

The Effect of Cooperative Learning on Students' Efl Reading Comprehension: Meshentie Grade Nine High School Students in Focus

Aragaw Delele Endeshaw

Department of English Language and Literature, Arba Minch University, Arba Minch, Ethiopia

Email address:

aragawdelele73@gmail.com

To cite this article:

Aragaw Delele Endeshaw. The Effect of Cooperative Learning on Students' Efl Reading Comprehension: Meshentie Grade Nine High School Students in Focus. *Education Journal*. Vol. 4, No. 5, 2015, pp. 222-231. doi: 10.11648/j.edu.20150405.16

Abstract: Education is a teaching learning process. Learning depends upon teaching instruction. During instruction, Students cannot be treated like an empty vessel into which any type of information can be passed down. A teacher must think of ways and means of stimulating and encouraging learning in the students. Hence, Cooperative Learning is as instructional methods in which students of all levels of performance work together in small groups toward a common goal. Therefore, the study aimed to investigate the effect of cooperative learning on learners English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading comprehension in Government Comprehensive Meshentie High School of grade nine students. The total population of the study was 320 students. Hence, two sections (80 students) were selected using random selection and assigned one experimental and the other section was control group by random assignment technique. To get data from the sample group, pre- and post-tests of reading comprehension, and two set of questionnaire probing students' and the teacher reflection towards cooperative learning were used. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of pre-test scores gained from 10 non-participant students and the validity of the pre-test was evaluated by three well experienced EFL teachers. The design of the research was nonequivalent pre-test-post-test control group quasi experimental design. One way ANOVA, Independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test were conducted to examine whether there were significant inter- and intra-group differences of reading comprehension achievements. Content analysis was utilized to analyze the experimental groups and the teacher reflective reports toward CL. Results of this study showed that cooperative learning group gained significant progress between pre-and post-tests and outperformed conventional learning group in the English reading performance. In addition, the experimental group's three-leveled achievers made striking improvement simultaneously. The experimental group and the teacher perceived CL as the method of interacting with group members to generate mutual advantages.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language Learning, Cooperative Learning, Student Teams' Achievement Division

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Ali khan (2008) explained that education is a teaching learning process. Learning depends upon teaching instruction. During instruction, a child cannot be treated like an empty vessel into which any type of information can be passed down. A teacher must think of ways and means of stimulating and encouraging learning in the students. She/he should provoke their interest and motivate them to learn. She/he should create conditions in which they feel the need to teach.

When one has read a text with understanding, s/he is said

to have comprehended it. The ultimate goal of reading is comprehension or to get meaning from written text. Therefore, reading comprehension can be defined as a process of constructing a mental representation of textual information and its interpretation, or in other words, it is extracting meaning from written words, sentences, and texts. Without comprehension, reading is wearisome, worthless exercise (Van Den Broek & Kremer, 2000 cited in Tesfamichael, 2011).

Slavin (1982) defines Cooperative Learning (CL) as instructional methods in which students of all levels of performance work together in small groups toward a common goal which encompasses instructional models such as Student Team-Achievement Divisions (STAD), Team-

Assisted Individualization (TAI), etc. As such, Johnson et al. (1998) maintain that CL accommodates the tenets of the theories of cognitive-developmental, behavioral, and social interdependence.

The attention of the present study is the applicability of Student Teams' Achievement Division (STAD) model in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading comprehension classroom. According to Slavin (1987), STAD has been used in such diverse subject areas as math, language arts, social studies, and science. The STAD model has consistently been shown to be among the most simple and effective CL methods in improving student achievement of well defined objectives in various subjects (Ghaith and Yaghi, 1998). Slavin (1978) asserts that STAD is a model of CL which includes small heterogeneous teams of 4–6 members who tutor each other on the material in the course and prepare each other for weekly quizzes. In addition to this, Slavin (1987) adds that STAD operates on the principle that students work together to learn and are responsible for their teammates' learning as well as their own, and stresses having team goals that are dependent on the learning of all group members.

Slavin (1995) and Ghaith (2003) highlight four important stages for implementing STAD in the classroom: teaching, team study, individual quizzes, and team recognition. As such, learners first listen to the teacher's explanation of material, following which they work in mixed groups based on their ability to complete activities or worksheets, take individual quizzes, and finally recognize their team achievements.

This study, thus, aims to explore Cooperative Learning model STAD which is an instruction for teaching in the classroom involving pairs and small groups of learners by means of cooperative activities to meet the requirements in the above conclusion.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Though learning to comprehend is one of the most essential learning processes, becoming a proficient comprehender is not easy for everyone that many students appear to have huge and persistent problems. Previous local reading studies of various focuses like, Dubale (1990), and Mesfin (2008) verified that students reading ability seem to be at lower level.

