

The Impact of Cooperative Learning Activities on Developing the Writing Skill of Learners of English

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Abstract: Writing is one of the four key language skills that have a significant impact on language learning. This paper examines the impact of cooperative learning (CL) activities on developing the writing skills of learners of English. The research aims to enhance writing skills using cooperative learning strategies, as modern methodologies in teaching foreign languages. The use of CL strategies has proven to be an effective method in shaping the learner's linguistic, social, and communicative competence. It focuses on studying the impact of CL in improving the writing skills of International University students. Research was conducted on a section of students to examine the effectiveness of CL strategies in improving the writing skills and oral proficiency of learners of English. The learners were divided into two groups, with one adopting a traditional method while the other adopting a cooperative learning approach. The research showed that there was a positive impact of teaching with the CL method, with the learners displaying a positive attitude towards implementing CL methods in writing and oral classes. Besides, it's a more effective way of maximizing student participation and driving meaningful input and output to the learners.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, Writing Skill of Learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to learning a foreign language, speaking and writing are skills that can turn out to be problematic among most learners. These two belong to linguistic intelligence which provides a foundation for the skills that a person needs to convey a message. It can be viewed as a process of speaking, writing, and reading. Language entails articulating, talking, expressing, and passing ideas or thoughts in the outside world, through different methods. According to Gardner (1999), language intelligence can be defined as one's ability to understand and comprehend the language learning process.

On the other hand, writing can be perceived as a more precise and concrete version of the language. When a person develops their writing skill and masters the art of organizing ideas understandably, it becomes easier to speak, read, and write thoughts or ideas more accurately (Namaziandost et al., 2020). English reading, writing, and teaching in the modern era create an opportunity for active participation for learners and teachers and help in improving the student's writing skills. Cooperative learning is an excellent strategy for instilling the writing ability of learners much faster. It creates many teaching methods for teachers to use as social interaction is possible. According to Tran (2013), cooperative learning allows the teacher to give the learners a chance to actively participate in reading and writing. However, teachers need to know effective training methods that they should adopt to equip learners in specific learning situations. The CL method can be done using a combination of teaching techniques and activities that introduce active participation in the learning process. The approach can be composed of small or mixed groups to foster collaboration and increase the learners' confidence as they interact with each other in the learning subject.

Cooperative learning strategies take the learner's social background, mental level, and feelings into consideration, making it a valuable instructive technique (Salem Aldossary, 2021). It increases language learning as it ensures group participation

and focuses on students' self-assessments. For instance, in a situation where students are helping each other with a task, they are more likely to understand different parts of writing and reading faster. Besides, cooperative learning techniques embrace all groups with different levels of understanding of the English language.

It is predicted that cooperative methods may increase the learning rates of students. Since it provides opportunities for sharing ideas and discussions in groups, there is a strong relationship between cooperative learning and academic performance (Ratnaningsih & Clara, 2021). It fosters responsibility and cooperation among students who take an interest in group activities. From group activities, students can share ideas and comprehend tasks together, which gives them a chance to learn, write, and share knowledge, which in turn helps in improving their overall academic performance.

In a language classroom, writing is typically taught as a productive skill, which involves the creation of written texts that convey meaning to the reader (Ahangari & Samadian, 2014). Writing proficiency is considered essential for academic and professional success, as well as social and personal development. However, developing English writing skills in a second language setup may be challenging as it requires a mastery of various sub-skills such as punctuation grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Traditional writing instruction, which is often based on a teacher-centered approach, may not effectively engage learners or provide them with sufficient practice and feedback to improve their writing skills. Therefore, there is a need for an alternative approach that can help the learners develop these skills faster.

2. COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND THE COGNITIVE THEORY

Cooperative learning focuses on group work and collaboration to teach the writing skills of English. This method has proven its effectiveness in promoting critical thinking, social interaction, and problem-solving skills among students. It is based on cognitive theory that suggests that learning is an active process involving the construction of knowledge through social interactions and experiences. According to the cognitive theory, students actively construct knowledge through their experiences with the world around them (Tran, 2013). In a cooperative learning environment, students work together in small groups to solve problems and complete tasks. Cognitive theory suggests that working in groups allows students to share their perspectives, challenge their thinking, and refine their ideas based on input from their peers. This process of social interaction facilitates the assimilation of new information and the integration of different viewpoints, leading to a deeper understanding of the English language's oral and writing skills (Zayed, 2019). According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, students are exposed to different perspectives and ideas when working in groups, which can enhance their critical thinking and language skills.

3. THE WRITING SKILL

Learning a language means being able to communicate with others in that language. For this to happen, learners need to develop their ability to read, write, understand, and speak. Writing can be viewed as a basic skill that needs a person to learn for them to reach an acceptable level of understanding of the language. It needs considerable effort and practice to attain it.

