



Collaborative English Language Learning in Primary School: a Sequential Explanatory Study in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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Abstract

This study was aimed to investigate whether implementing the Cooperative Learning approach increase the target language use, improve the communication skills, build confidence and stimulate individualized learning in primary school classes. To obtain the research aim and questions, a sequential explanatory mixed method was designed between two groups of primary sixth grade students in Private Ronaki Hawler, where the medium of instruction was English. An experimental and a control group classes were taught by the same teacher and at the end of the study an interview was conducted with the volunteer students in terms of understanding their development in English Level. The results of the study showed that the experimental group who were taught with the cooperative learning strategies performed a significant success in their examinations. Students' ideas and understanding of working with the other students also supported the results of the quantitative data results.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, English Language, integrative work, primary school, student centered education.

1. Introduction

Much of today's classroom learning is focused on activities by which the learners acquire facts, rules and action sequences. The majority of the lessons require outcomes only at the lower levels of cognition: knowledge, comprehension, and application. This may explain why many researches have been conducted about why many students are unable to think independently of the teacher or to go beyond the content in their text and workbooks. These studies suggest that the manner in which the most schooling occurs may not be teaching students to become aware of their own learning, to think critically, and to derive their own patterns of thoughts. One of the solutions of these ongoing problems is to use the cooperative learning approach that actively engages students in the learning process to acquire higher-order thinking skills. It helps students construct their own understanding and meaning and helps them to reason, solve problems and think critically about the content with the aid of metacognitive strategies. By bringing the students together in adult-like settings to provide appropriate models of social behavior, cooperative learning instills in learners important behaviors that prepare them to reason and perform in a positive learning atmosphere.

Classrooms in Kurdistan are mostly teacher-centered (Khosravi et al., 2015; Sofi-Karim, 2015). The teacher is the only one who is responsible for explaining and describing information to the learners regardless if the material does need to be practiced. There is no role for the students to participate in the classroom, they are not encouraged to express their ideas or discuss facts. The main reason for this is that in the Iraqi and Kurdish culture, the age, social class and official position govern relationships among people. Teaching depends more on spoon-feeding and this attitude includes English language lessons (Al-Hamash & Ra'ad, 2007). There are in fact very few activities that can be practiced by students inside the classrooms due to the very crowded number of learners. Besides, students' initiatives either is not stimulated or valued by the authoritarian teachers in the learning environment.



Language is just taught as grammar and vocabulary, without any cultural image, which provokes students to make not only language, but also behavioral mistakes while communicating in English (Taqi, 2008). Masculinity and femininity difference does not affect the way of teaching language; generally, student variety is not taken into consideration (Rarick et al, 2014). Students in primary schools have their cognitive development on an adequate level (formal operation stage) to become effective students (Collins, 1984). Their relationships are a part of their identity, which permits them to join in groups in class and even at home. The level of their knowledge and skills normally permits them to be good students (Farhad, 2015); however, primary school students may have some difficulties such as lack of motivation in reading, passivity in class, no clear interest, personal problems distracting from learning, scientific reasoning that characterizes formal operations, lack of background knowledge and often even a negative attitude towards it. Thus, for them to maximally benefit from English language classes, it is especially important to enjoy learning, to use the learning techniques really adequate for them, to get a feeling of progress, etc.

This is why it is believed that Cooperative Learning (CL) will let them efficiently develop their English skills. Kurdish people pay attention to learn English, for them learning English is very important. Yet, there are some problems as well. The main problem in teaching English Language is that teaching is mainly based on grammar, vocabulary and reading. Writing, reading and listening is not as important as the aforementioned skills (Farhad, 2015). The Kurdish Government started to shift the medium of instruction to English Language in public schools (Borg, 2016). By doing this transformation, it is aimed to improve the students' perception of the English Language that is very vital all over the world now.

However, teachers use Grammar Translation Method to teach English in their classes in Kurdistan, which does not cover all the aspects of language equally (Sofi-Karin, 2015). The Grammar Translation Method is a traditional way of teaching in which teaching is based on grammar and translation drills, memorization of rules and lists of words and has text translation as the goal.

Listening and speaking are the least important skills. The focus is on to memorize the grammar rules and the vocabulary list in Grammar Translation Method (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). Since the focus is on translation and grammar in GTM, the students do not achieve the comprehension and GTM does not make the students as a proficient readers (Richards, 2004).

