language skills of the learners studying English at elementary as well as secondary stage (Bibi, 2002).

Many teachers confuse group work with cooperative learning. They put learners in groups, tell them to work together.

(Elbow, 2000) has explained the benefits of using cooperative learning method in grammar :

This method allows learners to learn from each other and as a results this will make a successful writing practices.

It helps learners to solve a complex tasks cooperatively.

This method fosters relationships among a coommunity of writers and reduces the loneliness of the writing act.

And guiding them to reach the next level of potential development. EFL learners often face difficulty in writing activities ; therefore, they need help and support from time to time to complete the task and improve (Jacylin Ho Cye Lin, January 2019).

Learners have the oppourtuniy to change their language output slightly to make it more suitable in order to understand each other inside the group. Therefore, learners will be anxious to speak out in front of the whole class, it is easy for learners to talk with a supportive classmate. Whereas, learners encourage and support each other in language practice. So they are engaging in an interactive learning situation, and learners need to understand each other.

whereas, in the light of above mentioned researches, it was concluded that cooperative learning is more effective as teaching/ learning method.

In most of the public schools, teachers have to teach large EFL classes in which more than thirty students learn together, cooperative learning technique may be employed to improve the basic four language skills of the learners. Most teachers in public schools are using traditional teaching method as competitive and individualistic method.

Whereas, the learners of large classes have to cover and achieve the learning syllabus in a limited period of time. So there is no opportunity for a teacher in traditional learning instruction approach to give individual attention to all the learners equally.

(Davudheiser, 1996) stated that by applying pair and group work teachers can increase the quality of grammar instruction that can help retention. So he explored a successful student-centered method of grammar instruction in second language classes.

(Boals, 2012) affirmed that writing is a process of meaning making and a sets of combined text-making assignments by drafting, generating and developing ideas in sentences.

Learners have difficulties in fulfilling the requirements of writing skill due to low competencies of the language. In addition, learners' lack knowledge of English vocabulary, grammar,

English teachers at the same time are often faced with a serious problem which is the difficulty of using the suitable teaching approach to overcome writing apprehension in their learners, particularly in Algeria where English is treated as a foreign language (Qismullah Yusuf, 2019). Many researchers suggested the introduction of cooperative learning method in language teaching, because by using this pedagogical technique in the process writing, EFL learners not only gain the educational benefits but also social interactions between group members through asking question, discussing different ideas, choosing the best items in order to write an effective passage (Raimes, 1983).

The Prewriting Stage : in this step learners start to ask themselves a set of questions such as ; How do we get started ? How do we write this ? Most of the group members gathered information and thoughts by interviewing their classmates or neighbors.

The Planning Stage :refers to the form and the organization of the ideas and thoughts collected in the previous stage.

The Drafting Stage : consists of putting thoughts and ideas that were collected in the previous stage into sentences and paragraphs.

Cooperative learning method refers to a variety of teaching techniques in which learners work in small groups to help one another learn academic content (Johnson, 1999). (Slavin, 1995) adds that in cooperative classrooms, learners are expected to help each other, to share thoughts and ideas, and discuss issues to assess each other's understanding of the topic.

Moreover, cooperative learning method may be defined as an extension of communicative language teaching (CLT), it is a learner-centred approach and emphasizes students interaction. So, cooperative learning method provides this interaction among students in the classroom and helps learners acquire their learning goals naturally.

Cooperative Learning Method also known as collaborative learning is a body of concepts and techniques for helping to increase the benefits of cooperation among learners (Jacobs, 2003). Or learners work together to learn and are responsible for their groups' learning as well as their own.

2.2. Elements of Cooperative Learning Method

1-Heterogeneous Grouping:

Building Groups in which learners are mixed on one or more of a number of variables including gender, social class, personality, age, and language proficiency.

However, in forming groups for grammar lectures, the researcher wants to look and make conscious decisions about which learners should work together. So he prefers the heterogeneous groups. Furthermore, he spends some time on team building activities.

2-Collaborative Skills:

These are the basic skills in group work. Team members must learn interpersonal skills such as asking questions, encouraging, and sharing ideas in order to facilitate cooperative work. Therefore, interpersonal and small group skills are needed to work with others.