When applied to developing writing skills, cooperative learning in the English language classroom can lead to improved writing proficiency, increased learner engagement, and enhanced collaboration and communication skills. The writing process involves many steps, from understanding grammar and vocabulary to generating ideas and revising written content. In a cooperative learning setting, students work together to complete each stage of the writing process and provide learners with an environment to collaborate and develop their writing skills (Ratnaningsih & Clara, 2021). Collaborative writing activities such as revising and peer editing foster a sense of ownership in the writing process at Arab International University, where students can give and receive feedback. Peer editing tasks encourage the learners to critically analyze their writing and provide constructive feedback, enhancing their understanding of the writing process.

Working in groups allows students to improve their writing skills by learning from each other's vocabulary, grammar, and writing styles (Ahangari & Samadian, 2014). It exposes them to different writing techniques and strategies and enables them to learn how to brainstorm activities and communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively in writing. Cooperative learning simplifies this process and enables the students to develop their critical thinking skills, idea generation, and creativity, which are essential elements of effective writing. Besides, it creates diverse thinking and allows for the integration of multiple perspectives among students. This diversity can lead to a more nuanced and well-rounded understanding of the writing topic and enhance the quality of writing in the English language. Also, it provides a platform to discuss and debate ideas, which can strengthen the students' argumentation and persuasion skills.

Definition of Writing

Writing is a complex process that involves transforming thoughts and ideas into a written form using a structured manner. According to Pham (2021), writing can be defined as a form of human communication that uses symbols such as alphabets, spaces, and punctuation and transforms them into readable formats. It is a fundamental skill that is used in different aspects, ranging from personal communication to academic and professional settings. Having strong writing skills enables one to understand and construct written texts with clarity, coherence, and organization. Writing skills refer to the set of abilities that an individual possesses to effectively express ideas, thoughts, and feelings in a written format (Yovie, 2019). These skills include understanding the writing processes, constructing arguments, developing ideas, and using proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Besides, it entails creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to adapt writing styles and tones to different audiences and purposes.

According to Bryne (1991), writing extends beyond the production of graphic symbols. It's a complex process that calls for a high level of mental involvement and coordination of various cognitive processes like planning, organizing, revising, and editing to create a coherent written piece. This complexity of writing makes it a challenging skill for learners of English as a second language (ESL). However, cooperative learning has enabled trainers to look at the writing in ESL classrooms and highlight on the importance of writing skills.

4. TYPES OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), cooperative learning is a teaching approach that involves working together in groups to complete a task or achieve a goal. In ESL learning, it can be divided into formal, informal CL, and cooperative base groups.

Formal Cooperative Learning

Formal CL is a structured approach to teaching and learning with classes lasting from several minutes to several sessions (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). This approach involves tasks that require active participation, accountability, and distribution of tasks. The students work together towards shared tasks, with the groups carefully designed to be heterogeneous, and have members with different abilities and backgrounds. Formal CL promotes social interaction and support for diverse learning styles. This approach to learning has been shown to improve academic achievement, enhance communication and social skills, and foster positive interdependence among students.

Informal Cooperative Learning

Informal CL is a teaching method where students work in a group to complete a task or a common goal. Unlike formal CL, informal learning is less structured and can occur informally or spontaneously during group projects, study sessions, and class discussions. It allows for peer feedback and support, creating a supportive learning environment for students.

Base or Home Groups

These are long-term groups with a more stable membership. Learners in this group are chosen from members who can provide each other with assistance, encouragement, and support. In most cases, the group is heterogeneous, with members meeting regularly at different times of the month, semester, year, or several years.

Elements of Cooperative Learning

According to Kagan (1992), cooperative learning comprises five elements that should be present at different learning stages, which are group formation, positive interdependence, social skills, individual accountability, and structuring and structures.

Group Formation

Groups are a key part of cooperative learning and crucial in making positive interdependence. However, certain factors are put into consideration when forming groups such as:

- Deciding on the group size
- Dividing students into specific groups, which can either be student-selected, random, or teacher-selected.
- Allocating student roles, with each member playing a specific role.

Positive Interdependence

In a cooperative learning setting, the learners need to recognize themselves as interdependent, with the group's success being dependent on the success of all members. Since each person has a role to play and a target to complete a task, cooperation implies that the members have to play their role for the shared goal to become successful. Bafadal (2015) argues that positive interdependence fosters the relationship between learners and enables them to provide support to each other when it comes to learning writing skills. These groups need to put several factors into place which are the shared goal, the role of each member, materials divided among them, and the rewards when learners complete a task.

Individual Accountability

If certain learners perform more tasks than others, then the purpose of cooperative learning loses its meaning. Individual accountability helps ensure that members are not ignored and are allocated equal tasks like everyone else in the group (Kagan, 1992). Each member needs to demonstrate that they understand their tasks for the group to succeed.

