



PEOPLES 'DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC
RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF -MOSTAGHANEM

FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

DEPARTEMENT OF ENGLISH

MASTER IN

“DIDACTICS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES”

The Impact of Cooperative Learning on Teaching Mixed Ability Classes
The Case study of First year Master Students at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis
Mostaghanem University, Algeria (2017/2018)

Submitted by:

Belhadj Djamila

Members of the board:

Chair person: Dr.Djoub .Z

Supervisor: Ms. Kharoubi .M

Examiner: Mrs. Derraz.A

Academic year:2017/2018

Dedications

To My Parents

To My Brothers

To My Teachers

To My Best Friends Nassima and Sanaa

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank ALLAH for giving me the chance to be well-educated and honoured by His love and merciful.

I would like also to express my special thanks to my dear teacher Ms.Kharoubi Mounira who helped me a lot in achieving this project.

I would like to thank my parents who encouraged and helped me in my studies.

My special thanks to my darling Nassima and Sanaa for their support and help in finishing this project.

List of Abbreviations

EFL : English As A Foreign Language.

CL : Cooperative Learning.

TTT :Teacher Talking Time

STT : Student Talking Time

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Students' Gender	17
Table 2 .Students' Abilities and Levels	18
Table 2.3 Students'Preferences of Group Work	18
Table 2.4 Students' Point of View of Group Work	19
Table 2.5 Students' Preferences of Grouping	19
Table 2.6 Teachers' Use of Cooperative learning	20
Table 2.7 Students' Motivation towards Cooperative Learning	20
Table 2.8 Students' Influence towards Cooperative Learning.....	21
Table 2.9 Students' Point of View About learning in Groups	21
Table 2.10 Students' Problems towards Cooperative Learning	22
Table 2.11 Students' Point of View towards Learning in Groups	23
Table 2.12 Students' Point of View towards Group Work	23
Table 2.1 Teachers' Interest about Their Students Abilities and Levels.....	24
Table 2.14 Teachers' Point of View towards Teaching Mixed Ability Classes	24
Table 2.15 Teachers' Preference about Grouping Students	25
Table 2.16 Teachers' Problems in Paring and Grouping Students	26
Table 2.17 Teachers' Point of View Towards Cooperative Learning.....	26

Abstract

The present study aims at identifying the relationship between mixed ability teaching and cooperative learning strategy. In this respect, this work is devoted to cover such a point and find out the effectiveness of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes. The present study is divided into three main chapters to see how cooperative learning can be helpful in teaching such classes. Furthermore, teaching mixed ability classes is not an easy task but in fact it needs certain strategies to make teaching and learning in the same circle that contains better results .To make these results in the process of learning , teachers attempt to use cooperative learning in the light of helping students exchange, share knowledge and communicate for positive learning outcomes. In order to test this hypothesis, two tools were used; a questionnaire and an interview to collect data. These two tools were administrated to Master 1 students of the department of English at Abdel Hamid Ibn Badis University.Mostaganem. The findings have shown the positive and effectiveness of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes.

General Introduction

Teaching is not an easy task. It has to do with making students' learning goes smoothly in classes. In these areas particularly, teachers can meet different abilities and levels among students i.e. mixed ability teaching deals with working with students who have different skills, personalities, culture and learning needs and styles. Some teachers find it difficult to make all students get involved on the learning process where students participate, do activities and follow the teacher in giving them instruction. Furthermore, the ability to group students together objectives has really a good effect on their learning process in a cooperative task.

This research aims at investigating the impact of cooperative learning on teaching EFL mixed ability classes as well as the positive achievement students can have when working in pairs or groups. This fact is the reason for undertaking such a topic by showing the efforts that teachers do so that to create a positive environment that leads students to learn more as well as learn from one another. To do so, the present study has raised two main questions to be explained during the investigation. They are mentioned as follows:

1. How could teachers teach EFL Learners in mixed ability classes through cooperative learning?
2. To what extent does cooperative learning affect teaching mixed ability classes?

The two possible hypotheses for these research questions can be:

1. Teachers can use different methods and techniques that need to be applied for achieving certain goals to make cooperative learning in EFL mixed ability classes.
2. The application of cooperative learning leads EFL students to obtain positive academic achievement in mixed ability classes.

The current research contains three main chapters. The first chapter is literature review in which it contains the different previous works related on the impact of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes .While the second chapter in a practical one. It is concerned with the questionnaire and the interview that are administrated for both students

General Introduction

and teachers to collect data and see to what extent cooperative learning is helpful for teaching mixed ability classes.

At last, the third chapter has shown the findings of the study and some recommendations for both teachers and students as well as the limitation of the project that concerns with some problems and obstacles during the investigation.

1. Introduction

Teachers have the responsibility to make their students learn in a better condition and especially those students who are weak in class. Teaching mixed ability class is not easy in the fact that it is a demanding task to have successful learning outcome. Since students are different, teaching would be very difficult in terms of making them participate, do activities and understand the lessons.

Moreover, cooperation between students can make a huge development in creating a positive academic achievement as well as facilitate interaction and collaboration that leads to share information and knowledge among students. This chapter discusses the concept of mixed ability teaching by shedding light on the differences between learners, and the teacher's role in the class as a focal point in managing the classroom and designing lessons and activities and then some problems that face mixed ability class. In addition, this chapter discusses also the conceptual definition of cooperative learning as a fundamental element in having an effective learning outcome, by starting with a definition and then its types, elements and the purpose of cooperative learning as well as seeing the difference between heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping and finally shedding light about what things to do if students are uncooperative.

