A Suggested Technique for Cooperative Learning Implication in EFL Classroom: Mixed Methods Research

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Abstract

This paper aims to suggest a strategy for employing cooperative learning in situations where traditional methods are of great domination. It also explores tertiary students' attitudes toward cooperative learning. Furthermore, it checks the relationship between the total group achievement and its individual members'. Students' creativity is also another concern of this study. The sample of this study is third year students at college of education Al-Mahra, Hadhramout University for the academic year 2017-2018. The study uses a mixed- methods research design (qualitative and quantitative) by observing the students' performances on the use of the teaching method principles applied by them and their creativity in selecting the materials for applying the chosen teaching method. Questionnaire is also used at the end of the semester to find out students' attitudes about using cooperative learning. The study found that cooperative learning plays good roles in reflecting what the students have studied to their mates. Moreover, the study revealed that there is strong relationship between group degree of success and its members' achievement in the final term scores in the course. Depending on the findings, the researcher concludes that whenever students are given the chance to select their learning habits, creativity appears.

Keywords: Achievement, cooperative learning, creativity, mixed method teaching methods.

Introduction

Modern teaching methods call for centralizing learners in the learning/teaching process. Thus, cooperative learning is one of the best ways for engaging learners actively in the classroom. However, cooperative learning has high positive influences on students' learning and outcomes (Tran, 2013); it is very difficult to apply such kind of learning in classroom where traditional lectures are used. Thus, this paper tries to smoothly introduce cooperative learning to students at college level by engaging them in active participation during the considerable time allowed

for the course. The ideas of partial implication of cooperative learning is that the tutor explains one teaching method to his students in the first lecture and asks one group of students to discuss the studied method amongst themselves at homes or at their free time at college and apply the method in the next lecture in front of their colleagues and teacher. The researcher observes the group-member participation and record what he has seen and provided feedback to the group once there is any fault.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:
1. examine students' use of the teaching method principles they selected to present to their mates; and
2. investigate the relationship between students' centeredness and creativity.

Research Questions
1. What are the students' attitudes about applying cooperative learning in their classroom?
2. Is there any relationship between group success and its members' final achievement?

Purpose of study

The purpose of the current study stems from its suggested strategy for the use of cooperative learning in situations where traditional methods are of great domination. Moreover, the study signifies the correlation between cooperative group achievement and the achievement of its individual members. Such studies to the researcher knowledge who have not been focused so far. Creativity is also given a major importance in this study.

Literature Review

Cooperative learning is defined as a 'part of a group of teaching/learning techniques where students interact with each other to acquire and practice the elements of a subject matter and to meet common learning goals.' (Macpherson, 2015:p.1). It can also be viewed as 'a student-centered, instructor-facilitated instructional strategy in which a small group of students is responsible for its own learning and the learning of all group members' (Li & Lam, 2013:p.1). Likely, it is also defined as 'a methodology where children are working in small groups with individual and team accountability.' (Primaria, 2011:p.112). Furthermore, it has been conceptualized as learners doing learning by themselves under their teachers' help (Varga, 2011). It has been claimed that cooperative learning not only has advantages on the learners' achievements, but also it does strengthen friendship

amongst them (Varga, 2011). To summarize the definitions of cooperative learning, they share similar points, i.e., learners are the center of the learning process, both group members have the same goal and work to achieve it and all the work is done under the guidance of the teacher.

It has been argued that cooperative learning is widely researchable topic amongst classroom research (Sonthara & Vanna, 2009). A study which was conducted on the Tawnies junior learners found that cooperative learning not only enhanced learners' communicative ability in English, but also encouraged them to use the language (Liang, 2002). Furthermore, another study found that cooperative learning supports territory students with both social and academic skills which enhanced their achievement and degree of success (Basta, 2011). Similarly, an experimental study found that cooperative learning increased students' engagement in the classroom (Herrmann, 2013).

Why cooperative learning? Many hands make light work. Cooperative learning destroys the students' pride and fair by working together during the task (Stenlev, 2003). Likely, it also positively activates the roles of learners and minimizes the traditional roles of teachers in the learning process. Some of the positive roles of learners according to Felder and Brent (2007) are: in cooperative learning weak students work cooperatively with brilliant students so they can go on whereas in individual learning they stop trying whenever they meet any difficulty. Furthermore, good students find the chance to activate their intellectuality when they explain a task to their group mates. Also, in individual learning, learners may stop completing the task but in a cooperative learning each group mate encourages the other to complete the task.

