

## THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE TEACHING OF READING COMPREHENSION BY INTEGRATING LANGUAGE SKILLS: SOME USEFUL STRATEGIES

By

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is intended to show to teachers how cooperative language learning can be useful in the teaching of reading comprehension by integrating language skills. This will be possible with the use of some activities. A teacher, as a facilitator in the classroom should train his learners to be cooperative during the reading comprehension lesson by using strategies such as: group dynamics, unified group, dyad and large group. With the use of all these strategies, he will focus on the use of the integrated language skills by his learners. These skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing.*

**Keywords:** *Cooperative language learning, teaching, reading, comprehension, integrated, language skills, strategies.*

### RESUME

*L'objectif de cet article est de proposer aux enseignants la manière dont ils peuvent utiliser l'approche coopérative de l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise lors d'une leçon de lecture en y intégrant les quatre sens. En tant que facilitateur dans la salle de classe, l'enseignant doit utiliser certaines stratégies telles que : groupe dynamique, groupe unifié, paire groupe et groupe large. En utilisant ces stratégies, son attention sera basée sur l'usage de quatre sens pour la maîtrise de la langue.*

**Mots-clés :** *langue, Apprentissage coopératif, enseignement, lecture, compréhension, intégration, compétences, stratégies.*

### INTRODUCTION

In many English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, most teachers do not use integrated language skills during the reading comprehension lessons. In the present article, I want to show how cooperative language learning can be useful in the teaching of reading comprehension by using some strategies.

First of all, I will state precisely what is meant by cooperative language learning by giving assumptions on which cooperative learning is based,

strategies used in cooperative learning, benefits from the use of cooperative techniques. Then I shall point out some shortcomings of cooperative language learning.

Secondly, I am going to explain what is meant by reading comprehension and its procedure. The use of some strategies and the impact of cooperative techniques in the teaching reading by integrating language skills will be mentioned.

To highlight what is discussed through this paper, a conclusion will be drawn.

## **I. COOPERATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Cooperative language learning is an integral part of language learning and teaching, the purpose of which is to provide teachers with more information on cooperative learning so that the decision to use it or not is based on a more complete understanding of the process.

Many definitions have been provided about cooperative learning, but some of them have drawn my attention. To begin with, on the one hand Olson and Kagan (1992:1) have stated that cooperative learning is a body of literature and research that examine the effects of cooperation in education. They also argued that the cooperative learning offers ways to organize group work, to enhance learning and increase academic achievement. It is carefully structure - organized so that each learner interacts with others and all learners are motivated to increase each other's learning. On the other hand, Calderon (1987:1) has defined cooperative learning as a strategy for classroom that is used to increase motivation and attention, to help s students develop a positive image of self and others, to provide a vehicle for critical thinking and problem-solving, and encourage collaborative social skills. As can be seen, both definitions are complementary and show the role of cooperative learning, which is, helping learners make joint effort to contribute to their education.

On his turn, Brown (2000:138) assumes that cooperative learning directs students to share their knowledge, and play down competition among students. But, Bygate (1987) states that learners are cooperatively and collaboratively going to influence one another in small or large group to progress in the teaching-learning process.

For (Cohen, 1994) Johnson and Johnson 1994, Johnson and Stanne 2000, Kagan 1985, 1993, Slavin 1986, 1990 confirm that cooperative learning is an educational opportunity in which students learn from one another, and it has got different forms.

In short, cooperative language learning can be characterized in the following Chinese proverb:

Tell me, and I'll forget  
Show me, and I'll remember  
Involve me, and I'll learn.

### **I.1 Assumptions about cooperative learning**

To set forth the basis of cooperative language learning, the following assumptions have been provided by Olson and Kagan (op. cit: 13):

- A) Cooperative skills must be learned, that is, pupils must be taught how to cooperate skills with others in order to encourage activity and games in language acquisition.
- B) The physical and spatial arrangement of the classroom affects cooperative work, that is to say, if students in EFL classes are to cooperate and talk to each other. If they want to have a conversation with someone, they cannot talk facing back-to-back or front-to-back, they need to talk face-to-face.
- C) Peer support and group dynamics are keys to successful group work, that is, the members in the group are the ones who determine how well the group will function. There must be careful balance between the actors and the materials submitted to the group. The latter will share responsibilities and respect each other. Low performing group members should be included.

### **I.2 Strategies for group dynamics**

Before dealing with strategies used in cooperative learning, let's first of all define the two concepts. Before getting into the discussion about the concept strategy, let's say that it is not easy to define it. Ellis (1994: 529) assumes this assumption in the sense that it remains 'fuzzy'. Many authors have given different definitions. To comprehend well this definition, let's take this old proverb given by Wenden (1985) stating that 'Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a life'. It is clear through this proverb that the teacher should show to his learners how they should manage the language by giving solutions to problems. Ruben (1975:43) defines strategy as the technique or device which a learner may use to acquire knowledge. In this definition it is demonstrated that when one wants to learn a language, there is a path that he has to follow to succeed. This path is the strategy. This author distinguishes two kinds of learning and teaching strategies: those which contribute directly to learning and those that contribute indirectly.

