
Investigating the Impact of Using Cooperative Learning Strategy in Improving EFL Students' Reading Skill: A Case Study of First Year Students of English at College of Education- Sudan University of Science and Technology

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ABSTRACT: *This research article is aiming at investigating the Impact of Using Cooperative Learning Strategy in Improving EFL Students' Reading Skill. Subjects were 40 male university students in the English Department, College of Education, SUST. They were randomly assigned into two groups: The experimental group using cooperative reading strategies and the control group using a traditional method of instructions. The study reached the following findings: firstly, students of first year can develop better reading skills by implementing cooperative learning in the learning process. Secondly, students' performance improved significantly, and they developed better attitudes towards learning English via cooperative learning strategy. Finally, in cooperative learning, students are motivated and less reluctant. Also, the study recommends the following: first, teachers of English should adopt cooperative learning methods in the teaching and learning process. Second, students should be provided with enough opportunities in the learning process, and more importantly, they should be encouraged to implement cooperative learning methods both in and out the classroom.*

KEY WORDS: cooperative learning, reading, Strategy, EFL, students' reading skills,

INTRODUCTION

English language is considered as international language in all over the world. It is taught in all governmental and private schools as well as in all the Universities and Colleges. To teach the integrated skills, it is very important to use different strategies of teaching. Majorities of teachers who teach English use traditional methods for teaching the four English language skills. Minorities of other teachers try to use some modern methods and strategies that are regarded to be learner-centered strategies as cooperative learning strategies.

Typically, in Sudanese classrooms at all educational levels, a teacher-centered approach seems to be utilized. In such classrooms, the lecturer is typically seen as the source of knowledge with students passively taking notes, asking very few or no questions. Also, this strategy can develop positive attitudes towards learning process and high achievement. As it was mentioned by (Coelho,1991) what group goals and individual accountability do is to motivate students to give explanation and to

take one another's learning seriously, instead of simply giving answers. Taking this into account, this study will be conducted to investigate the impact of using cooperative learning strategies in improving students' reading skill. The study will adopt the experimental and descriptive methods. Pre-posttest and questionnaire will be used as primary tools for data collection. Pre-posttest will be given to first year students of English at College of Education-SUST and questionnaire will be distributed to teachers of English at some Sudanese Universities.

Statement of the study

It has observed by the researcher as an expert in the field of teaching and learning English that undergraduate students are somehow weak in reading skill, therefore, this study is trying to provide students with solutions to overcome those problems of reading and to improve for better. While, reading difficulties are common problem facing the majority of learners of English. This problem is to some extent neglected to be corrected both by learners and instructors.

Objectives of the Study

This study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate whether using cooperative learning strategy affects EFL students on developing reading skill.
2. To highlight that cooperative learning strategy helps EFL students enhance reading skill.

Questions of the Study

The study sets out to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent can using cooperative learning strategy affect EFL students on developing reading skill?
2. To what extent can using cooperative learning strategy help EFL students enhance reading skill?

Hypotheses of the Study

The study sets out to test the following hypotheses:

1. Using cooperative learning strategy can positively affect EFL students on developing reading skill.
2. Using cooperative learning strategy can significantly help EFL students to enhance reading skill.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the importance of reading skill for the learners of English. English language has become more prominent in the world when it is compared with other languages due to large amount of its user all over the world. The Sudanese learners of English encounter numerous barriers in reading. Therefore, the results of this study will help both teachers and learners to choose appropriate teaching techniques when teaching reading skill inside the classroom class. English teachers can use cooperative learning activities to improve reading skill and encourage students to have positive attitude toward reading. In addition, it can pave the way for further development of teaching English reading skill and learning in the future.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the past decades, a new approach called “Cooperative Learning” seemed to attract a lot of attention and became popular. This conceptual approach is based on a theoretical framework that provides general principles on how to structure cooperative learning activities in a teacher’s specific subject area, curriculum, students, and setting.

Teachers can use this approach to stimulate students to acquire the knowledge as well as create interpersonal and team skills. Traditionally, classes always consist of good students and weak students. Students with low level sit in isolation as they lose confidence in their ability to learn English. Working in groups, therefore, is believed to help solve this problem. Shy students who don’t like to loudly read in a large class are more comfortable speaking out in smaller groups. Group members can complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses in English. Brookfield and Madrid (1993) believe that discussion and dialogue provide students with an opportunity to exchange their thoughts and feelings in order to develop their understanding of the subject they are learning. Each student has different background and ability in English, which he or she can bring to the group. For example, one student might have a strong vocabulary that can supply to students with a solid background in grammar. Furthermore, poor students will benefit from interaction with better ones, and good students will feel proud that they play an important role in helping their weaker classmates. Macey (1996) presented a study on cooperative learning centers and its helps to develop the self-esteem of students. He stated that self-Esteem is an important element of the wellbeing of any individual.

Reading is a skill which becomes the window of knowledge. Almost all of knowledge is understood by reading. Therefore, science and technology developments demand the creation of society with reading hobbies. This society will obtain knowledge and new insights faster which will increase their intelligence so they’ll be more capable to answer life challenges in the future (Robyn, 2008). Since reading plays an important role in getting information and knowledge from original resources, foreign language teachers should attribute importance to teaching reading comprehension in English classes.

