استخدام التعلّم التَّعاونـــــي لتدريس مـــهارات الاســـــتيعاب لطلاب السنة الأولى بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية الزنتان

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Using cooperative learning to teach comprehension skills to 1st year students at Faculty of Education in Zentan Universit

ملخص الدراســـــــة:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراســـة مدى تأثـــير التعلّم النّشــط فـــي تدريس مادة الاستيعابي للسنة الأولى بكلية التربية الزنتان ، فقد ركّـــزت الدراسة على الســنة الأولى بصفتهم اعتادوا على طريقة القراءة و التّكرار بعد الأستاذ عند دراستهم مادة القراءة ، وقد أثّـــــرت هذه الطريقة على المخرجات بصفتهم تعاملوا مع القـــــراءة بدون أي تحليل للنص أو القراءة بين السطور، الأمـــــر الذي أدّى إلى ظهور تحديات جمّة للوصـــــــول إلى فحوى النص أو غرض الكاتب أو الاستيعاب الكامل للنص.

جُمعت المادة العلمية عن طريـــــق الملاحظة المباشرة والاختبارات، وقد تحققت الملاحظة في المحاضرات الفعلية بينما الاختبارات قُسمت إلى اختبار (قبلي وبعدي) الغرض منهما دعـــــم ملاحظات الباحث، فقد كانت مدّة الدراســـــة شهر مقسّـــم إلى مرحلتين : طبّـــــق الباحث في المرحلة الأولى الطريقة التقليدية ، بينما تم تطبيق التعليم النشط فـــي المرحلة الثانية ، وتم جمع نتائج الاختبارات ومقارنتها وتحليلها ، وأظهرت هذه النتائج التأثير الايجابي لتعليم النشط داخل الفصل من حيث رفـــــع مقدرة الطّـــــــلاب على الفهم والمشاركة ، ففي مرحلة التجربة أظهر الطّـــــلاب المقدرة على تكويـــــن طريقتهم الخاصّـــــــة في الفهم وتحسّـــــن ملحوظ في فهم النصوص ، وهذا يؤكّـــــد أن التعليم النّشط يعتبر استراتيجية ناجحة في تعليـــــم القراءة والاستيعاب.

1.1.Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in teaching comprehension to the first year students of English department at faculty of Education in Zentan University. The study targeted the 1st year students who were familiar to method of read and repeat after the teacher in teaching reading comprehension. The impact of this method is reflected on the outcomes of the students because they dealt with reading without any

analysis or reading between the lines which led to nemours challenge to reach the text orientation or the writer's intent. The methods that were used for data collection were direct observation and testing. The observation was conducted by the researcher during which the participants were observed on their behavior during reading lessons. The tests were held in interval periods. The first test took place at beginning of the study period as (pre) and the second one took place after the study period, (post). These two tests were meant to track the impact of cooperative learning and to support the observation.

The duration of the study was one month divided into two phases. At the first phase, the researcher applied traditional teaching methods in his lectures. Whereas ,cooperative learning took a place in the second phase. The tests' scores were collected, compared and analyzed. The post test results indicated that cooperative learning had positive effects on the students' ability of understanding. During the observations, the researcher recorded field notes on students' behavior during reading lessons and noticed that the cooperative learning strategies showed positive effects on the improvement of the participants on reading and comprehension. The participants in the experimental phase were able to create their own ways of thinking and showed a great deal of improvement in comprehending texts. It reflected that teaching reading comprehension by using Cooperative Learning method was effective.

2.1. Introduction.

Reading is not only necessary for students to understand the subjects in the university or even to continue the students' study in the post graduated study, but also to increase the amount of vocabularies and the information. Although reading plays an important role in acquiring the language and expanding the students' horizon, students always consider reading and comprehension as the most difficult subject. In fact, the low score of students' in the pre- test could be one of the factors that reflects this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the challenges and difficulties may lie in the teaching methods that are supposed to deliver and facilitate the learning process. The participants used to technique of repetition after the teacher in the school. This technique carried a significant misuse in comprehension because students

were not training on analyzing the text and/or they had lack of motivation to read between the lines, rather, they were taught in a way that they were considered as (parrots). In general, the methods of teaching are based on translation and the teacher plays the main role in the teaching process (teacher-centered classes); whereas, teaching comprehension must be well prepared according to the scientific approach to gain the best results with the students.

