Allameh Tabatabaee University

ON THE EFFECTS OF THE LEARNING TOGETHER MODEL OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE READING ACHIEVEMENT OF IRANIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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On the Partial Fulfillment of an M.A Degree from Allameh Tabatabaee University

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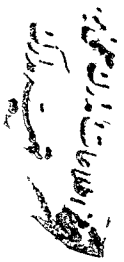

۱۳۸۷/۳/۱۱

2007

۱۰۱۴۷۱

فرم گرد آوری اطلاعات پایان نامه ها

کتابخانه مرکزی دانشگاه علامه طباطبایی

عنوان: مقایسهٔ تدریس مهارت خواندن به دو روش: "یادگیری با هم" ، از روشهای "یادگیری مشارکتی"، و"شیوهٔ دسته جمعی مرسوم

نویسنده / محقق: مهدی رحیمی

مترجم:

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کتابنامه: — واژه نامه: ندارد

نوع پایان نامه:
کاربردی ☐ بنیادی ☐ توسعه ای ☐

مقطع تحصیلی: کارشناسی ارشد — سال تحصیلی: 86-85

محل تحصیل: تهران — نام دانشگاه: علامه طباطبایی — دانشکده: ادبیات و زبانهای خارجی

تعداد صفحات: 130 — گروه آموزشی: زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی

کلید واژه ها به زبان فارسی:
یاد گیری مشارکتی
یادگیری با هم
خواندن

کلید واژه ها به زبان انگلیسی:
Cooperative Learning
Learning Together
Reading

چکیـده

الف . موضوع و طرح مسئله (اهمیت موضوع و هدف):
در تحقیق حاضر سعی شده است تأثیر" یادگیری با هم"، یکی از روشهای "یادگیری مشارکتی"، که توسط جانسن و جانسن پی ریزی شد، روی مهارت "خواندن" دانش آموزان دبیرستانی در ایران مورد بررسی قرار گیرد.

ب . مبانی نظری شامل مرور مختصری از منابع، چارچوب نظری و پرسشها و فرضیه ها:
آیا روش "یادگیری با هم" ، از روشهای "یادگیری مشارکتی"، موثرتر از"شیوهٔ دسته جمعی مرسوم" در آموزش مهارت "خواندن" به دانش آموزان دبیرستانی ایرانی میباشد؟ هیچ تفاوتی میان روش "یادگیری با هم" و شیوهٔ "دسته جمعی مرسوم" در آموزش مهارت "خواندن" به دانش آموزان دبیرستانی ایرانی وجود ندارد.
پ . روش تحقیق شامل تعریف مفاهیم، روش تحقیق ، جامعهٔ مورد تحقیق ، نمونه گیری و روشهای نمونه گیری ، ابزار اندازه گیری ، نحوهٔ اجرای آن ، شیوهٔ گرد آوری و تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها:
دو کلاس از دانش آموزان سوم دبیرستان سطح متوسط ایرانی در این تحقیق شرکت نموده اند. با انتخاب تصادفی، به یکی از این دو کلاس متنهای خواندن امتحان نهایی سال سوم دبیرستان به شیوه مشارکتی و به گروه دیگر به شیوه سنتی و انفرادی به مدت 6 هفته آموزش داده شد. برای کسب اطمینان از همگونی دو گروه فوق پیش آزمون مهارت خواندن اجرا گردید و بر اساس نتایج به دست آمده مشخص شد که دو گروه به یک جامعه آماری تعلق دارند. درگروه "مشارکتی"، دانش آموزان به گروههای 3 نفره تقسیم ومطابق چهارچوب و اصول پنجگانهٔ روش "یادگیری با هم"،آموزش مهارت "خواندن" در3 مرحله انجام شد.

ت . یافته های تحقیق:
نتایج تحقیق نشان داد که پیشرفت مهارت خواندن گروه یادگیری به شیوه مشارکتی به طرز معنی داری از گروه دیگر بیشتر نبوده است.اما مقایسهٔ عملکرد هر گروه با عملکردش در پیش آزمون نشان داد که تنها عملکرد "گروه مشارکتی" در طول دوره به طرز معنی داری رشد داشته است.

ث . نتیجه گیری و پیشنهادات:
به نظر محقق، یادگیری به شیوه مشارکتی تعادل مناسبی میان فعالیت معلم و دانش آموزان بوجود آورد و به علاوه یادگیری از همگروهها یک عامل مهم در بهبود عملکرد کلی گروه بود. علت این یادگیری را می توان بیشتر در شیوه ارزشیابی روش جانسن و جانسن جستجو کرد.

