

COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HIGH ACHIEVERS AND LOW ACHIEVERS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

By
Dr. Shafqat Ali Khan*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of cooperative learning on academic achievement of high achievers and low achievers in English language. One hundred and twenty eight students of government comprehensive high school of English subject were selected as sample of the study in which 16 students were high achievers, 32 were average and 16 were low achievers. The effect of cooperative learning method was examined only on high achievers and low achievers and performance of average students was ignored. A pre-test, post-test control group experimental design was used. A factorial design (2x2) was used for treatment and t- test was used to know the difference between the means. The results indicated statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the dependent variable of academic achievement. The experimental group performed better. The result of the study indicated that cooperative learning was more effective method for English as compared to the traditional learning method. Furthermore, cooperative learning appeared to be equally favourable for high achievers as well as low achievers. The author discussed pedagogical implications of cooperative learning in the light of conclusions.

Keywords

Cooperative Learning, Academic Achievement, High Achievers, Low Achievers, Traditional Learning, Linguistic Skills, Second Language (L2), Student Team Achievement Division (STAD).

Introduction

Cooperative learning is one of the recommended teaching learning technique in which students achieve learning goals by helping each other in social setting. Cooperation is compulsory component of cooperative learning. Cooperation means working together to accomplish shared goals. Within

* The writer is working as Lecturer, Special Education, Centre for HIC, H-9/4, Islamabad.

cooperative situations, individuals seek results that are beneficial for all members of a group. Students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. It may be contrasted with competitive learning in which students work against each other to achieve an academic goal and individualistic learning in which students work by them to accomplish training goals unrelated to those of other students. Competitive and individualistic traditional learning methods are popular among Pakistani teachers. To use cooperative learning effectively, teacher must realize that all groups are not cooperative groups. Some teachers use traditional learning group. In this instructional method, a group whose members are assigned to work together but they have no interest in doing so. The structure promotes competition at close quarters, on the other side in cooperative learning group; members of a cooperative group meet all reasonable expectations which are given to them. In cooperative group, students work together on specific tasks or projects in such a way that all students in the group benefit from the interactive experience. The learners are different in their intellectual capacity, their motivation and their linguistic skills. Low achievers and slow learners are particularly very difficult to motivate to learn these skills. There are two strong motivations that students have. One is a need for praise or positive feedback. Students want to be praised. However, they need to have self verification and verification from others. Cooperative learning may provide the positive feedback. On the other side, competitive and individualistic (traditional learning) methods provide competition among the students.

English is used as a second language in Pakistan. Numbers of second language acquisition models have been propounded in the last two decades. English is taught as compulsory subject valued for its educational significance. Yet, there is more emphasis on teaching English as perceived to be more important for communication in the domains of science, trade, and technology. However, instruction of English in the context of the present study remains competitive in nature and does not provide opportunities for active learning particularly for low achievers. According to National Education Policy (1998-2010, p.27), 40 percent students fail in annual examination at elementary level. It is expected that students leave elementary education stage and be able to read and write English correctly, but they are not able to do so. Teachers who are teaching English subject to classes 1-8, do not get any special training in this subject. Teaching methods are not appropriate for learning and do not motivate pupils, particularly academically weak students. There is a need to examine cooperative learning as an instructional approach in a traditional school context such as this one based on the assumptions that it would promote active learning. In this article, the researcher will attempt to relate two completely different view points: traditional (whole class) method, and the cooperative learning method to second language teaching and their effect on low achievers.

Cooperative learning encourages active participation in genuine conversation and collaborative problem-solving activities in class climate of personal and academic support. It also empowers learners and provides them with autonomy and control to organize and regulate their own learning (Clifford, 1999).

Slavin (1995) examined ninety nine studies that lasted for four or more weeks and that used a variety of cooperative learning methods. Sixty four (64%) of the ninety nine experimental control comparison favoured cooperative learning. Only five (5%) significantly favoured the control group. Overall, students in cooperative learning groups scored about one fourth of a standard deviation higher on achievement tests than did students taught conventionally.

Similarly, Ghaith and Yaghi (1998) reported that Students Teams Achievement Division (STAD) method is more effective than individualistic instruction in acquisition of second (L2) rules and mechanics. Several studies have focused on the question of which students gain the most from cooperative learning. One particularly important question relates to whether cooperative learning is beneficial to students at all levels of prior achievement. In this respect Allen (1991) concluded that high achievers could be held back by having to explain material to their low achieving group mates.

Stevens and Slavin (1993) found that high, average, and low achievers, all achieved better than controls at similar achievement levels. However, a separate analysis of the very highest achievers, those in the top 10% and top 5% of their classes at pretest, found particularly large positive effects of cooperative learning on these students.

To assess the impact of cooperative learning method on high achievers, Kenneth and young (1999) specifically investigated the effect of cooperative learning groups on academic achievement of high achieving pre-service teachers and noted that cooperative learning did not enhance their academic performance. Similarly Armstrong (1999) conducted a study comparing the performance of homogenously grouped, gifted students to heterogeneous ability groups that included gifted average and low performing learners. Both groups experienced a comparable increase in achievement after working together, with gifted group performing only slightly higher.

Cooperative learning method is equally better than traditional learning method. According to Iqbal (2004) cooperative learning is more effective as a teaching learning technique for mathematics as compared to traditional learning method. Students in cooperative groups outscored the students working in