Teacher centered education is another big problem in teaching English. In this type of education teacher is the leader of the classroom and the students learn what the teachers teach. The students do not take part in the lessons and teachers act as corrector of errors. Teacher's main duty should be to provide a warm and positive atmosphere to lead and guide the students or help the students to learn by themselves, which is mainly constructivism. Both in GTM and teacher-based education teamwork occurs very little and there is no student-student interaction. The third biggest problem is that the classrooms are very crowded while the size of the classroom is smaller than it should be. In one class there may be forty to fifty five students depending on the rural or urban areas. Within these kinds of classes it is very difficult to plan and apply teaching strategies.

Cooperative Learning can offer solutions to these three problems mentioned above. This approach can provide opportunities for different types of learners and provide interdependent group work. Cooperative Learning groups encourage students' interaction where there is intense oral communication. In Cooperative Learning, the focus is on the students' group work rather than teacher-centered education, consequently, the students can be more successful when they themselves are the core element of teaching and learning.

2. Literature review

According to David and Roger Johnson from the University of Minnesota (Johnson & Johnson, 1999a), Cooperative Learning is instruction that involves students working in teams



to deal with a common aim, under conditions. Sharan (1994) describes CL as “a group centered and student-centered approach to classroom teaching and learning” (p.336). In addition, Cooperative Learning is a within-class grouping of students, usually of different levels of second language proficiency, who learn to work together on specific projects or tasks in such a way that all students in the group benefit from the interactive experience (Kessler, 1992). Jacobs and Ward (2000) define CL as ways of improving the student-student interaction. Since the Cooperative Learning does not stand for simply joining students in groups in class, it may involve whole-class and individual work as well, but what is important that this is the strategy that teacher helps to develop in students to gain knowledge via cooperation.

Cooperative Learning contributes to academic achievement, social development and language learning (Slavin, 2001). It provides students with plenty of time, compared to traditional teaching, for interaction. Cooperative learning is student-centered. According to Kessler (1992), Cooperative learning not only groups students, but also enables them to work together on a common task, which both stimulates interaction in the target language and develops socializing between students. It enables them to learn from each other and construct a learning community.

According to Byrd (2009), Cooperative Learning is beneficial in several ways: it increases students’ interest to the task, speeds up its fulfillment, develops critical thinking and boosts self-esteem, teaches students to listen to each other’s opinions and be tolerant to various points of view; in language teaching CL permits to practice both productive and receptive skills in a natural context. Choosing a task which will be attractive for all students, splitting students into groups effectively and non offensively, assigning them roles in the groups, choosing the student who will represent the group’s product – all these depend on teacher qualification. Although teacher is not doing any direct teaching during CL, she/he is actively involved in the process, moving between the groups, giving direction and consulting when necessary.

The efficiency of CL is explained by the social interdependence theory, which states that when each individual’s goals are accomplished under the influence of the actions of others, each student is triggered to contribute as much as she/he can (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

The fact about the Cooperative Learning theories is that there is a constant increase of research on the subject in education setting. Bandura’s (1971) Social Learning Theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous interaction between behavioral, cognitive and environmental influences. Besides, the theory underlines the importance of teamwork and collaboration, which are the key features of Cooperative Learning (Murray, 1994).

When group members act to achieve the common goals, the mutual Interdependence will motivate them to go on for the benefits of group. When the group achieves the goal, the individuals accomplish the mission as well. Cooperative Learning is now used with great success worldwide and across all subjects and school levels (Johnson & Johnson, 2009b), including English. Many students responded positively to Cooperative Learning approaches because they satisfy their affective needs.

The traditional language learning theorists, Mitchell and Myles (2004), argue that language teaching should focus on language competence, which means that teachers should focus on the structures of the target language. Yet, from the 1970s fluency versus accuracy started to be discussed in the literature. Fluency, which refers to automatic mode of processing, enables the language learners to use the language without thinking the process.

With the advent of Humanism in the 1960s, traditional teaching way left its place to student-centered learning strategies. This paradigm shift, of course, affected the language teaching as well. In the following years much more focus was devoted on meaningful language involvement as well as fluency (Brown, 2007). The intended and expected aim was



to focus on producing efficient and fluent speakers of the second or foreign language. The learners in the language classrooms were lead to improve the ability to engage in a conversation, produce and talk sentences, the ability to say appropriate things according to the context and the ability to be creative in language use (Brumfit, 1984).