1.1 Mixed Ability /Heterogeneous Class

The term "mixed ability "has been defined by different scholars where it is not approximately the same definition. Harmer.J. (2007) said, "Mixed ability classes /groups are those where students have different levels of English knowledge and ability."(p.278).He also claimed that teachers can face different levels of students in a giving lesson in which some of them are competent while others their English is not good at all. (Harmer.J, 1998, p.127).

While others define it in another perspectives. As the case with Ireson and Hallam (2001) said, "teachers need to recognise that a class is mixed ability because children have different strengths and weaknesses and develop at different rates. They have different preferences for learning and display their work."(qtd from Bremner.S,2009,p.1).

Ur(2005) preferred using the term heterogeneous rather than mixed ability class .He said, "The term mixed ability ,however, implies that the important difference between members of

mixed class is in their language-learning ability, but this is not necessarily so. Even if the main observed difference between them is in the amount of language they know, this may have its roots in all sorts of other reasons besides ability (previous teaching, motivation, etc.). Moreover, there are plenty of other differences between learners that need to be taken into account by teacher: preferred learning styles, personality, interest, cultural background -to name only a few. Thus the term "heterogeneous"-composed of different kinds of people -is I think more suitable in defining such classes."(cited from Venâncio Faleiros.M.H, 2009, p.115).She claimed that the term "*mixed ability*" does not cover all aspects involved in such classes. However, heterogeneous class is the appropriate term in dealing with those classes.(Venâncio Faleiros.M.H,2009,p.115).

1.2 Differences between Learners

When it comes to differences between learners, teaching mixed ability class makes the teacher knows that all students are different at the level of a foreign language learning and teaching. This difference includes students' motivation, personalities, attitudes, and responses to a particular instructions in the classroom. Moreover, whenever the teachers know the differences of their students, they have the ability to meet their learning needs.(Felder.M.F & Brent, 2005,p.57).

1.3 The Teacher's Role

The teacher plays an important role in making his/her students learn effectively. Thus, Harmer.J.(2007) said, "one of the reasons that is difficult to give general description of good teachers is that different teachers are often successful in different ways."(p.23).He said also, "good teachers are born, not made", in the fact that they learn their strengths and abilities through a mixture of personality, intelligence, knowledge and experience.(Harmer.J, 2007,p.23).

Lowe I (2009) claimed, "the basic principles is that you should first do all that is easily in your power, then work towards the ideals."(p.19).And again, the teacher should aim at a higher level of teaching to make his/her students access to the learning environment.(Lowe I, 2009,p.19).

Harmer .J. (2007)claimed that a good teacher has the ability to adopt certain role in the class that depends on what students are doing.(Harmer.J.2007.p25). He said, among these roles, the

teacher is a controller and if he acts always on that, standing at the front and dictating, he makes his/her students lose the responsibility for their learning. In other words, the teacher acts as a controller for grammar explanation and presentation.

He acts also as a prompter in encouraging his/her students, motivating them to do more and help them. While assessors, are teachers who tell their students how they are progressing and giving them grades. The teacher is a resource for language information and consulting his/her students as well as a tutor in advising and guiding students. (Harmer.J, 2007, p.25).

1.4 Classroom Management

There is no common definition to the concept of classroom management. Evertson and Weinstein (2006) refer in their definition of classroom management to the actions teachers take to create a supportive environment for the academic and social - emotional learning of students .(cited from Korpershoek .H,et.al,2014,p11).

While Harmer .J.(2007) stated that having an effective classroom management is under several variables which are seating arrangement (traditional rows, U-shape, horseshoe , and cluster seating arrangement) and how teachers appear to students as well as the way they talk to them and this includes the voice , who talks the most (Teacher Talking Time (TTT)and Student Talking Time (STT))as well as the ability to deal with difficult situation.(Harmer.J,2007,p.34).

Walters .J.M.A and Frei.Sh (2007) said, "the classroom has been called the experimental lab of the child ".(p.7).This can be shown in the whole time children spend in school ,it is very important to maintain and formulate an effective classroom where students need to be protected for effective learning. (Walters .J.M.A and Frei.Sh, 2007, p.7).

1.5 Problems in Mixed Ability Class

Teachers are in the process of making their students learn effectively. Even if their differences, teachers should undertake every single detail to cover what is going on in class. Furthermore, these differences may lead to various problems. (Venâncio Faleir.M.H, 2009, p.117).

Ur (2005) states some problems in mixed ability classes:

- difficulty to control discipline ;
- difficulty to be certain that all students are learning effectively;
- difficulty to find appropriate material;
- difficulty to follow individual progress in large classes;
- difficulty to activate all learners' participation;

(cited from Venâncio Faleir.M.H, 2009, p.117&118).

Ur (2005) also suggested possible solutions to overcome the problems above that are found in mixed ability classes:

- To deal with discipline problems, teachers can vary tasks and activities to create challenge between students.
- To know that all students are learning effectively, teachers can do individual tasks in order to assess their students.
- Finding appropriate materials depends on students ' choice in addition to coursebook.
- To follow individual progress, the teacher should work with his//her students individually or pairing and grouping students to listen to them and assess them after.
- To active all learners ' participation, the teacher needs to have students engagement by working cooperatively.

(cited from Venâncio Faleir.M.H, 2009,p.118)

1.6 The Conceptual Definition of Cooperative Learning (CL)

Different scholars have defined cooperative learning. Sonthara. K and Vanna.S (2009) said, “teaching practices that provide opportunities to students to learn together in small groups are known as cooperative learning.”(p.2).It is a structured learning process by pairing and grouping students who are responsible for their learning.(Sonthara.K and Vanna.S ,2009,p.2).

