

Learners' Attitudes on the Infusion of Cooperative Learning in Education

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Abstract

Cooperative learning (CL) has marked a key importance in education and it has become imperative in language education. The use of the paradigm has gained popularity among the learners. The use of this model is persistent in language education. The present research is an attempt to gain learners' attitudes in grammar learning activities. The study involved quantitative method and survey research design was employed to answer the research. The subjects of the study were Elementary level EFL learners. The data were gathered through a questionnaire. SPSS 21 was used to analyze the data. The results of the study revealed positive attitudes towards the infusion of CL.

Key Words: Attitudes, Cooperative Learning, EFL

Introduction

CL is the collaborative use of small groups in order to enhance learning on their own and with each other through students working together (Lange *et al.*, 2016; Salma, 2020). This a pedagogy that produces a highly diverse body of instructional methods that unites students to work towards a shared objective result in groups, or have a common challenge or an assignment in such a manner that offers them only to foster in completing the desired activities. It is important to realize that cooperative learning is more than just the group work. The tasks and the execution of tasks vary in a cooperative classroom setting from conventional group work in several significant ways (Kövecses-G si, 2018).

Cooperative learning (CL) involves a specific set of rules, as opposed to traditional group work practices, and the tasks need to be highly disciplined (Foldnes, 2016; Laguardo, 2014). The tasks must be designed in a way that allows learners to complete activities successfully alone (positive interdependence) or rely on peers to explain or solve (individual accountability). It is appropriate to point out at a certain point that studies in this arena have disclosed that group assignment that does not meet this criterion does not yield the useful results linked with CL. The expansion of social skills, i.e., interactive and small group skills, is another essential element of CL (Mbacho, 2013). The effectiveness of any CL assignment and/or lesson depends on the willingness of learners to depend on their interactions and group skills to communicate with other classmates (Felder & Brent, 2007; Lonning, 1993; Witarso, 2017).

It is necessary to assert from the outset that every structure of the learning process may not take in the same implications or is entirely acceptable for every task, category or individual. Some CL frameworks are intended to assist learners to learn and review new material. Likewise, some of the CL frameworks aim at basic cognitive practices. They include recalling, recognizing and applying new information, in terms of Bloom's (revised) taxonomy, while others are more suitable for advanced cognitive

practices, such as assessing, reviewing and generating new knowledge (Howard *et al.*, 1996; Munir *et al.*, 2018).

Existing Teaching Practice is CL

It is an eminent element that there is not much space in typical teacher-fronted classrooms for the development of the target language (Dole *et al.*, 2016). Although some learners definitely get the chance to state understanding in the target language, in this case the lips of most students remain sealed at all times. This is because the instructor monopolizes the discussion and there are inadequate chances for the learners to share their knowledge verbally (Shatery, 2012). Nevertheless, in recent decades, the way foreign languages are taught has significantly changed and much more focus has been placed on student communication. Because every language's main objective is to communicate, and it is essential for the learners to have the opportunity to study a novel language in an atmosphere that facilitates communication and encourages student conversation (Ning, 2011). Studies have shown that students need to generate language through speech or writing in order to improve their second language proficiency (Ferris, 2011). Likewise, learners are required to participate in activities that lead them to the usage of the target language in an accurate way. This allowed Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to gain dominance in the teaching model in various EFL settings. If we are required to pick a word over the years to signify the developments in learning another language, it would be a communicative way of learning language. In language teaching, it is a belief of the majority of the students, even beginner. CLT is not only established on a set of grammar rules or vocabulary lists, but on a view of language as communication (Butler, 2011). Fluency is marked, not accuracy in the norm of language learning (McDonough & Sato, 2019). CL works well within the CLT model in this regard. In the CL environment, words are created not as an end in themselves, but as a means to achieve a goal (Astuti & Lammers, 2017). Motteram (2013) asserted that pupils are fortified to collaborate and correspond with their peers instead of sitting in tidy rows, looking at the blackboard, listening to the teacher, copying answers and drilling new words in order to accomplish a common assignment. With the use of small groups, students are given the ability to generate far more expression in the target language than they would in a typical one. Students are 'forced' to continually take turns in a cooperative learning atmosphere to voice and share their opinions on a certain matter (Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). This means that the target language is used by every student to communicate. In addition, research has shown that the ability of students to talk in small groups increases as the fear of speaking before an audience reduces (Sowell; Yunusova, 2020; Zhalelova *et al.*, 2017). If a paradigm shift has taken place, teachers need to acknowledge and accept the need for change. Teachers need to familiarize themselves with and practice effective teaching methods in order to address the demands of the current learning environment (Buchs *et al.*, 2017). In addition, it is essential for the teachers to internalize these new teaching methods and their underlying methods for the paradigm shift to be completed (Wang & Ryan, 2020). This is a method that is lengthy and complicated. In general, student-centred activities are very time-consuming in general and cooperative learning activities in particular, and less content is covered in a cooperative learning classroom than in a typical teacher-facing classroom (Jacobs & Ivone, 2020). The cooperative learning material, however, is studied in much more detail and therefore has a more long-lasting and beneficial