One factor might be attributed to students low comprehension achievement more than others is the ineffectiveness of the instructional methods. As to Catherine (2002) as cited in Tesfamicael (2011), effective instruction is one of the powerful means of developing proficient comprehenders and averting reading comprehension problems. Hence, comprehension instruction promotes the ability to learn from text.

The teacher centered approach has dominated our English teaching in Ethiopia for a long time. Some writers like Long and Porter (1985), argued that one of the main reasons for low achievement by many language learners is simply that they are not given the opportunity to practice

the new language. Instead, their teacher sets the same instructional pace and content for everyone by lecturing or explaining a grammatical point, of the whole class. Since teacher-fronted lessons favor a highly conventionalized variety of conversation, one rarely found them outside classrooms and they may also limit the quality of talk students engage in.

Thus, the researcher believes that Cooperative learning method that was initiated by Israel and the United States in the 1970s (Kessler, 1992) is used as instructional approach to tackle the above problems and improve the reading comprehension of the students since reading is one of the four language skills which is given emphasis in second/foreign language learning.

Dick (1991) noted, "Working together has always made the pathway to success significantly easier. The idea that 'people working cooperatively toward a common goal can accomplish more than people working by themselves' is a well-established principle of social psychology" (p. 179).

On the other hand, (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990) stated that, cooperative learning method promotes students to have positive interdependence, communication and psychological skills in face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability, social skills, and good teamwork skill in group processing.

Also, Lai (2002) asserted that running small-group activities in language classrooms maximizes students' exposure to a new language. Hence, Cooperative learning (CL) creates much more opportunities to practice the target language than traditional whole-class instruction does.

However, even if CL has been strongly recommended by scholars and researchers (Wang, 1992; Kagan, 1995; McGroarty, 1993; Yu, 1993; Yu, 1995; Wei, 1997; Chen, 1998; Tsai, 1998; Chen, 2002; Chiu, 2002 and Chen, 2005) as an effective instructional method in EFL teaching to solve the above problems, many English teachers in the school find difficulty incorporating this instructional method in their classes due to unfamiliarity with the knowledge and techniques of CL, and the inappropriate grouping methods, the large class size or the learning activities adopted.

Similarly, in Ethiopian context, Wondwosen (2008) in his research finding stated that, though Ethiopian English text books invite students to do in pairs or groups in classroom as a cooperative learning, but the teachers do not implement it in the classroom.

For the above reasons, this study attempted to look at workable and efficient models out of CL instruction so that most teachers of EFL in high schools can include such models to their teaching practice for profiting both teachers and students.

And also as the researcher's experience, there is no local research finding related to cooperative learning on reading comprehension and as of the researchers observation, most of the students are not capable for EFL reading comprehension, as a result, there is the gap between students.

This study, therefore, arises from the researcher's motivation to resolve and narrow the gap of these

controversial views using CL model STAD which boosting the students reading comprehension and most suitable strategy that gives all students a chance to participate in the class by taking grade 9 students in focus. Cooperative learning can enhance the four skills, but the researcher focuses only reading skill because of the broadness of the four skills to cover them for this study.

1.3. Research Questions

This study attempted to investigate the following research questions:

1. What is the achievement difference for the experimental (CL instruction) group in comparison with the control group?
 - a. Is there a significant difference between the pre-and the post-test results in the experimental and the control groups?
 - b. Does the experimental group improve significantly more than the control group?
 - c. Is there a significant achievement difference among the experimental group students with various levels of reading comprehension?
2. How do the participants in the experimental group reflect the cooperative learning instruction after the treatment?
3. How does the trained teacher reflect the cooperative learning instruction during and after the treatment?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was examining the effectiveness of cooperative learning on EFL reading comprehension. More specifically, the study attempted to:

- examine the effect of cooperative learning instruction on students EFL reading comprehension.
- examine the students' in the experimental group feeling towards CL after the treatment.
- examine the teacher's feeling towards CL instruction during and after the treatment.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study expected to have the following significances: It may be crucial for determining whether CL is effective for EFL reading instruction and learning in high schools. The long-term purpose of this study is to explore the workable strategies to help EFL teachers solve the problems resulting from ambiguity of knowledge or techniques in CL. Thus, teachers can be more encouraged to transform their conventional classes into a cooperative STAD.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the effect of cooperative learning on students EFL reading comprehension, so the study was delimited to the High school of Meshentie Particularly grade 9 students of in that school. On the other hand, only reading comprehension was included

in the study and researcher made tests were used to measure the reading comprehension.