In language learning, there are many advantages for Cooperative Learning such as: increased student talk, more differentiated talk, a calmer learning environment, more motivation and an increased amount of comprehensible input (Liang, Mohan, & Early, 1998; Olsen & Kagan, 1992). Yet, implementing Cooperative Learning is not very easy. In fact, it needs planning and decision-making. The teacher should pay attention to some challenges like whether to stress intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, how much time should be devoted to students, how, about what and with whom should the students collaborate.

Language classrooms, generally, are busier than lessons in other courses. There have always been many tasks adopted in language teaching courses, especially in English. The activities include group discussions, scenario, role-play, problem solving, reading together, researching a subject, peer teaching and so on (Harel, 1992). In the well-organized Cooperative Learning groups, students gain the responsibility for these classroom activities.

Although classroom environment and social task is not linked to language learning directly, but the atmosphere of the classroom and positive reinforcement motivate the learners. Decorating bulletin board and arranging classroom furniture before the class, keeping attendance records, setting up equipment for film, welcoming each other, making announcement, advice on disciplinary issues are some of the activities that help to develop social skills. Students are also involved in curriculum work such as goal setting, material and task selection, which are directly linked to language learning. In the monitoring and evaluating area the learners should be encouraged to collaborate through tasks such as progress monitoring charts and self-assessment.

The attitude towards Cooperative Learning in EFL, which is generally popular in the sphere, is to some degree contradictory. For instance, Duxbury & Tsai study (2010) involving 385 students in one American university and in three Taiwanese universities revealed that cooperative language learning did not decrease the anxiety levels, as hoped by the researchers. On the other hand, Jiang (2016) found that 120 EFL learners from a Chinese polytechnic institute benefited from Cooperative Learning in several ways: it facilitated mutual assistance among group members, was approved of by learners at different levels, decreased their writing anxiety and increased their writing skills. Probably, due to the difficulties in application and contradictory research results and views on Cooperative Learning in foreign language learning it has not gained a wide enough popularity yet.

The goal of this study is to search if using Cooperative Learning techniques is effective among primary school six grade students. Also it is focused on to what extent the Cooperative Learning activities help students to be proficient in their English. It also aims helping EFL teachers to understand the potential of Cooperative Learning. Regarding the literature review and the goals of the study, the research questions are as below:

1. Can Cooperative Learning increase students' positive attitude towards the course?
2. Can Cooperative Learning increase the level of students' language skills?

3. Methodology

3.1 Study design

The researcher used a true experiment to test whether an intervention, such as using cooperative learning strategies and working integrative during the English Language classes consisted of with different types of learners in a private primary school, effect their learning and academic development. In this study, a sequential explanatory mixed methods design was conducted. Instead of collecting data at the same time, the researcher collected and analyzed quantitative information first and then collected qualitative information in a second phase. For



the qualitative data collection Oxford Online English Standardized Test was used as pre and posttests to measure the students' English language level and to monitor their progress as a result of intervention. A questionnaire was conducted before and after the experiment to figure out the change in students' opinions towards cooperative learning. Mid terms and Final exams were conducted as the achievement examinations to see the academic progress of the students in the experiment period. In the second phase, the qualitative data collected through the in-depth interviews with the volunteer students to explain and elaborate on the quantitative results. This was a straightforward design to understand the quantitative and qualitative data in two distinct phases.

3.2 Participants

The experimental group consisted of 51 six-graders: 14 females and 12 males, while the control one – of 14 females and 11 males. There was an equal number of female (n . 14/14) and male (n . 12/11) participants in per classes for an action research, their average in age was 12, have been studying at the same school for 6 years. The majority of those students were Kurds but there were also, Turkish, Turkmen, Arab and Syrian students in the classrooms with a few numbers. Their language skills were at Pre-Intermediate level. While teaching them for four years, the researcher has noticed than many of them were not too motivated. The students for the experimental and control groups were chosen randomly because it was supposed to provide a maximum assurance that a systematic bias did not exist in the selection process. Thus it was aimed that the selected participants were representatives of the population. Randomly selecting the samples of the participants from the population and then randomly assigning the participants to the cooperative groups was thought to be an adequate arrangement for the experimental study. Consequently, each research participant had an equal probability of being assigned to each group. No one had less chance to be assigned to the experimental or control group. It was taken into consideration that every individual could bring his/her certain variables (e.g., experience, learning styles, etc.). When participants were randomly selected, the variables they brought with them were also randomly assigned. Random assignments, therefore, produced control by virtue of the fact that the variables be controlled and distributed in approximately the same manner in the groups at the beginning of the experiment.

