



Cooperative Learning Fosters Students Engagement in The Learning Process

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Abstract

Student engagement in the learning process, or engaged learning time, is a key behavior that refers to the amount of time students devote to learning in a classroom. Even though a teacher may be task oriented, providing maximum content coverage, the students may be disengaged. This means they are not actively thinking about, working with, or using what is being presented. Such disengagements prevent learning in the classroom. One way of engaging the students to the learning process is cooperative learning that motivates all the learners to participate to the courses actively. This study examines how cooperative learning engages and motivates the diverse students in reading classes of English Preparatory School of Ishik University to the learning environment. An engagement rate tally and pre and post examinations were used to gather data about students' actively engagement in the learning process. The preliminary results of the research show that students from different level participate the learning process actively and their exam results improve when cooperative learning is used. It can be concluded that students' participation in the learning process positively correlates with the lesson delivery that arouse their motivation and attraction.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, Engage in the Learning Process, Motivation Reading, Success

Introduction

Student engagement in the learning process, or engaged learning time, is a key behavior that refers to the amount of time students devote to learning in the classroom. Student engagement is related to but different from a teacher task orientation. Teacher task orientation should provide students the greatest possible opportunity to learn and practice the material to be assessed.

Distinct from the task orientation or the amount of time that a teacher devotes to teaching a topic is the time that students are actively engaged in learning the material being taught. This has been called their engagement rate (Borich, 2011), or the percentage of time devoted to learning when the students are actually on task, engaged with the instructional materials, and benefitting from the activities being presented. Even though a teacher may be task oriented, providing maximum content coverage, the students may be disengaged. This means they are not actively thinking about, working with, or using what is being presented (Borich, 2008).

Such disengagement can involve an emotional or mental detachment from the lesson that may or may not be obvious. When students jump out of their seats, talk, read a magazine, or leave for the restroom, they obviously not engaged in instruction. Students also can be disengaged in far more subtle ways, such as looking attentive while their thoughts are many miles away. An unpleasant fact of life is that one-quarter of a class may be off task at any time, distracted for personal reasons that are often amplified by an impending lunch period, the day before a holiday or a Friday afternoon (Thursday afternoons in Iraq). Correcting this type of disengagement may be difficult, requiring changes in the structure of the task itself and the cognitive demands placed on the learner (Baum, Viens, & Slatin, 2005).

Several authors (Evertson, 1995; Kuh, Kinzie, Smith, & Whitt, 1995) have contributed useful suggestions for increasing learning time and more importantly student engagements during learning. Those teaching practices have been found to be beneficial for small groups that are learning cooperatively (Anderson, Stevens, Prawat, & Nickerson, 1988).

Today's classrooms are consist of with different types of learners, the classes are very large and teaching is mainly teacher-centered where the not all of the students can use critical thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, teaching and learning time is not



adequate for the teachers and students to cope with so many students. Cooperative learning is an approach where there is always interaction between the students, student teacher and teacher- student. As a result the students can learn better by interacting with each other. Also by bringing them together in adult like settings to provide appropriate models of social behavior, cooperative learning instills in learners improvement behaviours that prepare them to reason and perform in an adult world (Greeno, 2006; Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002).

One of the aims of Cooperative learning is to engage the students in the learning process and promote higher patterns of behavior. CL has been linked to increases in the academic achievement of learners at all ability levels (Stevenson & Slavin, 2005). Cooperative learning actively engages students in the learning process and seeks to improve their critical-thinking, reasoning and problem solving. Critical thinking cannot occur outside a context of attitudes and values, prosaically behavior, alternative perspectives, and an integrated identity. But together with these outcomes, cooperative learning can provide the ingredients for higher thought processes and set them to work on realistic and adultlike tasks.

These higher thoughts processes are believed to be stimulated more by interaction with others than by books and lectures, which typically are not interactive. Books and lectures may be useful for teaching knowledge, comprehension and application, but they seldom are sufficient to bring about the private, inner speech required for thinking, reasoning and problem solving in real-life settings. These behaviors require interaction with others, as well as oneself, to unleash the motivation required for thinking and performing in complex ways.

