

The Effectiveness of Cooperative Group Learning in an English Language Classroom at a Private College in Kuala Lumpur

Sarasvati Rajindra*

Faculty of Arts and Science, International University of Malaya Wales, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: 21090115@student.iumw.edu.my

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Abstract: *The focus of this research is to study cooperative group learning as one of the types of grouping procedures in the language proficiency classroom. It will investigate the possible learning outcomes of cooperative groups including students' academic achievements in their test scores in an English language classroom context. Besides that, this research will study the cooperative group learning attitudes and interest at the individual and group level. There are three learning strategies that are commonly used in a classroom. They are competitive, individualistic, and cooperative models of structuring students' interaction in the classroom. In a competitive model, students will work against each other. While, in an individualistic model, students work alone with limited interaction in achieving their individual goals. However, in a cooperative model, students would work together to achieve common goals. A cooperative learning model refers to the use of a classroom technique in which students work on learning activities in small groups and receive feedbacks or recognition based on their performance. The task structure is the mix of activities that make up the learning effective. Cooperative learning theory is applicable when students work together in a small group to ensure everyone can participate on a collective task that has been clearly assigned. The five essential components of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, face to face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills, and group processing. This small-scale study will mainly look at four research questions to analyse the outcome of the cooperative group learning to help teachers and learners of ESL to have an effective lesson in the ESL classroom.*

Keywords: Effectiveness, Cooperative Group Learning, ESL Classroom, Private College

1. Introduction

This research is mainly conducted to explore the effectiveness of using cooperative group learning as one type of grouping procedures in the ESL language proficiency classroom. This research will further investigate the possible learning outcomes of cooperative group learning including students' academic achievements in their assessment performance in an English language classroom context. Besides that, this research will study the cooperative group learning attitudes and interest at the individual and group level. There are three learning strategies that are commonly used in a classroom. There are competitive, individualistic, and cooperative models of structuring students' interaction in the classroom. In a competitive model students will work against each other. While, in an individualistic model, students work alone with limited interaction in achieving their individual goals. However, in a cooperative

model, students work together to achieve common goal Garrote et al. (2017). A cooperative group learning model refers to the use of a lesson in which students would do learning activities in minimal number of students in a group and receive response or praises based on their quality of the task produced. The task comprises of various work that make enhance the learning effectively. Cooperative learning theory is applicable when students collaborate in a small group to ensure all the students can participate on a group task that has been clearly assigned. This small-scale study will mainly look at four research questions to analyse the outcome of the cooperative group learning to help teachers and learners of ESL to have an effective lesson in the ESL classroom. Cooperative group learning is being applied in the ESL classroom to help students practice transferable skills needed for the jobs in the 21st century employable skills like interacting and standing up firmly of own ideas, problem solving, or opposing ideas courteously. Cooperative group learning I believed to arouse interest in students to learn better together that would promote peer learning in the classroom. Incorporating and playing assigned role in a group can aid students them to achieve better results in the classroom and during their assessments. (Johnson and Johnson, 2008; Gillies, 2016).

Background

Teaching and learning English language should be conducted in a fun learning manner. Cooperative learning demonstrates an evidence-based teaching and learning strategy. Teachers plan and prepare students to interact and working together in small groups by helping each other in learning processes. Basic cooperative learning methods include think-pair-share, reciprocal questioning, jigsaw, scripted cooperation, and group investigation. Think-pair-share is a discussion technique in which learners develop and share ideas in response to a question in pairs. Cooperative group learning engages students to collaborate in small groups of 3 students or more to create a peer interactive learning together in the ESL classroom context. During cooperative learning activities students are exposed to perspectives that may be new, fresh ideas or contrary to their own. This would promote a healthy learning pattern in the classroom. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec's (1994) theory have identified three types of cooperative learning groups: formal, informal, and base groups. Cooperative group learning promotes learning experience for the students while group work focusses more on the task achievement. In cooperative group learning, discussion task is planned beforehand, and students are carefully formed. Students of mixed abilities are chosen carefully and grouped accordingly by teachers for students to have a good interaction and learn from each other while working on a task given. Cooperative group learning is a teaching and learning strategy which uses small groups to promote students collaborating to maximize learning together (Johnson, et al., 2008).