Johnson & Johnson (2002); Lou et al, (1996); Salvin,(1986) said that it is a pedagogical practice where students get both academic and social achievement when they have the chance to be grouped and interact together.(qtd from Gillies.R.M & Boyle.M, 2010,p.933).

While Belmakki.A and Kebiri.A (2010) refers to cooperative learning as a student centred approach that considers learners as responsible and active agents in their learning outcomes.(p.29).

1.7 The Purpose of Cooperative Learning

Sonthara.K and Vanna.S (2009) stated that before starting using cooperative learning, it is appropriate to know that CL is really recommended and this is under of four main reasons:

1.7.1 More children actively learning

Cooperative learning helps students to be engaged in the learning process. And this can be achieved by grouping students together for particular learning tasks.(Sonthara.K and Vanna.S ,2009.p.4).

1.7.2 Child-to-child learning support

Cooperative learning helps students to develop a higher-achievement learning in the fact that they can communicate and share knowledge as well as understand from each other better than the teacher .(Sonthara.K and Vanna.S ,2009,p.4).

1.7.3 Improved motivation through success

Cooperative learning improves students' motivation in the fact that it helps students to experience the moments they spend together. Sonthara.K and Vanna.S (2009) said," in classrooms where the students are divided into cooperative teams, each with its high-and low-achieving students, the opportunity to succeed is more evenly distributed. (p.4)

1.8 Heterogeneous vs homogeneous grouping

Alexa, et.al define heterogeneous grouping as students of all levels are represented in each group. While homogeneous grouping ,they said, is grouping students of similar ability and needs .According to them, researchers hypothesized that student' interactions patterns might have an impact on the effectiveness of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping.(video play).

Alexa, et.al presented an article (article 4) of a study that shows the extent to which students of high, average and low ability benefit from collaborative elaborations work depends on whether they are assigned to homogeneous or heterogeneous ability groups.

The participants of this study are 104 fourth grade males from five classes in a Kuwait Elementary School .The result shows:

- **High ability students:** equally academically successful in heterogeneous and homogeneous groups (**25 percent**).
- **Average achieving students:** more academically successful in homogeneous groups (**50 percent**).
- **Low achieving students:** more academically successful in heterogeneous groups (**25 percent**).

While Sunarti.S & Das.J & Nootan.R (2006) said that Mathews (1992) found that high ability students prefer cooperative learning in homogeneous ability groups than heterogeneous

ability groups because students of high ability prefer working with those who are the same level .(p.1).

1.9 Elements of Cooperative Learning

Sonthara.K and Vanna.S stated that there are five main elements of cooperative learning that take place in the lesson. (p.6).But most important are only three.They are cited as follows:

1.9.1 Positive Interdependence

Students should know that they need each other for the group's task. Sonthara.K and Vanna.S (2006) claimed that," the key to doing this successfully is to structure the group so that group members clearly get the message that" I can only succeed and do well if the other members in my group also succeed and do well."(p.6).

1.9.2 Collaborative (Social) Skills

Sonthara.K and Vanna.S (2006) stated that social skills can be present in cooperative learning if the teacher organizes the lesson and gives a chance to the following skills to be developed:

- Praising each other, promoting each other's success.
- Listening.
- Showing patience.
- Keeping each other on task.
- Orally explaining how to solve problems.
- Teaching one's knowledge to other.
- Checking for understanding.(p.7).

1.9.3 Heterogeneous Grouping (Mixing Students)

Teachers should not form the same group in all tasks. By contrast, changing groups creates always an effective social skills by placing students in a dynamic environment. (Sunatri.S & Jay.D & Nootan.R ,2006,p.7).

1.10 Types of Cooperative Learning Groups

Johnson , Johnson ,& Holubec (2013) claimed that a cooperative classroom depends on three main types of cooperative learning groups(cited from Johnson and Johnson ,2017,p.5) ,that are used to teach a particular content in order to demonstrate an active cognitive processing of information as well as support students for their learning process. These three types are cited as follows:

1.10.1 Formal cooperative learning groups

Johnson , Johnson ,& Holubec (2013) stated that formal cooperative learning groups for period of time to several weeks to complete a specific task or assignment (for example solving problem, writing a report or reading a story ,chapter or book)(cited from Johnson and Johnson ,2017,p.5).

Johnson and Johnson (2017) said," any course requirement or assignment may be reformulated to be cooperative. In formal cooperative learning groups the teacher:

1. Specifies the objectives for the lesson (one academic and one social skills).
2. Makes a series of decisions about how to structure the learning groups (what size groups, how students are assigned to groups, what roles to assign, how to arrange materials, and how to arrange the room).
3. Evaluates student performance against the preset criteria for excellence and ensures that groups process how effectively members worked together."(p.5).

Johnson & Johnson (1989) claimed that formal cooperative learning is needed for learning objectives that are highly important to develop critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. (cited from Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.5)

1.10.2 Informal cooperative Learning

Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec (2013) stated that informal cooperative learning groups are formed only for a few minutes in class (cited from Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.5). It is a way to focus more on student's attention during lectures through teaching them by using materials. (Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.5).

Johnson and Johnson (2017) said, "during direct teaching the instructional challenge for the teacher is to ensure that students do the intellectual work of organizing material, explaining it, summarizing it, and integrating into existing conceptual structures." (p.5). These informal cooperative learning groups are organized in order to get students' engagement and discussions behind forming these groups in two to five minutes before and after the lecture. (Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.5).