Researches have specifically studied whether cooperative tasks affect learning outcomes positively. Also they have investigated whether group cohesion, cooperative behaviour, and intergroup relations are improved through cooperative learning procedures. In some of their investigations they have examined the effects of cooperative task on traditional learning tasks, in which students are presented with material to master.

Cooperative learning groups generate the type of energy that results in improved academic learning. In classrooms organized so that students work in pairs and larger groups, tutor each other, and share ideas, there is greater mastery of material than with the common individual-study-cum- recitation pattern. The shared responsibility and interaction also produces more positive feelings toward tasks and others, generates better intergroup relations, and results in better self-images for students with histories of poor achievement. In other words, the results generally affirm the assumptions that underlie the use of cooperative learning methods (Sharan, 1990).

Some exciting studies of the cooperative procedures occur when it is combined them with models from other families in an effort to combine the effects of several models. For example , Baveja, Showers and Joyce (Baveja, Showers, & Joyce, 1985) conducted in India where concept attainment and inductive procedures were carried out in cooperative groups. The effects fulfilled the promise of the marriage between the information-processing and social models, reflecting gains that were twice those of a comparison group that received intensive individual and group tutoring over the same material.

Cooperative learning also improves the students' critical thinking ability as well as reasoning and problem-solving skills are of much use if they are applied in cooperative interaction with others. Besides, self-directed and cooperative learning share the complementary objectives of engaging students in the learning process and promoting more complex patterns of behavior.

2. Method

Participants: The participants were 48 English Language Preparatory School students. Those students were grouped as pre-intermediate experimental group and control group. The size of the classroom in control group was 23 and in experimental group was 25. The mean age of the subjects in the study was 19.3. There were 13 female and 10 male students in the control group whereas, 12 female and 13 male students in the experimental group.



Design: The most important part of the Cooperative learning is to divide the learners into the groups based on certain criteria. The population of this experiment was divided into 5 groups which consist of 5 students seem to work best, though depending on the task. Determining how the groups will be formed can be more complicated, since ideally the groups should be diverse enough to include students with a range of intellectual abilities, academic interests, and cognitive styles. Allowing students to select their own group members can work well in small classes, but this method always runs the risk of further isolating some students or creating cliques within the class as a whole. Those groups were formal groups and rely on student team learning methods, which include team rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunities for success.

Instruments Procedure: This action research was conducted in the preparatory school of English Language at Ishik University. The study groups were pre intermediate level of English Language learners. One group was the experiment group and the other was the control group. Not only the test scores were very low, also their interest in reading was almost nothing. Those students do not like reading even in their mother tongue. So there were barriers in front of their understanding reading. Moreover, as a result of demotivated and negative attitudes toward reading generally classroom management became a tough and difficult issue.

Before the beginning of the study, the students had been observed and shared the ideas with the other instructors who were teaching them. And also a Multiple Intelligence Inventory test was conducted to decide the students' dominant intelligence. A personal questionnaire was conducted to figure out their socio economic status and their background knowledge in education. It was seen that the students were different in cognitive, socio economic and background knowledge. I tried to focus on these differences while creating the groups. Later on a pre test was held in reading whether they were good or not.

By implementing a cooperative learning activity in reading class, I tried to improve the students' academic and social interaction and decrease their difficulties in the classroom environment. I have had my students to employ collaborative learning in a systematic way. At the very beginning the easiest way of cooperative learning strategies were planned. The students were grouped as "help line" groups. Group members would work together to understand the difficult tasks or reading texts. They would make corrections to mistakes by relying on a group member who understood the text and got the correct answer. The group would also study together before each test and on certain times with the goal of improving the groups' understanding of reading.

