

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN IMPROVING
READING COMPREHENSION AMONG ESL STUDENTS:
A CASE STUDY**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this project paper is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning method in improving reading comprehension. The study intended to find out if the use of Cooperative Learning method can bring about improvement in the post-test scores after treatment as compared to the pre-test scores. The one-group pre-test post-test experimental design was adopted in this study in order to discover the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning method in improving reading comprehension. Twenty form four students of a National Secondary school served as samples in this study. At the beginning stage of the experiment, a pre-test was administered to the group of students. Subsequently the group was exposed to the Cooperative Learning method treatment. At the final stage of the experiment, a post-test was administered. Data in the form of scores from the pre-test and post-test were collected to be analyzed. A comparison of mean scores between the pre-test and post-test showed that the students have improved their test scores after they were subjected to treatments using cooperative learning method as compared to test scores before treatment. The test scores were further tested for statistical significance using the T-test analysis procedure. Results from the T-test indicated that there had been a significant improvement in reading comprehension. Therefore it was concluded that the Cooperative Learning method was effective in improving reading comprehension. A questionnaire was also administered to find out the students perceptions toward Cooperative Learning method. Analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that students preferred and had positive perception of the Cooperative Learning method. They also indicated that they were very motivated and had enjoyed English lessons using the Cooperative Learning method.



ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dilakukan untuk menyelidik keberkesanan pembelajaran menggunakan kaedah Kooperatif untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dalam bacaan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan sama ada pembelajaran Kooperatif berkesan dalam memperbaiki pemahaman bacaan. Kaedah kajian eksperimen satu kumpulan ujian-pra dan ujian-pos digunakan dalam kajian ini untuk menentukan keberkesanan kaedah Pembelajaran Kooperatif dalam meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan. Dua puluh orang pelajar tingkatan empat dari sebuah sekolah menengah kebangsaan dijadikan sampel dalam kajian ini. Kumpulan pelajar yang sama dilibatkan dalam ujian-pra dan ujian-pos. Pada tahap awal eksperimen, ujian-pra dijalankan kepada dua puluh orang pelajar. Berikutnya, kumpulan pelajar ini didedahkan kepada kaedah pembelajaran Kooperatif dimana pelajar berbincang sesama ahli kumpulan untuk mencari jawapan kefahaman kepada teks bacaan. Pada tahap akhir eksperimen kumpulan yang sama dilibatkan dalam ujian-pos. Data skor mentah dari ujian-pra dan ujian-pos direkodkan. Selepas itu kedua-dua markah mentah ini dianalisis. Perbezaan skor mentah dan juga skor min menunjukkan bahawa pencapaian pelajar dalam ujian-pos yang dijalankan selepas sampel menjalani rawatan kaedah Pembelajaran Kooperatif, telah meningkat. Kemajuan yang telah dicapai diuji lagi untuk memperoleh nilai signifikan. Prosedur ujian-T dijalankan untuk memperoleh nilai signifikan. Justeru itu penggunaan kaedah Pembelajaran Kooperatif didapati berkesan dalam meningkatkan kefahaman bacaan. Maka, implikasinya ialah kaedah Pembelajaran Kooperatif adalah kaedah pembelajaran yang berkeupayaan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan. Sebagai tambahan, satu soal selidik telah diedarkan untuk mendapatkan maklumbalas daripada sampel tentang persepsi mereka terhadap kaedah Pembelajaran Kooperatif. Analisis respon terhadap soal selidik ini menunjukkan mereka mempunyai persepsi yang positif terhadap penggunaan kaedah ini dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction



English has established itself to become an important lingua-franca. Furthermore, the English language has also become the window for gaining knowledge. So it is very important and beneficial to master the English language. Due to the above reasons a lot of emphasis and importance is given to English Language when formulating our education policy. Under the KBSM syllabus the focus of teaching English is to develop language proficiency in the four skills, that is listening, speaking, reading and writing. The communicative approach is adopted in teaching English language in schools. Due to the emphasis on communication and the use of English language in and out of the classroom situations, language teachers should create a learning environment where learning English will be more interesting and enjoyable. Students should be given the opportunity to communicate with each other and clarify the information that they do not understand with their friends. Reading comprehension



has become one of the sub skills in learning English language. But the reading comprehension skill in the classroom today is students read and write answers to the questions. It has made the comprehension aspect of English language very dry and dull.