3-Simultaneous Interaction or Face to Face Promotive Interaction: another principle of cooperative learning method is that it emphasizes on small group interaction. While learners work cooperatively, they support and encourage one another to achieve the group's goals.

Teaching Grammar in EFL Class :

Grammar is defined as the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology and sometimes also phonology and semantics (press, 2022).

According to (Nunan, 1991) who had stated that grammar helps learners to perform in the target languages better. He also added and confirmed that learners can not communicate well if they lack the fundamental grammatical rules.

However, (Brown, 2007) states that writing is a thinking process that can be planned and given with an unlimited number of revisions before its release. In addition (Harmer, 2004) proposes that writing encourages learners to focus on accurate language use. It is because learners consider how language is used when the learners engage in their writing process. Moreover, (Troyka, 2010) confirms that the purposes of writing are so that learners can express themselves, provide ideas, create literary passages.

In Algerian Education system, English language is taught as a second foreign language, which means that the teaching of English Language is not easy as expected. Learners are supposed to master all the language skills.

2.3.The definition of grammar :

It consists of the description of the ways in which English words are combined to form meaningful and acceptable sentences. Whereas, grammar covers syntax and morphology. Syntax means the systematic rules, it is grouping and ordering words to form clauses, phrases, and sentences. While, morphology means the ways in which the forms of words are changed according to their use in clauses, phrases, and sentences (Seely, 2007).

3.2. Literature Review :

In fact, many EFL learners simply do not enjoy writing skill in general and grammar rules in particular, because of the nature of the complexity of these skills, and even out of the university, it has a little interest for them as a form of social interaction. However, in most cultures the ability to write with exact grammatical rules carries prestige, that lead a few learners succeed in becoming really proficient at writing with no grammar mistakes and many learners cease to use this skill once they leave the university, or use it occasionally for specific purposes. (Byrne, 1993)

Therefore, cooperative learning has been considered one of the most successful and useful methods that applies social and educational psychology to education practice.

However, the ability to write with no grammatical mistakes is not naturally an acquired skill, it is usually learned as a set of practices in formal instructional settings. So, grammar rules have to be learned through practices and experiences.

Integrating cooperative learning method in teaching grammar promises results in helping learners master the grammar skill better.

There are rich body of literatures surrounding the topic the effectiveness of cooperative learning as an innovative method in EFL grammar classes. Some of the researches indicated that cooperative learning allows learners develop their English language skills (Atkinson, 2003 ; Wong, Chin Chen and Gao, 2009 ; Elola and Oskoz, 2010 ; Mahmoud, 2014). These researches

allowed the researchers to construct the theoretical background about the implementation of the cooperative learning method to enhance learners' EFL grammar skill. But it still needs more indepth studies to illustrate how cooperative learning as an innovative method could be implemented in specific academic settings resepectively to the studies mentionned previously. Although action researches supported the effectiveness of the use of cooperative learning in various fields and different age groups. There are still less studies regarding the effectiveness of cooperative learning as an innovative method in enhancing Learners' EFL grammar skill. (Ermawati M. A., 2018)

In a study conducted by M.Ali Ghuftron and Sili Ermawati entitled on The Strength and Weaknesses of Cooperative Learning and Problem-based Learning in EFL Writing Classes :Teachers and Student's perspectives. This study was aimed at evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of cooperative learning and problem-based learning in EFL writing classes. As a results of this research the strong points of cooperative learning are the raise of the students self - confidence , motivation and the reduce of student's nervousness. However, implementing cooperative learning provides raising students' responsibility in learning. On the other sides the weaknesses of incorporation or integrating cooperative learning in EFL writing classes are : It needs much more time to apply it. Also both teachers and learners should participate actively inside the class. It is diffucult to manage this technique witout preparation for both teachers and learners (Ermawati, 2018) .

An other research had done by Alexandra Aldana which was about the Process of Writing a Text by Using Cooperative Learning. The researcher attained a set of findings. First, cooperative learning helped learners in facilitating the learning procees and especially when they interact with each others. Second, learners need to cooperate inside the group in order to reinforce learners' responsibility about their learning. Third, when low achieving learners work with strong ones, as a results they can improve their language performance.