Cooperative learning is considered as a pedagogical approach that increases students' interaction through working in groups to expand information and reach their shared goals and upgrade their language. According to Scaglion (1992), this type of learning approach decreases opportunity to actively construct the knowledge among students. Moreover, comprehension lessons must be in three main stages: (pre –stage / during- stage/ post- stage) to lead students to be in the right atmosphere to gain the information and to increase their understanding. To design a course or even to plan a lesson in tradition ways, the outcomes are naturally be the same with hardly any progress, but using innovative techniques surly the result is expected to be better. One of these innovative techniques is Cooperative Learning which bases on active learning strategies that rely on the work of the students in small groups in order to achieve educational goals.

The objectives of this study are designed to discover the effectiveness of using cooperative learning method in comprehension lectures to the 1st year students at Faculty of Education in Zentan University. Therefore, this study tries to answer the following research question:

To what extend does the use of cooperative learning strategies improve the students' comprehension in reading lectures ?

3.1. Literature review.

3.2 Cooperative learning Vs Reading Comprehension

There is more than one definition of the cooperative learning strategies. Most researchers agree that cooperative learning involves a small group of students who share and exchange ideas and experiences and gain knowledge in order to reach a common goal of education (Hall,2006). Faryadi (2007) also defined cooperative learning as : "a small dedicated group of students learn together and take advantage of each other's expertise to achieve a common

goal". Unlike the traditional method in which the teacher is the centre of the teaching-learning process, the technique of cooperative learning is based on the students' role inside the class. In other words, in students-centered classes, the teacher works as a facilitator or guide to reach the aims of the lesson. Although the group size and type depends on class settings and the activity in hand, every average group consists of three to five students who share their information together in many ways in order to achieve the goal. In fact, this lead to engage students of different levels and/ or same level. Johnson, and Smith (1991) define cooperative learning as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning". Whereas, Reading comprehension, as defined by researchers, is an interactive process that requires the reader to grasp all the information in the text, remember it and be able to extract meaning from it (Alhalewany, 2003; Taylor & Taylor, 1990). In addition, comprehension is one of the most important skill a student must own because it is the purpose of reading. Students in universities need to understand what they read, and without reading comprehension skills, students are not able to have access to academic success. Soden, Christopher, Hulslander, et al. (2015) have pointed out, "Reading comprehension, defined as the ability to understand and employ text for learning, is a foundational skill for academic and occupational success. Reading comprehension is clearly a receptive skill, subject to differences in instruction and in the environment".

4.1. Methodology

This study took place in one month during the period of time from January to Feburary2020. Participants were taught in traditional method, teacher-cantered method for 2 weeks, and the targeted method –cooperative learning- was used with the second phase which was another two weeks. Besides observation, the method that was used in this research was the pre test-post test nonequivalent group design. Interval tests were conducted every two weeks in each phase of this study. That is, after the participant completed the phase one, they did a test in order to compare the result with the second phase. Creswell (2005, p. 297) states that quasi experimental research involves selecting groups, upon which a variable is tested without any random pre selection processes, and comparing the two groups: control group and

experimental group. The two research method, observation and testing, are discussed in details below.

4.2.1.Participants

The individuals who participated in this study were 12 in the first year of English department at faculty of Education in Zentan University. All the participants were females and their age 18 and above. To collect data the researcher followed two methods:

A. Observation .

First of all, observation as a method for collecting data defined by more than one scholars but one of the best was by Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p.79). Whereas, Schensul, and Lecompte (1999) define participant observation as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting" (p.91) In fact, there are two types of observation:(1)-direct observation. (2)- In direct observation.

 As a matter of fact, this study adopted direct observation during which the researcher observed the cases of the research and took notes in each lecture - one lecture in a week on Saturdays at 9am to 11am .