3.3 Procedure

After randomly assign the classes as experimental and control group, a two phases study was conducted. In the initial phase, a piloted questionnaire, and a pretest was conducted to test the level of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha of 0.78) and to figure out the students' level of English Language.

In this study there were 25 students in the experimental classroom, divided into five cooperative groups. The groups had five members each. Having five different groups made monitoring of group performance easier, because the number of interactions with the students in the group was decreased accordingly. On the other hand, groups of six argued more, and discussed a lot before reaching a consensus. Besides, they had more difficulties in sharing the limited materials and took a longer time to finish the final project. While forming the groups, it was taken into consideration to establish heterogeneous groups with a representative sample of all learners in the classroom.

The experimental class was given projects, assignments and homework corresponding to their group work. This approach focused on seeking how cooperative grouping-focused teaching influenced the students' attitudes, motivation and improvement of their English Language skills. Different teaching techniques and methods were adopted in experimental group. In contrast, for the control group, the traditional method (without any emphasis on cooperative grouping) was used. Thus, a mix of higher/lower-performing, more verbal/less



verbal, and more task-oriented/ less task-oriented learners were assigned. In addition, gender differences were taken into account. Also, it was taken into consideration that the groups should reflect the composition of the community outside.

The experiment lasted 12 weeks during the academic year 2017/2018. As much as possible in the circumstances, all other variables such as students' age, textbook used, time dedicated to tasks, task types and difficulty level in testing, etc. were under control. This was necessary to enable the researcher to compare their results and make the received data valid. Then the results of both groups were compared and corresponding conclusions were made. In the second phase of the study an interview was conducted with the volunteer students. During the interview the students' were free to answer the open-ended questions regarding the effectiveness of the cooperative learning activities.

3.4 Instrumentation

The literature was reviewed through the University Online Library database and topic relevant articles, books, journal were collected and analyzed. The students were observed during the class hours and break times without disturbing and informing them. Observations were one of the most reliable data collection tools because the observer can see the students the most nature status without any bias. An Online Oxford Young Learners Placement Test (2016) has been adopted for those study classes as a standardized test to measure students' English Language Skills. A piloted 5 likert scale questionnaire was conducted during the study for the experimental group to measure the differences in students' assumptions towards Cooperative Learning. There were twelve questions and all those questions were translated into the students' native languages - Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish. The questionnaire dealt with the attitudes of the students towards Cooperative Learning. After having applied a post-questionnaire about the student' attitude for the experimental group and traditional teaching activities for control groups, an interview, was conducted to all experiment participants. With the qualitative data collection tools it was aimed to explain and explore the subjects' view's in depth based on those qualitative statistical results (Burns & Grove, 2005).

4. Results

From an inspection of all those tests there seemed to be a significant difference arising.

4.1 The Results of the Questionnaire about Cooperative Learning Attitudes

The numbers in the table show how many students gave the answer. Keep in mind that in the experimental group there were 25 students, while in the control group – 26. The data were analyzed by using SPSS 19.0. The results were shown below.