صحت اطلاعات مندرج در این فرم بر اساس محتوای پایان نامه و ضوابط مندرج در فرم را گواهی می‌نمایم.

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BY MEHDI RAHIMI

ENTITLED

On the Effects of the Learning Together Model of Cooperative Learning on English as a Foreign Language Reading Achievement of Iranian High School Students

BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Committee on Final Examination:

.....Dr. Khatib

.....Dr. Norouzi

.....Dr. Fahim

.....Dr. Mostafaee

Dedicated to

My Wife,

The Best Part of
my Every Day

Abstract

Cooperative Learning flourished out of a social constructivist perspective to learning and is almost an inevitable learning/teaching component in the dominant modern classrooms all around the world. With a growing reliance on cooperative learning in L1 classrooms and with the development of different versions of CL methods, a key question is how effective each one of these methods could be in L2 contexts. Findings of the recent studies, though controversial, are starting to uncover the complexities of Cooperative Learning and are evaluating the impact that different CL methods have on the overall achievement of the ESL/EFL learners.

To investigate the possible ways of such incorporation in reading classes, two groups of lower-intermediate Iranian high school students were taught reading via two methods of Conventional Whole-class and Learning Together Model of Cooperative Learning developed mainly by Johnson & Johnson. A reading pre-test was given to assure their homogeneity before instruction. The data on the pre-test was also used to see any significant change at the end of the study. It was confirmed that the groups belonged to the same population regarding reading ability at the beginning of the study.

At the end of the instruction this was not to be the case. The Cooperative Learning group outperformed the Conventional group with regards to reading ability. It seemed that in the cooperative classroom the balance between teacher and students control was well established. In addition, peer learning proved beneficial since the evaluation criteria dictated that each group would have the same faith at the end of the day.

To conclude, this study indicates that it's high time that more novel techniques of instruction start taking the place of the lecture format classroom. Or at least there should be some harmony between old and new. Only time will tell if this can ever be accomplished.

Acknowledgement

During the Slow and Often interrupted evolution of this research project I have accumulated many debts, only a proportion of which I have space to acknowledge here.

First and foremost, I would particularly like to thank Dr. Khatib, My advisor, for his constant willingness to give advice, revise the work, and steer me back into a more focused direction. Without his help, this work would not and could not have been done and I certainly would not have been in the position to do it. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Norouzi as well who was so much more than just the best reader for my thesis. Not only has he been a mentor and a teacher, but also he has been a generous and reliable fountain of support for me and all the other students. And a warm, special thanks to Dr. Marefat whose stimulating, exciting, convivial and productive classes were always a learning experience and I benefited tremendously from them, specially the one on discourse analysis. I am grateful to Dr. Haghanni who really helped me with the data analysis process and provided me with the necessary instruction for the interpretation of results. I wish to thank the students at Pouya High School who made the study feasible through their individualistic and cooperative efforts. I also see it as incumbent upon myself to appreciate the help of Mr. Sajjadi, the Principal of Pouya High School who cooperated closely in conducting the study.

I could not possibly name everyone who has contributed significantly to my understanding of the subject one way or another and hence my apologies if I have inadvertently omitted anyone to whom acknowledgement is due.

I hope this end result does not let down most of you dear professors and friends who have supported me all along. Without doubt there will be errors, omissions and oversimplifications, for which I take absolute responsibility, as is customary, while hoping that the rest of the material will be enough to stimulate insights and new trains of thought into language teaching.

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Chapter One

Background and Purpose

1.1. Introduction

From a variety of theoretical perspectives, it is claimed that learning improves when it is carried out as a constructive and social activity. (Barros & Verdejo, 1998). Cooperative learning (CL, henceforth) originally based on the social constructivist views of learning and as a major teaching/learning strategy , aims to make instruction more relevant and students more responsible (Barros & Verdejo, 1998).

CL 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).CL represents the product of ongoing investigation based on theory, research, and practice as to how to maximize the benefits of student-student interaction. (Jacobs, Iddings, & McCafferty, 2006). Over 550 research studies (ibid) back the conclusion that Cooperative Learning produces gains across all content areas, all grade levels, and among all types of students including special needs, high achieving, gifted, urban, rural, and all ethnic and racial groups. In terms of consistency of positive outcomes, Cooperative Learning remains the strongest researched educational innovation ever

with regard to producing achievement gains (Kagan, 1999). Several studies have also been conducted in L1 settings comparing the relative effectiveness of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

The purpose of CL is to make each group member a stronger individual in his/her own right (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). It is not having students merely sitting together, helping the others do their work. Having students who finish their work first to assist others is not a form of CL, either. Neither is assigning a group of students to work together without assuring that all contribute to the product. The concept of grouping and the nature of these grouping is an important issue.

