

Learner Academic Achievement in English; Case of Cooperative Learning Approach and Conventional Teaching Methods

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Abstract: Language learning is the attainment of proficiency in a target language (TL) through formal instruction. Effective teaching strategies require students and not the teacher to do the conceptualizing, organizing, and theorizing about the subject matter. There are many teaching and learning methods used in teaching and learning English. The objective of this study was to find out any differences in scores on English test among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching in mixed day sub-county public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. The study was founded on cognitive-developmental, social-cognitive, behavioural-learning and social interdependence theories which support the use of cooperative learning. The study applied an experimental research design. It targeted all 1665 form two students and 54 English language teachers from 14 public mixed day sub-county secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County where the respondents were the form two students and English language teachers. Sample size was 273 students and 8 English subject teachers. In sampling for the schools, students and teachers, simple random sampling technique was applied. Data was collected using learners' questionnaires which were administered to both the experimental groups and the control groups, interview schedules which were administered to teachers of English in the sampled schools and Learners' English Language Achievement Tests which were administered as pre-tests before the treatment to one experimental group (E₁) and one control group (C₁) and a post-test was administered after one week of treatment to the four groups (E₁, C₁, E₂ and C₂) to measure students' achievement. A pilot study was conducted in Machakos sub-county to test validity and reliability of the research instruments. These instruments were also validated by experts from the university. Reliability of the achievement tests was established through a split-half method and a correlation coefficient of $\alpha=0.86$ was obtained. Test re-test method was used to establish reliability of the questionnaire and the interview schedule. A correlation coefficient of $\alpha=0.807$ for the questionnaire and $\alpha=0.806$ for interviews was obtained and the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the tools was higher than the minimum acceptable alpha value of 0.70 or above hence, the research tools were considered reliable. Data was analyzed using both descriptive analyses (percentages, mean scores and standard deviation) and inferential analyses (a t-test and ANOVA) and presented in tabular form while the Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis majorly thematic analysis. The study revealed that the mean gain (M = 15.34) of the Experimental group was significantly different from that of the control group (M = 11.67). Experimental groups (E₁ and E₃) had higher mean scores than the control groups (C₂ and C₄). This implies that the treatment (CL) enhanced students' achievement on English test among students in mixed day sub-county public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. Experimental groups were taught through cooperative learning (CL), which may imply that the method resulted into higher achievement than the conventional teaching methods. The differences between the mean scores were statistically significant at the 0.05 level implying that the treatment given to the experimental group had some effects on students' test scores and that the treatment (CL) enhanced students' achievement in English. The hypothesis stating that there is no statistically significant difference in scores on English test among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County was rejected. Teachers of English in secondary schools need to embrace student-centered teaching approaches during instruction since they are associated with efficiency in the acquisition of linguistic skills.

Keywords: Achievement in English language: Students' ability to listen, speak, read, write and understand English. In this study, it refers to the behavioural competencies displayed by learners after the learning process.

Conventional teaching: It's a traditional mode of instruction in which the teacher uses various methods of teaching as learners listen and carry out activity as directed by the teacher. In this study it's the method used in the control groups.

Cooperative Learning: An instructional strategy in which small groups of students work together on a common English language task. In this study it's the method used in the experimental groups

Effectiveness: is the capability of producing a desired result or the ability to produce desired output.

Individual accountability: Each member in the cooperative learning group must contribute in order to improve the performance in English language of both the member and the group.

Learning outcomes: It is the achievements of the learning objectives. In this study, it refers to the behavioural competencies displayed by learners after the learning process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Cooperative learning (CL) is a teaching strategy where students of mixed levels of ability are arranged into groups and rewarded according to the group's success, rather than the success of an individual member. In some cases, each group member is individually accountable for part of the task; in other cases, group members work together without formal role assignments (Illies et al., 2015). Conventional approach refers to the traditional way of teaching where in most of the time lecture method is used. The way learners interact and perceive one another has a lot of impact on their achievement.

