

The Impact of Cooperative Learning on Improving Omani Intermediate EFL Learners' Grammar Skills

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Abstract:

This study aimed to investigate the impact of cooperative learning on the grammatical competence of intermediate EFL learners in Oman. This research was designed as a quasi-experimental study. The participants in the research were totally 70 female students from the intermediate stage (cycle 2) in Dhofar governorate. They were enrolled in 23rd of July school, a public-school subordinate to the ministry of education in Salalah, Oman. The study included one control group and one experimental group. During the second term English classes, the experimental group was taught grammar through cooperative learning activities. In contrast, a control group was taught grammar through the ordinary method. Both groups experienced a 15-item grammar pre-post test before and after 8 weeks of treatment. A t-test was used to analyse the data obtained. The results showed that cooperative learning strategies can improve EFL grammar skills. It's recommended that EFL teachers should use the cooperative learning strategies to improve learning the grammar skills.

Index Terms— cooperative learning, grammar skills , EFL learners.

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Introduction

Teaching a foreign language is a dynamic process that requires both active teacher-student and student-student engagement. It has been emphasized in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching techniques that shift away from the study of language perceived as solely a system and shift towards the study of language as communication. These methodologies emphasize language as more than a system of rules but as a dynamic resource for the development of meaning. Because of this, there is a genuine need for a great possibility for classroom interaction. English is the only recognized official foreign language in the Sultanate of Oman (Al-Issa, 2005). Previous investigations on the student's proficiency in English in Oman reported that the examination-oriented schooling system, assessment tools, and traditional teaching methods that predominated the educational framework in Oman were reported to be among the factors that limit students' learning in previous investigations on the language proficiency of students (Al-Ani, 2017). Traditional educational practices, such as memorizing notes (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018) and restricting learning resources to textbooks solely, fall short of addressing the needs of higher education and the demands of the workplace.

Grammar plays a significant part in language learning, just like other linguistic components do. Many EFL students perceive grammar instruction as acquiring academic knowledge of the language, according to Ellis (2006), which gives them a sense of security and self-assurance when speaking and writing in the target language. Like thus, some EFL teachers believe that mastering grammar gives students a solid foundation on which to build their knowledge and empowers them to utilize the language effectively. When learning grammar, EFL students actively use certain tactics to empower themselves. Learners acquire grammatical knowledge using these methods, which are referred to as grammar learning strategies, in order to more quickly, conveniently, and pleasantly pick up a new language. These strategies also make it more likely that new grammar

is applied in new situations (Oxford,1990, and Aladini et al., 2022). According to (Laal & Laal, 2012), students in a collaborative learning (CL) environment collaborate in small groups to complete tasks by supporting one another, having discussions, taking ownership of their own learning, and trading and looking for ideas. When compared to a teacher-centered approach, where the teacher speaks the majority of the time, collaborative learning strategies are very different. Students in CL put out some effort, exercise critical thought, collaborate to grasp a problem, offer potential solutions, and then choose the best option to jointly address the issue. Collaboration is more effective when group members are equally invested in the group's goal and rely on one another's contributions (Brand, 2018).

This study investigates how cooperative learning strategies can affect the teaching of grammar. It aims to give readers a greater understanding of how the following study has significantly advanced the problem, the hypotheses, and the design of the current study. Learners employ a variety of strategies while practicing cooperative learning, either directly or indirectly. Cooperative learning requires the use of numerous strategies, including explaining, debating, negotiating meaning, repeating essential phrases several times, and applying words in actual context (Hill & Flynn, 2006).

Statement of the Problem:

According to the previous studies about the lack of grammar skills among the Omani learners as (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018) who confirmed that EFL Omani learners have several problems in learning grammar skills. Thus, the researchers decided to choose that skill to be improved. This is because grammar is considered as a subskill that is used in the four main skills on language, listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The strategy of cooperative learning was applied. However, most of the studies were outside of Oman. The researchers, therefore, reviewed the studies of near countries like KSA, UAE and Iran. As these countries share several common aspects with Oman as culture, language, attitude, norms, and traditions.

The study Questions:

- Does cooperative learning contribute to the improving the grammar skills among seventh grade students?

Hypotheses:

1. There are statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the mean score of the post-test results between the experimental and the control group in the extent to which the cooperative learning contributes to learning grammar among learners of English as a foreign language in the Intermediate stage in Dhofar Governorate.

Aims of the study:

The paper investigates the impact of the cooperative learning on improving students' grammar skills among seventh grade students in the Sultanate of Oman.

The significance of the study:

As far as the researchers are aware, no prior research on cooperative learning and grammar learning skills in Oman has been conducted. As a result, this methodology will be a new addition to those that are used to teach English skills. Additionally, this approach mixes language study and group activities, which motivates students to learn English and allows them to scaffold their own learning.

