



Payame Noor University

Faculty of Humanities

Thesis Submitted for the Award of
M.A. in Teaching English Language

Department of Foreign Languages

The effect of Cooperative Game on Iranian
Students' achievements in English Alphabet Learning

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Abstract:

This study sought to examine the effect of cooperative game on Iranian students' achievements in English alphabet learning. Cooperative games are games, in which players or teams work together towards a common goal without defeating someone. The methodology used in this study was experimental. The population of the study was 60 female students from the grade one in secondary school in Tabriz, Iran. Prior to study five grade one classes were administered a homogeneity test. From the results obtained through the test, two homogenous groups were selected as an experimental and control group. The tools used were a homogeneity test, an achievement test, two oral tests and six practice quizzes. Cooperative game was used with a grade one class and was compared to another grade one class which worked in groups lacking the game. Both groups completed homogeneity test, six practice quizzes and two oral tests which measured changes in academic scores. The study suggested the following null hypothesis: H₀. Cooperative game has no significant effect on Iranian students' achievements in English alphabet learning. The findings of the achievement test are analyzed through t-test. The results of the study suggest that cooperative game had a significant effect on Iranian students' achievements in English alphabet learning.

Table of the contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1-7
1-1 Introduction.....	1
1-2 Statement of the problem.....	4
1.3 Research questions and hypotheses.....	5 1.4
Background of the study.....	5
1.5 Significance of the study.....	6
1.6 Definitions of key words	6
Chapter 2: Literature of review.....	8-39
2.1 Defining Cooperative Learning.....	8
2.2 Theories Underlying Cooperative Learning.....	9
2.2.1 The Vygotskian Perspective.....	9
2.2.2 The Piagetian Perspective.....	10
2.2.3 Bandura’s Social Learning Theory.....	12
2.2.4 Constructivism.....	13

2.3	Cooperative Learning vs. Group Learning.....	14
2.4	Learning Pyramid.....	15
2.5	Common Models of Cooperative Learning.....	17
2.5.1	Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT).....	17
2.5.2	Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD).....	18
2.5.3	Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI).....	18
2.5.4	Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC).....	19
2.5.5	Johnsons' Circles of Learning or Learning Together.....	20
2.5.6	Cooperative Controversy.....	21
2.5.7	Jigsaw and Jigsaw II.....	22
2.5.8	Group Investigation.....	23
2.5.9	Co-op Co-op.....	24
2.6	Research Supporting the Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning.....	25
2.6.1	Cooperative Learning and Achievement.....	25
2.6.2	Research and Studies on Cooperative Learning.....	27
2.6.3	The effectiveness of games for educational purposes.....	29
2.7	Reasons for using game.....	36
2.8	Advantages.....	37
	Chapter 3: Methodological approach.....	40-53
3.1	Introduction.....	40

3.2	The context.....	40
3.3	Participants.....	41
3.3.1	The experimental group.....	43
3.3.2	The control group.....	44
3.4	Materials.....	45
3.5	Instrumentation.....	45
3.5.1	Game method.....	46
3.6	Data Collection Procedure.....	48
3.6.1.	homogeneity test for determining homogeneous groups.....	48
3.6.2	Practice quiz.....	48
3.6.3	Oral tests.....	50
3.6.4	achievement test.....	50
3.7	Procedure of the Research.....	51
	Chapter 4: Results and findings.....	54-62
4.1	Statistical procedure.....	54
4.2	High and Low Achiever students.....	62
	Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Implications.....	63-72
5.1	Conclusions.....	63
5.1.1	Effects of Cooperative Learning game on High/Low Achievers.....	64

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions.....	68
5.3 Time Constraints.....	71
5.4. Implementing in elementary, middle and high schools.....	71
References	73
Appendix 1: Homogeneity test.....	82
Appendix 2: World list.....	84
Appendix 3: Practice quiz.....	85
Appendix 4: Drills of the text book.....	86
Appendix 5: Achievement test.....	88
Appendix 6: Game cards.....	90
Appendix 7: Critical values for the t-test statistic.....	92