Activities associated with cooperative learning

Jigsaw and snowball are amongst the activities used in cooperative learning. Such activities 'open classroom climates, peer support, individual reflection, paired sharing, and academic buddy systems also enhanced their engagement and participation.' (Parker, 2013:p.164). Jigsaw is an activity in which a gap is existed amongst the participants. Thus, to bridge that gap, a participant must use the target language asking his mate about the kind of information one lacks. According to Nunan (2015), this kind of activity can be performed at the beginning of a course or semester so that a teacher can discover the brilliant and weak students. By doing so, he can pay more attention to the weak students to improve them during the semester. The second activity is snowball. It is a kind of cooperative learning activity in which each member in the group is working alone at the beginning of the task, then they present their ideas to the group goals. This activity enables all

group members to participate in the task, it also disable dominancy amongst the group members (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010). To end this section, a query may be set on the difference between cooperative learning and group work.

Cooperative learning focuses on the details of what are the group members going to do and how to grow the feeling of together success whereas group work sets members together without helping them (Liang, 2002).

Elements of cooperative learning

According to Jonson and Jonson (1999), there are five bases for any task to be cooperative. They are:

Positive interdependence is based on the idea that all group members should contribute together in doing the task. They should perceive that they whether together success or fail (Li & Lam, 2013). In *Face-to-face promotive interaction*, each group member should help encouraging the other members in the same group. According to Tran (2013) promotive interaction happens when each individual in the group facilitates and boosts the other members to achieve the group's intended goals. Furthermore, a task should be done with Individual accountability to be cooperative. *Individual accountability* is based on the view that each member in the group must learn the new materials required for performing the task. They should also share their learning to the success of the group (Basta, 2011). In cooperative learning, learners also learn not only the task, but some social and processing skills. Learners are in crucial need for *social skills* like decision-making, leadership, managements, conflict managements skills which can help them to positively participate in their group and cease any problems that may appear or even resembling their group in front of their teachers (Felder & Brent, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The last base of cooperative learning is *Group processing*. Group processing measures how well the members have achieved their goals and what are the problems that they faced and which behavior should be boosted and which one to be stopped (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Kind of cooperative learning groups

Not all group works are cooperative (Johnson et al 1998). However, for any group work to pertain cooperative learning should be designed according to the common shared aims for the whole group, the success for all, every member has to take part in the group and they also evaluate their performance and boost the nice behavior and condemn the worst one. Moreover, groups in cooperative learning can be designed to include one of the following, formal, informal, or base group.

Formal cooperative learning is based on the idea that a group team works together to do the activity or task assigned to them for a minimum of one period and a maximum of several weeks for achieving the set goals. The teacher in this type of cooperative learning decides the type of task and the importance of working together and assigns the number, so students in each group and what are they going to do during this task. Furthermore, the teacher monitors the groups' progresses and intervals where it needed, and finally the instructor assesses the team achievements (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998).

Unlike the formal cooperative learning group, *the informal cooperative group* is temporarily. Group members may be given five minutes to discuss a task amongst themselves (Johnson et al, 1998). The third kind of cooperative group is called *cooperative base groups.*

This kind of cooperative learning group takes the longest time amongst the three group kinds. It continues for a whole semester and course in which the group members work together to achieve the required goals (Johnson et al , 1998). This cooperative base group is applied in this on-going research in which the class is grouped into groups and each group worked together from the beginning of the semester into the end.

Methodology

Participants

The sample of this study is third year students at college of education Al-Mahra, Hadhramout University for the academic year 2017-2018. They are doing their B.A. in English. The sample includes all the students in the third year.

The study adopts mixed methods design. It is the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. The purpose of collecting both kinds of data in a single study according to Creswell (2012) is to reach a better understanding of the research problem. Thus, in a mixed method research, the researcher uses more than one instrument to collect the data form the sample. Therefore, the defect in any instrument will be supported or triangulated by the other (Patton 1999).

Instruments

The researcher in this study builds his own questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of items which ask the respondents about their attitudes toward the cooperative learning. Furthermore, the researcher observed each group of the

learners to check their success for the implication of the method. Moreover, the researcher uses students' scores in the course to check the relationship between the success of each group and its member final achievements.