B. Testing

Testing is considered as a mean to evaluate the study and plays the main role to prove the hypothesis or to deny it. In this study, the researcher divided the study into two phases as it mentioned above. Creswell (2005, p. 285) states that the pretest provide a measure on some attribute or characteristics that asses for participant in experiment before they receive a treatment; a posttest measures some characteristics after a treatment. In this study, the tests were composed of ten questions in the form of multiple choices.

5.1. The Result.

Comparing the two phases scores was applied to clarify the difference among the participant of the study and to measure the improvement that the participant gained . The time table below shows the data in both phases.

Q. No	First phase		Second phase	
	Correct answer	Wrong answer	Correct answer	Wrong answer
1	05	07	12	0
2	04	08	10	02
3	04	08	08	04
4	01	11	10	02
5	06	06	10	02
6	04	08	05	07
7	01	11	05	07
8	01	11	05	07

As shown in the first phase, the heights score was 6 students who answered question number 5correctly.Whereas, the lowest number was in questions 4/7/8 with just 1 students in each question. In fact, the experimental phase indicated that there was a significant improvement and the table above reflected that where the super score was 12 out of 12 in question number 1 and the lowest score was in questions 2/4/5 with 2 students in each questions. The purpose of this study was to prove that a cooperative learning strategy is better in increasing the comprehension skills than the tradition ways that they usually apply in the Libyan universities' halls. All in all, the mean of the correct answer in the first phase was 3.25 and the mean in the incorrect answer was 8.75 . Whereas, the mean of the correct answer in the second phase was 8.125 and the mean in the incorrect answer was 3.87

6.1. Discussions.

At the first phase that continued for one month with a lecture a week, the researcher applied the tradition methods of teaching reading comprehension. Firstly, the researcher was in front of the participants and each single of them owned a separate table and chair and the layout of the class was Row-and-column seating. The researcher read the text and explained the vocabularies then provided a chance for participants to read the text one by one loudly, and the researcher corrected the pronunciation mistakes. Then, the researcher asked the students to answer the questions about the text and provided them with the correct answers. Finally, to check

the participants understanding the researcher asked the participants ' any question before we leave' and they response 'No, thanks'.

The most important points in my first observation were the level of the participants in English language was inadequate to meet the standard of university's level. Take for instance, some participants were not able to communicate in English with a lack of understanding in English language. In addition, most of the participants were totally confused when they were asked questions. Some were anxious, and others were blushed when they read. I observed that the participants were not aware of the skimming and scanning skills to read. The struggling students needed a long time and much practice to help them with their reading and understanding the general idea of the text or the words within their context. In fact, I discovered that students needed educational strategies in reading comprehension to overcome the difficulties they might face.

At the second phase, the researcher changed the teaching method with the experimental group by implementing the cooperative learning strategy. First, as the cooperative learning strategy requires grouping, the students were divided into three groups so that each group contained four members. Then, each group was assigned to distribute cards that listed and defined the roles of the group members. Take for instance, task manger, English monitor, time keeper, writer and reporter.   The researcher divided the lesson into three stages (pre-task / middle-task and post –task):

A- In pre stage (presentation): I presented the topic and I used think /pair and share technique which simply provided a chance to students to think for a minute and do a brain storming, then they discussed the subject within their groups for three minutes and each student has the role as I mentioned above. After that I started a discussion with the reporters only to discuss what?.

B- In the middle stage(practice): I gave the participants (or students) the text and I asked them to read the text silently for 3 minutes. I asked the participants to speak together within their groups about the gist of the text and what the text was about. Then I started an open-group discussion with all the class during which I asked them about technique we used when the reader search about the general information but I did not get an answer. In fact, I provided them with the correct answer which was skimming. Having

introduced the participants (or students) the new technique, I asked them a specific question in the text and I let them search about the answer and fortunately many students answered correctly. Here, I asked about that technique but again no right answer was received and I had to tell them it was scanning.   Finally, I asked them to read the text one by one in a loud voice.

