Effectiveness of Using Cooperative Learning Approach to Have Students Engaged in Learning Short Stories

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Abstract

Cooperative learning is important in the classroom. It is a teaching method in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. This study was carried out in order to identify the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperative learning approach to increase learners' engagement in learning short stories. In this paper, cooperative learning approach by Crawford, Saul, Mathews, and Makinster (2005) was used in teaching the short story. Four cooperative learning strategies proposed by Crawford et al. (2005) and Kagan (1980) were applied. The strategies were sequenced according to ABC model (Anticipation Phase, Building Knowledge Phase, and Consolidation Phase). In this study, (75) first year English specialization students at Hinthada University participated. The selected material was a short story, "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. Evaluation of the students' attitudes towards cooperative learning approach was conducted by using a survey questionnaire. Analysis of the questionnaire results showed that most of the students actively participated in the cooperative learning activities and their views on cooperative learning were positive. It is hoped that this research will be of some help for teachers in teaching not only short stories but also any reading text.

Keywords: short stories, cooperative learning approach, strategies, attitudes

Introduction

The use of literature in the classroom allows students to learn new ideas and knowledge. Midhin (2015) said that among the types of literature, short story is considered as an effective tool since it is not only attracting the students' attention but it is also self-motivating. However, teachers must be able to use the correct and suitable strategies in teaching short stories to meet the needs of the students. According to Tivnan & Hemphill (2005), conventional and text-centered classrooms do not provide any instruction in the skills and strategies necessary for students to learn how to comprehend the text. This statement is strengthened by Slavin (1980) who says learners will benefit more from sharing each other's thoughts when working together as a group rather than working alone. Therefore, in this study, cooperative learning approach by Crawford et al. (2005) was employed as a tool to encourage mutual helpfulness in the groups and the active participation of all learners. As a learner-centred method, cooperative learning is a teaching method by which learners study by helping one another in small groups in their learning process in order to achieve a common objective (Açıkgöz, 2003). Four cooperative learning strategies of Crawford et al. (2005) and Kagan (1980): Mix/Freeze/Pair, Jigsaw, Inside-Outside Circle and Gallery Walk were chosen to enhance students' motivation and engagement in reading a selected short story. The material is the short story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. It is a prescribed text for first year English specialization students. After implementing the cooperative learning strategies, a survey questionnaire was distributed to determine students' attitudes towards the strategies.

Aim and Objectives

This research aims to discover the effectiveness of using cooperative learning approach in reading short stories. The objectives of the study are as follows:

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1. To introduce cooperative learning strategies to improve understanding of reading texts

2. To assess students' progress while performing activities

3. To find out students' views on cooperative learning

Research Questions

The present research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do cooperative learning strategies have an impact on the students?

2. What is the attitude of students towards cooperative learning?

Research Problem

When teacher-centred approach was used in teaching a short story prescribed in the textbook, students just passively took notes, listening to the teacher all the time and asking very few or no questions. Moreover, it was found that understanding a text was a problem for the weaker students while better ones could do it. Taking these problems into account, this research was conducted to make all the students cooperate in the learning process.

Literature Review

Cooperative learning is a teaching approach in which learners of diverse abilities, talents and backgrounds work together in small groups to attain a common goal. This will motivate stronger students to help weaker ones to be successful. Slavin (1986) said that cooperative learning enables students of all ability levels to improve. It allows students to learn actively even in large classes.

Benefits of Cooperative Learning

According to Crawford et al. (2005), there are some benefits of using cooperative learning approach in the classroom.

▪ **Higher Order Thinking**

Students in cooperative learning groups are made to work with ideas and concepts. They are challenged to offer their own interpretations of topics and to solve problems.

▪ **Motivation and Morale**

Students who take part in cooperative learning feel more attached to the school and to the class. This may lead to better attendance.

▪ **Learning Interpersonal Skills**

Students in cooperative learning groups learn to cooperate with others. Cooperation is increasingly recognized as an important life skill, for successful work, for happy family life, and for participation in a society.

▪ **Promoting Inter-personal and Inter-group Understanding**

Students who work in cooperative groups are more likely to learn to get along with people of different genders and from different social groups.

