EFL Learners' Behaviour States During Cooperative Learning Strategy

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Abstract

To examine the impact of cooperative learning strategy on the behaviour states of EFL learners, a 3-month study was conducted in 4 government secondary schools in EFL context (Saudi Arabia). This study aims to identify the effect of cooperative learning in comparison to traditional learning in learning English grammar on the behaviour states of EFL Learners. This study contributed to the knowledge about how EFL learners behave when they interact cooperatively together in cooperative learning groups in comparison to their colleagues who learn in traditional learning. In this study, the participants were 139 tenth grade male students, in 4 male government secondary schools in Al-Baha city, in Saudi Arabia context.

An examination of the Kruskal-Wallis tests shows that the EFL learners in the experimental conditions displayed more cooperative behavioural states and less non-cooperative states, individual task-oriented, and individual non-task behaviours than their classmates in the control condition. In addition, outcome scores were, on average, higher in the experimental condition for cooperative behavioural outcomes. They were lower in the experimental condition for non-cooperation behaviour, individual task oriented and individual non-task oriented.

Keywords: Applied linguistic, Teaching English as Foreign Language, Cooperative learning, Behaviour states, Traditional small groups

1. Introduction

Research on cooperative learning over the past three decades has documented academic and social benefits that students derive when they work together (Gillies, 2011).When students work together in small groups to achieve shared goals it is called cooperative learning.Previous research has shown that when cooperative learning is compared to individual learning, students who learn cooperatively obtain better academic results. Similarly, when it is compared to lecture directed learning, students also obtain better academic results (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). The other benefits of cooperative learning include enhanced thinking skills, more self-motivation to learn, higher self-esteem, greater respect for others and improved attitudes towards learning . Cooperative learning helps enhance thinking, acquisition of information, communication and interpersonal skills, and most importantly, self-confidence (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). These skills and characteristics are developed by dividing students into groups and then allotting them structured cooperative tasks where students work together on homework assignments, laboratory experiments or design projects.

2. Background

Research on cooperative learning has been extensive. For example, Slavin (1991) reviewed 70 studies that used cooperative learning techniques for more than four weeks in secondary and elementary schools and found that 61% of the studies showed that students obtained better results when they learned cooperatively than their control group peers. Furthermore, Slavin (1995) reviewed a further 99 studies and found that only 5% among these studies extensively support control group gains, while 63 % among these studies appreciably support cooperative learning.

In the context of EFL, such as in Taiwan, it has been verified by many researchers that social relations can be improved, motivation can be increased, and goals can be achieved under cooperative learning (Chang, 1995). This contention has been demonstrated empirically by three major studies of current time by Chen (1998), Chen (1999) and Liang (2002). Liang's study is rigorous, since various methods have been used in collection and analysis of data such as content analysis, testing, interviewing, observations and questionnaire surveys.

In addition, other studies that were conducted in Taiwan (Liao, 2005) showed that motivation and speaking skills can be enhanced via cooperative learning. These studies were conducted on junior and senior high students in Taiwan regarding their cooperative learning and its effects on their learning motivation and English speaking skills.

With regards to the Vietnamese context, Tuan (2010), conducted various studies on cooperative learning among students of secondary and intermediate level where they analysed the experiences and perceptions of students. The results showed that language skills were improved, interpersonal skills were developed and creative thinking was promoted upon undertaking cooperative learning. However, not all studies are supportive of CL. Bock (2000) conducted studies on cooperative learning pedagogy in Vietnamese EFL classrooms at a tertiary level and found that students were unwilling to cooperate with the teachers. In Turkey,

Mohammad (2010) examined the implementation of cooperative learning groups to understand the effect on learning achievements and attitudes in college mathematics in the context of virtual online grouping coupled with in-class grouping .The study revealed that the students' mathematics achievement and attitudes toward mathematics improved as a result of cooperative grouping.

3. Purpose of the Study

There is still not much known about how EFL learners actually behave in a cooperative classroom and traditional small classroom. This study aims to identify the effect of cooperative learning in comparison to traditional learning in learning English grammar on the behaviour states of EFL Learners. This study contributed to the knowledge about how EFL learners behave when they interact cooperatively together in cooperative learning groups in comparison to their colleagues who learn in traditional learning. Furthermore, this study is important to identify whether the EFL learners need more training program in how to apply cooperative learning properly in EFL classroom.