impact on the learning of the student as a whole. Communication in the target language is the most beneficial way to participate in learning a second language (Khan *et al.*, 2020; Shahbaz & Khan, 2017).

Many positive characteristics are attributed to CL, such as providing opportunities for naturalistic second language learning through interactions between learners and teachers (Kohonen & Bedley, 1992). There are great differences between learning a language and using the language in practice. Students study lots and lots of courses in the conventional classroom on the different aspects of the language; on the contrary, they lack the practical fluency when they tend to use it. CL strengthens the technique of instruction as the interactive activities develop more examples for language objects and communication techniques (Zhang, 2010). In addition, CLL improves the enthusiasm of students and decreases tension in order to create a healthy affective atmosphere in the classroom (McGroarty, 1989). The learning and use of a second language can trigger stress. Questions are set up before all students in the teacher-fronted classroom in which some do not get the correct response or speak, the public and such conditions are deemed to be threatening for language learning. In other words, researchers believe that tension has a negative effect on the attitudes and language learning of learners (Aydin, 2009; Lasagabaster, 2017). In addition, Karim (2018) recognizes several advantages in the use of co-operative learning strategies such as fun, interactive and critical thinking growth.

However, as a downside to cooperative learning, three notes are pointed out. In the first place, the great challenge of integrating cooperative learning is that it relies on a dynamic group mechanism that is efficient (Jong *et al.*, 2006). Conflicts among group mates can decrease their ability to work together if they lack the ability to resolve conflicts. High-level students will complain about the learning capacity of poor peers, or may take leadership positions, whether or not they are assigned to them and decrease learning. Secondly, the workload and evaluation are uneven. At the same time, the bright learners could dominate work running after facilitation and saving time, ignoring the participation and learning of weak members (Sclater *et al.*, 2016). In addition, it is often difficult to determine an individual member of a community; thus, regardless of how much a person participated, all the group mates awarded the same grade. Classroom management, finally, challenges teachers. Students also need total interaction with each other when they work together, and this can lead to off-topic chatter and class misunderstanding (Baghcheghi *et al.*, 2011). Cooperative learning, in general, requires a qualified teacher.

A paper was presented by Farzaneh and Nejadansari (2014) to illustrate the attitudes of learners towards using CL in intermediate-level reading comprehension. Their findings from the questionnaire was that the students demonstrated positive support for the use of CL. Ali (2017) found that the gender differences in CL while learning the writing skills based on primary level English in Ethiopia. The knowledge was gathered through questionnaires, interviews and observations. The subjects indicated positive opinions on the use of CL in writing skills. In addition, the study revealed negligible statistical gender disparity, that is, in English writing; female students were in favor of applying CL.

The findings and results of Alghamdy (2019) study showed that most students found that CL allowed them to improve their English skills, establish new associations with other classmates, perform different roles, improve their oral presentation skills, build their self-confidence, accept responsibility, respect different viewpoints and give their distinct views, increase their motivation, and grow. This included: low-achieving EFL learners relying on high-achieving learners, classmates not allowing group members an opportunity to share their views, and inadequate distribution and monitoring by the instructor of group members. Likewise, Er and AtaÇ (2014) research was conducted to emphasize the views of ELT university students on the use of CL. Descriptive empirical approaches were adopted by the researchers and students in various faculties were questioned. In order to collect data, a questionnaire was introduced and the results showed that the respondents defined CL benefits and limitations. In addition, they discussed gender differences that are beneficial for female students who are supportive.

Features of Cooperative Learning

Five characteristics are important to effective cooperative learning were highlighted as positive interdependence, individual responsibility, development of relationships, acceptable social skills and community structuring (Amedu & Gudi, 2017; Laguador, 2014). Positive interdependence implies result, means and boundaries. The outcomes are the goals and incentives that increase efficiency and achievement.