1.10.3 Cooperative Base Groups

Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec (2013) said, "cooperative base groups are long-term, heterogeneous cooperative learning groups with stable membership." (qtd from Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.5). These cooperative base groups are aimed at giving help and encouragement each student needs for his/her academic development as well as they can be formed each day of class where students and teacher meet one another. (Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.5)

1.11 What If Students Are Uncooperative?

Harmer, J. (1998) argued that all teachers notice that students do not enjoy working in groups. These uncooperative problems might be never listening to the teacher, failure in doing homework and complaining to others. (p.130).

He stated possible things that the teachers can do to solve those uncooperative problems, which are talking to individual members outside the classroom about their feelings and how to solve those problems. It is also about using activities that are enjoyable and liked by all students as well as consult other colleagues for investigating the problems and finding possible solutions.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the issue of mixed ability teaching as a demanding task for teachers who face a big challenge in dealing with different students' abilities and levels, by starting first with a definition of the concept of mixed ability and then some differences between learners since they are in mixed ability class, after that focusing on the teacher 's role as a focal point in the class as well as in managing the classroom effectively and then discusses some problems that face the teacher in mixed ability class.

This chapter highlights also the conceptual definition of cooperative learning and the purpose of it as a fundamental strategy in enhancing students' academic achievement. It also provides a difference between heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping as well as the basic elements and types of cooperative learning and closing this discussion by shedding light on to what extent student are uncooperative.

2. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview about the quantitative and qualitative methodology that is used to answer my research question .Furthermore, it provides a description of the sample, the research instrument, procedures of the study, students' questionnaire analysis and teachers' interview analysis

2.1 The Research Instrument

The research of the study depends on two major tools : a questionnaire and an interview for having a quantitative and qualitative research in order to gather data about the study and give a detailed understanding of the impact of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes , as well as to show the contribution of grouping students that leads to have effective learning outcomes .The students' questionnaire contains twelve (12) questions which are Yes/No questions and multi-choice questions. While the teachers' interview includes six (6) questions that are needed to be answered in a detailed way.

2.2 Procedures

This study contains different tools in investigating the impact of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes. As a researcher, I have chosen a questionnaire for Master 1 students and an interview for teachers who teach Master 1 Students .This investigation takes approximately 15 days where students answer the questionnaire immediately while others need time because of their studies and other things. Some students do not understand some questions but others ask me if they are allowed to provide more explanation while answering the questions.

Concerning the interview, it has six (6) questions for six (6) teachers from different specialties. Those teachers have between 5 to 20 years of teaching experience .This interview is about eight (8) to ten (10) minutes of discussion. I have gone through the following steps :

- Ask for having an interview together.
- Welcome to the interview.
- Introduction about the research project.

- Ask about the teaching experience.
- Ask the six questions.
- Having debate and discussion.
- Record the answers.
- At last, thank the teachers for giving a helping hand.

2.3 Students' Questionnaire Analysis

1. Gender :

a) male

b) female

Choice	Number	Percentage
Male	9	36%
Female	16	64%

Table 2.1 Students Gender

2. Do you think that your teacher take into account your different abilities and levels while teaching you?

a) Yes

b) No

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes	18	72%
No	7	28%

Table 2.2 Students Abilities and Levels

This question aims at noticing if teachers take into consideration their students' abilities and levels while teaching them because some teachers do not care about such a point and start teaching directly. Most students (**72%**) said that their teachers take into account their different levels and abilities while few of them (**28%**) said the contrary.

3. Do you prefer working in groups?

a) Yes

b) No

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes	20	80%
No	5	20%

Table 2.3 Students Preferences of Group Work

This question seeks if students like working in groups .Most of them (**80%**) like working in groups and enjoy doing this. While others (**20%**) do not like the idea of grouping students but prefer working individually much more than in groups.

4. Do you think that working in groups goes best to join students from different levels?.

a) Yes

b) No

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes	21	84%
No	4	16%

Table 2.4 Students Point of View of Group Work of Different Levels

This question aims at measuring how it is important working in groups of different student's levels and abilities to encourage learning from others and exchange knowledge. The majority of students (**84%**) said that working in groups goes best to join students from different levels and abilities while few of them (**16%**) do not so .

5. Do you prefer to be grouped either heterogeneously (different abilities and levels) or homogeneously (same abilities and levels).

.....

Choice	Number	Percentage
Heterogeneously	21	84%
Homogeneously	4	16%

Table 2.5 Students Preferences of Grouping

This question investigates the way students are groups, either heterogeneously (different abilities and levels or homogeneously (same abilities and levels).The majority of them (**84%**) prefer being grouped heterogeneously in the fact that it is very helpful for weak and shy students as well as the need of developing other abilities and skills from the other . By contrast, few students (**16%**) prefer being grouped homogeneously in the sense that they are the same levels, so the task or the activity can be completed perfectly or the other way around.

6. How often your teacher use cooperative learning in class when having activities and tasks to be completed ?

- a) Always
- b) Sometimes
- c) Never

Choice	Number	Percentage
Always	1	4%
Sometimes	24	96%
Never	0	0%

Table 2.6 Teachers ' Use of Cooperative Learning

This question concerns how much time teachers use cooperative learning in class. Most students (**96%**) said that their teachers sometimes implement working in groups when having activities, project, presentations and tasks to be completed .While very few students (**4%**) said that their teachers use always cooperative learning in class.