List of the tables

Table 3.1: The profile of the population by English familiarity and number.....	42
Table 4.1: Scores of pre-test and post- test for experimental group.....	55-56
Table 4.2: Scores of pre-test and post- test for control group.....	57-58
Table 4.3: The analysis of post-tests scores.....	59
Table 4.4: Scores of oral test for experimental group.....	60
Table 4.5: Scores of oral test for control group.....	60
Table 4.6: The scores of practice quizzes for groups (Control).....	61
Table 4.7: The scores of practice quizzes for groups (Experimental).....	61
Table 4.8: The calculated points of practice quizzes for groups (Experimental).....	62
Table 4.9: The means scores of high/low achiever students in the achievement test.....	62

List of the figures

Figure (2-1): Learning pyramid.....	16
Figure(3-1): Procedure of the four phases.....	52

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

It cannot be denied that English language teaching is a broad area of study which constantly attracts attention and interest. Although the study of language is considered a science, it still remains largely an art-based discipline. Language teaching involves not only linguistics, but also anthropology, psychology, history and so on. For this reason, language teaching is a very complicated and subjective area which is virtually impossible to be defined.

English language teaching becomes more complicated with the increase in learning and teaching of the language throughout the world. Many English language teachers are constantly striving to improve the quality of English language teaching. On the other hand teaching English to non-native speakers presents a significant challenge. Language and cultural barriers make it especially difficult for beginning students grappling with English for the first time. According to David Thybera (2011) “teachers’ skills in motivating learners play a pivotal role in student achievement. Lack of motivation leads to lack of focus and effort and ultimately lack of success” (para. 1). Teachers must figure out

effective techniques to motivate foreign students if these learners are to make improvements in their English language capabilities.

There is a variety of activities that create this kind of atmosphere-games are only one of them. It would be easy to say that games are dynamic activities for complementing the teaching-learning process. Children learn through playing. Oftentimes they don't even realize they are learning if they are enjoying the game. Playing a game is a great opportunity to repeat the material in a way which is encouraging and not intimidating. If the teacher adds the element of challenge and competition into it and caters to the needs of a larger range of students and learning techniques which suit them; the outcome will be great achievements. We must discard the misconception which is that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and fun, it is not learning. This assertion is entirely faulty, simply because it is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. It appears then that one of the best ways of doing it is through performing games.

Some teachers often use games as short warm up activities or when there is some time left at the end of the lesson. This misuse of games will not be beneficial to the learners because they are not performed in the right way.

On the one hand, Ndiaga Sylla (2010) stated that games should not be regarded as activities filling odd moments when the teacher and the students have nothing better to do. He added that teachers can acknowledge that no one today can deny the efficiency and the effectiveness of games in teaching English as a foreign language. Teachers have to add that

games lend themselves well to revision exercises helping students remember material in an entertaining and pleasant way.

On the other hand, Vygotsky's (1986) emphasis on social relationships in the development of mental abilities and thus learning underlines the importance of peer support for any form of learning. The Vygotskian approach, then, emphasizes the need for a collaborative learning environment where learners are enabled and encouraged to interact and give each other support with their language learning, a public space characterized by interaction and scaffolding. Cooperative learning occurs during the interaction among small groups of students. According to educational researchers and psychologists, peer-interaction is the most successful form since it promotes support, acceptance, and social development (Slavin, 1990; Wells, Ling, & Maher, 1990). One of the key concepts of cooperative learning is the importance of a high success rate that results from working collaboratively on tasks.

Furthermore, cooperative language learning embodies the idea that language has a predominant social function and endorses the "social integrationist theory" in which language immediates communicative needs (Doughty, 2000). These statements encouraged me to think about cooperative games. According to James Withers:

Educators often neglect the concept of cooperation. When students learn only how to satisfy their own individual learning goals, they fail to recognize the value of helping one another to succeed. In the real world, people cannot afford to ignore the needs of their coworkers and neighbors. Thus, children need encouragement to coordinate their efforts in appropriate ways and for appropriate reasons. Cooperative learning games let

children know that the learning process can be fun. If it's a shared experience teaching children to cooperate can be a difficult task. (Withers, 2011)

Therefore, it is helpful to make cooperation into a game. Children can learn cooperation without even realizing it because they are forced to work together in order to complete certain tasks.