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

the participants were 139 tenth grade male students, in 4 male government secondary schools in Al-Baha city, in Saudi Arabia.

4.2 Procedures

The researcher videotaped eight classes at four secondary schools: two schools in the experimental condition who have trained with CL skills, and two schools in the control condition without this training, for a 12-week period. Two tenth grade classes from each school participated in the study. In the experimental classes, students were divided into two CL groups and each of the groups was video-recorded for a total of twelve hours for the two conditions. Similarly, in the control classes, the researcher asked the teachers to form two small groups of students in each classroom and each group was videotaped three times for 15 minutes each.

The English teachers in the experimental classes participated in a workshop that developed their knowledge of implementing CL in their classroom. The other two English teachers of the students in the control condition did not receive this training, but the researcher spent the same length of time introducing them to different books about teaching English as a second language in Saudi Arabia.

The students in both the experimental and the control conditions studied the same English lessons in their groups for one hour, four times a week. The English teachers taught their students by following the techniques outlined by Gillies (2007) for introducing different activities, providing follow-up practice, and demonstrating procedures for working on prescribed tasks.

4.3 Statistical Analysis

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine the overall impact of the intervention on the students' behaviour states in the two conditions in all three time periods. The Kruskal-Wallis test, which is used when the data sets are small, allows for between-groups effects to be identified. Because each class was videotaped three times throughout the study either in the experimental or control conditions, the researcher analysed and discussed all these video clips from Time 1 to Time 3 to give more reliable results. The researcher videotaped all eight classes at the beginning (Weeks 2 to 4), the middle (Week 6 to 8), and at the end of the study (Weeks 9 to 11).

5. Findings and Results

5.1 Students' Behaviour States (Time 1, weeks 2 to 4).

In order to determine if there were differences in the students' behaviour states between the conditions at Time 1, four Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted on the frequency of recorded behaviour states for the students in the two conditions.

Table 4.7 Tests of Between Group Effects for Four Behaviour Variables at Time 1 by Condition

Variables	N	Mdn	X^2	P
Cooperation				
Experimental	32	9.0	9.875	.002
Control	32	7.0		
Non Cooperation				
Experimental	32	2.0	7.417	.006
Control	32	3.0		
Individual task oriented				
Experimental	32	2.5	7.538	.006
Control	32	3.0		
Individual non-task oriented				
Experimental	32	2.0	.456	. 500
Control	32	2.0		

It is evident from Table 4.7 above that there were significant differences between the conditions in: cooperative behaviour, X^2 (2, N = 32) = 9.875, p = .002; non-cooperative behaviour, X^2 (2, N = 32) = 7.417, p = .006; individual task oriented behaviour, X^2 (2, N = 32) = 7.538, p = .006; but not in individual non-task oriented behaviour, X^2 (2, N = 32) = .456, p = .500. The results showed that the students in the experimental condition worked cooperatively more than their peers in the control condition (Mdn = 9, N = 32) at Time 1. Moreover, the results pointed out the significance between the students in the experimental condition and the students' in the control condition in terms of the individual task oriented variable (Mdn = 3, N = 32).

It is clear from the Table 4.7 above that there is no statistical significance between the students in the experimental condition and the control condition in terms of the individual non-task oriented behaviour at Time 1.

5.2 Students' Behaviour States (Time 2, weeks 6 to 8)

Similarly, in order to determine if there were differences in the students' behaviour states between the conditions at Time 2, four Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted on the frequency of recorded behaviour states for the students in the different conditions.

Table 4.8 Tests of Between Group Effects for Four Behaviour Variables at Time 2 by Condition

Variables	N	Mdn	X^2	P
Cooperation:				
Experimental	32	10.0	29.893	.000
Control	32	7.0		
Non Cooperation:				
Experimental	32	2.0	10.454	.001
Control	32	3.0		
Individual task oriented:				
Experimental	32	2.0	17.093	.000
Control	32	3.0		
Individual non-task oriented:				
Experimental	32	2.0	1.442	.230
Control	32	2.0		

