

# Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning on Students' Achievement in English Language

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## ABSTRACT

Language learning is the attainment of proficiency in a target language (TL) through formal instruction. Effective teaching strategies require students and not the teacher to do the conceptualizing, organizing, and theorizing about the subject matter. There are many teaching and learning methods used in teaching and learning English. The objective of this study was to compare effectiveness of instructional methods used on achievement in English among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in mixed day sub-county public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. The study was founded on cognitive-developmental, social-cognitive, behavioural-learning and social interdependence theories which support the use of cooperative learning. The study applied an experimental research design. It targeted all 1665 form two students and 54 English language teachers from 14 public mixed day sub-county secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County where the respondents were the form two students and English language teachers. Sample size was 273 students and eight English subject teachers. In sampling for the schools, students and teachers, simple random sampling technique was applied. Data was collected using learners' questionnaires which were administered to both the experimental groups and the control groups, interview schedules which were administered to teachers of English in the sampled schools and Learners' English Language Achievement Tests which were administered as pre-tests before the treatment to one experimental group ( $E_1$ ) and one control group ( $C_1$ ) and a post-test was administered after one week of treatment to the four groups ( $E_1$ ,  $C_1$ ,  $E_2$  and  $C_2$ ) to measure students' achievement. A pilot study was conducted in Machakos sub-county to test validity and reliability of the research instruments. These instruments were also validated by experts from the university. Reliability of the achievement tests was established through a split-half method and a correlation coefficient of  $r=0.86$  was obtained. Test re-test method was used to establish reliability of the questionnaire and the interview schedule. A correlation coefficient of  $r=0.807$  for the questionnaire and  $r=0.806$  for interviews was obtained and the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the tools was higher than the minimum acceptable alpha value of 0.70 or above hence, the research tools were considered reliable. Data was analyzed using both descriptive analyses (percentages, mean scores and standard deviation) and inferential analyses (a t-test and ANOVA) and presented in tabular form while the Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis majorly thematic analysis. The study revealed that the mean gain ( $M = 15.34$ ) of the Experimental group was significantly different from that of the control group ( $M = 11.67$ ). Experimental groups ( $E_1$  and  $E_3$ ) had higher mean scores than the control groups ( $C_2$  and  $C_4$ ). This implies that the treatment (CL) enhanced students' achievement on English test among students in mixed day sub-county public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. Experimental groups were taught through cooperative learning (CL), which may imply that the method resulted into higher achievement than the conventional teaching methods. The differences between the mean scores were statistically significant at the 0.05 level implying that the treatment given to the experimental group had

some effects on students' motivation and that the treatment (CL) enhanced students' motivation. The hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in instructional methods used on achievement in English among students taught English by cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching in Kathiani Sub-County was rejected. Teachers of English in secondary schools need to embrace student-centered teaching approaches during instruction since they are associated with efficiency in the acquisition of linguistic skills.

**Key words:** Conventional teaching, Cooperative Learning, Learning outcomes

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Cooperative learning (CL) is a teaching strategy where students of mixed levels of ability are arranged into groups and rewarded according to the group's success, rather than the success of an individual member. In some cases, each group member is individually accountable for part of the task; in other cases, group members work together without formal role assignments (Illies et al., 2015). Conventional approach refers to the traditional way of teaching where in most of the time lecture method is used. The way learners interact and perceive one another has a lot of impact on their achievement.

A study to investigate the effects of CL on Chinese English foreign learners' competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary revealed clear improvement when using CL in the teaching of listening, speaking and reading but no differences were found between the CL and the conventional teaching in the areas of writing and vocabulary (Ning & Hornby, 2010). Another study conducted among the Taiwanese college students in terms of English oral performance and motivation when teaching is done using CL showed an improvement of the learners' oral skills and motivation (Yough, 2018). In addition, a study amongst Yemeni university students revealed that there was a remarkable development in the students' speaking and motivational strategies after the introduction of CL (Ahmed & Omer, 2014). These and other studies not mentioned herein indicate that there is a significant effect of CL on learners' language skills.

English as a second language is taught and used as an official language of communication in Kenya as well as a medium of instruction in schools and other learning institutions. It is also a language used for international communication hence those who master and speak it well; reap many academic, social and professional benefits (Owiti et al., 2014). Teachers need to apply methods and strategies for learner centered instruction and a promising method to traditional speaking instruction is the Cooperative Learning Approach (Hall, Haley, & Ferro, 2011). This method serves as the alternative way of teaching for promoting speaking and social interaction among the students (Ning, 2011). Cooperative learning as per the available research suggestions is of great influence on the development of learners' speaking skills (Al-Sohbani, 2013).