Hence, it is believed that Cooperative Group Learning helps to raise students' overall achievement in the assessments. By working together in a cooperative group learning students can build positive relationships and create a good learning community that values multiculturalism and diversity. Cooperative group learning could create experiences that would improve learning skills and social skills among young adult learners in the college upscaling towards tertiary learning. Cooperative group learning is important in the 21st century because it provides a platform for students to develop interpersonal and small group skills needed at workplace in the future. Interpersonal skills would enable students to engage in discussions healthily and are able to solve problems in the workplace professionally.

Statement of the Problem

Based on previous literature there is a significant relationship between cooperative group learning and the teaching of productive skills of speaking and writing in the ESL classroom.

Theorists such as Vgotsky (1978) strongly mentioned and promoted the learning theories of cognitivism to achieve the zone of proximal development (ZPD) that an effective learning in the classroom first takes place in an active and healthy interaction among students before it becomes a constructive process for students to think and produce the work. According to, Johnson & Johnson, (1989, 2005) cooperative group learning model has been neglected in the management of classroom because of other learning models which promotes more individual learning in the classroom.

In this digital learning era, it has always been a norm for students to work in isolation on their own and give various excuses not wanting to work in pairs or groups instead they prefer to work alone with their technological gadgets individually. This has become a trend in the private college classrooms these days after the pandemic and it's not a healthy pattern of teaching and learning in a long term. The support of digital learning is essential however, students must promote a healthy interaction and learning in groups to overcome the common problems being raised by students claiming to have social anxiety disorders when they are required to speak, present or work in groups in the ESL classrooms. Moving towards the 21st century learning there is an urgent need for students to be taught how to be critical thinkers, risk takers, problem solvers and professional speakers in the future workplace.

Therefore, to address the gap, this study intends to evoke the impact of cooperative group learning instructions on students' speaking and writing performance in the classroom and students' view on the use of cooperative group learning strategies in assessments. Cooperative group learning is a teaching learning strategy which is brain friendly to students. Students of this millennial era can learn socially, they would feel safe and less threatened to share ideas, opinions and experiences while working among group members. Apart from those, students also know what to expect, what to do and feel included in cooperative group learning that would promote the 3 c's cooperate, collaborate, and communicate which is the key transferable skills needed in the workplaces in the 21st century. Lewis, B. (2019).

Research Questions

- 1) Is there any improvement in the assessment of students' performance due to the implementation of cooperative group learning in the classroom?
- 2) Does cooperative group learning motivates students towards effective speaking and writing skills in the ESL classroom?
- 3) What are the challenges to implement a cooperative group learning in the ESL classroom in the 21st century classroom?
- 4) How to overcome the challenges met in promoting and implementing Cooperative Group Learning in the ESL classroom?

Research Objective

Cooperative Group Learning would create teaching and learning activities and opportunities for students to.

- 1) engage in subject specific discussions with peers in group /pair
- 2) learn how to work cooperatively and support each other
- 3) develop effective teamwork and communication skills
- 4) build interpersonal and cross-cultural awareness in formal and social settings

Significance of Study

The mini research is strongly believed to benefit several parties, namely the students, educators, and policy makers. The needs of the students will be concerned through identifying their attitudes and interest towards learning English language and improve on the most feared skills of speaking and writing through cooperative group learning. It is believed that cooperative group learning would enable students to have a proper and good flow of idea generation, enhance creative and critical thinking, adapting problem solving skills, communicate explicitly, impart leadership skills, and promote interpersonal and group communication skills. The findings of this research will further contribute to improving the students' motivation towards productive skills of speaking and writing in the ESL classroom. Moreover, educators especially ESL teachers can use the findings as a reference in helping the ESL learners to further improve on their English language skills to guide their writing proficiency and boost their interest in English language academic speaking skills.

The cooperative group learning is student centred which allows the educators to minimize traditional way of teaching method and focus on facilitating, observing students' attitudes and give more constructive feedbacks for students self-learning and rectifying their mistakes there and then. Teachers and students will be highly motivated in an interesting and both ways interacting learning atmosphere classroom of the 21st century alongside with the help of the digital classroom to search for information to support the teaching and learning efficiently and effectively.