A study to investigate the effects of CL on Chinese English foreign learners' competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary revealed clear improvement when using CL in the teaching of listening, speaking and reading but no differences were found between the CL and the conventional teaching in the areas of writing and vocabulary (Ning & Hornby, 2010). Another study conducted among the Taiwanese college students in terms of English oral performance and motivation when teaching is done using CL showed an improvement of the learners' oral skills and motivation (Yough, 2018). In addition, a study amongst Yemeni university students revealed that there was a remarkable development in the students' speaking and motivational strategies after the introduction of CL (Ahmed & Omer, 2014). These and other studies not mentioned herein indicate that there is a significant effect of CL on learners' language skills.

English as a second language is taught and used as an official language of communication in Kenya as well as a medium of instruction in schools and other learning institutions. It is also a language used for international communication hence those who master and speak it well; reap many academic, social and professional benefits (Owiti et al., 2014). Teachers need to apply methods and strategies for learner centered instruction and a promising method to traditional speaking instruction is the Cooperative Learning Approach (Hall, Haley, & Ferro, 2011). This method serves as the alternative way of teaching for promoting speaking and social interaction among the students (Ning, 2011). Cooperative learning as per the available research suggestions is of great influence on the development of learners' speaking skills (Al-Sohbani, 2013).

In Kenya, a study on the use of CL on poetry teaching indicated that there was a great improvement on poetry learning and motivational strategies among learners (Chemwei & Somba, 2014). Another research conducted on the effects of CL on students' achievement and motivational strategies towards oral literature genres revealed that CL was an effective method which English and literature teachers needed to be encouraged to use in the instruction of English and literature (Sono, 2018). A research on the effectiveness of computer-based CL on students' English grammar indicated that computer-based CL method helped learners improve their achievement in English grammar (Orato, 2013). However, among the boys and girls who were exposed to cooperative learning strategy, there was no significant difference in their performance in English. In addition, those in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group who were instructed using the conventional teaching approach. The study therefore was on effectiveness of cooperative learning on achievement in English language in Kathiani sub-county, Kenya.

The Kenya national examinations council (KNEC) report for the year 2018 KCSE examination outlined the performance of candidates in the three papers offered in the English subject. Data for the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 was also provided for comparison. Candidates' overall performance in English subject for the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 were

reported to be poor. Performance of candidates in the year 2018 is comparable to that of 2017. The English subject mean dropped minimally by 0.77 points from 73.55 with a standard deviation of 22.57 to 72.78 with a standard deviation of 22.27 (KNEC, 2019). The overall performance in the subject for the five years falls short of the ideal mean of 100 (50%) calling for innovation in curriculum implementation (KNEC, 2019). Poor mean scores in English language were also reported in Kathiani sub-county for the last four years. The mean scores were: 2015 (4.87) D plus, 2016 (4.59) D plus, 2017 (4.05) D plus and 2018 (4.58) D plus (Kathiani sub-county examination reports, 2019).

Teachers of English language in most of the Kenyan schools use conventional teaching, the teacher is seen as the authority of the classroom and learners have a limited chance to practice their English language skills (Sure & Ogechi, 2019). Despite the academic, social and professional benefits of the English language, its performance in K.C.S.E continues to be poor over the years. There is need therefore to improve the current performance of English language among Kenyan secondary school learners (KNEC, 2019). This study was therefore on effectiveness of cooperative learning on achievement in English language in Kathiani sub-county, Kenya.

Objective of the Study

To find out any differences in scores on English test among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County.