In Kenya, a study on the use of CL on poetry teaching indicated that there was a great improvement on poetry learning and motivational strategies among learners (Chemwei & Somba, 2014). Another research conducted on the effects of CL on students' achievement and motivational strategies towards oral literature genres revealed that CL was an effective method which English and literature teachers needed to be encouraged to use in the instruction of English and literature (Sono, 2018). A research on the effectiveness of computer-based CL on students' English grammar indicated that computer-based CL method helped learners improve their achievement in English grammar (Orato, 2013). However, among the boys and girls who were exposed to cooperative learning strategy, there was no significant difference in their performance in English.

In addition, those in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group who were instructed using the conventional teaching approach. The study therefore was on effectiveness of cooperative learning

on student's achievement in English language in Kathiani sub-county, Kenya.

The Kenya national examinations council (KNEC) report for the year 2018 KCSE examination outlined the performance of candidates in the three papers offered in the English subject. Data for the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 was also provided for comparison. Candidates' overall performance in English subject for the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 were reported to be poor. Performance of candidates in the year 2018 is comparable to that of 2017. The English subject mean dropped minimally by 0.77 points from 73.55 with a standard deviation of 22.57 to 72.78 with a standard deviation of 22.27 (KNEC, 2019). The overall performance in the subject for the five years falls short of the ideal mean of 100 (50%) calling for innovation in curriculum implementation (KNEC, 2019). Poor mean scores in English language were also reported in Kathiani sub-county for the last four years. The mean scores were: 2015 (4.87) D plus, 2016 (4.59) D plus, 2017 (4.05) D plus and 2018 (4.58) D plus (Kathiani sub-county examination reports, 2019).

Teachers of English language in most of the Kenyan schools use conventional teaching, the teacher is seen as the authority of the classroom and learners have a limited chance to practice their English language skills (Sure & Ogechi, 2019). Despite the academic, social and professional benefits of the English language, its performance in K.C.S.E continues to be poor over the years. There is need therefore to improve the current performance of English language among Kenyan secondary school learners (KNEC, 2019). This study was therefore on effectiveness of cooperative learning on student's achievement in English language in Kathiani sub-county, Kenya.

### **Objective of the Study**

To compare effectiveness of instructional methods used on achievement in English among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County.

### **Hypothesis of the Study**

There is no statistically significant difference in effectiveness of instructional methods used on students' achievement in English among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was based on four major theories supporting the use of cooperative learning: cognitive-developmental, social-cognitive, behavioural-learning and social interdependence theories.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Cooperative learning is a promising method in relation to the traditional language teaching method (Renau, 2016). It serves as alternative way of teaching for promoting language skills and social interaction among learners (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Research done by scholars from various parts of the world indicate that CL is of great effect on developing learners' language skills (Katawazai & Saidalvi, 2020). Ahmed and Omer (2014) conducted a study amongst Yemeni university students and the findings revealed that there was a remarkable development in the students' speaking and attitudes after the introduction of CL techniques. Each teacher is unique in his or her teaching when it comes to delivery of content. That is why some teachers can be described as effective or ineffective pedagogically. It therefore becomes the duty of all teachers to involve students in practical exercises which will foster the development of students' speaking skills and also test these skills. Aldrich and Shimazoe (2016) view talking as a means of learning through exposure for students' linguistics development to be achieved. Saloman and Parkins, (2019) add that

learners shape and reshape ideas through talking. Therefore, spoken language is very important thus learners are expected to talk during classroom interaction. To enhance speaking in class, a teacher of English can employ various methods to enhance the development and acquisition of speaking skills in English. Saloman and Parkins, (2019) conducted a study in language to establish the effect of the language teachers use of approaches on the learning process. The author found out that the style of language used by the teacher could prevent the content from getting through to the learners and prevent some from contributing to the classroom dialogue.

In Kenyan schools, Akuka et al., (2013) studied on the use of CL on poetry teaching which indicated that there was a great improvement on poetry learning and attitude among learners. Another research conducted by Otieno, (2014) on the effects of CLA on students' achievement and attitude towards oral literature genres revealed that CLA was an effective method which English and literature teachers needed to be encouraged to use in the instruction of English and literature. Orato, et al (2013) also researched on the effectiveness of computer-based CL on students' English grammar and the results indicated that computer-based CL method helped learners improve their achievement in English grammar. These and other studies not mentioned herein indicate that there is a significant effect of CL on learners' language skills.