ABC Model

According to Crawford et al. (2005), strategies of learning can be divided into three phases: Anticipation, Building Knowledge, and Consolidation (in English these three terms are abbreviated as "ABC").

1. Anticipation Phase

In the anticipation phase, students are made ready to learn from the lesson. They are directed to think and ask questions about the topic they are going to study. It serves to call up the knowledge that students already have learned. Moreover, it sets purposes for learning and provides a context for understanding new ideas.

2. Building Knowledge Phase

The building knowledge phase is a phase of inquiry, in which students discover or construct new knowledge about the topic. Students also have to identify the main points and make the personal connections to the lesson.

3. Consolidation Phase

This phase occurs toward the end of the lesson in which teachers expect students to reflect on what they have learned, ask what it means to them, and reflect on how it changes what they thought.

Cooperative Learning Strategies

There are various cooperative learning strategies applied in teaching in different situations and contexts. Teachers can employ suitable strategies in order to make students learn cooperatively.

Crawford et al. (2005) suggests that there are mainly (14) cooperative learning strategies.

1. **Mix/Freeze/Pair:** a discussion structure where students have the opportunity to share ideas with new partners

2. **Close Reading with Text Coding:** the act of having students look for certain things in a text and mark the text when those things are found

3. **Jigsaw**: a learning strategy that enables each student to specialize in one aspect of a task

4. **Roles in Cooperative Groups**: a strategy of assigning certain roles to students within the groups to help them take individual responsibility

5. **Community Agreements**: an activity of sharing agreements among students

6. **Pens in the Middle**: a learning strategy that helps students share group time equitably

7. **Walk Around – Talk Around:** a useful method for quickly sharing ideas among a large group of students in a very short time

8. **One Stay/ Three Stray:** a learning activity for sharing ideas within a classroom

9. **Academic Controversy:** a strategy that leads students to argue different sides of an issue

10. **Trade a Problem:** a cooperative activity that requires students to locate an important issue in a topic of study and then formulate a problem about it for another group to answer

11. **Specialized Roles in Discussions:** a technique for managing discussions in small groups in which each student plays a different role and takes a different perspective on the discussion

12. **The Request Procedure:** a useful activity when students are reading through a text that is difficult for them

13. **Reading and Questioning:** a procedure that is carried out in pairs in reading a text

14. **Reciprocal Teaching:** an instructional activity in which students become the teacher in small group reading sessions

The cooperative learning structure of Kagan (1980) encompasses a variety of strategies. Among them, the following strategies have received the most attention.

1. **Three-Step Interview:** a technique that facilitates the development of skills such as active listening, note-taking and sharing information

2. **Inside-Outside Circle:** a sharing or discussion based learning strategy that allows students to work with multiple partners

3. **Rally Robin:** a learning strategy that enables students to share their thoughts and raise their concerns with questions

4. **Timed Pair Share:** a learning strategy in which students share ideas with a partner for a predetermined time while the partner listens

5. **Rally Coach:** a useful strategy that provides students with an opportunity to coach their peers through problems and questions

6. **Stand up, Hand up, Pair up:** an effective technique for energizing the class, forming random pairs or teams and reviewing information

7. **Gallery Walk:** a discussion technique that gets students out of their chairs and into a mode of active engagement

Research Methodology

Participants

The research was carried out at English Department, Hinthada University in the first semester of 2019-2020 Academic Year. (75) first year English Specialization students participated in this study.

Research Method

In this paper, cooperative learning approach by Crawford et al. (2005) was used to have students engaged in reading short stories. (2) out of (14) strategies proposed by Crawford et al. (2005): Mix/Freeze/Pair and Jigsaw and another (2) strategies by Kagan (1980): Inside-Outside Circle and Gallery Walk were used.

1. Mix/Freeze/Pair

This strategy is a lively means of having students work with new partners to complete a closely defined task. It is used to make students more alert and to arouse students' curiosity towards the lesson. Finding a random partner to solve a problem or to share the ideas develops social skills.

2. Jigsaw

This strategy helps all the students to study and learn all of the materials. Each student has an active role in teaching and learning and experiences deep understanding and higher order thinking.

3. Inside-Outside Circle

This strategy can give chances to all students to share information at the same time with different partners in a short time. As each student from both circles has to speak in English as much as possible, it will improve students' speaking and listening ability.