Hypothesis of the Study

H0: There is no statistically significant difference in scores on English test among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on four major theories supporting the use of cooperative learning: cognitive-developmental, social-cognitive, behavioural-learning and social interdependence theories.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Cooperative learning is a promising method in relation to the traditional language teaching method (Renau, 2016). It serves as alternative way of teaching for promoting language skills and social interaction among learners (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Research done by scholars from various parts of the world indicate that CL is of great effect on developing learners' language skills (Katawazai & Saidalvi, 2020). The effects of CL on learners' language skills have been repeatedly demonstrated and confirmed by studies conducted in L1 and L2 learning (Devi et al., 2016; Haq et al., 2015; Mohammad & Mohammad, 2018; Rodphotong, 2018). Many of these studies indicate that the use of CLA in the teaching of language skills can lead to increased speaking skills (Hikmat, 2019; Kalyani & Murugan, 2021; Mokhtar, 2016). It has also been noted that most studies on the effects of CL have consistently shown that CLA improves learners' English-speaking skills (Makini et al., 2020) and English reading skills (Alemayehu, 2014; Yavuz & Arslan, 2018). English competence in skills and vocabulary in CL classes are superior to whole class instruction particularly in speaking, listening and reading (Liang, 2016). Ning and Hornby (2010) conducted a study to investigate the effects of CL on Chinese EFL learners' competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary. The findings revealed clear improvement in CLA in the teaching of listening, speaking and reading but no differences were found between the two approaches in the areas of writing and vocabulary.

Cognitive psychology, in contrast to motivational and social views, focuses on how humans take in, store and process information to learn. Cognitivists try to look inside the mind to explore how their thinking and learning take place. According to Slavin (2017) cognitive perspective holds that interaction among students will in themselves increase student's achievement for reasons which have to do with mental processing of information rather than with motivations.

Cooperative methods developed by cognitive theorists involve neither the group goals that are the cornerstone of the motivation list methods nor the emphasis on group cohesiveness, the characteristic of social cohesion methods. The cognitive developmental perspective is grounded in the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piagetian perspectives suggest that when individuals work together, socio-cognitive conflict occurs and creates cognitive disequilibrium that stimulates perspective-talking ability and reasoning. Vygotsky's theories present knowledge as a societal product (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). Thanh et al., (2018) defines the zone of proximal development as "the Distance between the actual

developmental level as determined by independent problem solving under Adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". Thanh et al., (2018) narrated the connection between cooperative learning and Vygotsky's social interaction theory with reference to the concept 'the zone of proximal development (ZPD)'. He says that the firm collaboration with more capable peers is only possible in cooperative learning. Similarly, Thanh et al., (2018) discusses the bearing of Piaget's concept of "assimilation and accommodation" with cooperative learning. Assimilation is the incorporation of new information into an existing schema. It involves guided exploration with physical objects in which students can make prediction and confront misconceptions by activating prior knowledge; and accommodation, changing the existing schema or creating a new one to fit new information. For these both processes, a cooperative learning group provides the best opportunity to occur rather than traditional instruction. Moreover, he adds that the "Learning cycle" is a student-centred teaching method which was developed from Piaget's stage theory, and can be implemented via the cooperative learning approach.

Pattanpichet, (2011) proposed a theoretical model by integrating Piaget's and Vygotsky's perspectives on peer collaboration, which explains why cooperative learning, improve students achievement. This model suggests that the group discussions that occur during cooperative learning achieve the following: They expose inadequate or inappropriate reasoning, which results in disequilibrium that can lead to better understanding. They motivate individuals to abandon misconceptions and search for more powerful concepts. They provide a forum that encourages critical thinking. They lead to constructive controversy, which focuses student's thinking and increases the use of higher order cognitive processes. They encourage students to vocalize ideas, which inevitably improve their performance. Group discovery methods such as groups of four (Akuka et al., 2013) are the practical cooperative learning methods closely related to the developmental perspectives. Due to little evidence about cooperative methods, which depend solely on interaction to produce higher achievement, Slavin (2017) refers concepts of developmental perspective important as mediating variables to explain the effects of group goals and group tasks on students' achievement.