Table 4.1 Questionnaire results for Experimental Group

		STRONGLY DISAGREE		DISAGREE		NEUTRAL		AGREE		STRONGLY AGREE	
		Pre survey	Post survey	Pre survey	Post survey	Pre survey	Post survey	Pre survey	Post survey	Pre survey	Post survey
Q1	I like small group work in the classroom	5	2	7	3	3	1	8	13	3	7
Q2	I feel small group in the classroom can lower my anxiety and fear of learning / using English	4	1	4	1	8	3	7	11	4	10
Q3	I feel small group in the classroom can increase my motivation.	4	3	6	2	7	3	6	13	4	5
Q4	I prefer cooperative learning in group work rather than traditional teaching methods	8	3	7	4	8	2	3	9	0	7
Q5	I feel cooperative learning in group work can increase my general English proficiency	7	2	6	2	10	3	2	12	1	7
Q6	I feel cooperative learning in-group work can improve interpersonal relationships among classmates.	6	1	7	2	7	2	3	11	3	10
Q7	I feel small group work in the classroom can increase my interest and participation in learning English.	7	2	5	2	7	3	5	11	2	8
Q8	I feel small group work in the classroom can give me more confidence.	5	1	6	1	8	2	5	11	2	11
Q9	I like the CL class activities	7	2	6	2	8	1	4	14	1	9
Q10	I like to work with my classmates as a group work.	3	1	1	1	2	0	14	14	7	9

From the outcomes in Table 4.1, it can be inferred that some students initially loved the idea of cooperating. Especially question1, 4 and 10 demonstrate that pupils even before the experimental study began preferring cooperating. Eventually, the majority of the respondents loved it (13+7 for the first question, 11+10 – for the second, 16+5 – for the first, etc.).

By cooperating, they have opportunities to talk to each other which helps them relax and feel less tense than when answering individually in front of the whole class. From this it can be reasoned that cooperating in little gatherings and helping each other made the students more spurred.

Table 4.2 Questionnaire Results for Experimental Group (continued)

11. Why do you like to work in pairs / groups? (Choose as many answers as you think necessary)	x
a) It's less boring than to study alone	10
b) It's easier	20
c) I feel protected (I know help will come when I need it)	12
d) It decreases my anxiety while learning / using English	10
e) It is motivating	14
f) I can get higher grades	2
12. Why don't you like to work in pairs / groups?	
a) I have to do the job, and others are loafing	3
b) One student takes the leadership, and others are passive	5
c) I like to work alone	9
d) I don't like working as a group	2
e) Is not motivated	5
f) Is boring	7