However,in the context of EFL learning the results above confirmed the studies that had been conducted researching the impacts of cooperative learning method upon learners' achievement in this domain.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research question, Hypothesis and Aims of Reseach :

3.1.1.Research questions :

In attemping to find out whether or not cooperative learning method enhances positively the EFL learners' grammar achievement, it is necessary to answer the question :

1- Does cooperative learning method have a positive impact on EFL learners' performance in English Language Grammar ?

2-is there any significant differences in English grammar achievement results of the EFL learners taught through cooperative learning method ?

3.1.2.Hypothesis :

Thus, the research hypothesis can be formulated as follows : If cooperative learning method is implemented in grammar classes while teaching EFL students' performance is likely to improve.

3.1.3.Aims of the Study :

This research aims to investigate the effects of cooperative learning method on EFL learners' writing achievements at the Department of letters and English Language, Faculty of Letters and Language, Mustapha Stambouli University, Mascara. However, the researcher had investigated, in particular the impact of cooperative learning activities on EFL learners' writing performance.

Whereas, the main objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of the differences between English grammar classes that are taught in a cooperative learning situation, and traditional instruction environment.

3.2.Research Method :

3.2.1.Participants :

The sample consisted of thirty (male and female) first year students studying English Language and Literature at the Department of English language, Faculty of Letters and Languages, University of Mustapha Stambouli, Mascara during 2019-2020 school year. Their native Language was Arabic. Their ages ranged between 18-21 years. They all have their baccalauriat degree in different specialities.

3.2.2.Procedure :

In order to organize the research steps, the researcher started by building a groups or team works by dividing the learners into heterogeneous groups, than asked them to answer the questionnaire using also a pre and post-test as a research tools in order to gather data.

3.2.3.Team building :

In order to form the groups, the researcher have decided to have five members in each group. The total number of learners in treatment team was 30 students. So, the number of groups was six. Each group had five members.

Whereas, the researcher formed the heterogeneous groups, consisting of learners of high, average and low abilities each. For this purpose, a list of learners of experimental teams was prepared separately for boys and girls on the basis of pre-test score ranking from high to low. While the researcher have used the letters A-F as names of groups.

At the first lecture of the semester, the researcher made the learners to practice. During the treatment he told them how to sit during the group work. The researcher prepared a work sheet based on the material other than the one which was going to be taught during practice. He expressed the same topic to the students and then allowed them to practice in groups. After that he made a test as a practice. During the treatment period many questions were asked by the learners, were answered by the researcher.

3.2.4.The questionnaire :

This questionnaire was designed to check the difficulties that EFL learners usually face when they write individually. It contained 10 questions with three Likert scale : agree, neutral, and disagree. The respondents answered individually the questionnaire. When they finished, an analytical study was done in order to facilitate data gathering for the purpose of investigating the research hypothesis.

3.2.5.Resaerch Treatment :

An achievement test was conducted by the researcher as pre and post test. While Pilot quiz was developed to test the reliability of tools which was 0. And calculated through Cronbach

Alpha reliability test. Validity of instrument was checked by five English teachers who were teaching at tertiary level.

3.2.6.Pre-test and post-test :

The aim behind administering two tests was to compare the EFL learners before the treatment and after it by clarifying whether there was a significant difference in the EFL learners' writing skill in general and grammar in particular after the employment and integration of cooperative learning method in the study of grammar (written expression). Data were gathered to analyze the pre-test and post-test by comparing their results and learning achievement as it is mentioned in the table below.

Results (findings) :

Table 01

Comparison of control and experimental groups on pre-test and post-test scores :

From the table above, the overall comparison of control and experimental groups, no statistical significant difference is observed on Pre-test period between mean scores of control group (M=14.38,SD=3.90) and experimental group (M=14, SD=3.75). The value of $t(61.36)=.323$, $p=.433$ is greater than $\alpha=0.05$ whereas in comparison of mean scores of control group (M=19.80,SD=3.77) and the mean score of experimental group (M=27.96,SD=4.67) on post-test. So both the groups are significantly different in their mean scores. While the value $t(57.96)=-5.15$, $p=0.000$ is less than $\alpha=0.001$. finally, the value effect size was 0.27 which showed large magnitude of increase in performance of experimental group.