The cognitive elaboration perspective identified by Slavin (2017), assume that elaboration provides for rehearsal and cognitive restructuring which produce and enhance learning. This perspective emphasizes the role of elaboration to explain the effect of cooperative learning. Elaboration involves the addition of new information to, or restricting of existing knowledge. One of the most effective ways of elaboration is explaining the subject matter to someone else. Research on helping behaviour in small groups work shows students to clearly learn more from providing elaborated help to others and less from the receipt of help when the explanation they receive contains some form of elaboration. Efrizal, (2012) discovered that the students who gained the most from cooperative activities were those who provided elaborated explanations to others. The students who received elaborated explanations learned more than those who worked alone but not as much as those who served as explainers. Ahmed and Omer, (2014) found a correlation between the types of questions asked by students and nature of answers that they receive with higher – order questions leading to high level answers (Orato, 2013). Asking thought-provoking questions promotes high level discussion, which has been found to result in high level learning. That is, the question triggers elaborated explanation, which can positively influence the performance of both the student providing the help and the student, receiving the help (Cabo & Rothman, 2012).

With reference to cooperative learning, the student interaction associated with a basic element face-to-face promotive interaction drives one or more cognitive process. Notable among these is elaboration-putting material into one's own words. Elaboration provided by one student to another is a win/win situation. Elaboration not only deepens the understanding of the student providing the explanation (Bailey et al., 2010). Orato, (2013) adds that the humanistic theorists stress the casual link between conversation and thinking being product of verbal interaction. Conversation characterized by diversity of perspectives results in rich, deeper, more comprehensive and more complex thinking. In the field of cooperative learning, cooperative integrated reading and composition writing/language arts program and reciprocal teaching are the examples of practical use of the cognitive elaboration potential. All the four perspectives of cooperation learning have sound rationale and empirical support for their probity. However, each perspective requires a set of favourable conditions for its implications. For example, according to Slavin (2017) motivational and social cohesion effects require extrinsic and intrinsic motivation along with long time social interaction in the classroom to appear, while developmental and cognitive elaboration perspectives require short time interaction in pairs or groups. In essence these perspectives are complementary, not contradictory. When cooperative groups are seen under motivational perspective, no one can deny the perspective of social cohesion, developmental or cognitive elaboration at the same time. Same is true for each perspective. The idea behind the individual improvement scores is to give each student a performance goal that can be attained if one works harder and

performs better than the others in the past. Any student can contribute maximum points to his or her team in this scoring system, but no student can do so without doing his or her best work. Each student is given a "base" score, derived from the student's average performance on similar quizzes. Students then earn points. The present study narrowed down to assessing the effectiveness of cooperative learning on students' achievement in English language in Kathiani sub-county, Kenya.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized Experimental Research Design, in which the researcher used Solomon's four, non-equivalent control group design. The quasi-experimental design compared control groups, which were taught English using the conventional teaching methods with experimental groups which were instructed English using CL. To achieve the objective, form two learners of English in four intact classes were sampled for the study. From a population of fourteen public mixed day sub-county secondary schools, four intact classes were identified through simple random sampling. There was a sample of two experimental classes which were taught English subject for one week using CL to check on learners' involvement in CL activities and two control groups which were taught English using the conventional methods. The researcher used questionnaire, interview schedules and English language achievement tests as data collection tools.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Comparison of students' pre-test mean scores

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value
E ₁	64	28.69	2.85	121	0.842	0.291
C ₁	59	29.04	2.76			

Two groups (E₁ and C₁) were pre-tested before the collection of actual data. This was important to enable the researcher to check whether the groups were homogenous before exposing them to the treatment. This was also used to determine the effect of pre-test in comparison to the groups that did not do pre-tests. The homogeneity test was done by comparing the mean scores of the two groups using t-test. The results of the pre-tests are presented showed that the mean score of students in the experimental group (28.69, SD = 2.85) was slightly less than that of the control group (29.04, SD=2.76). The t-test results revealed that the difference in mean scores between the two groups was not statistically significant at 0.05 level, $t_{(121)} = 0.842$, $p = 0.291$.