The results showed that there was a significant difference between the conditions in terms of: cooperation behaviour, X^2 (1, N = 32) = 29.893, p = 000; noncooperation behaviour, $X2$ (1 N = 32) =10.454, p = .001; individual task oriented behaviour, X^2 (1, N = 32) = 17.093, p = .000; but not in individual non-task oriented behaviour, X^2 (1, N = 32) =1.442, p = .230. The results showed that the students in the experimental condition worked cooperatively more frequently than their peers in the control condition (Mdn = 10, N = 32) at Time 2. Furthermore, it is clear from the Table 4.8 above that there is no significant difference between the students in the experimental condition and the control condition in terms of the individual non-task oriented variable (Mdn = 2, N = 32). Moreover, the results pointed out the significance between the students in the experimental condition and the students in the control condition in terms of the individual task oriented variable (Mdn = 3, N = 32).

5.3 Students' Behaviour States (Time 3, weeks 9 to 11)

Similarly, at Time 3, four Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted on the frequency of recorded behaviour states for the students in the different conditions.

Table 4.9 *Tests of Between Group Effects for Four Behaviour Variables at Time 3 by Condition*

Variables	N	Mdn	X^2	P
Cooperation Experimental Control	32 32	11.00 8.00	40.498	.000
Non Cooperation Experimental Control	32 32	1.00 2.50	18.235	.000
Individual task oriented Experimental Control	32 32	1.00 3.00	13.812	.000
Individual non-task oriented Experimental Control	32 32	1.00 2.00	5.327	.021

In order to determine if there were differences in the students' behaviour states and between the conditions at Time 3, four Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted on the frequency of recorded verbal interactions for the students in the differing conditions. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the conditions in cooperation behaviour, X^2 (2, $N = 32$) =40.498, *p* =000; non-cooperation behaviour, X^2 (2, $N = 32$) =18.235, *p* = .000; individual task oriented, X^2 (2, $N = 32$) =13.812, *p* = .000; and in individual non-task oriented behaviours, X^2 (2, $N = 32$) = 5.327, *p* = .021. The results showed that the students in the experimental conditions worked cooperatively more than their peers in the controlled condition (Mdn = 11, $N = 32$) at Time 1. Furthermore, it is clear from the above table that there is a significant difference between the students in the experimental condition and those in the control condition in terms of individual non-task oriented variables (Mdn = 2, $N = 32$). Moreover, the results pointed out the significant differences between the students in the control condition and the students in the experimental condition in terms of individual task oriented variable (Mdn = 3, $N = 32$).

An examination of the Kruskal-Wallis tests shows that the students in the experimental conditions displayed more cooperative behavioural states and less non-cooperative states, individual task-oriented, and individual non-task behaviours than their classmates in the control condition. In addition, outcome scores were, on average, higher in the experimental condition for cooperative behavioural outcomes. They were lower in the experimental condition for non-cooperation behaviour, individual task oriented and individual non-task oriented.

6. Discussions

The purpose of this study was to investigate if there were differences in the behaviours of the students in the cooperative learning groups and traditional small groups. In order to examining the differences in the behaviour states of EFL learners, the present study also looked at whether the students' achievements in English are positive or not and evaluated the extent to which their behaviour states affect their achievement in a CL environment. The results, as stated above, have shown that the students achieved more marks in the experimental condition than did their peers in the control condition.

Students' behaviour states provide insights into how students behave in a CL environment and traditional small group environment. However, this data does not provide enough evidence to conclude that students who behave cooperatively obtain higher scores than their peers who behave less cooperatively. There is a need for a more in-depth examination of students' verbal interactions and their communication in both the CL environment and traditional small learning groups. In the following chapter, the researcher discusses EFL learners' verbal interaction and presents how they interact with each other. The researcher provides examples from both conditions to show the difference between them and to answer the question of why CL was the point of difference between students' achievement levels in the two conditions.

7. Conclusion

This study aims to identify the effect of cooperative learning in comparison to traditional learning in learning English grammar on the behaviour states of EFL Learners. An examination of the Kruskal-Wallis tests shows that the EFL learners in the experimental conditions displayed more cooperative behavioural states and less non-cooperative states, individual task-oriented, and individual non-task behaviours than their classmates in the control condition. In addition, outcome scores were, on average, higher in the experimental condition for cooperative behavioural outcomes. They were lower in the experimental condition for non-cooperation behaviour, individual task oriented and individual non-task oriented.

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