4. Gallery Walk

Teachers usually use this strategy to encourage students' creativity. It allows students to be actively engaged as they walk throughout the classroom to explore multiple texts or images that are displayed in a "gallery style".

Research Design and Procedure

The study was carried out through cooperative learning approach by Crawford et al. (2005). The subjects were (75) first year English specialization students from Hinthada University. The material was the short story "The Gift of the Magi" written by O. Henry as it was prescribed for first year English specialization students. Four cooperative learning strategies recommended by Crawford et al. (2005) and Kagan (1980): Mix/Freeze/Pair, Jigsaw, Inside-Outside Circle and Gallery Walk were employed through teaching process. The activities were arranged according to ABC model (Anticipation, Building Knowledge, and Consolidation). In Anticipation Phase, "Mix/Freeze/Pair" strategy was used to create a comfortable environment among students and to arouse students' interest about the topic. For Building Phase, "Jigsaw" was employed to read the text closely and "Inside-Outside Circle and Gallery Walk" strategy were applied in Consolidation Phase to reflect on what they learned. The students took one hour and fifty minutes for learning that story through four strategies. Then students were distributed a questionnaire adapted from Mcteish (2009) to determine their attitudes towards employing cooperative learning strategies on reading short stories. The data were calculated and the results were shown in a table and a chart.

Data Analysis and Results of the Study

This section is divided into two parts. The first subsection is about designing the lesson by using cooperative learning strategies and in the second subsection, attitudes of the students towards cooperative learning approach are analyzed.

Designing the lesson

The process of teaching the short story "The gift of the Magi" follows the three phases: Anticipation Phase, Building Phase and Consolidation Phase. (75) first year English specialization students took part in learning the short story through four cooperative strategies.

Anticipation Phase

Strategy	Mix/Freeze/Pair
Group Size	The whole class
Time Required	10 minutes
Step 1	Teacher wrote the topic "The Gift of the Magi" on the white board and asked students to think of any ideas about the topic. If they did not know the meaning of "Magi", they were allowed to use dictionary.
Step 2	Teacher explained the procedure of the game. When the teacher said "Go", students got up and went in different directions. Recorded music was played while students were moving around the room.
Step 3	When the teacher said "Freeze", they stopped and paired up with the person closest to them. Students took one minute each to share their ideas about the topic. The teacher circulated among the pairs and listened to their conversations.

Building Knowledge Phase

Strategy	Jigsaw
Group Size	Five members in each group
Time Required	45 minutes
Step 1	Teacher divided the story into five sections such as "Task A, Task B, Task C, Task D and Task E".
Step 2	Students were assigned to home groups of five members. There were 25 home groups. Each group had a mix of boys and girls and more capable and less capable students.
Step 3	The students were asked to name each member within home groups: "Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D and Student E".
Step 4	Teacher assigned five places to create expert groups again such as "Corner A, Corner B, Corner C, Corner D and Corner E".
Step 5	Student A was asked to go to Corner A, Student B to Corner B, Student C to Corner C, etc.
Step 6	The new group from each corner was the expert group. There were 25 students in each expert group. Students of expert group A were assigned to read Task A, the first portion of the story and other groups were also supported with assigned tasks.
Step 7	Students from each expert group, gathering five members, discussed and learnt together their same material.
Step 8	After having a thorough understanding about their portion, students returned to their home group and taught the chunk of text they had read to their group members and listened to the other ones.

Consolidation Phase

Strategy	Inside-Outside Circle
Group Size	Five members in each group
Time Required	10 minutes
Step 1	Teacher divided students into two equal groups (A and B). Each group (A) and (B) consisted of five students.
Step 2	Group (A) formed an inside circle and Group (B) formed an outside circle. The inside circle turned and faced the outside circle, forming pairs.
Step 3	Teacher provided them with a question "What is the biggest irony in this story?" to be discussed.
Step 4	Students from inside circle shared ideas to his or her partner from outside circle. Then, students from outside circle took their turn to share ideas again.
Step 5	Teacher said, "Change your partner". Then students from outside circle rotated (clockwise) and faced a new partner from inside circle and gave the information about the question.