It was known that much of the success of those groups rest on their composition, and much work have been devoted to ensure that they are heterogeneous in many ways. First of all, the students' achievement scores and past grades in reading were checked and made sure all levels were represented within each group. It was also maintained cognitive diversity within the groups, as well as a male female balance reflective of the class. I tried to split up cliques and special friends and to mix shy with more outgoing students.

To communicate properly, each group member should be able to read fluently and know the key vocabularies to understand the text. Answering the comprehension questions were not enough. Participation was very important. All students had to play active roles in their group; there was mutual responsibility and benefit, shared identity, and joint celebration of success. To show respect and support for each other, students were not to engage in ridicule or sarcasm. Instead they had to try to say constructive things about fellow group members.

Group work can easily get out of hand in the excitement, controversy, and natural dialogue that can come from passionate discussion. This possibility requires the teachers to place limits on each stage of the cooperative learning activity, so one stage does not take time from another and leave the task disjointed and incomplete in the learners' minds.



Most time, naturally, was devoted to the work of individual groups, during which the major portion of the end product would be completed. Individual group work normally would consume 60% to 80% of the time devoted to the cooperative learning activity. The remaining time divided among individual group presentations and whole class discussion and debriefing that places the group work into the perspective of a single end product.

The students were encouraged to accept the individual responsibility and idea sharing in a cooperative learning experience by making role assignments within groups and by applying task specialization across groups. These roles and responsibilities were used to complement group work and to interconnect the groups. Some effective cooperative learning role functions were assigned within the groups. These are: Summarizer, Checker, Researcher, Runner, Recorder, Supporter, Observer/ troubleshooter.

3. Results

The first and foremost job of reading teachers is to teach participants to be fluent and strategic readers by using cooperative learning instruction to various types of learners. Thus, an experiment was done and it was seen that implying cooperative learning instruction techniques were useful and beneficial for the learners. During the experiment held in 2011/2012 academic year all the students involved in the study were administrated one pre-test, three achievement examinations and a post-test to illustrate the changes in students' reading skills. Doing those examinations enabled me to see how cooperative learning and teaching activities affected the students' progress in reading courses. From an inspection of all those examinations of the reading courses, there seemed to be significant differences arising. Both the experiment and control groups had to take the same examinations, which identified the differences between the groups. The results were an important measure of how cooperative grouping affected the students' reading proficiency. SPSS 19.0 was used to analyze the results. It is shown in Table 3. 7.

Table 1.1 Descriptive statistics for the pre-test, achievement examinations and post-test of the control group and experimental groups at *pre-intermediate* level of English

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRETEST (experimental)	25	42	84	68.48	14.145
PRETEST (control)	23	32	77	58.72	15.238
ACHIEVEMENT1 (experimental)	25	34	77	60.87	13.616
ACHIEVEMENT1 (control)	23	20	96	58.88	27.24
ACHIEVEMENT2 (experimental)	25	34	88	67.61	12.862
ACHIEVEMENT2 (control)	23	24	84	59.88	17.548
ACHIEVEMENT3 (experimental)	25	40	100	76.96	19.641
ACHIEVEMENT3 (control)	23	29	72	57.36	11.489
POSTTEST (experimental)	25	52	100	88.96	16.772
POSTTEST (control)	23	38	94	64.8	15.168

It is worth noting that at the beginning of the study the English language level of the two classes were nearly the same according to the placement test. As it is seen in the table, the experimental group showed a mean of 68.48 in the proficiency pre-test and 88.96 in the post-test (an increase of 20.48 points), while the control group showed a mean of 58.72 in pre-test and 64.80 in post-test (a less increase of 6.08).

Besides, though in the first achievement examination the mean of the experimental group was lower than the pre-test examination, probably, because until the first examination the students in the experimental group were trying to get used to the MI teaching activities, finally they



received higher grades, besides, the grades were stably growing (60.87 → 67.61 → 76.96). In the control group the situation wasn't as good (58.88 → 59.88 → 57.36): the level of the skills didn't really increase, but just fluctuated. Analogous results were received in intermediate level experimental and control groups.