CL as a generic term refers to numerous strategies for grouping students. At least 20 different strategies have been formally described in the research literature (Johnson& Johnson, 1989; 1994, 1998; Jacobs, Iddings, & McCafferty, 2006). For example, the Structural Approach (Kagan, 1989), Group Investigation (Sharan & Sharan, 1992), Student Team Learning (Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, & Snapp, 1978; Slavin, 1995), Curriculum Packages (Slavin, Leavey, & Madden, 1986) Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD), Learning Together Model(Johnson & Johnson,1994), Team Game Tournament, Team-

Assisted Initialization, Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, Numbered Heads Together, etc...

Even though appropriate use of student groups for learning has been shown to yield significant learning improvement across disciplines, the successful application of CL in classrooms still eludes many educators (Johnson& Johnson, 1999a).In fact one of the very important features of CL is appropriate assignment to groups since grouping "Who with whom" in the courses which employ CL as the major instructional model is very important. Considering just with a change in group composition a whole educational course can be more efficient or unsuccessful, it seems reasonable to investigate this issue empirically instead of wavering among many contradictory findings (Baer, 2003).

As mentioned, one of the newly developed models of CL is Johnsons' Learning Together Model. This model consists of well-organized strategies each in line with one of the five major principles forming the backbone of the whole model, namely, positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, group processing, and development of small- group interpersonal skills (Johnson & Johnson,1994a,1994b).The key issue to be investigated is the effectiveness of Learning Together Model in reading skills of EFL

high school students in Iran, where, most probably, L2 reading has been learned and taught conventionally and individualistically during the past few decades.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Reading is probably the most important skill the students need for success in their studies. Students may rarely have opportunities to talk to native speakers, but they have to read lengthy assignments in different subjects with varying degrees of detail and difficulty. As Farhady (1998) has pointed out, because of the rapid explosion in the world of science and technology, reading in English has received priority among other objectives of English language teaching. That is why the main goal of teaching English in many countries, especially within the educational programs, is to improve the reading ability of the students in order to enable them to extract new information from the original sources in their field. While most of the literature in second language reading has, so far , focused on such notions as bottom-up, top-down, and more recently, interactive approaches to reading, reading instruction is still conducted using traditional, teacher-centered formats in which most work is completed individually and often competitively (Nelson, 1996). In many occasions the conventional approaches to the teaching of reading in

which students are asked to review the relevant vocabulary, read the text, and answer the comprehension questions are not effective(Farrell, 2001). When students are required to "read the passage and answer the questions that follows" in fact, we are not teaching reading but rather testing their ability to comprehension a passage (Carrell, 1998).

Cooperative groups are important components of many L1 classrooms today. Many research studies have reported the superiority of this teaching/learning strategy to the traditional techniques of mostly teacher-centered methodologies. General guidelines for classroom motivation (e.g., Forsyth& McMillan, 1994) suggest emphasis on challenging, engaging, informative activities and the building of enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility in learners. CL as a well-developed instructional strategy offers these and many other potential benefits to learners (Panitz, 1998).

Although Cooperative Learning is attended to in such skills as writing and speaking in EFL & ESL situations, and indeed a number of valuable research projects is available focusing on these skills, cooperative reading classes are fairly new among L2 teachers and researchers. Many areas of CL are left untried and many language skill instructions are not taught following the CL models. Nowadays, many

researchers believe that teacher-centered classes will sooner or later give way to more active and humanistic approaches in which students are at the center of learning process (Chafe, 1998; Ghaith, 2003). However, there is still a need to investigate the efficacy of various CL models in promoting gains in the cognitive and non-cognitive domains of ESL/EFL instruction across different languages and cultures.

In the past, reading classes has mainly been held competitively in Iran. Most teachers prefer to follow their intuition as to the best way to help students learn reading skills. Although both the teachers and the students, find it hard to try this new and promising wave that is gradually changing all kinds of learning in educational settings, the scholars believe it is worth to take the trouble. The researcher has experienced many situations in which the students feel helpless when dealing with a reading text. The students don't know the required strategies and even if they knew, it would be impossible for many of them to decipher the intended meaning in the texts.

Cooperative Learning, with its promises to increase the achievement and reduce the feeling of alienation among L2 learners (Ghaith, 2003) could be a way out. Consequently, the present study set out to investigate the effects of the Learning Together model of CL on