7. Will you be motivated when your teacher use cooperative learning in class?

- a) Motivated
- b) Demotivate

Choice	Number	Pourcentage
Motivated	20	80%
Demotivated	5	20%

Table 2.7 Students' Motivation Towards cooperative learning

This question aims at finding out to what extent students are motivated or not in group work. The majority of students (**80%**) said that they are highly motivated and excited to work together as well as create a debate which is very helpful for them in their process of learning. However, few of them (**20%**) are demotivated when they are asked to work together.

8. As a students, have you noticed that working in groups may influence your academic learning process either:

a) Positively

b) Negatively

Choice	Number	Percentage
Positively	20	80%
Negatively	5	20%

Table 2.8 Students' Influence towards Cooperative Learning

This question concerns the influence of cooperative learning either positively or negatively on the academic learning process of the students .The majority of them(**80%**) said that this influence is really positive on their learning outcomes .While few of them (**20%**) said that its influence is negative on their learning process.

9. Do you feel that you have learnt more in groups rather than individually?

a) Yes

b) No

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes	18	72%
No	7	28%

Table 2.9 Students' Point of View about Learning in Groups

This question seeks for how much students learn either in groups or individually. Most students (**72%**) said that they have really learnt more in groups rather than individually and this is thanks to the cooperation between students while learning .However, few students (**28%**) have not learnt in groups because they do not like cooperative learning.

10. What kind of problems you face in group work?

- a) Talking and making noise.
- b) Feeling uncomfortable.
- c) Losing your ideas while others share theirs in giving answers.

Choice	Number	Percentage
Talking and making noise	15	60%
Feeling uncomfortable	3	12%
Losing your ideas while others share theirs in giving answers	7	28%

Table 2.10 Students' Problems towards Cooperative Learning

This question aims at investigating the problems students face while working together. Most students (**60%**) **said** that grouping students for certain tasks leads them to talk and socialize too much as well as make noise. This noise can be healthy in a way to which students may talk in one time for discussion and debating, but when it exceeds the limits, it becomes a real problem for both students and teachers. By contrast, few students (**28%**) have the problem of losing their ideas while their classmates share their ideas in giving answers because some students may think and listen to others at the same time. Whereas, only of them (**12%**) feel uncomfortable by being a member of a large group, especially those students who are shy.

11. Do you think that working in groups helps students learn from each other rather than from the teacher?

- a) Agree
- b) Disagree

Choice	Number	Percentage
Agree	17	68%
Disagree	8	32%

Table 2.11 Students' Point of View towards Learning in Groups

This question concerns to what extent students agree or disagree about the fact that they learn from each other rather than the teacher. Since students are the same in the language learning process, it is better when they explain to each other and especially those students who are good in class. Most of students (**68%**) agree that they really learn from each other in class rather than the teacher, while only of them (**32%**) disagree about such a point.

12. How do you find learning in groups?

- a) Effective
- b) Enjoyable
- c) Boring

Choice	Number	Percentage
Effective	15	60%
Enjoyable	9	36%
Boring	1	4%

Table 2.12 Students' Point of View towards Group Work

The final question aims at investigating how students see cooperative learning as a strategy of learning since the classroom is the place where students of different abilities meet together. Most students (**60%**) said that cooperative learning is strongly effective for a positive learning outcomes .While others (**36%**) said that it is enjoyable enough in the light of having discussion and debate as well. Whereas, a few of them (**4%**) stated that it is boring and there is no need to use it.

2.4 Teachers' Interview Analysis

1. While teaching your students, do you take into consideration their different abilities and levels?

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes, I take.	6	100%
No, I do not so.	0	00%

Table 2.13 Teachers' Interest about Their Students' Abilities and Levels

As an analysis to this question, all teachers (**100%**) take into consideration their different students' abilities and levels especially at the beginning of the school year through a diagnostic assessment that might help teachers to design a syllabus in order to enhance students levels. It is also the observation that teachers do at first to see what students know, good at, and weak in since they come from different context.

2. Do you think that teaching mixed ability classes is an easy task or it needs a lot of efforts in implementing certain strategies and methods?

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes	0	00%

No	6	100%
----	---	------

Table 2.14 Teachers' Point of View towards Teaching Mixed Ability Classes

All teachers agree that teaching mixed ability classes is not an easy task especially , they said , those students who are not interested and demotivated have disengagement all the time. This can be shown in the large classes teachers teach, it usually calls for noise and disorder. Concerning the efforts, teachers do for these classes, are to change the way of teaching from time to time by being flexible, eclectic and humour students as well. Teachers also mention that having experience with such classes play an important role to deal effectively with students of different levels and abilities.

3. Have you experience cooperative learning especially in tutorials when having tasks, project and presentations. Since learning is a kind of social process, it is very helpful in making students understand, construct meaning and learn from each other as well. Few teachers (16%) have not really tried it in the fact that there will be a person who realize on the other and it is impossible to see who did what and the level of each students. Therefore, those teachers like mostly individual work.

4. Do you group students heterogeneously or homogeneously?

choice	Number	Percentage
Heterogeneously	6	100%
Homogeneously	0	00%

Table 2.15 Teachers' Preferences about grouping students

All teachers (100%) group their students heterogeneously in the fact that it is appropriate to join students from different levels and abilities in order to learn from each other and develop the skills that some students are weak in.

5. Do you find problems in pairing and grouping students?

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes	6	100%
No	0	00%

Table 2.16 Teachers ' Problems in Pairing and Grouping Students

All teachers (**100%**) face problems in pairing and grouping students. Among those problems, some students do not like to be grouped at all. But rather, they prefer working individually to focus more on the task alone. Other students have the chance to socialize too much, they may tell their teachers that they are talking about the task but in fact, teachers hear some words that have nothing to do with the task. It is also the area where noise raises but most of the time it would be healthy noise since students discuss, debate and communicate about the task.