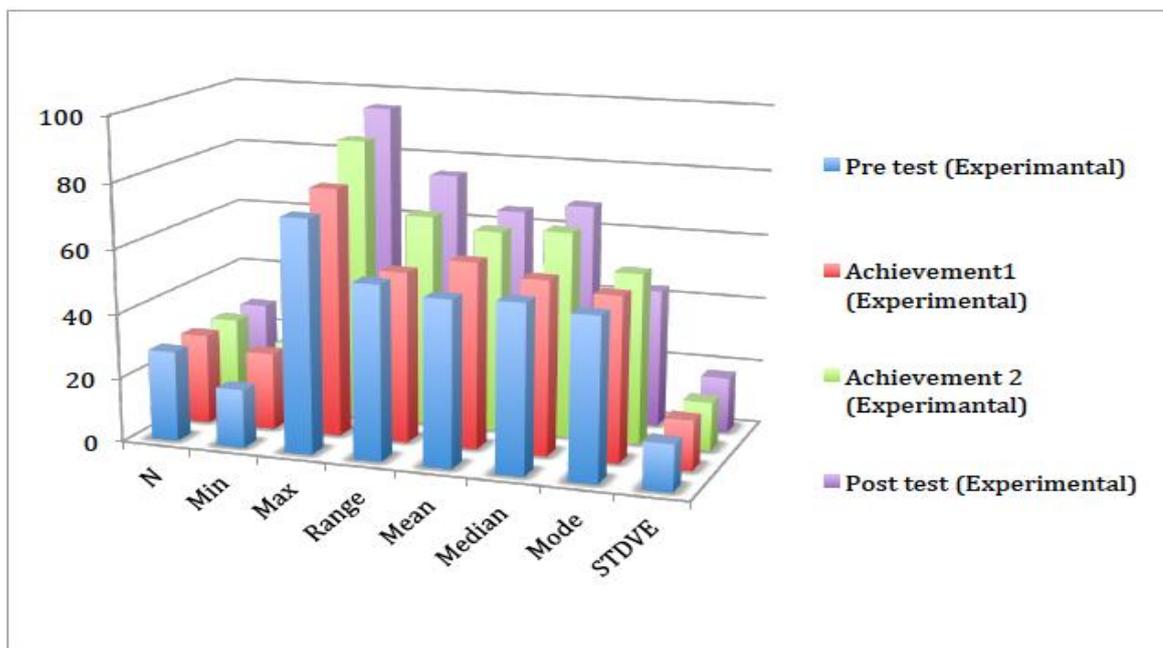


These two questions were the summary of the previous questions. Students who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” had to answer question 11, while those who answered “disagree” or “strongly disagree” had to answer question 12 and those who gave neutral answers, had to answer both questions. The students’ answers show that they prefer to study in cooperative learning groups because they think that it is easier to understand the lesson. Also they think that it is motivating and they feel that they are secure in the group that means that there is always collaboration and support. Students think that studying alone is boring and they prefer working together. Working together provides them more chances to learn better. By learning better they will be more motivated. So it can be concluded that cooperative learning activities are the trigger of motivation. On the other hand, very few students demonstrated that they would prefer working alone. Actually, the change from the very beginning of the experiment is significant. Many of the students were not aware of the CL, but during the experiment they got along with each other and lessons became very easy for them. As a result, according to students pre survey and post survey result, cooperative learning makes the lesson easier, more motivational and more collaborative.

4.2 Pretest, achievement examinations and Posttest

During the experiment held in 2016/2017 academic year all the students involved in the study were administrated one pre-test, two achievement examinations (midterm and final) and a post-test to illustrate the changes in students’ English Language competency. Those examinations enable us to see how CL teaching activities affected the students’ progress in English Language courses. From an inspection of all those examinations of the English Language courses, there seemed to be significant differences arising. Both the experimental and control groups had to take the same examinations which identified the differences between the groups. The results of the exams of the Experimental Group are shown holistically in Figure 4.1. N stands for the number of students, min. for the minimal point received, max- for the maximum point, STDVE – for standard deviation.

4.1 Experimental group exam results





4.2 Control group exam results

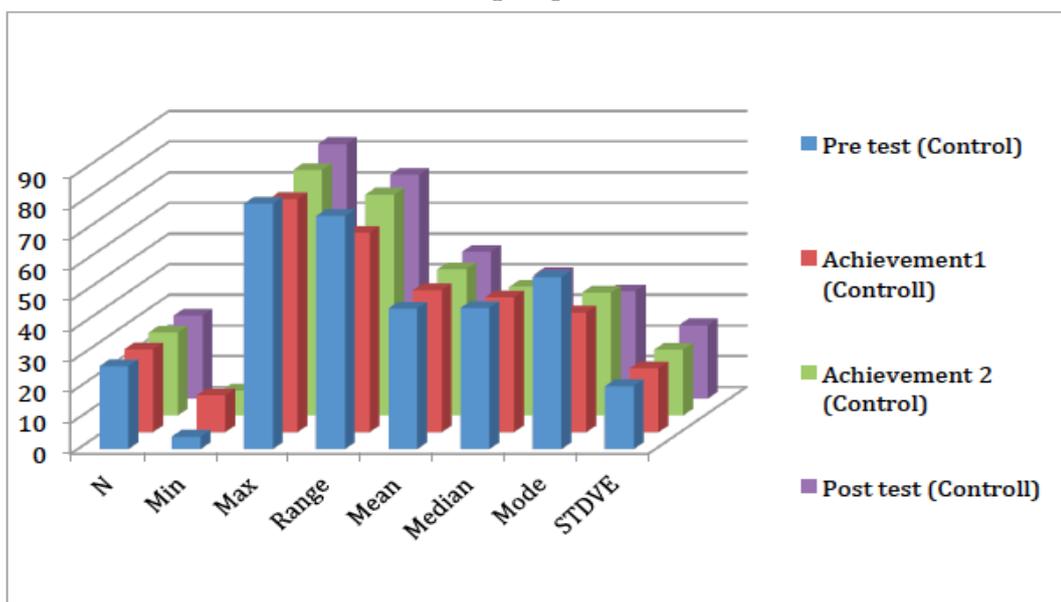


Table 4.3. Comparison of Control Group and Experimental Group Test Results

	N	Min	Max	Range	Mean	Median	Mode	STDVE
Pre-test (Experimental)	25	18	72	54	51	52	50	14.3
Pre test (Control)	26	4	80	76	49	46	56	20.5
Achievement1 (Experimental)	25	24	77	53	58	54	51	15.4
Achievement1 (Control)	26	12	76	65	46	44	39	20.8
Achievement (Experimental)	25	22	88	66	63	64	53	15.1
Achievement (Control)	26	8	80	72	48	42	40	21.4
Post-test (Experimental)	25	20	95	75	65	68	43	17.2
Post test (Control)	26	10	83	73	51	41	35	23.9