This indirectly contributes to the increase in the scores and grades of speaking and writing assessments in the ESL classroom. It is hoped that the findings can further aid the Ministry of Higher Education and the policy maker, to re-evaluate the education curriculum in fulfilling the needs of teaching of ESL productive skills using cooperative group learning by providing sufficient workshops/seminars/talks/ supporting materials to the private colleges, educators, and students. Lastly, this study is also hoped to share the findings and contribute towards further improvement in the effort to enhance students' English language towards future success in the 21st century working environment.

Scope of the Study

This study is based on only a small scale of sample size of 25 students. This study is conducted within a time frame of a semester approximately 12 weeks excluding examination weeks which began in January 2022 till May 2022. This research was conducted in a duration of 3 months of a studying semester. The study was carried out in an ongoing process as writing skill is a continuous process. The experiment was conducted by applying the cooperative group learning and the non-cooperative group learning. The research instruments were standardized and tailored by the content of the syllabus taught. Experimental and non-experimental groups were taught and tested on the same task. A pilot study was conducted beforehand to ensure the validity of the research.

2. Preliminary Literature Review

Over the years many researchers have thoroughly examined and experimented the cooperative group learning spectrum in the classrooms. There have been many studies that have looked at cooperative group learning at higher learning institutions, science laboratory, and conventional classroom settings, and others. Evidence shows that if cooperative learning is carried out in the correct manner, then it does have positive effect on almost every learning outcome in any subjects. Cooperative group learning is beneficial for students' better grades and performance

in class and on examinations, promotes higher-order thinking skills, and student motivation towards learning together and individually. However, cooperative learning does contain slight weakness. Some people believe that it short-changes the gifted, and others disagree with its efficacy for learners such as minorities and the learning-disabled (Matthews, 1992; Tateyama-Sniezek, 1990). Lack of understanding among teachers and researchers about the in depth meaning of cooperative group learning makes it a harder process. Willis (1992) states that roughly ten percent of teachers nationwide use cooperative group learning. In the 1970s the utilization of cooperative learning appeared in report. Since then, the use of cooperative group learning's development has been exceptional.

Many studies have been conducted by researchers and published. The findings show the benefits of cooperative learning for academic, social, and personal agendas which is still beneficial in the 21st century of learning. Cooperative group learning has encountered fast changes in academic matters, but comparable growth in applied settings, such as higher learning classrooms, has not kept pace. Antil et al. (1998) and Puma, Jones, Rock, & Fernandez (1993) find that most teachers' lessons lack of conducting cooperative group learning instruction in their ESL writing classroom. Motivational perspectives (Slavin 1995a, 1995b) on cooperative group learning mainly focus on the reward or goal structures. In this perceptive, cooperative group learning creates circumstances whereby individual personal aims can only be achieved if the group works together. In reference to Slavin, rewarding groups based on group performance creates an interpersonal reward structure in which group members will give or withhold social reinforces such as praise and encouragement in response to group mates task related work (Slavin, 1995 a). Major findings under cognitive perspectives believe that interaction among pupils will increase achievement due to the mental processing that happens. The primary assumption of developmental perspectives, on the other hand, holds that interaction among pupils increases their mastery of the concepts in the tasks. Vgotsky (1978) hold the view that learning first takes place in interpersonal communication among students before it becomes a mental process for the individual. Therefore, this study intends to examine the benefits of cooperative group learning and how it motivates the students' performance in ESL guided writing in a tertiary context.