1.7. Limitation of the Study

The basic limitation of this study is only reading skills in academic achievement were included in the study. Thus, the consequence of the study may not be generalized to all 4 skills of students all over the region. The last limitation is only one teacher taught the two classes.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The researcher adopted a quasi-experimental design in terms of using one experimental and one control group. Therefore, the design of the research was nonequivalent pre-test-post-test control group quasi-experimental design.

2.2. Participants and Sampling Techniques

This study was conducted in Government Comprehensive Meshentie High School of grade nine students. The target population of the study was 320 students enrolled in 2004 E.C academic year. Their ages ranged from 16 to 17 years. The students were grouped in to 8 sections. Each section has 40 students. From those 8 sections, 2 sections were selected randomly.

One class of 40 students including 24 boys and 16 girls was assigned to the experimental group, and the other class of 40 students made up of 22 boys and 18 girls was assigned to the control group using random assignment techniques to avoid the potential factors.

2.3. Data Collecting Instruments and Procedures

Three types of instruments were utilized in this study as data gathering tool. The pre- and post-reading comprehension tests, the students' reflection report questions towards CL instruction and the teacher reflection report questions on the CL instruction.

2.3.1. Reading Comprehension Tests

According to Cohen, Manion and Morison (2000, p.334) the pre- and post- test must be the same for the control and experimental groups, but the pre-test may have questions which differ in form or wording from the post-test, though the two tests must test the same contents.

Therefore, since the primary purpose of the study was to see whether students' comprehension skill can be improved as a result of treatment, comprehension tests were used. The researcher believes test was relatively the best tool to evaluate reading comprehension improvements. Thus, the researcher constructed pre-test and post-test based on the students' text book contents. The pre-test and post-test were the same, but their arrangements of items were changed in post test to avoid the Students remembrances of some questions.

2.3.2. The Students' Reflection Report Questions

The second instrument consisted of two open-ended questions for investigating the experimental students' perception or reflection of CL instruction after the treatment. It was also employed to support the result gained through pre- and post-tests. Among the experimental group students of the three levels of achievers, 3 students: one from low, one from medium and one from high achiever students were randomly selected and asked to reflect their experience and feedback on the CL instruction on the written form.

2.3.3. The Teacher Reflection Report Questions

The third instrument consisted of three open-ended questions for investigating the teacher's perception or reflection of CL instruction both on the experimental and the control groups. His reflections helped to explain the statistical gain of the results of the pre- and post tests of the experimental and the control groups. Thus, the trained teacher was asked to reflect his experience and feedback on the CL instruction in detail in English on written form during and after the treatment.

2.4. Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Before pilot testing to measure the reliability of the pre-test, it was evaluated by three EFL teachers holding BED degree and have well experiences of full-time service in high school. Cronbach's alpha was also used to test the reliability of pre-test scores obtained by 10 students who did not form the sample of the study. Thus, the reliability of the pre-test was 0.83 which is high reliability.

2.5. The Cooperative Learning Program

The objective of this intervention program was to improve the students EFL reading comprehension. The researcher prepared the teaching manuals for the experimental groups only as to Cooperative learning model STAD principles and procedures as designed by Slavin (1995). So, to implement the program, the researcher selected four units from the students' text book English for Ethiopia published by 2004 E.C.

The program was designed to put the cooperative learning teaching theory into practice. As mentioned above, the researcher prepared lessons and work sheets only for the experimental group. The experimental group students were taught by CL lesson for eight weeks in order to examine the effect of CL on the improvement of students reading comprehension. To minimize the extraneous variables from this program, the researcher did not teach for the two groups. Hence, the researcher's role was to observe the implementation of the program, and prepared and facilitated the lessons of the experimental group. Both the experimental and control groups were taught by the same teacher to control the potential factor.

The control group and the experimental group language contents were the same except the experimental group was taught through CL model STAD whereas the control group was taught using the conventional teaching methods as usual.

To implement CL in the experimental group, the researcher applied the program from February 1 up to March 30.

2.6. Procedure

2.6.1. Data Collection Procedure

Firstly, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the School Directors.

Secondly, the relevant literature was reviewed to establish the theoretical background of the study and then CL program was prepared.

Third, the teacher was selected by experience and trained for 40 hours by the researcher.

Forth, the same pre- and post-reading Comprehension tests were prepared by the researcher and validated by three well experienced EFL teachers.