Makini et al., (2020) carried out a study to interrogate learners' verbal communication in the English language during classroom interaction and it was found that group work was one of the methods which involved engaging students in debates and lively discussions. Learners should therefore be exposed to situations where they can use language in context (Odima, 2015; Syafini et al., 2018). In this context, learners should be encouraged to express themselves orally, for example, in class discussions and be provided with opportunities for role-play, drama and debates. Odima, (2015) goes on claiming that, if students are well exposed in their learning, minimal guidance is needed because they are able to gain more vocabulary and build in their use of language.

Owiti et al., (2014) posits that, learning should take place by doing in order to produce the best results. Therefore, practical methods like group activities, inquiry, discovery and discussions should be very much emphasized by educators. The author further contends that, learners should be encouraged to express themselves orally in class discussion and where possible and be provided with radios, televisions (TVs) and videos because they promote students' oral skills, aural skills and appeal to their senses. Moreover, the teacher of English too should continue perfecting own spoken English so as to serve as a role model for students to emulate. Lynch, (2016) support this argument by claiming that group work when managed well can lead to increased prospects for learners to speak English. This small group setting provides favourable context for the learners to use language freely from the teacher's domination. In this respect, classroom teachers should only be facilitators and enablers but not providers of knowledge. Besides, repetition and imitation be employed in the learning of speaking skills (Owiti et al., 2014).

Gilakjani, (2016) conducted a study on linguistic strategies teachers of English use to teach language oral skills. The study findings revealed that teachers taught using various strategies for learners to develop their English oral proficiency skills like dialogue, group and pair discussions and storytelling. Margret however in the study noted that debates were not adopted by the teachers due to the fact that debates seemed boring to teachers. Chemwei and Somba, (2014) carried out a related study to scrutinize the interaction in English language lessons with a view to investigating the role teachers played in encouraging learners to speak. Findings for the study indicated that teachers used teacher-centred methods in teaching, that is, explanation, questioning other than discussion methods. Chemwei and Somba, (2014) found questioning method used to check the understanding of concepts by learners.

According to Panitz, (2013), classroom and social contexts are very important for language learning to take place. As a result, teachers should help the learners learn by themselves by exposing them to contexts rich in English input instead of expecting learners to acquire new vocabulary naturally in an L2 just as children

when acquiring their first language (Metto & Ndiku, 2014). This implies that, for a learner to competently speak in English, first, this learner should understand the meaning of the new vocabulary learnt in the second language and then use these new words within a given context hence successful language acquisition and learning. There are several learning and teaching approaches that learners and teachers can use during instruction. These include cooperative learning approaches and conventional methods of teaching.

Effectiveness of conventional and cooperative learning methods has been done across syllabus and in various subjects (Siltala, 2020). Sonoi (2014) pointed out that conventional learning approach in a number of areas including poetry, plays, novels, summary writing, grammar and oral literature were found to be too difficult for students. However, it was felt that these areas were primarily perceived as difficult due to the approach adopted in teaching them. The review therefore recommended that the oral aspect of poetry and oral literature be covered under the language skills of listening and speaking while the study of novels would be handled under reading skills. On the other hand, summary writing skills would be taught under reading and writing. Grammar would be reorganized and content presented in a spiral approach under the broad areas of parts of speech, phrases, clauses and sentences (MOEST, 2009). This recommendation was adopted and led to a totally integrated English syllabus and strategy to the teaching and assessment of English in secondary school. Further, Slavin (2007) asserted that quality of instruction matters a lot during English students' instructions.

Owiti et al., (2014) argued in support of the cooperative approach in instruction of grammar in context, the same perception held by Wanjau, (2014) who notes that conventional methods to coaching grammar instruction policies out of context, together with labeling of sentence elements has shown that these processes have little or no effect on improving scholars writing. Makini et al., (2020) further argued that as opposed to conventional methods of instruction of grammar, in contextualized grammar practice, there is usage of real and longer texts. This aims at training learners on effective use of grammatical policies and sentence structures. The argument at the back of teaching grammar in context states that due to the fact that students have difficulty shifting what they research in drills to their writing, grammar ought to be taught through the writing itself. Diverse techniques of contextualizing grammatical ideas can be used to improve the writing capability of learners. However, little has been stated approximately the right, or simplest teaching techniques to facilitate the grammar acquisition and improvement of language. The present study thus sought to assess the effectiveness of cooperative learning on student's achievement in English language in Kathiani sub-county, Kenya.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized Experimental Research Design, in which the researcher used Solomon's four, non-equivalent control group design. The quasi-experimental design compared control groups, which were taught English using the conventional teaching methods with experimental groups which were instructed English using CL. To achieve the objective, form two learners of English in four intact classes were sampled for the study. From a population of fourteen public mixed day sub-county secondary schools, four intact classes were identified through simple random sampling. There was a sample of two experimental classes which were taught English subject for one week using CL to check on learners' involvement in CL activities and two control groups which were taught English using the conventional methods. The researcher used questionnaire, interview schedules and English language achievement tests as data collection tools.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The results of data analysis on effectiveness of instructional methods used on achievement in English among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in mixed day public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County in mixed day public secondary schools in Kathiani