Delimitation of the study:

Firstly, time was very limited. Although the treatment was eight weeks, we only had one day a week to visit the school which was on Tuesday. In addition, the amount of time available for each period was shorter than usual due to Ramadan. Where it was 35 minutes instead of 45 minutes. This made the number of activities that were applied less than expected. Secondly, the number of students in one class is also very large. Their number reached thirty-two or forty in some classes. Of course, this slows down the speed of completing some activities. Third, the nature of grammar lessons requires that they be taught in a specific context. Grammar cannot be taught in isolation. Grammar must be taught deductively. Starting with an example from the student's real life and ending with the rule. This requires the teacher to have high skills, as well as being well prepared.

Definition of the study Terms:

- **Cooperative learning:** lessons are organized around small teams that collaborate in a way that each team member's success depends on the group's performance.
- **Grammar:** the study of or application of the rules governing how words take on different forms and combine to produce sentences.
- **Cycle two:** fifth to ninth classes stage, (ages from 10-15) in Sultanate of Oman.
- **7th Graders:** students who are nearly 13 years old are in grade 7.

Concept of cooperative learning

Cooperative learning (CL) is an instructional approach that emphasizes student collaboration, interaction, and shared responsibility in the learning process. It is defined as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998, p. 5). According to Woolfolk (200), "cooperative learning is an "arrangement in which students work in mixed ability groups and are rewarded on the basis of the success of the group." Moreover, cooperative learning was defined as a method of instruction in which "a small group of learners work together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal" (Artz & Newman, 1990, p. 448).

According to Brown (2001), using CL makes students feel safe from criticism, and this feeling has a significant impact on CL's effectiveness. This sense of security results from spreading out the embarrassment that one would experience after correcting his mistakes among the group members. In this way, all students, including the shy ones, would become active participants in the learning process. Meanwhile, Bilen and Tavit (2015) state that "a child first learns new information through interaction with others on a social level" (p. 152).

Cooperative learning is associated with superior academic outcomes when compared to individual learning, according to earlier study. Students also have superior academic performance when

compared to lecture-directed learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). Cooperative learning improves critical thinking, knowledge acquisition, interpersonal and communication skills, and most crucially, self-confidence (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). By putting students into groups and assigning them organized cooperative tasks where they collaborate on homework assignments, lab experiments, or design projects, these abilities and traits are cultivated.

The term "cooperative learning" refers to a teaching method in which students are put into varied, small groups and taught to work together to accomplish a common objective. Students support one another, take responsibility for one another's education, apply social skills relevant to groups, and evaluate the performance of the group. Positive interdependence, equal opportunities, and individual accountability are the fundamental components. According to Kagan (2001) We have a natural tendency as beings to cooperate in order to accomplish our objectives in every aspect of life. Cooperative learning groups are a logical teaching approach to use in schools in light of this.

Concept of grammar skills:

One of English's approaches that has gained significant attention in the field of education due to its potential to enhance various aspects of student learning, is grammar skills. Grammar can be defined according to Richards & Schmidt (2010) as the set of rules used to construct words and sentences is referred to as grammar. Moreover, According to A language's grammar is a set of principles and rules for how words are combined to generate sentences. It includes both a language's morphology (the way words take on multiple forms) and syntax (how they are ordered in a phrase). Grammar includes choosing the right language and using it in different manners to convey meaning in addition to establishing how sentences should be linked together.

Grammar was defined by Richards and Schmidt (2010) and (Aladini et al. (2022), as the description of a language's structure and the process by which linguistic elements like words and phrases are

formed into phrases and sentences by considering their order in a language (2006). Grammar, as an essential component of language proficiency, plays a crucial role in effective communication. Therefore, investigating the impact of cooperative learning on students' grammar skills is of great importance. In grammar learning, there are a lot of cooperative learning techniques available. Kagan and Kagan (2009) provide almost one hundred structures.

According to Apple (1993), uncommunicative grammar instruction limits students' exposure to the material and prevents them from exercising critical thought. As a result, learners' capacity to acquire and develop critical higher-order thinking skills may be significantly impacted by their passive participation in explicit language learning (Al-Issa, 2010).

What is the framework of the study?