Figure 1. Concept Map: Student Benefits from Cooperative Learning

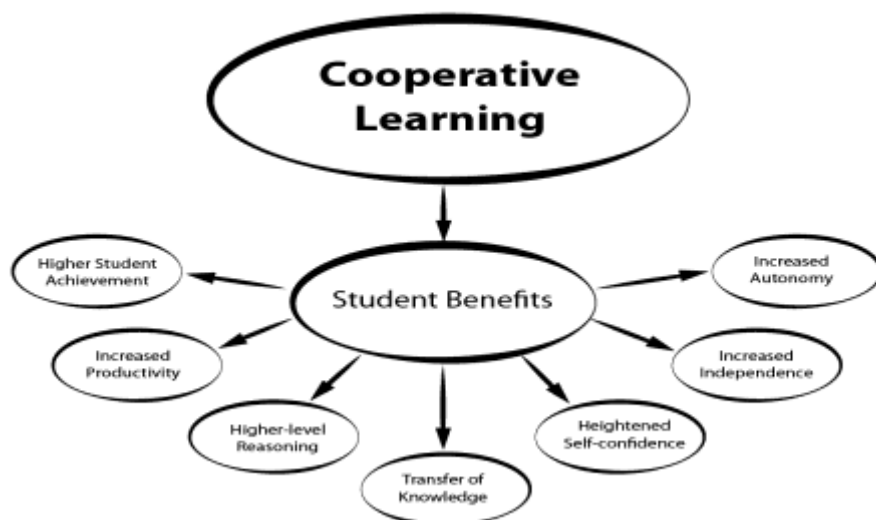


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Cooperative Group Learning.

Cooperative group learning theory was by the father of cognitivism Jean Piaget and social constructivism Lev Vygotsky's. This process can only happen successfully by exploring on learning and when you are ready and the need for help to advance to a higher level of knowledge and understanding (Shukor et al., 2012; ChanLin, 2012; Iqbal, Kousar, & Ajmal, 2011). Cooperative group learning is closely associated with social constructionist concepts that new acquired knowledge develops from a social construct (Meetoo-Appavoo, 2011; Choi & Kang, 2010). Choi and Kang (2010) found that classroom teachers using cooperative group learning strategies should include the use of educational digital technologies that support group working together with the help by the teachers using active constructivism pedagogy to enhance learning with the 21st century learners in the classroom.

Tools of intellectual adaptation is Vygotsky's term for methods of thinking and problem-solving strategies that students internalize through social interactions with the more knowledgeable students in the classroom.

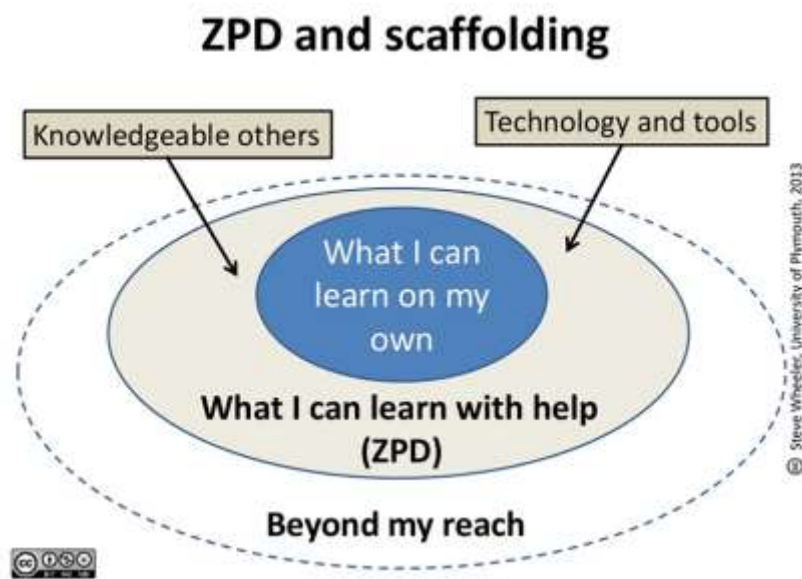


Figure 2: Theoretical framework that incorporates cooperative group learning

Vygotsky (1978) sees the Zone of Proximal Development as the area where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given by teachers to allow students to develop skills, they will then use on their own independently to develop higher order thinking skills.

Vygotsky also views interaction with peers in a cooperative group learning as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. He suggests that teachers use cooperative learning techniques where less competent children would develop faster with help from more skilful peers within the zone of proximal development.

3. Research Design

This research was carried out with a student population frame of 25 students from multiple ability, gender, and races in one of the private colleges in Kuala Lumpur. These group of students were derived for this study because these samples will be sitting for the English examination end of the year. Therefore, they are accessible among the large population of the College. These samples were chosen randomly. Hence, the samples went through the extended writing essay practice as a preparation for the examination. 20 students were randomly assigned to cooperative group learning (experimental group) and 5 students in individual learning

(controlled group). The experimental group used to use cooperative group learning instructions while the teacher teach the control group using the traditional instruction. Students were given free choice to select whom they want to work with to ensure a more positive framework. This reduced the number of groups to enable easier class management and more intra-group participation.