Social Skills

Social skills and cooperative learning are closely intertwined and have a symbiotic relationship. They refer to the abilities and behaviors that allow individuals to interact and communicate effectively with others. In a cooperative setting, students are required to work collaboratively and actively participate in discussions, decision-making processes, and problem-solving skills (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2018). Learning in this setting requires students to use their social skills such as self-confidence, trust, conflict resolution, empathy, and active listening to reach their target goal (Salem Aldossary, 2021). Through cooperative development, the students can develop social skills such as teamwork, compromise, leadership, and respect for each other's opinions and easily share ideas on a common ground.

Structuring and Structures

Structures refer to specific techniques and strategies that are used to organize students' interactions. It helps in establishing clear guidelines and procedures for group work. Besides, this element creates a framework for communication and decision-making, promoting effective teamwork and collaboration (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2018). In turn, cooperative learning reinforces the use of structures by fostering a positive and supportive learning environment. Members can learn through discussions, providing feedback, and giving explanations.

Cooperative Learning activities

To enhance the learning process, many activities can be introduced and simplify English language learning. Some cooperative learning activities have proven to be effective in a language classroom, such as:

Jigsaw

The jigsaw activity involves breaking down a class into smaller groups and each part is allocated to a specific member. Each member becomes an expert in their assigned task and is responsible for teaching their group mates. The groups then come together to share their findings and create a complete understanding of the task. Slavin (1996) illustrates that the activity fosters positive relationships among learners and promotes collaborative learning. For instance, a member may be assigned a task on vocabulary while the other focuses on punctuation. When they come together, each member teaches the other the part they are focusing on and makes it easier for learners to comprehend ideas and polish up their English language writing skills (Bafadal, 2015). Research shows that the jigsaw technique improves communication skills, self-esteem, and academic achievement.

Round table and round-robin

In this activity, students work in a group to complete a task or solve a problem, taking turns in giving answers. Round table and round robin encourage to listen to one another and build on each other's ideas. For instance, if it's on the order of adjectives, the students share a piece of paper with their views, and then speak out their contributions. This has proven to be an effective method in teaching writing skills to students, capturing ideas, and developing background information on a given topic.

Think/Pair/Share

This is a cooperative learning strategy that involves students thinking about a concept or question individually, pairing up with partners to discuss their thoughts, and then sharing their ideas with the whole class (Demirci & Duzenli, 2017). TPS enables the students to make preparations using their thinking skills and turn their thoughts into opinions. It serves as an assessment tool to see how the student's writing skills are fairing. In this activity, the teacher may pose a question, let's say in grammar, and the learners can partner and discuss the question. Next, the students can share their thoughts on the answers to the question.

Numbered heads together

According to (Slavin 1996), this activity involves students working in different groups and each member is given a number. The teacher asks a question for group members to discuss and once they are confident each person can answer it, the teacher selects a random number from the group. The chosen person answers the question to the rest of the class. This activity promotes teamwork, accountability, and critical thinking as all students rely on each other to come up with an appropriate answer.

Group investigation

Group investigation is an activity in which students in a group investigate a given topic. Each member has a role to play, such as timekeeper, recorder, researcher, and reporter. The members work collaboratively to collect information, analyze their research, and present their findings to the rest of the class.

5. THE IMPACT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES ON DEVELOPING THE WRITING SKILL OF LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

From statistics, cooperative learning techniques have a significant impact on writing skills in language learning and improving the students' speaking fluency and writing proficiency (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Group work is an excellent way adopted in ELL classes that has shaped the skills of learners of English in the Arab International University. Cooperative learning activities cut across all corners of a student's academic and personal life, significantly influencing writing performance in a stress-reduced and supportive environment. Working in small groups enhances face-to-face interaction and the quality of input and output among students. Pham (2021) says that working in small groups improves the learner's communicative skills and interaction and enhances their speaking, turn-taking, and listening skills.

Effects of cooperative learning activities on reading and comprehension

Comprehension refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and evaluate written or spoken text. In a study on the impact of using the jigsaw cooperative strategy on English language learning (ELL), there was a positive impact of the CL activities on reading and comprehension. Working together in groups, with each member being an expert in their assigned area provides students with a context to learn and practice (Aktaş et al., 2022). According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, students develop their understanding of the world through interactions with their environment. Through cooperative learning, the learners are actively engaged in discussions and activities, which allow them to construct their meaning of the content and comprehend different aspects of the English language much faster. This active engagement promotes deeper understanding and retention of information, leading to improved comprehension.