For measuring the impact of cooperative learning on improving Omani intermediate EFL learners' grammar learning skills, searchers did a manipulation of wight weeks on a population of 70 students. A variety of activities were used to teach each of the five rules that were covered in the study. The activities were distributed as follows:

The rule	Activity 1	Activity 2
Comparative and superlative adjectives	Complete sentences with the correct forms of adjectives	Fill in the blanks
Past simple	Verb storing activity	Speaking cards
Gerunds	Choose the correct option from the drop-down list	Gerunds and infinitives puzzle
Modal verbs	Listen and complete the conversation with modals	Use the right modal verb according to the contexts
Future tense	Write "will" "will not" using contractions, then identify the code	iPad MCQ online quiz

During each activity a group leader was selected. Each group consisted of about five to six students. During the class, points are calculated for each group, and then the winning group is determined at the end of the class. The calculation of points gives an atmosphere of competition between groups. As well as motivating students to work together as a group and help their peers in completing tasks.

What are the grammar topics that grade seven shall study?

The experts as DU professors, schoolteachers, and training supervisors advised researchers to follow the grammar topics that are covered on the Omani curriculum for grade seven. Therefore, as researchers we revised the curriculum before applying the manipulation and designed the questions of the test according to the significance of each rule on it. It was noticeable that past simple and future tense rules were the most two rules emphasise on the curriculum that is why they weighted 53.2% of the questions. Eight out of fifteen of the MCQ questions were related to those two rules. Four questions for each of them with the weight of 26.6%. The third important rule of the curriculum was Comparative and superlative adjectives. Its weight was 20% covering three of the test questions. The two less important rules were gerunds and modal verbs. For each rule there were just two questions mentioned. Each two of them weights 13.3% of the test questions.

Previous studies

Researchers didn't find many related studies that talked to impact of cooperative learning on the grammatical competence of intermediate EFL learners from Oman. The researchers have just found some published articles about the impact of CL in other surrounded countries e.g., Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. For example, Zarifi & Taghavi (2016) did a similar study on 50 intermediate English language learners studying English in EFL department at Shokuh-e-Danesh Institute, Dehdasht, Iran. The study included one control and one experimental group. The experimental group was exposed to cooperative learning activities. The result of this study revealed that cooperative learning had positive effects on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammatical competence. Researchers have benefited from this study in designing the activities and strategies that help in improving grammar skills.

Similarly, Yavuz & Arslan (2018) investigates the effectiveness of using cooperative learning on language skills in an English course. 66 students in the 10th grade at an Anatolian high school in the

Karadeniz Eregli neighborhood of Zonguldak participated in the study for 5 weeks in the fall 2015-2016 school year. One of the quasi-experimental designs used in this study was "nonequivalent control groups pre-test post-test." An accomplishment test that assessed pupils' vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and listening abilities was used to collect the data. Results showed that when compared to the conventional method, cooperative learning had a greater impact on vocabulary, grammar, listening, and reading skills.

In the same concern, Alghamdi & Gillies (2013) did a 12-week study was carried out in four secondary schools in Saudi Arabia to determine the impact of cooperative learning (CL) on the academic performance of EFL learners. 139 male students in the tenth grade, between the ages of 14 and 15, from four boys' secondary schools in Al-Baha city participated in this study. The findings revealed that, on the post-test, the mean scores of the students who were taught English in a cooperative learning setting (the experimental group) and those who were taught English using the conventional small-group method (the control group) differed statistically significantly. This distinction was in the experimental group's favour.

Method:

The study followed the quasi-experimental. A pre-post test design was used. The experiment lasted for eight weeks.

Sampling:

The sample of the study consists of 70 students assigned to one experimental group and one control group. Out of a total of 110 intermediate English language learners in grade 7 studying at 23 of July school in Salalah, Oman, the EFL participants in this study were chosen. Their ages range from 12 to 13 years old. They study English as a compulsory course to pass the seventh-grade stage and complete the rest of the requirements for obtaining the general certificate from the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

For most participants, English is considered a foreign language. In terms of nationalities, there were 5 participants from Egypt, two from the Yemen, and one from the Sudan, while the remaining 62 were Omani.

Instrumentation:

Pre and post Tests:

The researchers used a test consisting of 15 items in English grammar. The questions were distributed according to the important of grammar topics contained in the Omani curriculum for the seventh grade of the English language subject.

SPSS software was used to analyze the collected data of the study before and after the treatment. For the purpose of investigating whether there are significant differences among students of different proficiency levels in grammar due to cooperative learning or not.

Validity and reliability of the test

The researchers showed the test to a jury of professors at universities to referee its items and give feedback. The test was modified accordingly. Their names are mentioned on appendix (3). They edited the questions of the pre-post-test according to their experience. Both validity and reliability of the test were applied and the test was confirmed to be valid and reliable.

Data analysis

A grammatical proficiency test was handed out to the participants in the two groups to measure their knowledge of grammar comprehending. As was already indicated, this test was created using the seventh-grade Omani curriculum. This exam had two objectives: first, it was used to gauge the degree of participant homogeneity, and second, it was used to gauge how well-versed the subjects were in the required grammatical areas. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 present the results of this test.