Sub-County revealed the following:

**Comparison of students' pre-test mean scores**

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value
E <sub>1</sub>	64	28.69	2.85	121	0.842	0.291
C <sub>1</sub>	59	29.04	2.76			

Two groups (E<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub>) were pre-tested before the collection of actual data. The results of the

Pre-tests revealed that the mean score of students in the experimental group (28.69, SD = 2.85) was slightly less than that of the control group (29.04, SD=2.76). The t-test results revealed that the difference in mean scores between the two groups was not statistically significant at 0.05 level,  $t_{(121)} = 0.842$ ,  $p = 0.291$ .

Research outcomes showed that most of the students of English in secondary schools in Kathiani sub-county, Machakos County believed that cooperative learning approach in English lessons gives learners opportunities for interaction and participation in the classroom enabling the acquisition of speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills. In addition, majority of the teachers of English were of the view that through cooperative learning approach in English learning, students can infer and interpret meaning correctly from spoken discourse. This implies that cooperative learning approach can enable learners to develop conceptualization skills and therefore are able to correctly interpret the meaning of spoken words.

Learner centered methods enabled learners to develop conceptualization, listening, speaking writing and reading skills. This showed that learner-centered methods were effective in learners' acquisition of linguistic skills. Student's acquisition of speaking skills enabled them to speak fluently and confidently in different occasions in and outside school. In addition, adequate learners' preparation enabled learners to acquire linguistic skills in English. The preparation involves incorporating content material into language classes, storytelling during learning of content in English and use of audio player equipment in learning and teaching English grammar. In instructional planning, expert teachers use specific learning targets to remove distracting items and irrelevant tasks from the day's lesson. This improves a learning atmosphere enabling learners' acquisition of linguistic skills.

**Post-test Analysis Mean Score on Effectiveness of Instructional Methods**

Group	N	Mean score	SD
I (E <sub>1</sub> )	64	36.54	4.93
II (C <sub>1</sub> )	59	29.77	4.02
III (E <sub>3</sub> )	64	41.65	4.99
IV (C <sub>4</sub> )	59	34.88	4.55

From the table above, experimental groups (E<sub>1</sub> and E<sub>3</sub>) had higher mean scores than the control groups (C<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>4</sub>). Experimental groups were taught through cooperative learning (CL), which may imply that the method resulted into higher achievement than the conventional teaching methods.

**Comparison of Post Mean Score Using ANOVA**

Scale	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F-ratio	p-value
Between groups	1365.627	3	455.209	16.835	0.0001
Within groups	4315.381	179	24.108		
Total	5681.008	182			

The null hypothesis in the study was that there is no statistically significant difference in effectiveness of instructional methods used on achievement in English among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. In order to test the hypothesis, t-test and ANOVA were used. The differences in the mean scores of the groups were statistically significant at 0.05 level,  $F(3, 179) = 16.835, p = 0.0001$ . The implication of these results is that the treatment had some effect on achievement of students in English. This implies that the treatment (CL) enhanced students' achievement. Effectiveness of instructional methods used on achievement in English among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County is different. Therefore, the hypothesis that stated that there is no statistically significant difference in effectiveness of instructional methods used on achievement in English among students taught English through cooperative learning approach and conventional teaching methods in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County is not accepted at 0.05 alpha level.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers of English in secondary schools need to embrace student-centred teaching approaches during instruction since student-centred approaches were associated with efficiency in the acquisition of linguistic skills. Secondary school English teachers should also be encouraged to explore the application of cooperative learning in their classroom instruction as the task is enormous. Teacher trainers should integrate CL among instructional strategies being inculcated into the students. Further, seminars and workshops should be organised for serving teachers to keep abreast with principles and implementation process of CL.

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