Strategy	Gallery Walk
Group Size	Eight members in each group
Time Required	30 minutes
Step 1	Students were formed into groups and given blank sheets, highlighter pens, colour pencils, etc.
Step 2	Students discussed setting, characters, themes, plot, symbols used in the story and took notes of significant events.
Step 3	Students created posters that included the list of characters, important events and significant words of the story with illustrations.
Step 4	Students put their group posters on the wall.
Step 5	Teacher asked students to take a note of important points on each poster and prepare questions if necessary. Then each group was provided with colourful stars to vote the best poster.
Step 6	Students walked around the classroom to appreciate each group's creation and put the stars on the posters they liked.
Step 7	Students returned back to the seats. They asked the questions to the respective group when the facts on poster were unclear to them.

Students' evaluation on cooperative learning approach

After completing the above activities, a survey questionnaire was distributed among the students in order to realize their attitudes towards employing cooperative learning approach. The questionnaire was adapted from McLeish (2009) and had 10 items (See Appendix). The students were allowed to put a check mark (√) in the appropriate box to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), A (Agree), and SA (Strongly Agree).

Table (1) Description of students' attitudes towards cooperative learning

| No.	Statements	SD %	D %	A %	SA %
1.	Cooperative learning provides a relaxed classroom atmosphere.	-	2.5	33.5	64
2.	I willingly participate in cooperative learning activities.	6.7	9.3	30.7	53.3
3.	When I work with other students, I can perform more than when I work alone.	-	4	29.3	66.7
4.	Cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among students.	-	1.3	8	90.7
5.	Cooperative learning can improve my attitude towards reading short stories.	-	1.3	17.3	81.4
6.	Creativity is facilitated in the group activities.	-	2.3	14.7	83
7.	I want to work with students who are different from me.	4	16.7	43.3	36
8.	Cooperative learning makes me speak in English more than before.	3.5	21.3	47.2	28
9.	Through activities, I depend on myself rather than teacher.	2.7	-	10.7	86.6
10.	I prefer that my teacher uses group activities in teaching short stories.	1.3	2.7	13.3	82.7
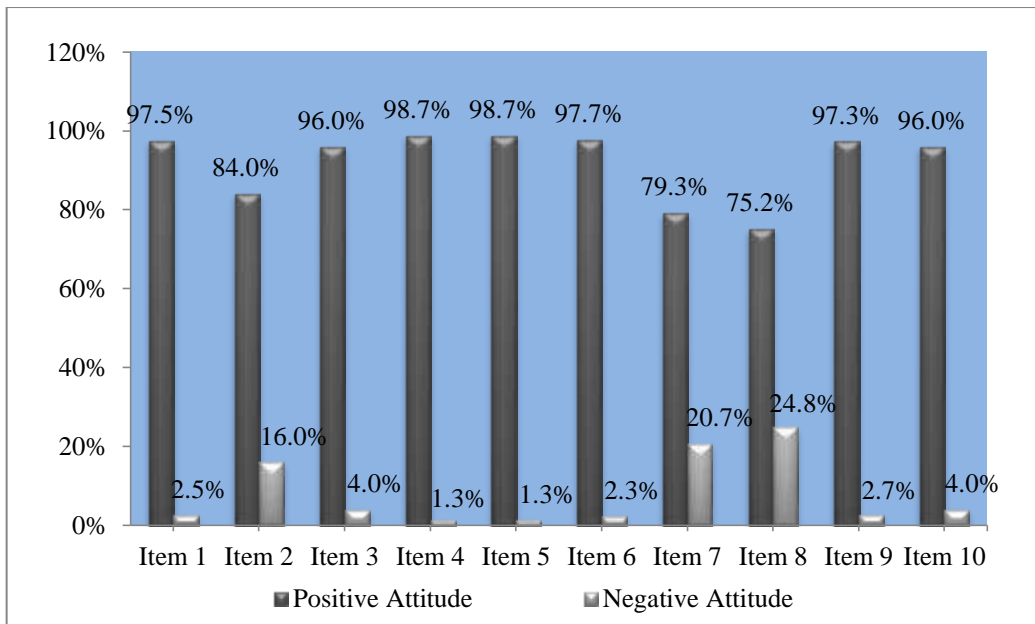
Figure (1) A comparison of percentages of students' positive and negative attitudes towards cooperative learning

Figure (1) shows the comparison of positive and negative views on cooperative learning approach. Observing the results, it can be seen that the majority of students enjoyed the strategies used in this study.

