

**HOW EFFECTIVE IS COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THE EFL/ESL
TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS?**

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How effective is cooperative learning in the EFL/ESL teaching/learning process?

Cooperative Learning involves different facts in a classroom such as group work, interaction, peer correction and so forth.

In the last years teachers have found a need of implementing some strategies that can be according to the new demands of the Ministry of Education of Colombia about bilingualism. Some teachers think bilingualism is too complicated to be applied in large classroom where the learning is difficult without translation into Spanish due to the implications a large classroom has.

What is cooperative learning?

Many definitions of cooperative learning have been stated; for example, Slavin (1996) reports that Cooperative learning has been found to be an effective instructional method that depends on the exchange information among pairs or group members and each learner is assumed responsible for his or her own learning and responsible for the group as well.

Deen, Bailey, & Parker (2001); Johnson and Johnson (2003); Slavin (2000) agree that cooperative learning is a successful way to enhance social and academic development among children.

Michael (2002: 8) defines cooperative learning as a process by which students work together in groups to master material initially presented by instructor and it is a classroom environment where students interact with one another in small heterogeneous groups while working together on academic tasks. In addition, James (2002: 8) defines cooperative learning as working together to accomplish shared goals.

Brandt (2002) and Liang, et al. (2003: 35), claim that cooperative learning refers to the instructional use of small groups in which students work together to accomplish meaningful school tasks. Smith et al. (2007), state that cooperative learning exists when students work together to accomplish shared learning goals.

To recapitulate the previous definitions, cooperative learning is one of the most widespread areas of research and practice education. This learning strategy has been applied to a broad variety of content areas at all levels. Cooperative learning is a pedagogical technique in which students work together in small, and mixed groups on a structured learning task with the aim of maximizing their own and each other's learning.

Cooperative Learning could be an adequate strategy for the English learning in a large classroom with heterogeneous learners.- According to (Hall, 1994) "Cooperative learning explores the benefits to work in large groups with heterogeneous learners. Larger groups are good because they provide more people for doing big tasks; they increase the variety of people in a group in terms of skill, personalities, background, and they reduce the number of groups for the teacher to monitor". This point has its advantages and disadvantages, Shindler, J. 2009 for example claims that a study showed that in groups of mixed ability, low-achieving students become passive and do not focused on the task.

Cooperative Learning is a kind of help for those teachers that address large classrooms and do not have time to review assignments to each of the students and to provide individual feedback, but it is important to take into account individuals needs and personalities, also some students have preferences working with some classmates more than others.

The learning throughout group work can help teachers to manage a variety of situations in the teaching, and the learners in the English learning through the interaction.-“Group work has a tremendous effect on the teaching/learning process of any subject because the students learn from one another. Pair and group work give the students more opportunity to practice a new language”. (Johnson & Johnson et al 2000). It happens only if there is motivation in the classroom, motivation is an “internal process that activates, guides, and maintains behaviour over time” (Slavin, 2006, p.317). If low-achieving students are motivated to learn from the others it is possible, but if they feel afraid to participate and interact, it interrupts the process.

Nevertheless, it is important to identify, not only how a student react towards others, due to the fact the different background and the way it is educated into their houses, but also taking into account that their mental capability could be different, some authors have stated that “gifted” students have the tendency not to work with other students with different capabilities (Matthews, 1992) in this sense, the idea of PZD stated by Vigotsky (1988), in his argument he says that a student can be learn with the aid of the instructor or a peer who is in a higher level of knowledge (Vigotsky, 1988, p.133), but as it quoted before, this idea does not work correctly with students who learn faster than others, and the do not want to help their peers.

It is a fact that cooperative learning classes encourage students to help each other, based on individual experiences and abilities, but we forget that human beings are so competitive, we do want to be the best, and we do what we can do to show our power, with this personal idea we want to quoted that the class environment and the reality could be in different scenarios, in this sense it is quite complicated to conduct a class when everybody construct their knowledge in a selfish way, included the teachers, “American education has been on a competitive and individualistic basis. In both learning

situations, teachers try to keep students away from each other. "Don't copy," "Don't worry about your neighbor--take care of yourself," and "Move your desks apart", Lois A. Hirst and Christy Slavik (1990), and also the system does not allow to reach these objectives due to the fact the stuck curriculum and the way the teachers have to work outside the classroom by filling up so many formats that at the end, does not help in the learning process, teachers are so busy by doing this, not having the time to design cooperative and meaningful tasks.

Learning through group work can help teachers manage situations such as creating a learning community where all students participate in a helpful environment, taking risks, opportunities to be exposed to a meaningful content and enhancing interpersonal relations among group members only if the teacher builds a motivational context. Slavin et al. (2003) named this theory "motivational theory". According to the motivational perspective, individual and learning group reward is based on the sum of individuals' achievement cooperative learning, because benefits is attained when group and individual goals are achieved when using cooperative learning. In general motivation is a wide topic, Slavin (2006) emphasizes the role of context, social environment and communities in the conception of learning, mainly to test validity and importance of the learners' beliefs, and their ideas by comparing them to the beliefs and ideas of others who are parts of the culture around them.

In conclusion, nowadays English is a very important school subject for Colombian students because of the bilingualism program. The Ministry of Education has established proficiency levels to be achieved in the long term 2004-2019 respectively. The Colombian government has started the national bilingual program in connection to the standards according to the Common

European Framework. In view of that many public schools in Colombia have heterogeneous and large classrooms it is necessary to implement some approaches to improve those issues, cooperative learning is a good strategy, but under certain bases and policies; motivation, clear instruction, also teachers compromised in their roles and involved in classes.

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