It is worth noting that at the beginning of the study the two groups were nearly the same according to the Oxford Online Practice test, however, the experimental group improved significantly, while the control group – insignificantly. As it is seen in the table 3.5, the experimental group showed a mean of 51.2 in the proficiency pre-test and 65.00 in the post-test (an increase of 13.80 points), while the control group showed a mean of 45.80 in pre-test and 47.90 in post-test (an increase of 2.1 points).

Besides, from the very beginning of the study, the experimental group showed a gradually increase in their achievement examinations as well. The experimental group demonstrated a very significant achievement both in midterm and final examinations as well



as pre-test and post-test. They increased their grades stably (51.2-----57.7-----62.7-----65). In the control group the situation was not so good (45.8--46.3---47.7---47.9): the level of the skills didn't really increase, but just fluctuated.

A few reasons might be proposed why English Language competency in the experimental group enhanced more than in the control one. While the control group was taught traditionally, the experimental group was given a wide range of sorts of exercises, which were all applicable to cooperative group work during the time spent of the study. With the assistance of those exercises, many of the students in the experimental group increased the English Language level. Furthermore, every one of the students in the experimental group could examine helpfully to finish their assignments and to do the exercises as they wished. This did not mean additional time for the students of the experimental group, as the learners likewise could do additional study at school or in class (along these lines, the controlled time variable did not change in any gathering). But it made a positive situation for class work, as well as for homework). This provided the experimental group students a self-esteem and enthusiasm towards English Language learning. Choosing to do cooperative group work activities 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 Learning activities, students' English Language skills obviously improved more than those of the control group' students.

4.3 Interview

After finishing the study, the researcher had an interview with the volunteer students in the experimental group. 9 boys and 7 girls voluntarily had the interview in their native language (to avoid the language level impact on the obtained results). The main reason for having an interview is that it allowed the researcher to speak directly to the students and requested their answers on the questionnaire and on some other questions. By interviewing, the researcher aimed to explore the reasons behind their success. Most of the students, who were interviewed, expressed a liking for active participation, change, self-correction or self-reflection, which are all integrated into lessons through the use of plenty of tasks in a cooperative classroom.

Students' comments were summarized as follows:

- There was role sharing in the group and when the roles were distributed I felt that I had less pressure and could like to achieve my role.
- It was an unusual learning process, while we were chatting, we were learning as well.
- The teacher allowed us to talk together and it was full of fun. I was not under pressure, and I liked speaking and reading.
- Doing the exercises together made me happy and it was a fun for me.
- Discussing the quiz results together stimulated me to learn the subject.
- I was not good at English and I was a bit shy to speak in class. But with grouping I liked learning English and felt more comfortable to participate.
- I was not a very successful student and I used to be bored when I was in the classroom. I couldn't understand any of the English Courses. But after starting to work together with my friends and doing the tasks, I developed a higher self-esteem and confidence to study in class. Though I did not get good grades from the exams, I did a good job by doing the tasks and having a good relationship with friends.
- I am an Arab student. There are different ethnic students here and in our group there was a mixture of ethnicities. We all get along with each other.
- The jigsaw in English Language classes helped us to work together, and sharing the ideas was really enjoyable.
- Having different types of duties in the group working made the lessons very cool.



- English Course projects like chars, posters, organizers and so on helped us to understand better. Decorating the classroom with our projects also motivated me. . All together we built up a learning environment.

Comments that were generalized	Number of students comments
The approach encouraged participation	2
Teacher is more energetic	1
Students felt more comfortable and had less pressure	5
Students developed self- esteem	4
The lessons were so dynamic and interactive	4
Students had more chances to learn	7
The level of self-esteem increased	3
Students liked and enjoyed the lessons	6
Students felt more supported	5

As it can be seen from the students' open-ended interviews, they were satisfied with the education process during the Cooperative Learning tasks. One of the most important factors, which engage the students during the lessons, is motivation, which in primary school is mainly based on interest. During the interview the researcher saw that the experimental group students were highly motivated. Besides, they indicated that working cooperatively in small groups meant that it was more child-centered rather than teacher-centered.

