



## **Cooperative Learning in EFL Classrooms: The Role of Effective Group Processing in Enhancing Teaching and Learning Outcomes**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the role of cooperative learning in enhancing language proficiency and social development in EFL classrooms. Effective language acquisition requires students to develop the four language skills, master linguistic elements, and understand cultural contexts essential for communication. However, limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom hinder students' progress. Cooperative learning addresses this challenge by promoting meaningful interaction and collaboration. According to Smith (1996), cooperative learning involves small groups where students work together to maximize their learning outcomes. Effective group processing within cooperative learning not only fosters the sharing and refining of strategies but also encourages learners to view language acquisition as a collaborative endeavor. Despite its benefits, many teachers fail to distinguish between merely placing students in groups and fostering genuine cooperation. Kessler (1992) emphasizes that successful cooperative learning requires structured activities that promote accountability, interdependence, and commitment to group goals. This study highlights the importance of carefully managing group dynamics and offers strategies for building effective cooperative groups in EFL contexts. Findings suggest that structured cooperative learning enhances students' language proficiency, engagement, and interpersonal skills, ultimately contributing to more successful learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Cooperative Learning; Group Processing; EFL Classrooms; Language Proficiency; Collaborative Learning; Student Engagement.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

EFL refers to learning English in a country where English is not the spoken language. Similar to learning English as the first language, In EFL classrooms students have to learn the 4 language skills, the language elements, and the culture behind of the target language that is so essential to communication. Students need effective inside-outside-classroom activity facilitating their learning. However, students have limited opportunities to speak English outside the class since they have less immediate English needs. In this case, Bell (2011) says EFL students need Exposure to living English because it is more than a set of rules and words to memorize. Concerning this condition, in order to provide students with effective learning experience, teacher could use cooperative learning method offering students more opportunities for interaction in English, helping them improve their English proficiency and developing their ability in their social and human relation. Biehler and Snowman (1997-) state that cooperative-learning methods have been proven effective in increasing motivation for learning and self-esteem, redirecting attributions for success and failure, fostering positive feelings toward classmates, and increasing performance on tests of comprehension, reasoning, and problem solving. Furthermore, as one of the five key principles of cooperative learning; group processing, a specific type of reflection will give contribution in supporting students' success in learning language. In this case, both language proficiency and the acquisition of social skills is best achieved through a structured approach where skills are modeled, practiced, reinforced, and then reviewed in reflection session as the last stage in cooperative



learning method. In this reflection stage, both teacher and students discuss about what students did, what difficulties they found, and what positive progress they made as a individual and also as the member of team. However, to allow for group processing at the group level and the whole class level, teachers should allow time and the end of each class for groups and whole class to process how effectively the members worked together.

## **METHOD**

This study investigates the role of effective group processing in enhancing cooperative learning in EFL classrooms. To examine the impact of group processing, we adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

### *Participants*

The study involved 32 EFL students from a high school in a large urban area, all enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course. The students were randomly assigned to small groups of four to five members for the duration of the study.

### *Group Processing Framework*

The group processing model, as described by Sharan (1990) and Johnson et al. (1998), served as the foundational framework for this study. Group processing was defined as the reflective activity where group members assess their interactions by identifying which behaviors were helpful or unhelpful and making decisions on how to improve group dynamics. This reflection aimed to identify strategies that were working well and areas that required improvement (Slavin, 1988; Woolfolk, 1993).