Fifth, the designed program was applied for a period of eight weeks in order to examine the effect of CL for the improvement of students reading comprehension.

Sixth, the teacher and the students were asked to reflect about the CL instruction during and after the treatment over.

Finally, the results of the pre- and post-tests were statistically analyzed using SPSS, and reflection questions were analyzed qualitatively. Finally, the findings of the study were discussed separately.

2.6.2. Treatment of Experimental & Controlling Procedures

Equal conditions for both groups were applied. All factors of the time of day and treatment length in time were equal to control the potential factor. Both groups were taught by the same content material that is the control group was taught by the textbook whereas the experimental group was taught by the manual which contains work sheets. The treatment lasted for 8 weeks and covered four instructional units from the regular participant text books and manuals prepared by the researcher.

2.7. Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis were used. Mean, Standard deviation and difference of means were computed for each group. The quantitative part was analyzed by using statistical SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software including, Independent t-test, paired-sample t-test, and One-way ANOVA. Independent t-test was utilized to investigate significant mean differences between pre- and post-tests for experimental and control groups. Similarly, Paired-sample t test was conducted to examine the achievement mean difference between the pre-test and post-test on control and experimental groups reading comprehension separately. On the other hand, one-way ANOVA and paired-sample t-test were applied to compare the effects of CL among students with low, medium and high achievers in experimental group. To answer research question 2 and 3, qualitative analysis was used to discover how the experimental group students' and the teacher perceived the cooperative learning instruction. On the basis of analysis findings, conclusions and recommendations were

made.

2.8. Variables of the Study

The independent variable is the cooperative learning method that influences the value of the dependent variable whereas the dependent variables are scores in reading comprehension tests and students' and the teacher reflection report questions whose values are influenced by the independent variable.

Variables controlled: Teacher, time, average age, classroom conditions, and anxieties.

Variables uncontrolled: I.Q. of the students, socioeconomic status, self-concept, interests and attitude.

3. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

3.1. Data Presentation and Analysis

3.1.1. Results of Research Question One

- a. Is there a significant difference between the pre-and the post-tests in the experimental group?

Table 1. Results of Paired Samples *t*-test of Pre- and Post-tests in Experimental Group (*N* = 40).

Group	Before		After		<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Experimental	19.45	4.89	28.05	3.76	-9.44	39.00	0.00

The results of the pre-and post-test administered in the experimental group were analyzed by paired samples *t*-test to know whether there was or not statistically significant mean difference between pre-and post -test scores of experimental group. Hence, the above table displays that,

there was statistically significant mean difference between pre- and post -test mean scores of the experimental group ($t = 9.44$, $df = 39$, $p < 0.05$). That is, the post- test mean score ($M = 28.05$) is greater than from the mean score of the pre-test score ($M = 19.45$) due to the intervention of CL instruction.

Table 2. Results of Paired Sample *t*-test of Pre-and Post-tests in control Group (*N* = 40).

Group	Before		After		<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Control	19.90	3.64	20.00	2.94	-0.22	39.00	0.83

Paired sample *t*-test was run to know whether there was or not statistically significant mean difference between pre-and post- tests of the control group. Therefore, the result in Table 2 shows that there was no statistically significant mean difference between pre-and post- tests mean scores of

the control group ($t = 0.22$, $df = 39$, $p > 0.05$) even if the post test mean score ($M = 20.00$) is slightly greater than from the mean score of pre-test score ($M = 19.90$) regarding no treatment of CL instruction.

Table 3. Results of an Independent Sample *t*-test on the Improvement between Pre-and Post-tests for the Experimental and the Control Groups.

Dim-ension	Group	N	M	SD	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Pre- test	Exper.	40	19.45	4.89	-0.61	78	0.54	-0.55
	Control	40	19.90	3.64				
Post- test	Exper.	40	28.05	3.76	10.67	78	0.00	8.05
	Control	40	20.00	2.94				

- b. Does the experimental group improve significantly more than the control group?

After running independent sample *t*-test through SPSS, the inter-group analysis of the above pre-test results indicate that there was no statistically significant mean difference between the two groups ($t = 0.61$, $p > 0.05$) due to no intervention.

However, the results of the post-test in the above table indicate that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group, with the improvement mean score of $M = 28.05$ ($SD = 3.76$) due to intervention against the control group's improvement mean of 20.0 ($SD = 2.94$) and ($t = 10.67$, $p < 0.05$) as exposed in Table 3 above.

Table 4. Results of one-way ANOVA of improvement between pre-and post-tests of experimental group.