Looking specifically at the program and data on students' activities suggested some reasons why their reading skills improved. Firstly, although the curriculum was designed the same with the control group, in the experimental group there were many different activities on the same curriculum both inside and outside the classroom based on the cooperative group work. While the control group was just taught in a traditional way, the experimental group worked as collaboratively With the help of each other, more than half of the experimental group students' reading level was significantly developed. In addition, all the students in the experimental group could go to the Learning Centers for self-study and cooperative study to complete their assignments and to do the activities as they wished. This did not mean extra time for the students of the experimental groups compared to the students of the control groups, as the students from the latter groups also could do extra studies at school on in class (thus, the controlled time variable did not change in any group). But it could have contributed to better results of experimental group (it created a positive environment not only for classwork, but also for homework).

This provided students a self-esteem and enthusiasm towards reading. Choosing to do activities which were adequate to their intelligence type made the experimental group' students motivated more than those from the control group. Motivation and attitudes were further transformed to the learning action. As a result, with the cooperative group work students' reading abilities obviously improved more than that of the control group students.

4. Discussion

Researchers have specifically studied whether cooperative tasks and reward structures affect learning outcomes positively. Also, they have asked whether group cohesion, cooperative behavior, and intergroup relations are improved through cooperative learning procedures. In this study it has been examined the effects of cooperative task and reward structures on 'traditional' learning tasks, in which students are presented with material to master.

The cooperative groups generate the type of energy that results in improved academic learning. The evidence is largely affirmative. In classrooms organized so that students work in pairs and larger groups, tutor each tutor, and share rewards, there is greater mastery of material than with the common individual-study-cum-recitation pattern. The shared responsibility and inter-action also produces more positive feelings toward tasks and others, generates better intergroup relations, and results in better self-images for students with histories of poor achievement. In other words, the results generally affirm the assumptions that underlie the use of cooperative learning methods (Sharan, 1990).

In our classrooms cooperative learning was an innovation found that it was easy to organize students in to pairs and triads. And it gets effects immediately. The combinations of social support and the increase in cognitive complexity caused by the social interaction have mild but rapid effects on the learning of the content and skills. In addition, partnerships in learning provide a pleasant laboratory in which to develop social skills and empathy for others. Off-task and disruptive behavior diminish substantially. Students feel good in cooperative settings, and positive feelings toward self and others are enhanced.

Another nice feature that I met was that the students with poorer academic histories benefit so quickly. Partnerships increase involvement, and the concentration on cooperation has had the side effect of reducing self-absorption and increasing responsibility for personal learning. Whereas the effect sizes on academic learning were modest but consistent, the effects on social learning and personal esteem could be considerable when comparisons were made with individualistic classroom organizations.



5. Results

This action research lasted nearly six months with the pre intermediate students of Preparatory school at Ishik University. Many types of activities were done in the groups and many of the students succeed their goals in reading classes. First of all, the synergy generated in cooperative settings generated more motivation than do individualistic, competitive environments. Integrative social groups were, in effect, more than the sum of their parts. The feeling of connectedness produced positive energy. In addition, the members of cooperative group learnt from one another. Each learner had more helping hands than in a structure that generated isolation. Next, interacting with one another produces cognitive as well as social complexity, creating more intellectual activity that increases learning when contrasted with solitary study. Furthermore, cooperation increased positive feelings towards one another, reducing alienation and loneliness, building relationships and affirmative views of other people. It also increased the self-esteem not only through increased learning but also through the feeling of being respected and cared for by the others in the environment. The study also showed that the students whose prior knowledge was really so bad increased their reading skills. Their gradually increasing grades shows that they achieved the objectives of the lesson. Also, students could respond to experience in tasks requiring cooperation by increasing their capacity to work productively together. In other words, the more the learners are given the opportunity to work together, the better they get at it, which benefits their general social skills. Consequently all students can learn from training to increase their ability to work together.

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