Results Analysis :

The questionnaire :

The percentage of those who responded with Agree was calculated. The results of the questionnaire were presented in the following bar chart.

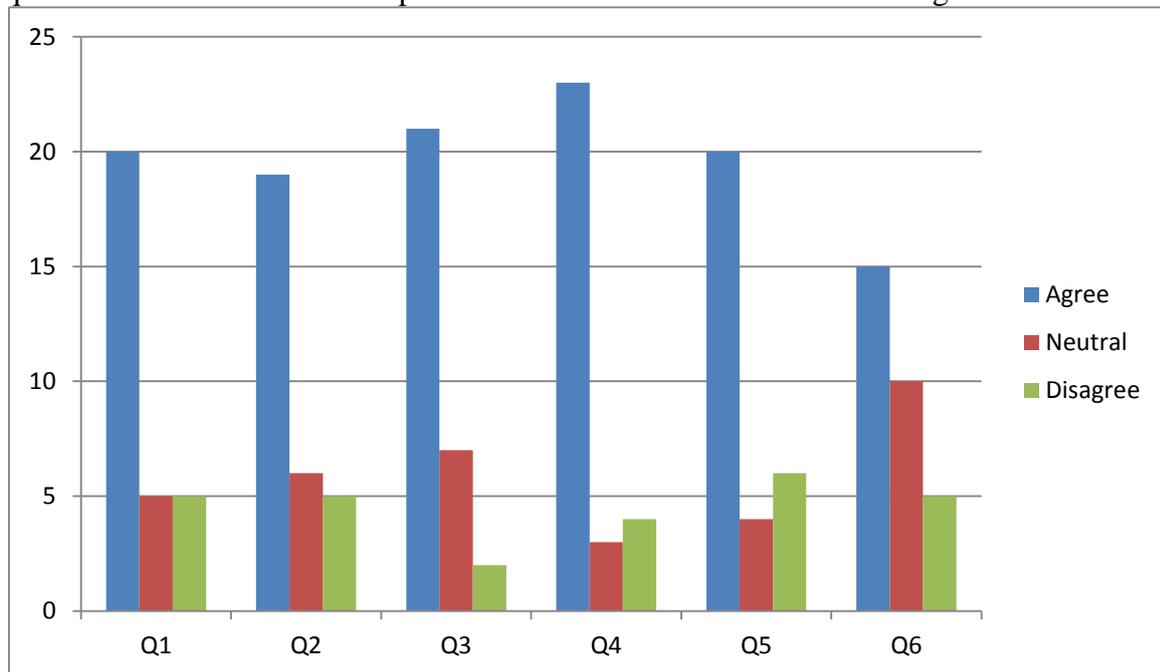


Figure 01 : Three Likert Scale Analysis Bar Chart

As it is illustrated in the bar chart above, the majority of those who chose Agree is the highest. It ranged between 15 and 23. Whereas the percentage of those who responded with Neutral was less than the first number. While a few learners answered and selected Disagree with an important observation most students think that working cooperatively is better than working individually or competitively.

Discussion :

In the traditional instruction approach the EFL learners work individually or competitively and generally concerned with improving their language proficiency level and their objectives are individualistic rather than team wise. While in cooperative learning situation EFL learners work together in teams to achieve common goals. Whereas, in cooperative learning environment, EFL learners benefit from sharing thoughts and information rather than working alone, learners help one another so that all can achieve shared goals. Cooperative learning method gives equal chance of success to all the group members because group rewards is based on the benefits of the whole group. The higher achieving learners ability in the groups tried to help to the low achieving students of their groups to boost their learning achievement in general and language proficiency in particular.

Moreover, the low achieving learners did not understand the teacher's lectures easily because they had a limited language proficiency. As a result by working cooperatively with those with higher achieving levels they could learn the different cases and feel at ease to be taught from their classmates rather than their instructor.