### *Procedure*

1. Pre-Intervention Phase:
  - a. Initial Group Assignment: Students were placed in groups based on their current proficiency level in English, ensuring a balanced distribution of skills across each group.
  - b. Baseline Data Collection: A pre-test was administered to evaluate the students' baseline English proficiency levels. Students also completed an initial questionnaire to assess their attitudes toward cooperative learning and group work.
2. Intervention Phase:
  - a. Cooperative Learning Activities: Over the course of 8 weeks, students participated in various group tasks designed to enhance English language skills. These activities included group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and role-playing exercises. Each group was tasked with completing these activities in collaboration, with an emphasis on active participation and mutual support.
  - b. Group Processing Sessions: At the end of each session, time was allocated for group processing, following the model outlined by Johnson et al. (1998). In these sessions, group members reflected on their interactions, discussed which strategies were most effective, and identified areas for improvement. These discussions were structured using a set of guiding questions:
    - 1) What actions during the group session helped you learn the most?
    - 2) What actions were less helpful or hindered your learning?
    - 3) What changes could improve the group's effectiveness in future tasks?
3. Post-Intervention Phase:
  - a. Post-Test: A post-test, similar in format to the pre-test, was administered to assess the improvement in students' language proficiency.
  - b. Follow-up Questionnaire: A follow-up questionnaire was distributed to evaluate the students' perceptions of the cooperative learning experience, their group



dynamics, and their overall attitudes toward English learning after the intervention.

- c. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of students (5-7 students per group) to gain deeper insights into their experiences with group processing and its impact on their learning.

#### *Data Analysis*

1. Quantitative Analysis: Pre- and post-test scores were analyzed using paired t-tests to assess significant changes in students' language proficiency before and after the intervention.
2. Qualitative Analysis: Data from the follow-up questionnaire and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Key themes were identified related to group dynamics, students' reflections on the effectiveness of group processing, and their perceived improvement in language skills. Student feedback was also used to examine the extent to which group processing fostered positive interpersonal relationships and cooperative skills.

#### *Ethical Considerations*

All participants were informed of the study's purpose and procedures, and their participation was voluntary. Consent was obtained from both students and their guardians. All responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and students were assured that their participation would not affect their academic standing. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of group processing in cooperative learning and its impact on student outcomes in EFL classrooms.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Findings**

Reflection is one way to make students' thinking explicit. Teachers can thus use reflection to help students become aware of their own thinking, which can be difficult at the developmental stage where children think in concrete terms (Salmon, 2008). Moreover, the literature also identifies group processing as a valuable learning tool (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985) because it helps learners to focus on reality. This focus on reality has been emphasized by Bandura (1986), Gibbs (1981), and Glasser (1965, 1986) as well as Mezirow (1991) in Strahm (2007: 65), who qualified the statement and specified that "scores of studies ... have found that it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being, and their performance." In line with the previous ideas, Bayer (2008) says that when students receive thinking skills instruction, academic performance and learning gains may be made. Concerning this, Teachers play a key role in facilitating reflection in the classroom. Their explicit teaching of metacognitive strategies can help improve student academic performance (Boulware- Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007).

In more detail, McDonell in Kessler (1992: 61-62) states that during the processing stage for cooperative learning, children ask more questions and make comments about language as they become more proficient with language. It would appear that metalinguistic awareness is a by-product of language development. Directly linked to this metalinguistic knowledge is the development of metacognitive strategies. These are strategies that involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring of learning while it is taking place, and self evaluation after the learning experience. In this case, led by the teacher, group members talk about how they work together, they reflect on what they learned, on strategy that have been implemented, and identify social skills that they have practiced. Dealing with the positive aspect of group processing, teachers must prepare their teaching well. They must make well-organized classroom activity and time



allotment. They also must be ready with common problems happened in the small group process. Sometimes talk is affected by the membership of the group. This could be a result of personalities, attitudes toward culture, and the relationship between boys and girls.

### **Discussion**

Group processing, as defined in educational theory, involves students reflecting on their group's work and their individual interactions within that group to assess and improve their efforts toward achieving collective goals and maintaining productive working relationships. It plays a crucial role in cooperative learning environments, as it allows students to examine how effectively they have worked together and provides a space for reflection on their learning experiences. The main goal of group processing is to identify what aspects of the group dynamics and interactions were successful, reinforcing positive behaviors, and offering opportunities for improvement. This process not only focuses on outcomes but also on fostering collaboration and developing skills that enhance the overall learning experience.