Procedures

Firstly, the researcher is teaching the sample (all the students) a course called Language Teaching Methodology. A book entitled: Technique and Procedure in Language Teaching by Diane Larsen-Freeman, (2000), 2nd edition is taught for the students. The researcher has two lecturers per week, something that equals three hours a week. The semester contains 14 weeks including tests and presentations. Then, the researcher divided the time equally, i.e. one lecture to be scheduled for explaining one chapter from the mentioned book and the second lecture is given to students to reflect what have they learned in the lecture, or what the tutor has explained to them. Every lecture focuses on some principles that the author of the book has explicitly mentioned, the goals of each chapter at the beginning. Thus, the students are required to reflect on the mentioned goals. One point will be discussed by some students to reach a clear coverage of the point. The researcher writes down the students' reflection. So that in later phases all students' participations (specifically applying the method principles and creativity in selecting the teaching materials) are analyzed in accordance with the group as one team and in comparison, to the other groups.

Analysis

The study uses many instruments. The first one is classroom observation which aims to check participants' ability in applying the method principles, and how creative they are in choosing the material for presenting the method in front of their colleagues. Similarly, the researcher also uses students' final scores to compare the relationship between the achievements of cooperative learning groups and the achievement of individual members in the group. Finally, a questionnaire is used to check students' attitudes about their experience in the implication of such kind of learning.

As the table above shows, the methods principles have been applied positively. Half of the groups applied the principles of methods to a very high extent. The first, the third and the sixth groups were the best in applying the principles of methods.

Table 1. *Comparison between individual student test scores and group creativity and applying to the method principles*

Method	Students' achievements		Group creativity	Group implication to the method- principles
CLT			To a very high extent	To a very high extent
		140		
		129		
		130		
		135		
		99		
ALM			To a high extent	To a very high extent
		135		
		142		
		84		
		29		
		129		
Suggestope dia			To a high extent	To a high extent
		139		
		78		
		59		
		85		
		109		
		88		
		83		
GTM			To a high extent	To a very high extent
		116		
		87		
		57		
		79		
CLL			To some extent	To a high extent
		92		
		109		
		86		
		93		
		120		
		78		
		85		

		Not at all	to a moderate extent
TPR	63		
	49		
	18		
	25		

The first group applied the principles of grammar translation method including brining a literary text, calling students to read the text sentence by sentence till the end. After reading the text, one of the group members called the class to read one sentence and translate it into Arabic language. Moreover, another member came to the front of the class and told the class to turn the paper over to see the comprehensive questions in the next side by calling one of the class to read a question and another to answer it till they finish all the questions. A third student is called to the front of the class and set the fourth principle of GTM by calling student to give the meaning of some words appeared in the manuscript and finding the synonymous and antonymous meanings of some words written in the sheet. Finally, the last student in the group is called to teach class a rule in grammar which explicitly appeared in the text, i.e., past simple. That student set the rule deductively and applied it on some examples, and finally requested the class to give some examples.

The third group applied the Audio-Lingual Method to their class. They presented a dialog and taught it to their class. The group boss came to the front of the class and explained briefly about the teaching method that are our target and divided the roles amongst the team as follow:

Dialog memorization: The first student read the dialog hung on the board and tells the class to just listen to her, then she tells them to repeat after her. The next step she reads one role and tells the class to read the other and finally shifts the roles. The second student applies the (*single slot-substitution drill)* by reading a sentence from the dialog and telling the class to repeat it and finally she holds a cue (card) and inquires the class to substitute it. The third student does the (*multiple slot substitution drill*) but not too effectively. The fourth student applies (transformational drill) by reading a declarative sentence from the dialog and telling the class to change it into question. The fifth (*the chain drill*) by reading a question form the dialog and pointing to one of the students to respond to her and telling her/him to ask one partner till the chain spreads over the class. The sixth student applies *the question and answer drill* by asking a question and holding a card in her hand whether matching with the cue in the question or not. If it is matching with the question, the students then respond by yes, in case there is no matching the students say no and utter the sentence by correcting the mistake. The

group boss then finished the dialog by asking the class if they have any question about the method or principles. The class thank her, and the author asking them what their opinions about the reflection are. They were very satisfactory. The author, then congratulated the group.