6. Have you noticed that implementing cooperative learning leads to an effective learning outcome?

Choice	Number	Percentage
Yes	6	100%
No	0	00%

Table 2.17 Teachers' Point of View towards Cooperative learning

All teachers (**100%**) have noticed that cooperative learning leads to an effective learning outcomes in the fact that it is a culture of learning where students exchange information, correct each other. It breaks down also boredom and the routine of daily learning in which teachers can see that students are happy while working together.

2.5 Conclusion

This practical chapter reveals that both teachers and students support the idea concerning learning through cooperative learning and its impact on teaching mixed ability classes. It is a strategy that most teachers use in class to encourage a positive learning outcomes among students.

3. Introduction

According to the results of the study , cooperative learning is a useful strategy that allows both teachers and students to achieve certain goals for a positive academic teaching and learning .Moreover , It considers as a process that should be used in different tasks and activities to develop students' critical thinking , and help them exchanging information .This chapter gives a general discussion of the research findings ; It also shows recommendations and limitations of the study as well as some suggestions to help both teachers and learners in using cooperative learning and at last , It provides some suggestions for further studies.

3.1 Discussion of the Findings

As an analysis to the findings, the majority of teachers realize heavily on using cooperative learning in class. It is really helpful whenever they join students for certain activities or projects in order to develop student's skills, levels, and abilities. Most teachers prefer grouping their students heterogeneously in the fact that it is very important when they are from different levels and abilities.

Some students could be easily anxious because of their fear of group work especially those who are weak .They really need some courage from their teachers who show them how their strength can be completed in the group work.

Concerning the seize of the group , It is difficult for large classes of 35 to 40 students .The group seize then would be from 5 to 6 students in each group , and this creates students ' disengagement and a way to which students talk and never complete the task or the activity . It is preferable then to form groups that contain 3 students no more and especially for small classes where the number of students does not exceed 20, Those small classes help the students to interact, exchange and share knowledge from each other.

The issue of controlling every single student in the group is really a demanding task for some teachers because make students work in groups does not seem that each one does his job. Some students may talk about other things but they look that they are discussing. Whereas, other students have the chance to joke and tell funny stories and start laughing.

Most students showed that cooperative learning is very effective towards their learning process. They really find it helpful to increase their motivation first and their curiosity that makes them highly motivated. According to the results, cooperative learning goes best whenever the teacher knows how his students are in the classroom, since it is the place that they spend most of the time in it, they might help their teacher by being good at their learning process and follow him.

The teacher is the focal point in the classroom, and whenever he knows his students' abilities and skills, he design a syllabus that suites every single student and enhance the weaker one. Pairing and grouping students is a good strategy if the teacher wants his students learn because the process of exchanging ideas and information builds students' critical thinking that can be developed through the discussion between students and the teacher.

Concerning shy students, they are under anxiety whenever they are grouped together. For them, it is very difficult to be a member of a large group because they keep silence while the other members are working about completing the task or the activity. In this situation, the teacher faces such a kind of a problem but it is very important for those shy students to feel comfortable and relaxing as well as never making them anxious. It is only a matter of time in being in touch with the group work.

Depending on the results of the study, it seems that some students have problems when they are asked to work in groups. It is really challenging when they have difficulties of organizing the group work where some students may easily become disengaged. While others have the chance to socialize and talk. Few students are really uncomfortable in the group work, they feel that they cannot do the task or the activity giving to them in the fact that they are not comfortable or anxious to share ideas and knowledge because they think that this process leads them to lose their ideas while discussing about a particular topic.

Raising students awareness of working in groups is something crucial in education where the teacher plays an important role to shape student's way of learning. Since the classroom is the area and the laboratory that helps both teachers and students to meet together. It would be very helpful for teachers to make their students aware about the effectiveness of cooperative learning as a strategy of learning.

Another main point that need to be mentioned is student's responsibility of their learning process. Most teachers notice that there are students who are not responsible for their learning process in the classroom as a whole and in the group in particular. Students who are forced to study English at university , their English language is really terrible in class and even in exams and tests scores .They hate the language and do not want to improve it through time. Concerning the group work, they do not share neither information nor complete the task. By contrast, they stay a part from the group and keep silent while other students make noise and talk. Other students may get bored about English since it is a foreign language. For them, it is difficult to be good at it or as native speakers somehow.

Furthermore, excellent students are responsible for their learning process. They tend to develop the language by reading books, listening to native speakers, learning in the classroom, doing activities and even the participation of the group depends heavily on them.

The application of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes is really demanding in the educational system. It is a golden key for teachers to have the connection between either teacher-student and student-student interaction. Since it is a learner-centred strategy, teachers should control their TTT (Teacher Talking Time) and encourage most STT (Student Talking Time).

While gathering data, we have noticed that most teachers use sometimes cooperative learning in class and this depends on the task accordingly. Some activities need to be completed individually such as writing ones. Those activities help the teacher see how his students' writing skill is developed through time and what their weaknesses are in writing to plan further lessons , as an example for grammar ones. Some teachers make their students correct themselves by reading others' paper and see if they have the same level of the language or not. This correction shows the cooperation between students in an implicit way.

Suggesting some solutions can be very helpful for both teachers and students to have a kind of positive influence on the academic learning process of students.