Each group were observed at a regular basis which constitutes once a week for two months, which is equivalent to eight observations of 60 minutes each. The cooperative group learners interacted among their group members while the non-cooperative group learners worked independently based on the same task given. The task was extended essay writing activity based on the notes, study materials, instructions and guidelines provided which follows the format of the assessment. At the beginning of each class, teacher gave a brief twenty-minute introduction and explanation of the task to be completed. Another forty minutes were spent for the whole class participation. Prior to that, twenty minutes were spent by the experimental group to be actively engaged in discussions and presentations using digital technology. Meanwhile, the non-cooperative group learners obtained their feedback through correction method from the teacher. Two writing activities based on the syllabus were conducted during the implementation of cooperative group learning. A pre-test and a post-test were administered on the first and last day of the session. This is to assess whether there is any improvement in the academic writing achievement test scores because of implementation of cooperative group learning. At the end of the entire session, randomly chosen groups and the individuals were interviewed.

The instruments used in the study are classroom observation checklist, semi-structured group and individual interviews, pre-test, and post-test. Classroom observation checklists were used to study if student's behaviour is closely related to their attitude in cooperative group work learning. Semi structured group interview was conducted to assess and observe how students responded as a group to cooperative group learning. Individual interviews were carried out to elicit information of student's affective attitude and interest of learning in a group as well as to find out whether they would participate in cooperative group learning in the future. Along this, the pre-test and post-test were conducted to measure students' performances and achievements to find out their improvements and reported accordingly

4. Findings and Discussion

Through this small scale of study researcher has found out that, the use of cooperative group learning in the ESL classroom has promoted an active learning classroom. By the end of the study based on the continuous extended essay produced by students weekly it has shown great improvement in academic writing as opposed to students who were chosen to do individualistic learning based on the chosen writing topics assigned. Students who worked on their own with some corrective feedback received from the researcher were able to write well however, students who worked in cooperation and collaborated were able to produce a good academic writing with brilliant ideas and examples provided. Peer learning and immediate peer correction enabled students to immediately learn from their own mistakes and continuously improve on their academic writing skills each week.

Researcher also identified that apart from academic excellence students who worked in a cooperative group learning were able to work closely students who come from diverse culture, and it has improved their interpersonal and group communication skills. Compared to students

who worked individually who had less opportunity to communicate and expand their ideas to write essays based on diverse point of views.

Based on the interview students have mentioned that working in groups saves their time of producing an essay because they get the opportunity to brainstorm brilliant ideas together. It promotes an active learning in the classroom and a positive peer learning. Students who worked on their own look forward to work together in group and then writing on their own. Likewise, students who worked in groups believe that cooperative group learning does promote a productive and effective teaching and learning among peers in the classroom. Nevertheless, students mentioned that they still need teachers' guidance s facilitator when they need to solve a problem while writing. Despite all the positive feedbacks from the students they mentioned that it's still undeniable that there are some students who took the advantage to remain silent throughout the discussion and just be a passive member. Some students felt that it's unfair however some students claimed that it's their loss of they do not participate in a group discussion to write better essays in the ESL classroom. Researcher's intervention throughout the cooperative group learning is very important to ensure all students participate in the discussion and no students dominate or being left out in the cooperative group learning. A set of rules and guidelines must be set prior to the cooperative group learning and a checklist must be prepared for continuous observation by teachers while implementing a cooperative group learning in the ESL classroom.

Limitations of the study

This study is based on only a small scale of sample size of 25 students. The small sample size selected may be unable to provide further conclusive results. Hence, generalization of the findings in the study might not be applied. Another problem of this study might be the duration of the experiment is only 3 months. Hence, it is insufficient to measure the quality of the outcome as writing based on a pre-test and a post test results because writing is an ongoing process.

Conclusion

Cooperative group learning has been proven over the years to be an effective teaching and learning tools for students to learn actively together in the classroom. This teaching and learning strategy would help to develop students' academic and social interaction skills needed for the 21st century learning and workforce. The ultimate goals of students working together is to achieve good results and achieve their common learning goals in the classroom. Apart from that, while working together in groups students can learn how to be more empathetic and compassionate that would promote a healthy learning environment among the digital learning generation. Finally, students believe that learning individually they tend do little as compared to working in groups together they can do more and better academically.

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