Communicative language teaching is applied by a group of students. The group boss presented a brief introduction about CLT focusing on its definition and the four elements. She states the importance of authentic materials in helping developing learners' competence. The second student explained how to use the language not only according to the rules of the grammar but also to the rules of language uses. A third student distributes a pater with the class. Some three sentences are written, and she confirmed that she quote them from a magazine. She told the class to work in groups and try to paraphrase the sentences in other way focusing on the degree of certainly on the original ones. One student came into the front of the class and showed some image to the students and asked them to tell what they mean and when she finished, she asked the class, who can tell the story as mentioned in the images. The fifth student put on audio to the class and asked them to listen to the report and finally want them to tell what they have heard. Another student asked a question to the class about the best places that a tourist enjoys in Yemen. She elicits ten places and wrote them on the board. Later on, she divided plain sheet and grouped the class into fours. She told them to write each tourist place on each sheet and she collected them back from them and redistributed them. Each member in the group is given three sheets except on who plays the role. One sheet is stayed facing the table. The role player member starts to set his/her prediction using less certain sentence like may, if the one of group member has the name of that place, he says, no, they could not go there by evening any excuse , the role player tries again and so on. If no one has that place name in his/her sheet the player would give strong prediction and finally confirms by checking the sheet on the table. The next result shows that two groups demonstrated the methods to a high extent. Another students tells the class to work in group and instructs them that they are required to select one of them as the minister of tourism and told them to discuss how to improve tourism in Yemen. She finally summarize the methodology.

Creativity

Creativity is the second variable that this study focuses on. According to table (1) above, three groups showed a high extent of creativity in choosing the teaching materials to apply the methods on, whereas one group showed a very high extent of creativity and one group showed to some extent of creativity and finally the last group did not show any creativity in their selection of the teaching materials.

The highest level of creativity is pursued in applying the communicative language teaching methodology. Students got the opportunity to use authentic materials and create real situation where language is used. This finding matches with the huge literature on communicative language teaching, for example see (Celce-Murcia, 1997; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Littlewood, 2013; Richards, 2011). The second level of creativity is seen in the implication of grammar translation method, audiolingual method and Suggestopedia. Finally, students who applied community language learning seemed little creative whereas the last group who applied the total physical response is not creative at all.

Students' response to the questionnaire's items:

The researcher also wants to check students' attitudes and opinions about cooperative learning and their application to the methods that they have studied.

Table 2. *Students' attitudes about cooperative learning.*

no	Questionnaire item	Percentage		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Cooperative learning gives students the chance to do the learning by themselves.	94.1%	0	5.9%
2	In cooperative learning, teacher is only helper.	52.9%	23.5%	23.5%
3	Each member in the group is responsible for the learning of the whole group.	64.7%	17.6%	17.6%
4	Each one of you has taken his/her role in the application of the method given to you.	64.7%	23.5%	11.8%
5	Cooperative learning strengthens friendship among students	100%		
6	In cooperative learning, all the group members got more knowledge than when they work in isolation	100%		
7	Cooperative learning breaks the shame you feel to talk in English with your friends and teachers.	88.2%	11.8%	
8	Weak students are encouraged when they work together with strong students.	76.5%	23.5%	
9	Cooperative learning helps weak students to do their roles in a task which they could not complete if they work alone.	88.2%	11.8%	
10	Cooperative learning gives you the chance to choose the lesson you want to teach to your classmates.	82.4%	11.8%	5.9%
11	Cooperative learning gives the group boss the chance	76.5%	17.6%	5.9%

	to share their knowledge with other members about what to do.			
12	Cooperative learning motivates the skills of leadership among the members, for example dividing the tasks among the group, solving any problem, etc.	94.1%	5.9%	
13	Cooperative learning improves your speaking skills.	88.2%	11.8%	
14	Reflecting on what you have studied to your classmate is a way of assessing your understanding	88.2%	11.8%	
15	If your teacher explained the method successfully, the students could successfully apply the method in any lesson	58.8%	29.4%	11.8%
16	Reflecting what you have studied to your classmates builds your teaching experience.	88.2%	11.8%	
17	After applying the method that you are required to teach to your classmate, you discussed with your group members your weakness and strength.	76.5%	11.8%	11.8%
18	Reflecting on the methods that you have studied in front of the classroom also helped you to answer the exam questions	76.5%	17.6%	5.9%
19	You will apply the cooperative learning you practiced in methodology course in your practical teaching	70.6%	23.5%	5.9%

Discussions

The researcher merges the data collected from the observation and questionnaire and analyzes them together.