Students' Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores

The objective of this study was to find out any differences in scores on English test among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching in mixed day public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. Before the treatment started, Experimental group (E₁) and Control group (C₁) were given a pre-test exam. After the treatment, Experimental group (E₁) and Control group (C₁) were also post tested to find out if the treatment had any effect on the experimental group. The means and standard deviation obtained for the pre-test exam for both groups are presented in the table below

Scale		Experimental group (E ₁)	Control group (C ₁)
Pretest	N	64	59
	Mean	28.69	29.04
	SD	2.85	2.76
Post test	N	64	59
	Mean	44.03	40.71
	SD	3.97	3.25
Mean gain		15.34	11.67

The table above shows that the pre-test mean score of experimental groups (E₁) was almost the same as that of the control group (C₁). The post-test mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group. It was also observed that the mean gain of experimental group (E₁) (15.34) was higher than that of the control group (C₁) (11.67). The results, however, did not reveal whether the mean gain of the two groups was statistically significant

Comparisons of Students' Mean Gain on English Test

The table below shows comparisons of students' mean gain on English test

Group	Mean gain	Df	t-value	p-value
Experimental (E ₁)	15.34	121	3.851	0.004
Control (C ₁)	11.67			

The null hypothesis in the study was that there is no statistically significant difference in scores on English test among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. In order to test the hypothesis, t-test and ANOVA were used. The mean gain ($M = 15.34$) of the Experimental group was significantly different from that of the control group ($M = 11.67$), $t_{(121)} = 3.851$, $p = 0.004$ (Table 4.13). This implies that the treatment (CL) enhanced students' achievement scores on English test among students in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. Therefore, the hypothesis that stated that there is no statistically significant difference in scores on English test among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County is not accepted at 0.05 alpha level. It can be said that the experimental group students who were taught with the cooperative learning technique were more successful than the control group students. The result is not surprising because the experimental group students were more active in both mental and physical aspects during the treatment and attended to group studies. The learners in the experimental group also found the possibility to relate their concepts to the everyday life. The results of the present study support the results of previous studies in the literature reviewed (Devi et al., 2016; Haq et al., 2015; Kandasamy & Habil, 2018; Wichadee, 2017). Similarly, research in the literature suggested that cooperative learning has a positive effect on academic achievement (Zarrabi, 2016), and skills of problem solving (Al-Mashjari, 2017), and enhanced motivation (You, 2014).

This finding is in support of Jepkosgey (2018) observation on the effects of Cooperative Learning (CL) on secondary school learners' English-speaking skills in Nandi central sub-county who found out that there was statistically significant difference between the achievement of control and experimental groups who were taught language through CL. The study revealed that there is a statistically significant effect of individual accountability, interpersonal and social skills, face to face promotive interaction and positive interdependence on learners' achievement in English language speaking. It was concluded that, individual accountability, interpersonal and social skills, face to face promotive interaction and positive interdependence positively affect learners' achievement in English language speaking. Jepkosgey (2018) found a significant difference in post-test scores among mixed public secondary school learners taught English language speaking skills through cooperative learning. The researcher noted that the boys and girls taught through cooperative learning scored better in their academic achievement. In addition, Kamau (2015) found the mean score of experiment students in Mathematics achievement test to be slightly higher than that of control students, and there was a significant difference among the secondary school Mathematics student's achievement with reference to their mean score at 0.05 level of confidence. The reasons of good performance by both boys and girls of experimental group may be due to motivation and reinforcement given to all students on every improvement, the treatment of cooperative learning to develop cognitive dimension, supplementary materials provided to students and formative tests conducted to find out the progress. Thus, the present study shows that if teachers use CL to teach English language, the students' academic achievement could be higher.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers of English in secondary schools need to embrace student-centred teaching approaches during instruction since student-centred approaches were associated with efficiency in the acquisition of linguistic skills. In addition, secondary schools need to use motivational strategies such as standardized achievement test, competitions in composition writing, debating and drama-based approaches of teaching. These motivational strategies are associated with student's effectiveness in the acquisition of linguistic skills. Secondary school English teachers should also be encouraged to explore the application of cooperative learning in their classroom instruction as the task is enormous. Teacher trainers should integrate CL among instructional strategies being inculcated into the students. Further, seminars and workshops should be organised for serving teachers to keep abreast with principles and implementation process of CL.

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