

Learning English As A Second Language Through Cooperative Learning

K. Annal Girija Theivarani¹, Dr. K. Nagarathinam²

¹M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., Ph.D- Research Scholar in English, RVS College of Arts and Science, Sulur, Cbe.

²M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, RVS College of Arts and Science, Sulur, Cbe.

Abstract

Cooperative Learning is widely recognized at the global level as one of the recently developed theories of Learning. This study aims to investigate what strategies within Cooperative Learning teachers use in the English Classroom. An additional aim is to investigate how teachers believe Cooperative Learning contributes to interaction among students. The study focuses on the perspective of the teachers. Cooperative Learning is a pedagogical method with roots in the sociocultural perspective. Furthermore, it is described by Kagan and Stenlev (2006) as a method where students work in groups and cooperate in order to achieve the mutual goal. The findings indicate that the Cooperative Learning method is more effective than the traditional methods.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, Interaction, Sociocultural Perspective, Creative Thinking, Problem Solving, Social Learning.

Introduction

In Cooperative Learning, students are generally divided into groups. In each group, three to five students share ideas, study and work together, and negotiate meaning to develop shared knowledge and achieve a certain objective or find a solution to a specific learning problem instead of working alone and competing with each other individually. The same issue was adopted by John (1997) who asserted that learners need to work together on a topic and help one another so that all could reach mutual success. According to Kagan (1994), Cooperative Learning would encourage learners to higher achievement than competitive or individualistic learning as Cooperative Learning offers learners opportunities that enable them to increase their self-esteem and become more intrinsically motivated.

Astin (1993) highlighted the importance of using Cooperative Learning as an approach to learning that could play a vital role in enhancing interaction among members of each group on one side and the divided groups on the other side. Budd (2004) stated that exercises used in Cooperative Learning, among small groups, could provide an adequate chance for students to analyse deeply the topic they discuss. Similarly, White and Caminero (1995) pinpointed that Cooperative Learning helped students learn from each other. On the same hand, Biggs (1999) contended that the increasing number and diversity of the University population minimized the usefulness of traditional lectures and tutorials. Brookfield (1999) suggested using active learning strategies [such as cooperative learning] to increase the benefit of incorporating discussion activities such as Think/Pair/Share and

Case Studies to help students develop their understanding and improve their overall attitudes. Hayashi (2005) asserted the importance of practising writing among peers as an effective means to improve their writing skills.

Many works of research have supported the effectiveness of using a Cooperative Learning approach in EFL classes. While some of these researches indicated that this approach could help students develop their English language skills, other studies focused on the effectiveness of using a Cooperative Learning approach in developing their writing skills in particular (Cole, 2012, Elola and Oskoz, 2010, Wong et al., 2009, Mason, 2006; Chen, 2004; Atkinson, 2003, Mariam, 2004; Chandrika, 2001). The findings obtained from the previously stated studies enabled the researcher to build a strong and sound theoretical background about the use of the Cooperative Learning approach to develop and enhance students' writing skills. However, these studies have been mostly confined to writing in the Secondary School setting within ESL writing classrooms. Undoubtedly, some of the previous studies focused on the use of CLL within tertiary writing classrooms, but more insights are still needed to show how this approach could be used in specific academic settings concerning the concerns highlighted previously. In other words, while empirical evidence advocated the use of the CLL approach with various subject areas and different age groups, less is still known regarding the effectiveness of such an approach concerning EFL not only ESL university-level learners. Therefore, the focus of this study is on EFL writing within tertiary writing classrooms as English in Saudi Arabia is taught and used as a foreign language, and not as a second language.

CLL approach could be used as a significant strategy in developing students' EFL writing skills and their attitudes towards using them. Atkinson (2003) stated that the use of the CLL approach to enhance EFL writing inside the classroom is based on the argument that, writing instruction in an EFL classroom is not only getting students to put pen to paper, but it also involves facilitating personal interaction among students as well as developing students' responses towards texts. Kim and Kim (2005) also highlighted the necessity of following the CLL approach instruction when students learn to write in this way so that students would be expected to generate, organize and share their ideas in addition to taking care of the main components of the writing process such as vocabulary, spelling, purpose, target audience, and mechanics. All these components were put into consideration when selecting the small group activities inside the class. Second-year University students suffer from a lot of problems with their writing skills, especially in the five previously mentioned points. They need a more active and interesting atmosphere in which they could enjoy more personal interaction rather than personal cognitive competence to be able to write effectively. It is supposed that working together in small groups could be a motivating factor to share ideas and get feedback by which they could correct themselves and achieve their purpose of writing effectively.

Benefits of Cooperative Learning:

A cooperative situation helps create a congenial atmosphere because participants give encouragement and support to one another. Cooperative Learning has been linked to greater learning, emotional maturity and strong personal identity.

Leadership Skills: For a Cooperative Learning group to succeed, individuals within the group need to show leadership abilities. Leadership skills that can be taught and practiced through cooperative learning include:

- Delegating,
- Organizing work,
- Supporting others, and
- Ensuring that goals are being met

Natural leaders become quickly evident in small groups, but most students will not feel naturally inclined to lead. Assign leadership roles of varying prominence to every member of a group to help all individuals practice leading.