3.2 Recommendations for Teachers

According to the research findings, some suggestions are provided for teachers to help students to do well in group work. These suggestions are as follows:

- Teachers should encourage their students to be optimistic towards their learning process.
- Teachers should increase their students' motivation in group work by showing them that it is a helpful strategy in improving themselves.
- Teachers should let students choose themselves for the group work but sometimes teachers have the responsibility to form the group when needed.
- Teachers try to help their students to develop their skills and levels through having collaboration and discussion while learning.
- Teachers should also vary activities like games, role plays, and presentation to get rid of boredom and daily routines.
- Teachers try to make the assignment clear by explaining it well so that every student understands what he/she does.
- Teachers should control students in the group work and give them the time to think carefully and then exchange the answers.
- Teachers should provide activities that enhance students' skills and especially writing because most of them are terrible at it.
- Teachers should provide their students some assignments in the fact that learners make presentation in the classroom to encourage shy students and help them to have presentations.

- At last, teachers should be humourist from time to time to make students happy and breakdown the routines, boredom as well as make students eager to learn more.

3.3 Recommendations for the Students

In attempt to students complains through the questionnaire, some recommendations are suggested that are needed to take into account the purpose of helping students against the challenges that face them in their learning process. These suggestions are cited as follows:

- Learners should be aware that cooperative learning strategy is really helpful and recommended for most teachers in the light of having a collaborative learning and develop the skills that students are weak in.
- Learners need to have a systematic way of organizing the group work and this can be achieved with the help of the teacher. He/She tries to divide the whole timing of the group work into three main times; if the assignment is about ten minutes, the teacher should divide it into three minutes for thinking about the topic, four minutes about sharing and exchanging information and at last three minutes about writing down the answers and reviewing them.
- Learners should stop talking when they are formed together because most of them have the chance to socialize too much and never complete the task or activity.
- Learners need to be responsible for their learning process and try to develop the language for having a positive learning outcome.
- Learners should have the awareness that they are strong enough in the group work rather than individually in completing the task.
- Students need to interact, discuss and debate while working in groups and make sure that this discussion helps them a lot.

3.4 Suggestions for Teachers and Learners

After knowing students responses towards cooperative learning , it would be better to give some suggestions and tips for both learners and teachers.

- Teachers need to create a positive environment where students can interact and communicate with no fear and hesitation.
- Teachers need to vary tasks and activities to increase student's interest to learn more by being in touch with solving those problems eagerly.
- Teachers need to have an effective classroom management by protecting students' feelings and emotions, which is very important for their academic learning process.
- Teachers need to have an emphasis on the four skills that must be presented in the group work.
- Teachers need to create a healthy area that helps students to feel safe and excited to learn more
- Learners need to have a polite interruption when negotiating in the classroom.
- Learners need to develop their English language either in the group work or individually.
- Learners try to be optimist towards their learning and keep going on to improve the language.
- Learners need to avoid making judgement about their classmates as well as hearting each other.

At last , these suggestions aims at encouraging students to improve their performance when they are asked to complete a task or activity in the classroom as well as the teacher ' s role in creating a healthy environment without boredom and repeating things to make students active and interested in their learning process.

3.4 Limitation of the Study

As a starting point of the limitation of this study, each research study faces some problems while gathering data and finding the truth. To begin with, the participants of the study were really limited, it was only about 25 Master Students. This sample was a narrow amount of the information to find out to what extent cooperative learning is helpful for them. Some students did not want to answer because they are busy and studying the whole day. While others did not bring the answers back.

The second limitation was time. We were really bounded by time because we have finished our studies by the end of March. We felt in hurry to start investigating and write our dissertations. Also we did not have time to cover a large sample of students because Master 1 students are few to provide us with their collaboration in the study. This problem of time made us under anxiety and the fear of never finishing the work before the deadline of submitting the dissertation as well as we really lose our ideas in writing and confidence in ourselves.

While doing the interview, some teachers did not want to have the interview because they are busy. While few of them gave us short answers that are not helpful for the investigation.

The third limitation of this study was the lack of documentation and sources in our library and this led us to use e-books and articles from the websites.

3.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

The research methods were used in collecting data i.e. interview and questionnaire were suitable tools to shape an understanding towards students' attitudes in using group work. Furthermore, the findings and the interpretations of data of the study provided different areas for future research about the impact of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes.

First, it is really demanding for more future studies to focus heavily on the use of cooperative learning for mixed ability classes since it is helpful to reach every single student and develop his learning process. This issue may be conducted on a large sample to see to what extent students work in cooperation and to investigate their strength in learning individually or in groups.

It would be more beneficial if studies focus more on the way mixed ability classes are taught by showing a methodical way that each teacher should undertake for having a positive learning outcome.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed at providing some pedagogical recommendations that might be helpful for teachers and learners for having a positive learning outcomes .According to the results of the study and the findings of some previous works, it is so important for teachers to keep implementing cooperative learning after knowing their students' abilities and levels as well as offering some helpful recommendations in the fact that learners face some obstacles and problems while learning.

The present study aimed at investigating the impact of cooperative learning on teaching mixed ability classes. This study helped so much to shape an understanding concerning the effectiveness of cooperative learning when having students from different levels and abilities. In order to test our hypotheses, the questionnaire and the interview are administrated to Master 1 students of the department of English at Abdel Hamid Ibn Badis University, Mostaganem during the academic year of 2017/2018.

This study contains three chapters. The first one concerns about a literature review that shows what scholars and authors said about mixed ability teaching and cooperative learning. First , we have discussed what mixed ability teaching is with some sub-titles as well as what problems teachers face in such classes .And then, we moved to cooperative learning and its definition, types and what if students are uncooperative.