The first the first type includes clarification, monitoring, memorization, guessing, inference, deductive reasoning and practice. Whereas, the second comprises creating opportunities for practice and production tricks.

In his turn, Brown (2000:113) defines strategies as specific methods of approaching a problem or task nodes of operation for achieving a particular

end, a planned design for controlling and manipulating information. It is clear that when there is a problem, it should be attacked to find a solution. In the same light of thoughts, the teacher must enable his learners to learn by themselves thanks to different strategies he provides them.

From dictionary.com. Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2022 this concept is defined as a plan or method put in place to achieve a goal or a result. It is almost the same sense as the preceding definition.

Following [www.mark@arkaro.com](http://www.mark@arkaro.com) retrieved 13<sup>th</sup> January, 2022, Blackwell says that "a strategy is the central rule of a framework, designed to unify all actions and decisions around busting the Bottleneck to achieving the foremost aspiration". This quotation focuses on the actions that the teacher and learners should undergo, so the latter becomes able to assimilate what they are taught.

According to Oxford (1990) quoted by Ardeo (2016:8) a strategy is a specific action taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations. This definition implies that learners employ different actions in order to perform different objectives.

It should be noted, however, that several authors (Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Chamot, 2001) have suggested that learners in general might be able to learn a language more effectively by the use of the Language Learning Strategies (LLSs). This means that students are able to overcome obstacles through different strategies, and there is the development of the language and learning.

As far as a group is concerned, Serott, quoted by Brumfit (1984:72) puts forth that a group is usually defined as a number of people who interact with another, and who perceive themselves to be a group.

Concerning strategies to use in teaching, Christison (1990:7) has identified some which help teachers understand group and promote peer support in the foreign or second language classroom.

- Strategy one: One centred

Activities are structured so that each student is given individual attention for a limited period of time, for instance, all students are given a list of interview questions to ask the spot light student.

- Strategy two: Unified

Here students begin to think about goals instead of individual goals to promote cooperation in the group. These activities require the participation of each group member.

- Strategy three: Dyad

These activities give students the opportunity to work one-to-one with others in the class. Students begin to feel more comfortable sharing personal ideas and values. Almost any activity can be structured for pair work.

- Strategy four: Small group

Small group activities are most loosely structured than pair activities. These activities help students to develop techniques for pair work interaction such as restating, expansion, contextualizing.

- Strategy five: Large group

Large group activities are similar to small group activities in the objectives and structure. The only difference is the inclusion of large number of students.

### **I.3 Benefits from using cooperative techniques**

The use of cooperative learning has benefits that Greaty quoted by White (1992:22) says that the recognition of the meaning of message, understanding the intentions of the writer, guessing what is hidden and unstated by the author. Olson and Kagan (op.cit:2-3) summarize these benefits as follows:

1. It increases frequency and variety of second language practice through different sorts of interactions.
2. It increases possibility for development of the first language in ways that support cognitive development and increase second language skills.
3. It offers opportunity to integrate with content based instructions.
4. It offers teachers opportunity to master new professional skills, particularly those emphasizing communication.
5. It offers opportunity to students to act as resources for each other and thus assuming a more active role in learning.

Apart from the above mentioned benefits, they go on arguing that cooperative learning classes are more enjoyable than traditional classes. Cooperative learning can help students address the needs of heterogeneous classes diverse in home language.

### **I.4 Shortcomings**

Unquestionably, cooperative learning cannot work without weaknesses, here are some of them:

1. The teacher in a large class cannot control the language being used in all groups.
2. The teacher's involvement will be more limited to chatting than to teaching.

## **II. THE TEACHING OF READING**

### **II.1 Reading comprehension**

Reading comprehension is frequently confused with reading aloud. Yet, it has the most practical value and its substance is rarely defined and understood correctly.

The real reading that is the ability to read and comprehend a given text quickly. This technique may As stated by Hanneing (1975:10) this technique may require such skills as skimming, vocabulary recognition, guessing vocabulary meanings from context clues, scanning clues, scanning the context for identification of words of words or phrases set forth in the question, interpretation of questions, and the ability to correct grammatical and comprehension responses to questions about the context.

Of course, reading is composed of two different stages. The initial stage of decoding consists in recognizing the relationship between the print on the page and the sounds of the language. The second stage is that of comprehension, this stage is too vast as it involves the recognition of the meaning of message, understanding the intentions of the writer, guessing what is hidden and unstated by the author (White 1992:22).

### **II.2 Procedures in teaching reading comprehension**

To begin with, before reading a given text, one should know that the comprehension of a text depends more on the interest and motivation the reader has. Hence, the vocabulary preceding the reading comprehension lesson might be used to introduce the topic that, is the teacher should ask related questions and expect answers using the new the new words. Thus, the topic to be discussed can be raised without going into details. Or also, a brief discussion may be raised just before reading by asking learners questions related to their own lives and touching the text.