“Reading is a transactive process in which readers negotiate meaning or interpretation. During reading, the meaning does not go from the page to the reader; instead, it is a complex negotiation between the text and the reader that is shaped by the immediate situational context and broader sociolinguistic context” (Weaver, 1998 :198).

As stated by Weaver it is very clear that situational and psycholinguistic context can aid learners in comprehending the reading text. In this aspect a learner-centered approach is more conducive than a teacher-centered approach in enhancing students reading comprehension skills. The teacher should use methods that is rich in collaborative activities among learners in a reading comprehension classroom. The exchange of ideas and opinions among learners can enhance thinking and comprehending ability. On the other hand the teacher-centered approach does not give the opportunity for students to enhance their comprehending ability. Teacher-centered approach also clearly deviates from our original KBSM syllabus which emphasizes child-centered and the communicative approach.

There is rampant use of teacher-centered approach in classroom teaching of the English Language. This is further supported by a study conducted by the Penang Education Department. The study was conducted in six schools in the state of Penang in 1994, on the implementation of the KBSM programme. The study showed that the majority of the teachers relied on textbooks and teacher-centered method. It is a one way lecture style. However, the KBSM is supposedly to be child-centered whereby meaningful learning is to take place. Teacher centered approach on the other hand does facilitate meaningful learning. This defeat the purpose of implementation of the KBSM syllabus. The English Language classrooms are places where students can be welcomed as language users and language learners. In classes where student-centered approaches are implemented, the artificial distinction between ‘school world’ and the ‘real world’ is usually wittingly or unwittingly induced (Ambigapathy Pandian)(cited 1998:237-243 ELT, MICELT).

The language learning environment in schools should therefore actualize the real world. In this case Cooperative Learning method can be applied in the ESL classroom situation to make English language learning more interesting , motivating , and which can accommodate the real world situation.

This is supported by T.Good and J.Brophy,(1999) which is summed up as below:

“The traditional approach to schooling calls for whole class lessons followed by independent seatwork. Cooperative Learning approach replaces independent

seatwork with small groups of students (typically four to six students) who work together on practice or application exercises. Thus under cooperative learning arrangement students receive information and feedback from peers in addition to the teacher and curriculum materials” (Good & Brophy 1999:270-271)

Implementing Cooperative Learning method will not pose problems because of the heterogenous nature of our Malaysian classrooms. This makes it conducive to incorporate Cooperative Learning in English Language lessons. Evidence has shown that Cooperative Learning will benefit students in terms of achievement and self-esteem. Also the use of group work is stressed by the Ministry of Education (1991) to ‘student self—direction’ and ‘interdependence’. Students will be able to “*guide their own development, make decisions as to what direction in life they want to go, and deliberately take steps to acquire knowledge, skills and experience needed to bring about the desired personal changes” which will help to achieve the goals of our National Educational Philosophy (Ministry of Education, 1991)*

Even teachers during their training have to undergo training in Cooperative Learning which is taught as one of the subtopics in the pedagogy component of the Education syllabus for Diploma in Teaching programme (Ministry of Education, 1991). It constitutes about one contact hour of 14 hours of the topic ‘Implementation of Teaching’, that is, about 3.3 % of the pedagogy component.

It can be clearly seen that Cooperative Learning is not something new for the teachers themselves. The teachers themselves need to take the first step to make the

Cooperative Learning a reality and also help achieve the nation's National Education Philosophy.

Teachers are still apprehensive to allow students to work on their own while they themselves play the role of facilitators. But they still do not have the confidence to stand back and let their students function independently. Most teachers do not allow students to work as a group with the fear of too much noise in the classroom, and because of time constraints. Roger Lee (2000:112) states that, *another perception among many of us is that learner-centered approach can only be used with high achievers whose English is 'good' enough to take care of their own learning.*

Such belief has prohibited many teachers from putting their 'faith' on their students who may not be outstanding learners of English. Perhaps this partly explains why the Communicative Approach has received only lukewarm enthusiasm locally (study conducted by Penang Education Department, 1994) despite all the evidence which suggests that learners acquire language skills more effectively in an interactive manner. People are skeptical of the usefulness of the communicative method because they think their students are not good enough to take part in the communication process. Teachers should realize that without adequate time spent to make use of the language and also the opportunity to learn from mistakes, students would fail to acquire any real fluency in the language concerned.