The interdependence involves responsibilities and tasks. The three concepts are contingent on each other. The bindings that tie members together as a union lead to boundary interdependence. Both of these interdependence forms are overlapping and connected to each other. Therefore, an individual's success correlates with the success of the other mates in the group. The positive interdependence that binds together the group members provides a sense of obligation to encourage and complete the work of the other group participants (Kohonen *et al.*, 1992).

In individual responsibility, the group members are assigned roles in which everyone is accountable and responsible for carrying out a certain part of the job. Each student's work in the group is measured and feedback is given to the participant and the group to compare it with a common standard (McGroarty, 1989). In order to obtain high-level collaboration, facilitated interactions should then be taught to students. It means learners absolutely trust each other, acknowledge and support each other, constructively manage conflicts. Besides, interpersonal capacity suggests that a participant has an opportunity to share his or her own thoughts and expressions (Laguador, 2014). Group structuring is developed to increase the efficiency with which the group mates carry out the group objective. To win high achievement, a category that includes bright students and poor ones is pointed out. Positive relationships were formed between participants who were taught social skills and engaged in group process. Similarly, Gonzales and Torres (2016) offered insightful descriptions of the five characteristics of CL as follows:

"Positive interdependence:" sink or swim together"

-promoted interaction: "promote the success of each other"

- Individual accountability:" no hitchhiking, no social loafing"
- Interpersonal skills: "ask members to clarify questions"
- Processing of groups:" ask what was a success and what can be strengthened"

The present study aims to answer following research question.

What are elementary level learners' attitudes on cooperative learning?

Material and Methods

Quantitative research is involved to carry the present attempt. Quantitative research design is an organized and efficient way of collecting data (Baumberg Geiger, 2016). Quantitative research uses sampling techniques to gather data from current and prospective customers and send out online surveys, questionnaires, etc., the findings of which can be expressed in numerical form. More specifically, survey design is employed to collect the data for the present investigation.

Participants

The participants of the present study were 65 elementary level non-native speakers of English. All the participants were male learners. The age of the participants ranged between 16 to 18 years. All of them were newly enrolled at the Department of the Common First Year. The participants of the study have the same language proficiency.

Instrument

A questionnaire was utilized to collect the data. The questionnaire was adopted from the previous studies (Amedu *et al.*, 2017; Mohammad, 2018). The questionnaire was developed to context of the study and then sent to three faculty members of the university to check the validity of the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 16 items. 5 point Likert scale was used to attain the learners attitudes on CL learning. Google form was used to design and administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the participants through formal email and in WhatsApp groups. Students' responses were coded and exported in the excel file. Finally, SPSS 21 was used to analyze the data descriptively.

Procedure

To facilitate the cooperative learning environment learners were divided into groups during the grammar activities of the course. All the participants were explained about the rules of group participants. Each participant was instructed to take part in the group activities. Moreover, learners' pairs were also formed in order to solve the activities. The time for group work ranged between 5 to 20 minutes depending upon the nature of the activity. This procedure was followed 7 weeks and each week participants had to do the group activities twice. After every week groups were rearranged in order to avoid the loss of interest in the group activities.

Data Analysis

Table 1
Learners' attitudes towards cooperative learning

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
I like to work in groups with my fellows	46%	22%	15%	12%	6%	3.8	1.6
I like to help and get help from other to complete my activity	29%	25%	11%	20%	10%	3.9	1.4
My achievement depends on the success of all classmates	39%	21%	19%	15%	15%	3.4	1.4
I have to do a specific part of the given activities	25%	36%	11%	10%	17%	3.7	1.4
Cooperative learning gives chances to answer my part	36%	15%	9%	16%	24%	3.8	1.6
I appreciate and focus to the individual activity done by the members	32%	16%	16%	17%	19%	3.0	1.6
CL provides interaction to communicate with students	41%	30%	10%	9%	10%	4	1.2
Group activities make my learning easier	38%	24%	15%	15%	8%	3.7	1.6
CL developed my motivation	42%	31%	13%	8%	6%	4.1	1.6
CL facilitates the interaction between teacher and learner	49%	29%	13%	9%	10%	4.0	1.3
I can express my ideas in the group activities	35%	30%	12%	13%	10%	3.9	1.5
CL helps us to deal with tricky activities	44%	26%	10%	10%	10%	3.8	1.5
Pair and group work help in understanding from the bright students	51%	35%	4%	5%	5%	4.5	1.1
In pairs, I feel more comfortable	44%	31%	15%	10%	10%	3.9	1.5
All participants of the group help and support one another	39%	29%	18%	6%	8%	3.8	1.6
I enjoy the doing the activities in the group	24%	38%	12%	15%	12%	3.2	2.6