There is a close connection between reading and writing. Students tend to become competent readers as they develop and sharpen their writing skills and vice versa. Cooperative learning strategies equips them with skills that enable them to think critically about a specific aspect of the English language and interact with other learner in rich and meaningful ways (Ratnaningsih & Clara, 2021). The writing skills increase the more one reads. Cooperative learning activities such as the jigsaw and the think-pair-share have proven to be particularly effective in promoting reading and comprehension. In these structures, the students have an opportunity to discuss and share their ideas with their peers, which helps to clarify their understanding, identify any misconceptions, and better their writing prowess.

Cooperative learning activities, for instance, may ask a student to read a particular book. In the numbered heads together or group investigation activity, the learners will then be asked to write down a summary of what the book entails. After that, one person from the group will be selected to explain to the class what they have read. In general, writing about one's readings is an easier and more practical way of practicing writing skills (Aktaş et al., 2022). According to previous literature,

when a student writes about what they read, they improve their comprehension skills and puts their writing skills into practice. This can be through continuing the story, writing an article, or answering open-ended questions. A study by Demirci & Duzenli (2017) confirms this relationship between cooperative activities and reading and writing skills and concludes that it's more effective compared to the traditional approaches among students.

Impact of cooperative learning activities on writing skills

In the context of writing skills, cooperative learning activities offer students an environment to engage in meaningful interactions and discussions with their peers, enhancing their writing proficiency through reading and practice. These activities have been found to have a positive impact on the students' writing skills. According to a study by Munawar & Chaudhary (2019), they lead to better writing performance compared to the traditional approach. For instance, the jigsaw technique that involves dividing a class into expert groups promotes collaboration and allows students to explore different perspectives and ideas from their peers. This has led to a more enhanced and diverse approach to writing assignments.

Similarly, the think-pair-share approach allows students to reflect on a topic individually, discuss it with a partner, and share their ideas with the class. From previous research by Harmer (2005), this activity enables a student to brainstorm and organize their thoughts before writing, leading to a more coherent and structured piece of writing. Besides, it promotes accountability and fosters communication skills, as students practice explaining their ideas to others, improving their ability to express themselves in writing. In the context of Arab International University, most students have Arabic as their first language, and learning English is pretty challenging. However, cooperative learning activities have been introduced to the education system, with studies suggesting its potential to improve students' English language skills. In a study by Slavin (1996), the activities improve motivation and self-efficacy in writing and create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. The sense of ownership in learning has increased motivation among the learners and is slowly enabling them to produce more thoughtful and well-written English pieces of writing. By working in groups, whether through jigsaw, think-pair-share, or round table and round-robin activities, students are exposed to different perspectives and ideas, which leads to a deeper understanding of the writing task given (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Impact of cooperative learning activities on students' attitude towards English

The results from the analysis of the study show there is a high mean score of the positive impact of think-pair-share and jigsaw activities as learning methods to develop the writing skills of learners of English. Besides, the results from a section of 30 students from AIU reveal that the participants have a positive attitude toward the cooperative learning activities. In a study by Veenman et al. (2005), students showed positive and cooperative behavior in terms of constructive activities and giving and seeking help. These behaviors can be categorized into affective, confirmatory, executive which involves asking for answers, and instrumental.

Impact of cooperative learning activities on narrative writing

The study on the impact of cooperative learning activities also concluded that it increased the students' achievement in narrative writing through the think-pair-share technique. Findings show that students under the TSP technique had improved writing scores in terms of grammatical accuracy, organization, mechanics, and vocabulary (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2018).

Impact of cooperative learning activities on vocabulary and writing performance

A study involving 30 learners was conducted to examine their performance on vocabulary tests. First, they were taught lexical items using the round table and round-robin method. After analysis, the findings indicated a positive relationship between vocabulary performance and writing performance, highlighting on the importance of contextualized vocabulary instruction in improving writing skills.

The impact of cooperative learning methods on oral proficiency

Oral proficiency can be defined as the ability to use language effectively and fluently in spoken communication (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). It includes the use of correct vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, discourse strategies, and the ability to understand and respond to different types of spoken language in a variety of contexts. Cooperative learning activities entail working in groups and actively engaging in academic tasks. In the AIU, these methods incorporate opportunities for students to use the language in a meaningful and authentic way, allowing them to practice and develop their oral skills.

6. CONCLUSION

Cooperative learning activities have a significant impact on the development of writing skills among English learners. The appropriate application of cognitive and cooperative learning improves the learners' writing skills, stimulating the need for expression and teaching with activities that are fun and innovative (Namaziandost et al., 2020). In a place where most students have a stronger Arabic background than English, there was an insufficient level of performance in the early stages. However, with proper organization of group activities and proper communication and interaction, this narrative has changed with collaborative learning methodology proving to be a more effective method of learning. In addition, cooperative learning activities have acted as a performance booster for most learners.

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