C – Post stage (production): I asked the students to answer the questions about the text in the same technique (think –pair and share) each group was asked about their answer and I   allowed the peer correction and I personally corrected some wrong answers. Finally I used (Exit ticket) way to finish the class. I asked the students to think and speak about:

 (1)- One thing they learnt today.

(2)- One thing they feel they did not understand.

(3)- One thing they think they needed to read about.

I observed that in the experimental phase, the students who received instruction using the cooperative learning strategy were more interactive and appeared more interested in learning than when they were in control phase. The members of the group actively and positively helped each other and consulted each other as if they were in competition. In fact, the peer learning was allowed in the most times of the class. Also, they cooperated with each other whenever they faced problems in word pronunciation or understanding . Therefore, I noticed that the cooperative learning strategy in teaching students gave them more courage and reduced their anxiety. The students' learning skills increased and their willingness to learn became higher than that in the control phase.

To sum up, when I asked the students what was the reason behind their willingness in learning, they stated that 'the new techniques allowed them to work in the lesson not just listen to the lecturer. In addition, the peer learning and the discussion within the same group provided them with a good chance to prepare themselves before speaking in front of the class. Moreover, grouping students increased their activity and helped them understand the lesson better through the discussion between members of the group. Finally, working within groups was successful in reducing inhibition and reveled the stress and reduced the anxiety, as well.

7.1. Conclusion.

The cooperative learning strategies clearly appeared at the findings in both the observation or in the post test. Through my observation I discovered that the cooperative learning strategy was absolutely successful in increasing the learning skills and improving reading comprehension among students. This is clearly shown by the mean of the correct answer in the first phase which was 3.25 and the mean in the incorrect answer which was 8.75. Whereas, the mean of the correct answer in the second phase was 8.125 and the mean in the incorrect answer was 3.875. It showed that the mean score of the students posttest in the experimental phase was higher than the mean score of the students' post-test in the control phase . The participants in the experimental phase were able to create their own ideas and to produce their own sentences in their speaking or in their explaining of the vocabularies or the texts . Also, they were able to share their opinions and demonstrate a high level of understanding. This showed that there was a massive improvements in comprehension the texts when the students' taught by Cooperative Learning method. It reflects that teaching reading comprehension by using Cooperative Learning method was effective.

8.1. Recommendations.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, some recommendations can be drawn.

- I recommend that researchers continue to collect data about the cooperative learning strategies in the coming years. It is also suggested that the cooperative learning strategies must be used in all the   schools and universities in Libya.

- I am certainly confident that this technique will be beneficial for the students if the Ministry of Education adapt this way of teaching. In fact, this strategy can broaden the students' knowledge and their critical thinking and even their making decision, which helps them improve achievement in their educational life.

- The General Centre For Training and Education Development at Minstery of Education must continue presenting workshops for increasing the ability of the cadres in the ministry of education.

- In teaching English, the teachers should be aware of the role of reading in the learning process. Reading is considered as a receptive skill. When the students improve themselves in this skill, they become good writers ,as well. In addition, the students can also improve their speaking as they express their feeling and thoughts to their mates when they work together, and the same is true with listening because they are trained to listen to their mates. In fact, the passive knowledge which they receive, they turn it into active skills when they produce the language.

- The most important points is that the cooperative learning is a good method to enhance students' understanding and to encourage them to participate in the lecture which create critical personality that adore asking to understand and trigger their curiosity to search. Besides, The participants in the experimental phase were more active and able to connect their own experiences with the texts to share their opinions and demonstrate a higher level of understanding as compared to the comprehension and engagement in the control phase. In addition, teachers should use cooperative learning strategies with other evidence based techniques and activities to teach the students during reading classes.

- Teachers should diversify teaching methods with an emphasis on the cooperative learning strategy because of its positive effects in increasing the academic achievement.

- I learned that the application of modern strategies such as cooperative learning strategy is important to improve the educational process.

- Libyan supervisors should support the English language teachers who apply modern strategies. Also, the Ministry of Education should take advantage of existing research on educational practices methods in order to develop and improve the learning environment for students.

- The subject of teaching methods at universities must be updating because it would reflect on the outcomes of these universities.

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