Learners' scores increased in the post-test period and this implied a better performance and achievement by the learners in comparison with their scores in the pre-test period in writing in general and grammar in particular.

After analyzing the percentage of each question in the questionnaire using the bar chart, the following was inferred from each question. For the first question most learners refused writing alone and only few of them chose writing individually. Out of 50% of respondents used writing cooperatively instead of working individually for the grammar activities. In question 3 most answers confirmed that selecting an interesting topic makes writing easier. In analyzing question 4 more than 73% of students preferred brainstorming ideas through group work. Therefore, in the question 5, 6 and 7 the majority of respondents agreed that discussing, sharing ideas, and organizing sentences with using appropriate vocabularies help them to achieve their learning goals. In question 8 out of 50% learners recognized that dealing with grammatical errors is not an easy task. Whereas, 60% thought in question 9 that proofreading and correcting mistakes will be easier in groups. Finally, for the last question out of 60% preferred teacher feedback instead of teacher intervention and error correction.

The results of the present research paper may have different explanations :

Firstly, the teacher is the core of the teaching instruction who answers the activities of explaining, paraphrasing and sometimes doing the whole assignments. So the learners are passive recipients whose role is no more than memorization or doing some exercises.

Therefore, the cooperative learning method reverse the roles : the learners are an active participants. In contrast the teacher assumes the role of guide.

But in the CL situation teachers spend and need enough time to train the participants on this learning method.

Secondly, not all subjects in the teaching syllabus need to be taught in cooperative learning situation. But, subjects which involve exchanging and sharing thoughts and ideas and can be interpreted from different angles might be better learned if cooperative learning method is employed than those subjects which involves rules like grammar.

Conclusion :

From the findings obtained and the results discussed and interpreted the following conclusion can be drawn :

In order to succeed with using cooperative learning method, the teachers should be more experienced with careful training, in a convenient learning situation. Because cooperative learning method entails a change in the teacher and the student's role in the educational field.

Cooperative learning method creates a situation of involved, active, and collaborative learning because it asks learners to interact with each other, share knowledge and thoughts, search for more information, present their findings to the group's members.

Slow achieving learners improve their performance when they cooperate with high achieving ones while the high achieving learners reaffirm their learning competencies when they help others.

So with cooperative learning method, it is easier for EFL learners to start writing. Whereas, they will have more ideas for writing about a specific topic. Moreover, the cooperative learning activities help them for the other tasks not only grammar or writing.

Thus, for the future studies, it is recommended that the researcher could replicate and extend this research paper in the other setting such as the students of Master degree.

Additionally, more contact discussion and intervention should also be conducted to increase the validity and reliability of the findings.

It is hoped that the findings of this study could encourage educators to integrate cooperative learning in the EFL classroom.

This research has confirmed that cooperative learning is connected with learning methods to improve grammar of the learners in the EFL classroom. so the cooperative learning technique should be employed with instructional practice to make learners performance better.

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Appendix

EFL learners' questionnaire toward cooperative learning and grammar

Dear students

We would be so grateful if you could answer the following questions about « cooperative learning as an innovative method to boost EFL learners' grammar performance ».

Directions :

For each of the following statements, please make a tick in the response on the answer sheet that best corresponds to your position.

1. Writing individually is boring.

Agree Neutral Disagree

2. working cooperatively is useful for grammar activities

Agree Neutral Disagree

3. selecting an interesting topic makes writing easier

Agree Neutral Disagree

4. brainstorming and mapping ideas is not difficult with group work.

Agree Neutral Disagree

5. Discussing and sharing information in team work facilitate learning

Agree Neutral Disagree

6. organizing sentences logically is difficult.

Agree Neutral Disagree

7. Finding appropriate vocabularies is not easy.

Agree Neutral Disagree

8. Dealing with grammatical mistakes is not easy task.

Agree Neutral Disagree

9. Proofreading and correcting mistakes is easier inside the group

Agree Neutral Disagree

10. Teacher feedback substitutes teacher correction

Agree Neutral Disagree

Thank you for your cooperation