On the other hand, some students, who really hesitated while speaking before the research started, felt more self-esteem and were involved in all the tasks. They became more sociable as well. Those students who before the experiment did not participate in the lessons became one of the most active students.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings presented in this study are based on interviews with the students, the surveys, and the results of the pretest and posttest as well as the achievement examinations. This study suggests the adoption of Cooperative Learning notions to curriculum development and solutions for the English Language Learning problems in primary schools in Iraqi Kurdistan. Also it aims to help students to improve their motivations towards language learning.

The population of this study was 51 primary 6th grade schools students. The subjects were the researcher's two classes of students. This was both a qualitative and quantitative data-based research. The researcher randomly chose one class of 25 students as the experimental group that was taught with the cooperative learning activities, and one group of 26 students as the control group for which the traditional method was used to teach English. The study was an action research and the duration of this study was 12 weeks in one semester, in total 48 hours of class time for each group. The assessment tasks were included in this time period.



The cooperative learning tasks such as Jigsaw, Learning together, Student Teams Achievement Divisions, Team Games- Tournament, and Team Accelerated Instruction were integrated into the teaching process. These models helped the students to involve the mixed ability grouping and motivate them to participate to the lessons.

In order to explore the research questions, four different data sources were used. One source was the Online Oxford Placement test as pre-test and post-test of the English Language competency. The second was the midterm and final exams as achievement tests which provided data on students' performances on language. The third source was a questionnaire to elicit the students' reflection, attitudes and feedback on different types of activities used in their group. The fourth was an interview with a selection of students from experimental group.

The results from this study suggest that the use of group work can lead to the feelings of comfort, less pressure and motivation. Many students in the experimental group declared their pleasure, liking and enjoyment of the lessons. It can be concluded from the interviews that the group work decreased the students' anxiety. Many of the students in the experimental group developed a very close friendship to each other and they felt that they are in a family environment. Since the classroom environment was very positive, the students' learning efficacy was higher. This was what happened in the study. Reflecting back to the research questions 1.1 and 1.2 Cooperative Learning enhanced students' attitude and motivated them as well as improved their language skills.

The Jigsaw of cooperative learning was a good way to involve all students in speaking and learning in the classroom. This activity was a good way to elicit participation from each class member. Students in this study felt less inhibited by first presenting in small groups. After much practice they often felt comfortable to present in front of the whole class. The jigsaw activity supported the communicative approach in which the students were highly interactive in the lessons. Besides, the jigsaw provided a plenty of different study materials for different levels.

The cooperative learning techniques provided a student-centered environment where all students were often exposed to an English discourse and their listening and speaking abilities improved. Moreover, the cooperative learning strategies allowed the teacher to use information sources and some texts at different levels of linguistics and conceptual difficulty in experimental group.

After this study, it can be summarized that the cooperative learning techniques provide more chances to show the students' strength. Above all, the low-achieving students enhanced their self-esteem and confidence in a great deal. The students' interviews and questionnaires verified this idea with students 'commenting how much they gained in confidence.

However, while using Cooperative-learning techniques to teach the students with low proficiency in English Language, teachers should be very careful about the curriculum design (Cohen, 1994), because the students are not proficient enough to provide an adequate input for each other if there is no form-focused instruction in the classroom at all. Therefore, to balance the meaning-oriented communicative activities and the form-oriented instruction in a cooperative learning class, the guidance for implementing cooperative learning into lesson plans should be taken into consideration since the classroom is a dynamic context full of unexpected problems (Gillies, 2014).

The presented study was a local research, participants of which were culturally similar to each other. Therefore, the results obtained may not reflect the overall subjects' features. According to their level of English, the students who took part in the experiment, survey and interview were pre-intermediate level of English learners. Totally 51 6th grade students participated in the study. This may not be enough to make conclusions for learners of all ages. It should be in mind that while holding a research on this topic, the classrooms should be big enough. In this research it was a bit difficult to manage the classroom because the



groups were so close to each other and they created certain inconveniences to each other. There were no problems with the time limitations. 4 hours in a week was enough to cover the syllabi. Less than 4 hours might cause problems to finish the curriculum.

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