In fact this study surveys the effect of cooperative game on Iranian students' achievements in English alphabet learning. In Iran students start English learning from secondary school when they are at 12. It means that alphabet learning is the introductory activity in language learning that occurs in their adolescent period. Therefore, the first stage of learning the language would be very interesting. Once you are fluent with the alphabet, slowly you can learn many words. So to say, learning the alphabet is an important step towards learning to read and write.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Students in Secondary schools face a lot of problems with their English learning in terms of grammar and vocabulary. The level of their English proficiency is low. In fact this situation exists due to the lack of exposure to English in their daily life, as well as lack of interest in learning and using English. Furthermore, they do not have much interest in reading materials in English language because they do not understand what is being read. Therefore, it is hoped that cooperative game can enhance students' achievement in their acquisition of English language.

1.3 Research question and hypothesis

In order to investigate whether cooperative game, as an independent variable, has a significant effect on Iranian students' achievements in English alphabet learning, as a dependent variable, the following research question is posed.

- Does a cooperative game have any significant effect on Iranian students' achievements in English alphabet learning?

This study will investigate whether an experimental group of Iranian secondary schools' students provided with cooperative game tasks do better with English alphabet learning than a control group of the same subjects not provided with the treatment. For this purpose the following hypothesis will be tested.

H0: Cooperative game has no significant effect on Iranian students' achievements in English alphabet learning.

1.4 Background of the study

Clearly alphabet learning is the introductory activity in any language learning process. Therefore, language teachers tend to follow certain ways in teaching this issue. If they consider this activity important, it can enhance motivation and promote positive attitude among L2 learners. In order to arrive at the intended purpose of this research, at the beginning of the semester the intended population is randomly selected. The results of this research can be used in all places without any limitation.

1.5 Significance of the study

Many studies have been done about the effect of cooperative work on learning English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). However, any research has not been done about the effect of cooperative game on learning English alphabet.

According to prior educational researchers and psychologists, peer-interaction is the most successful form since it promotes support, acceptance, and social development (Slavin, 1990; Wells, Ling, & Maher, 1990). One of the key concepts of cooperative learning is the importance of a high success rate that results from working collaboratively on tasks. Due to differences in background and in ways of learning, different people will attend to different information (Gardner, 1999). Working in a group allows learners to take advantage of this type of diversity. On the other hand, different students will have different strengths which may lead them to play different roles in their group (Cohen, 1998). To make the cooperative language learning process a more interesting, motivating and successful experience, therefore, cooperative game has been noted.

1.6 Definitions of key words

Alphabet learning. Clearly alphabet learning is the introductory activity in any language learning; therefore, language teachers tend to follow certain ways in teaching this issue. If they consider this activity important, it can enhance motivation and promote positive attitude among L2 learners. In order to arrive at the intended purpose of this research, at the beginning of the semester the intended population is randomly selected. The results of this research can be used in all places without any limitation.

Cooperative game. According to Hadfield (1998) “a game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun. There are two kinds of games: competitive games, in which player or teams race to be the first to reach the goal and cooperative games, in which players or teams work together towards a common goal” (p. 4).

In fact, the activities in this research also, fall into linguistic games. In linguistic games, the goal of the game is linguistic accuracy: producing a correct structure or a correct form. Cooperative games are games which emphasize participation, challenge, and fun rather than defeating someone. Cooperative games emphasize play rather than competition. Cooperative games are not new. Some of the classic games we participated in as children are classic because of the play emphasis. There may be competition involved, but the outcome of the competition is not losing and sitting out the rest of the game. Instead, it may involve switching teams so that everyone ends up on the winning team.

Chapter 2

Literature of review

2.1 Defining Cooperative Learning

Slavin (1992) stated that cooperative learning refers to instructional methods involving small heterogeneous groups working together, usually toward a common goal. He added that this approach to learning involves changes to both task structure and incentive structure. The task structure refers to the ways in which the teacher or students set up activities designed to result in student learning where a cooperative structure involves students working together to help one another. The incentive structure moves away from a competitive one in many classrooms to a cooperative one so that the success of one student is positively related to the success of others. Johnson and Johnson (1994) highlighted the importance of how students interact, arguing that it can affect learning, liking of school and other students, as well as self-esteem. Abu and Flowers (1997) added to this, stating that cooperative interactions provide students with the skills needed for working with others outside of the school setting. As Johnson and Johnson, pointed out, however, it is not enough to just put students in groups and tell them to work together for cooperative learning to work. How such groupings are structured will largely determine whether or not