Teamwork Skills: All Cooperative Learning activities help students practice working in teams. As Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft, says: “Teams should be able to act with the same unity of purpose and focus as a well-motivated individual.” Teamwork-building exercises teach students to trust each other to achieve more together than would otherwise be Possible.

Communication Skills: Effective teamwork requires good communication and commitment. All members of a Cooperative Learning group have to learn to speak productively with one another to stay on track. By teaching students to share confidently, listen intently, and speak clearly, they learn to value the input of their teammates and the quality of their work soars.

Conflict Management Skills: Conflicts are bound to arise in any group setting. Sometimes these are minor and easily handled, and at other times they can rip a team apart if improperly managed. Give students space to try and work out their issues for themselves before stepping in. With that said, always monitor class during Cooperative Learning. Teach students how to work things out with each other when disagreements crop up among them.

Decision-Making Skills: Make sure that each student has her/his responsibilities in cooperative groups. Thus, the classroom often offers a student first experiences in practising most life skills. Teachers should deliberately create opportunities for students to cooperate, share responsibilities, solve problems, and control conflict. These opportunities can be found in Cooperative Learning, which differs from individualistic or traditional learning where students work independently, sometimes even against each other. Cooperative Learning activities require students to work together in small groups to complete a project or activity, operating as a team to help each other succeed.

Five Characteristics of Cooperative Learning:

Cooperative Learning shares a lot of characteristics with communicative language teaching in which interaction between students, and communicative and speaking skills are regarded as the key concepts, and the teacher’s role is just a facilitator and guide. 5 key components of Cooperative Learning differentiate it from other methods:

1. **Positive interdependence:** It refers to the fact that students should work together to achieve the goal. In this case, they can also learn from each other.
2. **Individual accountability:** Each member is responsible for the group's success and responsible for their learning.
3. **Promotive interactions:** It refers to the students’ interactions to achieve the goal. They interact verbally in a group which can also result in their learning of speaking and communicative skills.

4. **Interpersonal and social skills:** Constructive feedback that students receive in a group can help them build their interpersonal and social skills.
5. **Group processing:** It requires group members to assess their functions in a group with a focus on positive behaviours and actions.

According to Jacobs, et al. (2002), there are eight key elements (or conditions) or principles that constitute Cooperative Learning. They are:

a. Cooperation as a Value:

Cooperation as a value means encouraging students to see mutual assistance as a goal to strive for, to view others as potential collaborators, and to choose Cooperation as often as possible as a viable alternative to competition and individual work. Cooperation offers not just a way of learning but also a way of life. Cooperation represents a value that we hope students will come to espouse.

b. Heterogeneous Grouping:

Students should cooperate with a wide range of people, and not just those with whom they want to cooperate. There are many reasons for heterogeneous grouping and there are criteria that help teachers to form groups heterogeneously.

c. Positive Interdependence:

Positive Interdependence occurs when gains of individuals and teams positively correlate. Students perceive that they need each other to complete the group's task. Teachers can structure positive interdependence by establishing mutual goals, joint rewards, shared resources and assigned roles (summarizer, encourager of participation, elaborator).

d. Individual Accountability:

Individual Accountability requires that all students are actively involved and responsible for their learning. Each student's performance is frequently assessed and the results are given to the group and the individual. Teachers may structure individual accountability by giving an individual test to each student or randomly selecting one group member to answer.

e. Simultaneous Interaction:

Cooperative Learning is fundamentally a simultaneous approach. Discussions and activities take place all at once. It is also called, Face to face Promotive interaction. Students explain, discuss, and teach what they know to classmates. Teachers structure the groups so that students sit knee to knee and talk through each aspect of the assignment.

f. Equal Participation:

In a traditional classroom, only one student would dominate the discussion, as out of the entire class one or a few will be participating at any one time. By working in teams, ALL students are encouraged to contribute allowing ALL students the chance for growth.

g. Collaborative Skills:

Students are encouraged and helped to develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication and conflict-management skills.

h. Group Autonomy:

It is also called 'Group Processing'. Groups need a specific time to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships among members. Teachers structure group processing by assigning such tasks as (a) List at least three member actions that helped the group be successful, and (b) List one action that could be added to make the group even more successful

tomorrow. Teachers also monitor the groups and give feedback on how well the groups are working together to the groups and the class as a whole

Conclusion

After studying and analysing the Cooperative Learning method we see that the students work in small groups, and by working together they fix an aim and objective in life and so they try to achieve the goal which they have set. We see that this method is more effective than the other methods in so many ways such as they study and work together as a team to reach higher achievement. This method also helps them to learn and support one another. They get ample opportunities to co-operate, share their responsibilities, solve the problems and manage the conflicts among themselves. They also learn good leadership skills and practice them. Positive qualities such as patience, perseverance, listening, respecting co-operation and interdependence, etc are learned. Schools may promote this Learning in their schools to mould the children to contribute for the betterment of society.

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