Discussion on the Results

In this section, the result of data analysis is discussed and the research questions are answered.

According to Sever (1995), since reading is a multidimensional process covering various aspects such as communication, perception and cognitive, affective and kinesthetic process, carrying out reading comprehension activities through cooperative learning strategies has helped the process to be experienced more actively.

Therefore, this study attempted to use cooperative learning approach in teaching a short story to have students engaged in learning process. (75) first year English specialization students at Hintahda University participated in reading the short story "The Gift of the Magi" through four cooperative learning strategies. While students were participating in the activities, the teacher walked around the class to observe the performance of the groups and it was found that almost all of the students were motivated and enthusiastic about their reading text. As each student had a responsibility to accomplish the task, both stronger and weaker students tried their best. However there were still few students who seemed timid and hesitated to take part in some speaking activities such as Mix/Freeze/Pair and Inside-Outside Circle. When a survey questionnaire was responded by the participants to reflect their views about employing cooperative strategies for reading the selected short story, it was found that the majority of the students had positive attitudes towards cooperative learning strategies. Figure (1) shows that statement (4) and (5) had the highest percentage (98.7%). So, it can be assumed that almost all learners agree that cooperative learning can improve their attitudes towards reading short stories. Moreover, as they have to depend on each other to complete the assigned task, they believe cooperative learning helps them to develop good relationships

among them. The percentages of statements (1), (3), (9) and (10) were also high (97.5%, 96%, 97.7% and 96%) respectively. It means a significant number of students have positive views on cooperative learning. They feel relaxed during activities. They think working with others can improve their performance more than working alone. Moreover, they believe that they become creative and independent and can offer new perspectives in group activities. As a result, the participants want more group activities and assignments to be used in teaching and learning short stories. However, as seen in Figure (1), few students (16%, 20.7%, 24.8%) disagree with the statement (2), (7) and (8). So, it can be known that some of the students are not willing to participate in learning activities. They feel uncomfortable to work with others and to speak in English in groups. The problem may be because of their learning style. They may prefer learning individually to learning cooperatively. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted to meet the needs of such kind of students.

Considering students' performance during activities and the results of the feedback questionnaire, it is found that cooperative learning approach is effective in teaching short stories and in enhancing students' motivation in learning process when compared with traditional teaching methods. Though there are few students who do not like cooperative learning, almost all of the students' perceptions towards this approach are positive. So, it can be said that cooperative learning has a positive impact on the students.

Conclusion

The present research analyzed the effectiveness of using cooperative learning approach in teaching short stories. As first year English specialization students were found passive in learning short stories, the research was carried out to have them motivated and enthusiastic. Four cooperative learning strategies: Mix/Freeze/Pair, Jigsaw, Inside-Outside Circle and Gallery Walk were used in teaching the story "The Gift of the Magi". After completing the tasks, students' views on cooperative learning model was evaluated with the help of a survey questionnaire. The results of this study indicate that most of the participants hold positive views of the implementation of cooperative learning strategies. It can be seen that when students work together in groups, they become confident to solve problems and enjoy learning. Therefore, it is recommended that cooperative learning approach should be employed to improve students' skills and to have students engaged in learning short stories.

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Appendix

Students' attitudes towards cooperative learning

Instruction: To respond to this questionnaire, please put a check mark (√) in the appropriate box to indicate level of agreement or disagreement with the statements: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), A (Agree), and SA (Strongly Agree).

No.	Statements	SD	D	A	SA
1.	Cooperative learning provides a relaxed classroom atmosphere.				
2.	I willingly participate in cooperative learning activities.				
3.	When I work with other students, I can perform more than when I work alone.				
4.	Cooperative learning enhances good working relationships among students.				
5.	Cooperative learning can improve my attitude towards reading short stories.				
6.	Creativity is facilitated in the group activities.				
7.	I want to work with students who are different from me.				
8.	Cooperative learning makes me speak in English more than before.				
9.	Through activities, I depend on myself rather than teacher.				
10.	I prefer that my teacher uses group activities in teaching short stories.				