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## The Effect of Co-operative Learning Techniques in Enhancing the Reading Comprehension

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*Cooperative Learning has been proven to be effective for all types of students, including academically gifted, mainstream students and English language learners (ELLs) because it promotes learning and fosters respect and friendships among diverse groups of students. In fact, the more diversity in a team, the higher the benefits for each student. Peers learn to depend on each other in a positive way for a variety of learning tasks. This article speaks about the effectiveness of co-operative learning strategies in ELT classroom.*

Keywords: Indigenous Agriculture, Indigenous Knowledge and Soil Conservation.

### Introduction

Teaching is the process that facilitates students' learning. Richards (1995:1) defines teaching as it is the application of appropriate theory, the development of careful instructional designs and strategies and the study of what actually happens in the classroom. The purpose of teaching language is to provide students with different standards of proficiency and language command in the language skills. One of the possible ways and strategies for meaningful language teaching is student-centered teaching (SCT). In student centered approach, there is the aspect of collaborating, supporting, and co-operating with one another.

Rahvard (2010:2) defines cooperative learning as successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates, to create an atmosphere of achievement. Thus, we find cooperative language learning used in teaching like reading skills. One of the reading skills is reading comprehension skill.

### Statement of the Problem

Reading is one of the most important skills for educational and professional success (Alderson, 1984). According to Alderson, it is the most important activity in any language class. It is used

not only as a source of information but also as a means of extending one's knowledge of the language. However, Andargachew (2004) states that the reading ability of many students in Ethiopia is low at different levels.

The low reading comprehension of the students resulted in from inappropriate teaching techniques which failed to help the learners understand the content of the reading materials (Chandavimol, 1998). According to Chandavimol, in general practice of teaching the teacher did not provide any activities that could motivate students to achieve better comprehension. Teachers do not arrange texts of students' interest and topics related to their everyday life. However, cooperative learning is assumed to improve students' reading comprehension better than the conventional type of teaching (Seid, 2002; Yalaw, 2011).

In Hare to preparatory school which is located in Oromia Region, Ethiopia, the researcher observed that class time was dominated by individual learning and teacher centered method of teaching rather than grouping students for activities. The reading comprehension skill of these students is very low as it is observed from the results of their classroom tests. Therefore, the researchers thought that students score can be improved if students do the reading activities in group before and after individual reading. So, the researchers want to apply the cooperative learning technique in reading comprehension class to see the change on students reading. Hence, the researchers attempted to investigate the effect of cooperative learning technique in increasing the students' reading comprehension. In order to frame the research, the following research questions were formulated:

Is there a significant difference between the mean scores of controlled group pre- test and posttest of reading text?

### Approaches to Research

The researchers used the quantitative method because the study needs isolating the variables, formulating hypothesis and studying the relation between the variables and the influence of one variable on the other variable. Thus, pre-test and post-test were administered to collect data. The target population of this study were grade 12 students of Hareto Preparatory School which is located in HoroGuduru, Wellega zone, Jimma Geneti District, Ethiopia. The total population of the study is 250 in number in 6 (six) sections in that academic year. Among these students 139 were male and 111 were female students. Two sections including 46 students each were selected randomly from the six sections using lottery method. Next, the two sections, one as experimental group and the other as control group were assigned randomly. Then, the researchers administered a pretest on reading comprehension for both groups. The result of the pretest showed that they were almost equal in their reading and understanding the text.

### Procedure of data collection

Before administering the post test, carefully selected reading materials were given for the experimental group and were taught using cooperative approach. It was done for 12 hours in 12

consecutive days. Each material comprised of pre-reading questions whereby students discussed the given questions before they read the reading passages.

The pre-reading questions were followed by the while and post reading activities that comprised of reading for gist and specific information whereby students got the opportunity to practice skimming and scanning skills and inferring and transforming information. Each reading activity was followed by a discussion. Students were made to do tasks after they read the passage silently and followed by discussion in groups. The control group was taught using the conventional approach in which they were provided with selected reading materials and do activities individually, unlike that of experimental group. Later, they give answers to the tasks individually. There were no tasks to be done cooperatively.

## Analysis

### The Result of the Pre-test of the Control and Experimental Group

Table - 1

Mean Variance and Standard Deviation for Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	Number	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation
Experimental	46	11.71	16	4.00
Control	46	11.8	11.28	3.36

As can be seen from Table 1 above, the mean score of the Experimental and the control group was found to be similar 11.71 and 11.8 respectively. However, we cannot say that there was significant difference between the reading comprehension performances of the two groups by simply looking at their mean scores. In order to know whether this difference is significant or not, an independent samples t-test is sought. Table 2 below displays the results.

Table – 2

T-test of experimental and control group pretest

Groups	Number	Mean	SD	dF	t- table	t- cal	result
Experimental	46	11.71	4.00	90	1.99	0.15	Non-significant
Control	46	11.8	3.36				

As shown in Table-2 above, the t-calculated of the pretest was found less than the value of t-table with 90 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level ( $T_{\text{calculated}} = 0.15$ ,  $T_{\text{table}} = 1.99$ ,  $df = 90$ ). If the value of t-calculated is greater or equal to the value of t-table with a given degree of freedom (df) and alpha level, it is said that there is significant difference between the achievements of the groups being compared. Moreover, if the t-calculated is less than the value of t-table, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the performances of the groups. It means the difference is non-significant.