Finally, Cooperative Learning plays an important part towards providing students with a relevant and profitable language-learning experience in the classroom.

In fact, this will make it easier for the teachers to carry out a lesson, or in preparing written materials and also exercises to suit the students' abilities according to their levels.

1.1 Need For The Study

Nowadays, there is a perception that the teaching of English reading comprehension in the classroom has become very dull and uninteresting. This was indicated by a study conducted in six schools by the Penang Education Department in 1994. According to the study, the majority of the teachers surveyed relied on textbooks and teacher-centered approach, that is one way lecture style. During a reading comprehension lesson in the classroom, the students read and answer the questions on their own. Students who cannot read are given some drilling practices on reading and guidance by the teacher in answering the questions that follow. They don't get much opportunities to discuss with their friends or classmates. At the end of the lesson the teacher will discuss and give the correct answers and the students do their correction. In this situation, students might not get the opportunity to ask for clarification for the information that they do not understand. Another setback is that students tend to rely too much on their teacher. This can lead to students becoming dependent on their teacher for everything in learning the English language. Creative thinking will not be developed by students due to their dependency on the teacher for answers. Fluency and proficiency in the English language too is not developed. On the other hand, the use of Cooperative Learning method can make the students feel more comfortable



and become more fluent in their language because they will have the opportunity to practice the language. Furthermore, Cooperative Learning method is basically student centered and is able to make them feel more independent. During their discussions and collaboration with other group members, the students are encouraged to give their opinions and ideas without much inhibition.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The main concern of this study is to find out which is a more effective way to enhance reading and understanding comprehension passage among the students of SMK Sayong. One way is through the traditional method or the use of Cooperative Learning method. Hence this study is interested to find out whether or not teaching reading comprehension using Cooperative Learning will bring about significant improvement. A questionnaire will also be administered to gauge students' perceptions toward Cooperative Learning.

1.3 Purpose Of The Study

This study is undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in improving reading comprehension among secondary school students.

This study is also undertaken to determine the perception among the students towards the use of Cooperative Learning method in the reading classroom.





1.4 Research Questions

In the pursuance of this study, the researcher seeks answers to the following questions:

- (i) Does Cooperative Learning help to improve reading comprehension?
- (ii) What are the perceptions of students toward the use of Cooperative Learning method in the reading classroom.

1.5 Hypotheses



Null Hypothesis 1

There is no statistically significant difference in the students' reading comprehension post-test scores after being exposed to the cooperative learning method as compared to their pre-test scores before the treatment.

Research Hypothesis 1

There is a statistically significant difference in the students' reading comprehension post-test scores after being exposed to the cooperative learning method as compared to their pre-test scores before the treatment.



Null Hypothesis 2

There is no statistically significant change in perception among students toward the use of cooperative learning method in the reading classroom.

Research Hypothesis 2

There is a statistically significant change in perception among students toward the use of cooperative learning method in the reading classroom.

1.6 Definition Of Terms

Cooperative Learning A form of collaboration, that is working together to accomplish shared goals. It is the instructional use of small groups through which students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson and Johnson,1994)

Reading Reading is a process whereby one looks at and understand what has been written. According to Nutall (1996), A person reads in order to get the writer's message from the reading materials or in other words the reading activity

involves the transfer of message from the writer to reader. Reading is a transactive process in which readers negotiate meaning or interpretation. It is a complex negotiation between the text and the reader that is shaped by the immediate situational context and broader sociolinguistic context.

Reading Comprehension According to Anderson and Pearson (1984) (cited in T.Yogeswary, 2001), reading comprehension is the process of using syntactic, semantic and rhetorical information found in the print text to reconstruct in the reader's mind using the knowledge of the world plus appropriate cognitive skills and reasoning ability.