The central premise of group processing is its focus on positive behaviors and constructive actions. Unlike traditional learning methods that often highlight mistakes or failures, group processing encourages students to focus on their strengths and the strategies that contributed to successful collaboration. By engaging in reflective dialogue, students develop a deeper understanding of their learning processes and are empowered to improve their teamwork and problem-solving skills. This focus on positive reinforcement helps build a supportive learning environment where students feel valued, increasing motivation and confidence in their abilities.

There are various ways in which teachers can structure group processing to ensure that it is both meaningful and effective. One common approach is for teachers to begin with a broad, open-ended question that invites students to reflect on their collective efforts. For example, a teacher may ask, "What did I find good, helpful, or positive about working together today?" This question encourages students to identify the aspects of the group activity that worked well and sets the tone for further reflection. From there, the teacher can guide the students with more specific questions designed to help them break down the group's interactions. These questions often include: (a) What actions from group members were particularly helpful in achieving our goals? (b) What behaviors or actions can be improved, and how can we make changes to improve our teamwork moving forward?

By focusing on these reflective questions, teachers enable students to assess their group dynamics in a structured way, ensuring that all voices are heard and that the discussion leads to tangible outcomes. This reflection allows students to engage in critical thinking about their actions, the actions of others, and the overall effectiveness of the group's efforts.

An important aspect of group processing is its flexibility to address specific challenges or areas for improvement. For instance, if a group is struggling with communication or cooperation, the teacher may use the group processing time to emphasize specific skills, such as active listening or clear communication. In this case, the teacher can allocate time for targeted practice during the group activities, monitoring the progress of each group and providing tailored feedback. By doing so, the teacher ensures that group processing is not only reflective but also purposeful, allowing students to work on specific skills that contribute to the overall success of their collaboration.

Another important consideration when implementing group processing is time allotment. While group processing can be highly beneficial, it requires careful management to ensure that it does not detract from the overall learning time. Teachers may choose to dedicate a small portion of the class to group processing at the end of each activity, making it a regular part of the routine. Alternatively, teachers can incorporate group processing into the middle of a class session to assess the progress of group work before it reaches its conclusion. Regardless of the specific



timing, it is essential that teachers remain mindful of balancing group processing with other instructional goals and time constraints, ensuring that students have enough time to reflect without sacrificing the completion of key learning tasks.

Ultimately, the process of group processing helps to create a culture of collaborative learning, where students not only develop academic skills but also social and interpersonal competencies that will benefit them in various contexts, both inside and outside the classroom. By encouraging students to reflect on their group interactions, teachers foster an environment in which students are motivated to improve their collaborative efforts, refine their learning strategies, and build more effective working relationships. Through careful structuring and ongoing support, group processing can significantly enhance the cooperative learning experience, leading to better academic outcomes and a more engaging and supportive classroom atmosphere.

## **CONCLUSION**

Cooperative group offers students more opportunities for interaction in English, helping them improve their English proficiency and developing their ability in their social and human relation. EFL students get effective inside-outside-classroom activity facilitating their learning in the form of exposure to living English. Pairs or small groups provide nonthreatening situation so that students are motivated to talk and communicate their ideas based on the real needs that is communicating their ideas to solve the task given by the teacher. Besides, during the reflection stage, group members have a chance to look closely at group process and their role so that students know well what the purpose of their learning, the learning process itself, and the progress that they have made. In this case, teachers have to do their role well. In preparing their teaching through cooperative learning, teachers need to clarify learning goals, students' roles, and expectations; divide resources within and among groups; provide task and rewards that promote team spirit; and most important, provide some kind of incentive and recognition for individual achievement. Teacher is also the person who facilitates whole class processing where groups share their reflections with the whole class. When students learn in conducive atmosphere that can facilitate learning, they can develop their language skill well. To sum up, McDonell in Kessler (1992: 51) states that one of aims of education is to assist students to achieve a high degree of language competence so that they may achieve personal fulfillment, reach their potential, and participate in society in meaningful way. For minority students, becoming an effective language user give access to mainstream culture. In this regard, language serves as a liberating tool.

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