1. What are the students' attitudes about applying cooperative learning in their classroom?

According to the questionnaire, and as table (2) shows, the students show positive attitude about their experience in the implementation of cooperative learning in their study. The finding matches with Tran's (2013) that students who are taught by cooperative learning are affected positively than other students taught by traditional methods. This can also been seen through the high percentage that 70% of the students said that they will use the cooperative learning in their future teaching. Some of the positive attitudes that the students got stem from the opportunity that they got to practice the language in front of their class. Thus, the high opportunity that the students got in cooperative learning helps them to be independent learners. Slavin (1991) stated that cooperative learning solves all the 'astonishing array for

educational problems.' (p.72). Similarly, Sunggingwati (2018) argues that when a student presents his ideas in front of the whole class, the students' anxiety is minimized, and their confidence is strengthened. Accordingly, students enjoyed in teaching using cooperative learning as they reported in the questionnaire. This finding suggests that cooperative learning should be activated at higher education, specifically at the university level. Students not only enjoy in such kind of methodology, but also, they learn the course effectively and build new friendships and new leadership skills.

2. Is there any relationship between group success and its members' final achievements?

According to the observation listed previously, the best group seems to be the last one that presented the Communicative Language Teaching. Regarding the members' final achievements in the course it seems that they got amazing scores which ranked between (140-99) out of 150. Two with excellent grades, two with very good and one with good. Audio-Lingual Method is also among the successful method presented by the group. Along with the CLT, the ALM group got scores ranging from (142-84). Two students with excellent, one with very good, one with good and finally one fails. Suggestopedia is the third successful group. Their success can be consider as moderate. One students got excellent, one good, four fair and one failed. Grammar translation method is the fourth successful group. Its success is accepted to some extent. One student got good, two with fair and one failed.

However, community language learning is presented less successfully than GTM, its member has got a few better scores than GTM group members. CLT members' scores rate between (120, into 78), one student got very good, one got good and the remaining had fair. And Silent way group had failed totally because they have not prepared anything and used to postpone their presentation along the whole semester and such postponing and laziness appeared also on the students' final scores in which they failed, and their scores range from (63: 18) out of 150. It seems that they are careless and do not pay any importance about the learning process.

According to the above mentioned discussions, a conclusion can be reached that in the first three groups and the last group, there is a strong relationship between cooperative learning group success and their member final achievements, while in the last two group the relationship between cooperative learning group success and their member final achievements is little bit not clear. This finding matches with the existed literature on cooperative learning that in cooperative learning students

achieve better than when they work individually (Johnson et al., 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Li & Lam, 2013).

Conclusion

This study aims at applying the cooperative learning at Yemen territory level. The study posts some queries regarding students' attitudes toward the applicability of cooperative learning in their learning process. It also checks both students' degree of positive applicability to the method-principles to their peers and also how creative they were in selecting the teaching materials and preparation. Finally, the study focuses on the relationship between each group degree of success and the achievement of its members. Thus, the researcher suggests a way for the teaching of Language Teaching Methodology to B. A. Yemeni students. Firstly, the class is divided into heterogeneous groups each group has between four into seven students who represent different level, good, medium, fair, students. The researcher explains one of the teaching method explicitly to the students in each lecture, the second lecture is given to each one of the groups to apply the method by themselves to their colleagues. The tasks are divided between each group members. The study shows that students show good impression in the students' attitudes about the suggested way for the teaching of the Methodology course. Moreover, students got new idea about the implication of cooperative strategies in the learning and teaching process. They also got opportunities not only to learn by themselves but also to practice the language in front of their peers. The study also reports that students showed great intellectuality and creative minds whenever the teachers give them the chance to select their ways of learning. This finding is in line with what Nunan called learners' centeredness (Nunan 2015) and Macpherson's (2015) ideas that in cooperative learning students shift from traditional learning to critically evaluate their learning under different situations (p.1). Furthermore, when cooperative learning is actively implemented, learners usually develop highly reasoning skills and build positive relationship with their peers (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). The majority of students showed that they are going to apply the cooperative learning in their practical teaching phase as teachers in the future. This finding expresses students' contest and satisfaction about pursuing their own learning under their own responsibility. Notwithstanding with the great opportunity that students got in the implication of cooperative learning, the study revealed that there are strong relationships between successful cooperation between each group members and their final achievements in the course. The study recommends further research to be conducted on the role of cooperative learning on enhancing slow learners. Another study may focus on the influence of cooperative learning on

developing students' academic writing. Finally, the research recommends a study to be conducted on the possibility of implying cooperative learning in informal learning to scaffold formal learning.

This study is closely related to teaching and learning. Thus, it is very important to state " pedagogical implications.

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