Table 1.1 Descriptive Statistics of The Control and Experimental Groups in Pretest

Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre_test experimental	35	7.8000	3.70850	.62685
Control	35	7.7714	4.12372	.69704

The statistics presented in table 1.1 show that there is an average difference of 0.03 between the control and experimental groups. An

independent samples t test was conducted, the results of which are shown in table 4.2, to ensure the homogeneity of the participants regarding their grammatical knowledge.

Because both groups' grammatical knowledge at the beginning of the study was very homogeneous, it can be concluded from the independent samples t-test results that the level of significance is higher than .05 ($.073 > .05$).

Table 1.2 Independent Samples Test of
The Control and Experimental Groups in Pre-Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pre_test	Equal variances assumed	1.955	.167	.030	68	.976	.02857	.93744	-1.84207	1.89921
	Equal variances not assumed			.030	67.248	.976	.02857	.93744	-1.84245	1.89959

The mean difference between participants in the control and experimental groups following the treatment, which is 2.74, can be observed in Table 1.3. An independent sample test was conducted between the two groups to confirm the claim of a significant difference.

Table 1.3 Descriptive Statistics of
The Control and Experimental Groups in Post-Test

	Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post_test	experimental	35	11.8857	2.16620	.36616
	Control	35	9.1429	3.06923	.51879

Table 1.4 shows that at the .05 level of significance ($.011 < .05$), there was a significant difference between the participants in the post-test. The results of the post-test scores' statistical analysis demonstrated that the experimental group outperformed the control group. In other words, cooperative learning had a considerable impact on the Omani intermediate EFL learners' ability to master grammar.

Table 1.4 Descriptive Statistics of The Control and Experimental Groups in Post-Test Group Statistics

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post_test	Equal variances assumed	3.706	.058	4.320	68	.000	2.74286	.63499	1.47575	4.00997
	Equal variances not assumed			4.320	61.139	.000	2.74286	.63499	1.47317	4.01255

Discussion:

The data gathered for the investigation between the cooperative learning and their grammar competence of Omani seventh grade students revealed that there was association between the two variables. The study's conclusions suggested that cooperative learning is superior to traditional techniques for assisting students in acquiring grammatical knowledge. At the .05 level of significance (.011.05), Table 1.4 demonstrated a significant difference between the post-test grammar knowledge of participants in the experimental and control groups. To put it another way, employing cooperative tactics could greatly enhance the grammatical knowledge of Omani EFL learners.

The findings of this study offer support to a few earlier investigations, one of which is the (2013) study by Alghamdi and Gillies. Additionally, they discovered that the cooperative learning strategy allowed the EFL students to perform either on par with or much better than the entire class students. Like this, the results supported those of Akuka, Wambugu, and Anditi's (2013) study, which found that using a computer-based cooperative learning method gave students a better chance to advance their understanding of English grammar. The current study also supports Bibi (2002), who claimed that group work activities greatly increased academic performance and the acquisition of the four language skills among English language learners in the primary as well as secondary stages. When cooperative learning increases student talking time and places an emphasis on meaningful communication, most researchers (Namaziandost,

Homayouni, and Rahmani, 2020; Renou, 2001; Rakab, 2016) concur that it is advantageous for developing fluency.

This study offered empirical support for the claim that CL is a successful method for teaching grammar. To remedy the inadequate English grammar understanding of EFL learners, EGFL teachers should be encouraged to use CL approaches. The fact that students perform the roles of investigators and discoverers in CL scenarios may be responsible for the effectiveness of the CL strategy in this study and others like it. Through questioning, making predictions, evaluating, debating, determining their strengths and weaknesses, connecting with one another, and attempting to learn, they actively participate in events.

5.2 Conclusion:

Teachers tend to play a more supportive role in CL than they do in traditional technique, assisting the students in collaborating to solve their learning issues. There are, however, a small number of studies that contradict the overwhelming body of research supporting the usefulness of CL approaches in enhancing knowledge of the many areas of language learning. For instance, Parveen (2003) examined the impact of cooperative learning on the Social Studies accomplishment of 8th grade students and concluded that it was not a more effective instructional strategy than the conventional approach. Therefore, caution should be used as the inclusion of CL in language classes necessitates careful planning and execution of the CL's methodologies.

5.3 Recommendations:

- Conducting courses to teach teachers how to apply cooperative learning in Omani schools.
- Preparing a guide dedicated to guiding teachers about the most important techniques related to cooperative learning that can be followed in order to teach Omani students in the second cycle.
- Pay attention to the importance of social skills in developing the level of students in learning the English language.
- Cooperative learning enhances the use of other strategies such as peer learning and play learning.

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