As proposed by Harmer (1993:75), the teacher will direct the comprehension task by explaining and directing the learners' purpose for reading, that is to say, he reads the questions aloud and explains them so as to facilitate the comprehension of the task assigned for learners. On their turn, learners read silently the text to perform the task set by the teacher before he provides feedback. The latter will find out the how they have done it. Finally, the teacher will direct text-oriented task, that is, he may organize a kind of follow up task related to the text.

### III. USE OF STRATEGIES FOR GROUP DYNAMICS IN THE TEACHING OF READING COMPREHENSION WITH LANGUAGE INTEGRATED SKILLS

As already mentioned in the introduction, I am going to show in the following pages how different strategies for group dynamic can be helpful in the teaching of reading comprehension by integrating the language skills.

#### ↔ Strategy one: One centred

The teacher chooses two students, one is the centred learner, and another is the spot lighted student. He distributes questions to the class, reads them loudly, meanwhile his students listen carefully, and then orders students to put questions to the spot lighted students. The centred learner answers to questions, if he fails he is helped by the spot lighted student. The teacher gives feedback and writes good answers on the board. Once the task is finished, the teacher asks his learners to read what is written on the board, if the read makes pronunciation mistakes he asks others to correct, after all students writes the summary.

In this strategy, all the four skills are integrated starting with listening skill because students are going to listen to him, afterwards the second skill is used when students ask questions to the two chosen students. Then intervene the two other skills, reading and writing skills. If students are by using this strategy the will often use all the sills in the reading comprehension lessons.

#### ↔ Strategy two: Dyad

The teacher constitutes pair groups in the classroom. He asks each pair group to choose a leader who acts as a supervisor in the process of fulfilling the task. Each group is given the tasks before the teacher explains what they have to do. Here the procedure is twofold, that is, the teacher gives the same questions to each group so that at the end of the reading, groups have to compare their answers and discuss the responses among the groups. The teacher provides feedback. In so doing each group fulfils its task by applying the four language kills.

Note that for dyad strategy, each participant listens to his partner, he reacts by giving his answers from what he has understood, he can even read his answer for his partner, at last when all the groups have finished and the teacher has provided feedback, all the participants are going to take notes of the correct answers.

#### ↔ Strategy three: small group

As far as small group is concerned, the teacher divides the class into groups of three or five students. Learners choose the leader of the group. The teacher

gives task to each group. In this strategy, attention should be put on group interaction as restating, expansion, contextualizing.

Considering restating, let's say that learners will be asked to restate in their own words some of the selected and underlined words by the teacher.

For expansion, learners should go beyond the text. They can apply what they read in a given text to their own lives. In other words, they tell what they have read confirming them to their lives.

Taking into account the contextualizing, each learner can be asked to give the summary of they have read and discussed in their own words.

#### ↔ Strategy four: Large group

This strategy is not different from the small group, the only difference is that it includes a large number of numbers. The procedure is the same for integrating the language skills, but as the number of partners is large, it will take time.

#### ↔ Strategy five: Unified group

This is the long standing way of cooperative learning that is usually made by students. The classroom is considered as unified group where each member has to play his role. The teacher has to play a paramount role in order to allow each learner to participate to the activity. For instance, he gives the main questions that should be read and answered by learners. He also foresees sub questions to be asked to other students so as the text should be well understood.

### **IV. THE IMPACT OF COOPERATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE TEACHING OF READING COMPREHENSION**

To point out the impact of cooperative strategies in teaching reading comprehension, I should refer to the implication of such reading for the classroom, that is, theoretical and methodological implications.

As far as the theoretical implications are concerned, mention should be made on short class discussion which is a way of providing background information that may be helpful for the understanding of the text. The discussion before reading allows students to use the two first skills of listening and speaking. Here, a short class discussion before reading can be raised to activate students' knowledge and increase sensitivity to the content of the reading material. It then provides an opportunity for students to consider their own experience in relation to the topic of reading. While reading and after reading the other skills will be used such as reading and writing. As can be seen, a class discussion

may be rendered through unified group, dyad, small group and large group which are the strategies for dynamic groups.

As for methodological implications, I can suggest that students are offered more opportunities to discuss in pairs or in groups and play a more active role in learning. They grasp the message from the text, they use all the language skills, and the role of the teacher is restricted to assigning tasks and providing feedback. Let's say that if such strategies are frequently used during the reading comprehension lessons, students will be accustomed to using the four skills.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, I have said that the cooperative language learning is a way of helping learners increase their motivation and retention in solving their language problem by encouraging collaboration among themselves. There are some strategies that are used with integrated language skills to facilitate the group dynamics such as one-centred, unified group, dyad, small group, large group. I have also pointed out some benefits from using cooperative language strategies which help students become real partners in the learning enterprise and increase the intellectual participation of the individual student in the task of learning a foreign language.

It should be mentioned however, that cooperative learning is not free from weaknesses that are less control of the language use on the part of the teacher and limited involvement in teaching.

As far as reading comprehension is concerned, it has been said that it is the ability to read and comprehend a given text quickly. This may be achieved thanks to different procedures used in teaching reading comprehension. The use of strategies for group dynamics in teaching reading comprehension has been shown through different strategies used in the classroom. These strategies provide theoretical and methodological implications and give the learners the opportunity to discuss in group the ideas related to the text.

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