On the basis of this assumption, it is possible to conclude that there was no significant difference between the reading comprehension performance level of the experimental group and the control group. Bagheri, Dabaghmesh and Zamanian(2013) conducted on the area and it supports the idea of homogeneity between the experimental and the control group before pretest. The cause for the equivalence of the two groups is that no experiment using teaching strategy is employed before the tests. It is, therefore, with this consideration that the rest of the study was carried out.

Table – 3

The Result of Pretest and Posttest of Experimental Group

Parallel tests	number	mean	variance	Standard deviation
Pretest	46	11.71	16	4.00
Posttest	46	17.76	11.49	3.39

As shown in table-3 above, students of the experimental group were given a pretest and posttest in order to see whether there is a significant difference between the results of the two tests or not. The mean score of the Experimental group pretest and posttest was found to be 11.71 and 17.76 respectively

Accordingly, the mean scores of the two tests show that there is a difference between the results of two tests however; it cannot be said that there was significant difference between the reading comprehension performances of the two tests by simply looking at their mean scores. In order to know whether this difference is significant or not, a paired samples t-test is sought. Table-4 below displays the results.

Table – 4

T-test Analysis of pretest and posttest of experimental group

Parallel tests	No	Mean	SD	DF	t-table	t-cal	result
Pretest	46	11.71	4.00	45	2.021	19.06	significant
Posttest	46	17.76	3.39				

Hypothesis 1: – There is a significant difference between the mean scores of experimental group pretest and posttest.

Table-4 shows that t-calculated is 19.06, t-table = 2.021, at 45 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. This means the t-calculated of the two tests were found greater than the value of t-table with 45 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha levels. Comparison was made between individual learning and cooperative learning preferences. The results show that there is a significant difference between the learning preferences. The learning preference of the students inclined to the cooperative learning technique and this is the very reason for the significant difference observed. When t-calculated is greater than t-table, hence the null hypothesis is rejected at = 0.05 level of significance. So, there is significant difference in the academic performance of students who were taught by usual method and those who were taught with cooperative learning technique.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the reading comprehension performance level of the experimental group before and after treatment in favor of the experimental group posttest. In line with this, the finding of the research by Akbamejad and Marzban (2012), Bagheri, et al. (2013), Kolawole (2007) support the finding of the present research. In contrast, the finding of the research by Sinder and Sullivan (1995) opposes the finding of the present research and the present researcher attempted to fill this gap and arrived at conclusion that cooperative learning is better than individual learning in improving students' reading comprehension.

Table – 5

The Result of Pretest and Posttest of Control Group

Parallel tests	Number	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation
Pretest	46	11.8	11.28	3.36
Posttest	46	13.26	16	4.00

As shown in table-5 above, students of the control group were given a pretest and posttest in order to see whether there is a significant difference between the results of the two tests or not. The mean scores of the control group pretest and posttest were found to be different 11.8 and 13.26 respectively. The mean scores of the two tests showed that there is a difference between the results of two tests. However, one cannot say that there was significant difference between the reading comprehension performances of the two tests by simply looking at their mean scores. In order to know whether this difference is significant or not, a paired sample t-test is sought. Table-6 below displays the results.

Table – 6

## T-test Analysis of pretest and posttest of control group

Parallel tests	No	Mean	SD	dF	t-table	t-cal	result
Pretest	46	11.8	3.36	45	2.021	2.25	Significant
Posttest	46	13.26	4.00				

Table-6 shows that  $t$ -calculated = 2.25,  $t$ -table = 2.021,  $df = 45$ . As far as it is observed,  $t$ -calculated of the two tests were greater than the value of  $t$ -table with 45 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha levels. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected at = 0.05 level of significance. This means there is significant difference between the results of control group pretest and posttest in their academic performance of reading comprehension even if they haven't got any special treatment.

Accordingly, it is concluded that there was a significant difference between the reading comprehension performance level of the control group pretest and posttest result. Corresponding to this, Richard and Rodgers (2001:192) state that traditional models of classroom learning is teacher centered, and it also favors the outstanding students and it discourages learner centered approach and the idea of working together. The significance difference between the pretest and posttest score of the control group is due to the contribution of the outstanding students score. In teacher centered teaching small number of students can succeed.

## Findings of the Study

There was no significant difference between the experimental group and control group students' reading comprehension pretest before the implementation of cooperative learning. Accordingly, the result of the pre-test showed that the two groups were found at a similar reading comprehension performance level. This finding implies that the students are at similar level of reading comprehension performance before the treatment given i.e. their proficiency level seems to be similar.

However, there was a significant difference between the mean score of experimental group pretest and posttest. After the implementation of the five elements of cooperative learning method, the experimental group demonstrated a better performance in the reading comprehension posttest than in the pre-test. Moreover, it is observed that cooperative approach to reading enhances students' social skills performance, interaction, cooperation and taking responsibility for their learning. Therefore, it would be possible to conclude, in the context of the study grade level (grade 12) and in the study school, that cooperative learning facilitates learning reading skills better than individual, silent reading approach.

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