METHODOLOGY

This study will have adopted the experimental and descriptive methods. Group interview (pre and posttest) was used as primary tools for data collection.

Participants

Subjects of this study were the students of first year at the university level whose major specialization is English Language. The researcher took 50 subjects of both sexes to represent the sample of this study. The subjects were divided into two groups: experimental group and control group so that to evaluate the performance before and after the experiment.

Instruments

The required data for the study were collected by means of group interview as pre and posttest.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data on students' score in implementing cooperative learning strategy to develop students' reading skills was used to analyze the scores obtained in the pre and posttest by using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22 (Corp., 2013). The result obtained in the two tests was analyzed by SPSS program.

Analysis and Discussion of group interview (Pre and posttest)

This part presented the analysis of pre and post-test for both control group and experimental group through the use of statistical paired samples test. For the analysis of the tests, the researcher found out the tests of normality for both pre and post-test and in the both cases of control and experimental group in order to provide an evidence for the verification of the study hypotheses.

Control group (test of normality for pre and post-test)

Table (7.1) shows the observed value for the test of normality in the control group post-test.

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic	Df	Statistic	Sig.
Before	.211	50	.903	.001
After	.201	50	.853	.000

Table (7.2) Experimental group test of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Before	.222	50	.000	.858	50	.000
After	.195	50	.000	.919	50	.002
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Table (7.2) represents the scores of pre and post-test in the experimental group which are normally distributed. As presented in the table above the Sig. of 0.001 in the pre-test and the Sig. of .000 in the post-test are less than 0.05 which means the observation values of the test are normally distributed.

Paired samples t-test

This part presents a comparison of means regarding pre and post-test for both control and experimental group.

Control group paired sample t-test

Table (7.3.1.1) represents paired samples statistics for control group pre and post-test

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Before	4.78	50	.954	.135
	After	4.56	50	1.459	.206

The table above presents the descriptive statistics for both variables as the mean, the number of observations, the standard deviation and the standard error mean. As presented in the table above that the mean in the pre-test is higher if it is compared with the mean in the post-test (4.78 vs. 4.56) which means the performance of the subjects declined through the experiment instead of rising.

Table (7.3.1.2) represents the paired samples correlations of the control group pre and post-test

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Before & After	50	.486	.000

The table above explains the correlation between the two variables pre and post-test. As it is clearly presented that the Sig. is less than 0.05 which proves the existence of correlation between the two variables. Based on the result above we sum up that students' performance in both tests was poor.

Table (7.3.1.3) represents the paired samples test for the control group pre and post-test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Before - After	-.220	1.298	.184	.149	.589	1.198	49	.237

The above table shows that $t(49) = 1.198$, $p = 0.237$. As it is shown in the same table that the Sig. or the P-value 0.237 is higher than 0.05 which provides strong evidence that students in the control group did not achieve any progress neither after the pre-test nor the post-test but in return their

performance went backward.

Experimental group paired sample t-test

Table (7.4) represents the paired samples statistics for the experimental group pre and post-test

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	After	8.38	50	1.369	.194
	Before	5.56	50	1.053	.149

The table above presents the descriptive statistics for both variables pre and post-test. It includes the mean, the number of observations, standard deviation, and the standard deviation error mean. As it is shown the table above the mean in the post-test is higher when it is compared with the mean in the pre-test 8.38 vs. 5.56. The result provided by the above table proves that the performance of the students in the experimental group.

post-test is significantly improved and that asserts the success of the experiment during the course. Table (7.4.1) represents the paired samples correlation for the experimental group pre and post-test

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	After & Before	50	.798	.000

The table above presents the correlation between the two variables. As we can see that the Sig. is less than 0.05 which proves the existence of correlation between the two variables. The subjects performed well in both the pre and the post-test.

Table (7.4.2) represents the paired samples test for the experimental group pre and post-test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	After - Before	2.820	.825	.117	2.585	3.055	24.160	49	.000

The table above shows that, $t(49) = 24.160$, $p = 0.000$. As it is explained in the table above that the

value of Sig. 0.000 is less than 0.05 a matter that proves the existence of statistically significant differences in the students' performance. The out all result provided presented in the above table proves the success of the treatment which had positive effect on the students' performance.

FINDINGS

The current study is investigating the impact of implementing cooperative learning strategy in developing English language learner's students' reading skills. The study has found that: firstly, students of first year can develop better reading skills by implementing cooperative learning in the learning process. Secondly, students' performance improved significantly and they developed better attitudes towards learning English via cooperative learning strategy. Finally, in cooperative learning, students are motivated and less reluctant.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

1. Teachers of English should adopt cooperative learning methods in the teaching and learning process.
2. Students should be provided with enough opportunities in the learning process, and more importantly, they should be encouraged to implement cooperative learning methods both in and out the classroom.
3. Teaching in the classroom should no longer be teacher-centred one.

CONCLUSION

This study is an investigation for the implementation of cooperative learning strategy and its impact on developing English language learners reading skills. The study has found out that students' performance improved significantly after the experiment if it is compared with students' performance before the experiment.

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