The second chapter of this study was concerned with a detailed description of the research work; it gave the description of the questionnaire and interview, the population and the discussion of the data. It presented also some recommendations for both teachers and students as well as the limitation of the study.

As a conclusion, cooperative learning is a pedagogical strategy that promotes higher academic achievement for teachers and learners. It is a positive connection between students themselves and the teacher in the fact that it facilitates learning and leads students from different abilities and levels to learn from one another for positive learning outcome.

Students Questionnaire

Dear students

This questionnaire is designed to investigate the impact of cooperative learning, as pairing and grouping students to complete certain tasks and activities in class on teaching EFL mixed ability classes. More importantly, these questions aim at clarifying if cooperative learning is helpful to develop a positive academic achievement among students. I would be very grateful if you answer the following questions.

Please tick (*) the correct answer and provide more explanation when needed.

1. Gender :

a) Male

b) Female

Do you think that your teacher take into account your different abilities and levels while teaching you?

a) Yes

b) No

2. Do you prefer working in groups?

a) Yes

b) No

3. Do you think that working in groups goes best to join students from different levels?

a) Yes

b) No

4. Do you prefer to be grouped either heterogeneously (different levels and abilities) or homogeneously (same levels and abilities)?

.....

.....

5. How often your teacher use cooperative learning in class when having activities and tasks to be completed ?

a) always

b) Sometimes

c) Never

Will you be motivated when your teacher use coopeartive learning in class?

a) Motiveted

b) Demotivated

6. As a student ,have you noticed that working in groups may influence your academic learning process either:

a) Positively

b) Negatively

7. Did you feel that you have learnt more in groups rather than individually ?

a) Yes

b) No

8. What kind of problems you face in group work ?

a) Talking and making noise

b) Feeling uncomfortable

c) Loosing your ideas while others share theirs in giving answers

9. Do you think that working in groups helps students learning from each other rather than from the teacher ?

a) Agree

b) Disagree

10. How do you find learning in groups ?

a) Effective

b) Enjoyable

c) Boring

Your collaboration is greatly appreciated.

Interview Questions for The Teachers

Teacher's Teaching Experience:

1. While teaching your students , do you take into consideration their different abilities and levels ?
2. Do you think that teaching mixed ability classes is an easy task or it needs a lot of efforts in implementing certain strategies and methods ?
3. Have you experienced cooperative learning as a pedagogical strategy and how often you use it in class ?
4. Do you group students heterogeneously or homogeneously ?
5. Do you find problems in pairing and grouping students ? What are they ?
6. Have you noticed that implementing cooperative learning leads to an effective learning outcomes ?.

References

Belmekki .A. and Kebiri.A. (2010)."Cooperative Learning in EFL Classes: A Students' Grammar Competence Enhancement Process". (p.29).

<https://bu.umc.edu.dz/theses/anglais/ATH115.pdf>.

Bremner .S. (2008). "Some Thoughts On Teaching a Mixed Ability Class ". (p.1).

<https://www.sciltorg.uk/portals/24:library/slr/issues/18/18-bremner.pdf>.

Felder .M.R and Brent .R. (2005). " Understanding Students Differences". (p.57).

www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lokers/users/f/felder/puplic/Papers/Understanding-Differences.pdf.

Gillies R.M. and Boyle.M. (2010)."Teachers' Reflections on Cooperative Learning:Issues of Implementations". (p.933).

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X09002327>.

Gurgenidze .M. (2012). " Methodology: Teaching Mixed Ability Classes". (p. 56.).

<https://www.etprofessional.com/article/mixed-abiliy.pdf>.

Harmer. J. (1998). "How To Teach English". (p. 127.130).

Harmer .J. (2007)."How To Teach English". New Edition. (p.23).

Harmer .J. (2007)."How To Teach English." New Edition. (p.25).

Harmer .J. (2007). "How To Teach English" .New Edition. (p. 278).

Johnson.D.W. & Johnson .R.T. (2017)."Cooperative Learning". (p.5).

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268235485-cooperative->

learning-in 21 st century.

Korpershoek .H ,et.al .(2014). "Effective Classroom Management Strategies and Classroom Management Programs for Education Practice". (p.11).

<https://www.rug.nl/research/portal/files/15665813/pdf>.

Lowe I. (2009). "The Role of The Teacher and Classroom Management ". (.p.)19.

<https://www.scientificlanguage.com/esp/classroom-management.pdf>.

Retrieved from: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=e4k9CbqIJ7Y>. "Heterogeneous vs Homogeneous grouping". Alexa, et.al (Video Play).

Sonthara.K. and Vanna .S. (2009). "Cooperative Learning : Theory & Practice". (p.2. 4 .6.7).

Sunarti . S. & Jaya .D. & Nootan .N. (2006). "Cooperative Learning : Heterogeneous Vs Homogeneous Grouping". (p.1.7.)

Edisdat.ied.edu.hk/pubarch/b15907314/full-paper/q1604065996.pdf.

Venâncio Faleiros .M.H. (2009) " Mixed Ability Classes: Problems, Strategies and Practical Help ". (p.115.116).

Venâncio Faleiros .M.H. (2009). "Mixed Ability Classes: Problems, Strategies and Practical Help". (p.117 & 118).

Walters .M.A.J and Frei.Sh. (2007). "Managing Classroom Behaviour and Discipline". (p.7).

<https://www.peoriapublicschools.org/cms/lib/IL01001530/centricity/>

Domain/4528/Sample

List of Abbreviations

EFL : English As A Foreign Language.

CL : Cooperative Learning.

TTT :Teacher Talking Time

STT : Student Talking Time