The above statistical scores indicate that most of the participants who replied to the questionnaire (46 % Strongly agree and 22 agree) chose to work with their classmates as a group. Similarly, (29% strongly agree and 25 % agree) to support each other to achieve the goals of the group. This entails that learners enjoyed the cooperative learning. Likewise, (39 % strongly agree and 25 % agree) suggest that the accomplishment of an individual depends on the performance of all team members. Thus, these observations of the participants indicate positive support of CL particularly in learning grammar activities.

It is obvious that most of the subjects (25%, 36%, 32%, respectively) strongly agree to identify each group member with a particular job to produce and listen to and motivate the group mates. This asserts that CL give chance to do the particular task in the group or pair work, which give them confidence to accomplish the task. Almost all participants (41% strongly agree and 30 agree) responded that CL gave them the chances of interaction. Interaction is regarded as an important element in the language learning as it provides the learners an opportunity to communicate and hence they develop their learning (Kormos & Csizer, 2014). Moreover, learners tend to feel comfortable to discuss their problems with the classmate as compared to the teachers. So the CL can easily facilitate this norm of language learning.

Statistical analysis also revealed that a large number of the participants (38% strongly agree and 40 % agree) indicate that they enjoyed the group activities. It is obvious that a remarkable number of the participants (38% strongly agree and 24% agree) indicate that group activities made the learning process easier. However, a small number of the participants did not like the idea of group activities. Group activities help in understanding the complex ideas and key point (Kılıç, 2014). So CL is the source of understanding the difficult activities and also helps learners to learn faster.

The above table also shows that most participants (52 strongly agree 35% agree) believe that bright learners help the weak in team learning. Moreover, then it is also obvious that (44% strongly agree and 31% agree), which confirms that all group members benefit from working together. Most of the responses therefore favored CL.

Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that participants tend to have a favorable view of the adoption of cooperative methods in the framework of teaching and learning. This is possibly because they believe they can rely on others for assistance while students work collectively, and this offers them the motivation and confidence to tackle problems and feel passionate for the development of learning. Positive attitudes regarding cooperative instruction approach will ultimately influence the mindset of learners towards language learning and promote their interest.

Many positive aspects, such as providing opportunities for naturalistic ways of second language learning through interactions between learners, are attributed to CL. Between learning a language and using the language in reality, there are great variations. On the various aspects of the language, students study lots of courses in the traditional classroom; on the contrary, as they tend to use it, they lack functional fluency. As the interactive process generates more examples for language artifacts and communication methods, CL improves the learning strategies. Furthermore, in order to create a positive adaptive environment in the classroom, CL increases student motivation and reduces stress.

The findings of the present attempt are in the line with Farzaneh and Nejadansari (2014) study who investigated the attitudes of learners towards using CL in intermediate-level reading comprehension. Their findings from the questionnaire were that the students demonstrated positive support for the use of CL in the present study too. Likewise, findings also endorsed the finding of the study by Ali (2017). The findings and results of Alghamdy, (2019) study showed that most students found that CL allowed them to improve their English skills, establish new associations with other classmates, perform different roles, improve their oral presentation skills, build their self-confidence, accept responsibility, respect different viewpoints and give their distinct views, increase their motivation, and grow. Likewise, Er and Atac (2014) research also established the similar finding on the use of CL.

Based on the results of the present attempt, teachers need to use a cooperative approach to learning side by side with traditional approaches to learning. It should be noted that the implementation process of cooperative learning strategies involves conceptually organized activities for teaching and learning. The use of technology is

common in language learning practices (Khan *et al.*, 2018). The integration of technology in CL may also produce better result in this pedagogy. It is also suggested that this technique be used for skills such as fostering reading skills, vocabulary learning as cooperative learning collects feedback and ideas from various members of the CL component and makes the concepts readily understandable. In addition, in other skills like listening, speaking, and writing, this technique can also be used for teaching. Furthermore, the literature indicates that the teachers could be inspired by further factors to use cooperative learning strategies.

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