Post test expt					
	Sum of Squares(SS)	Df	Mean Square(MS)	F	Sig.
Between Groups	40.71	2.00	20.35	1.48	0.24
Within Groups	509.19	37.00	13.76		
Total	549.90	39.00			

- c. Is there a significant achievement difference among the experimental group students with various levels of English achievement?

The intra-group analysis was made to study the difference of the CL instructional effect on reading comprehension performance among the experimental group's high, medium

and low achievers in terms of their improvement between pre-and post-test results. As shown in Table 4, results from the One-way ANOVA indicate that there was no significant

difference among the three-leveled achievers' improvement ($F= 1.48$, $df= 2, 37$, $P>0.05$).

Table 5. Paired Samples *t*-Test for the Comparison among Experimental Group's Three-leveled Achievers.

Level	pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	ImprovementM	Improvement SD	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Hi(11)	25.09	1.81	29.64	3.93	-4.55	-2.12	-4.27	10.	0.0
Me(14)	20.71	0.83	27.14	3.01	-6.43	-2.18	-6.87	13.	0.0
Lo(15)	14.13	2.59	27.73	4.11	-13.60	-1.53	-9.99	14.	0.0

It seems that representing these achievers of various levels improved synchronically within proximal range. To examine deeper, as can be seen in Table 5 through paired samples *t*-test, all the three levels of experimental group actually made significant progress after the intervention of CL: (1) the low achievers with the improvement mean score of 13.6 ($SD=1.53$) and the *p*-value of 0.000 ($t = 9.99$) performed the best of the three levels; (2) the medium achievers scored the improvement mean of 6.43 ($SD=2.18$) with the *p*-value as low as 0.000 ($t = 6.87$) and ranked the second; and (3) the high achievers gained the improvement mean score of 4.55 ($SD=2.12$) with the *p*-value of 0.000 ($t = 4.27$), showing the least improvement mean score.

3.1.2. Results of Research Question Two

How do the participants in the experimental group reflect the cooperative learning instruction after the treatment?

The students reflection report questions

1. Do you feel more interested in learning reading comprehension in the CL instructional activities? Why or why not?

Among the experimental participants, three students were also asked about their reflections towards CL instruction after the treatment. Their reflections helped to explain the statistical gain of the reading comprehension questions of the experimental group.

Therefore, in this question students who liked CL reasoned that the group members were suitable to help each other during CL activities, not just CL was interesting. For instance, Student Hana (pseudonym) stated that the interaction among peers became more frequent and the learning turned easier through helping each other during CL activities, thus advocating that mutual dependence could be the main reason for CL to attract the students. In line with the same idea, Selam (pseudonym) reflected that in CL, a low achiever could receive guidance from a high achiever just like one-to-one teaching style and helped us to have good results. And also, Wodaju (pseudonym) reflected that learning in heterogeneous and small group could motivate teammates to help each other. (Students' written reflection made on March 30, 2004 E.C)

2. Do you have any ideas or any suggestions towards the CL learning?

In the second question, the students reflected that many opportunities were provided during group work session for students to share and discuss with each other. Thus, students gained the satisfaction by exploring new knowledge and

problem-solving experience with group members during the session of group work. For instance, Selam (pseudonym) referred that she could not well comprehend the reading passages taught when learning individually, but her problems were usually solved after discussing in group work (translation). Also, Hana (pseudonym) noted, "The interactions in group work helped me widen my way of thinking because I can receive diverse opinions from peers" (translation). These findings may echo how those who benefited from group work perceive the CL method. On the other hand, Wodaju reflected that "having awards in reading comprehension CL classroom made me to participate and helped me to develop my reading achievement" (translation). (Students' written reflection made on March 30, 2004 E.C)

3.1.3. Results of Research Question Three

How does the trained teacher reflect the cooperative learning instruction during and after the treatment?

The teacher reflection report questions

The teacher was also asked about his reflections upon the experimental group and the control group. His reflections helped to explain the statistical gain of the reading comprehension questions of the experimental group and the control group.

1. What differences did you notice in the two classes in terms of their reading comprehension learning and achievements?

First of all, he thought that cooperative learning model STAD helped his students to be attentive in class. He enjoyed with the experimental class because almost all of the students were attentive and engaged in class. He said: "I felt more relaxed and encouraged to teach the experimental group. I did not have to spend a lot of time on classroom management. Because we had so many group activities going on in each class, the students became more spontaneous, and most of all, attentive. Majority of the students were on-task and busy in class room. There was hardly any students falling asleep, dozing off, or being distracted. I guess the group activities and the well-defined role assignments for each of them kept them very busy. They did not have time to 'waste time' in class." (Teacher's written reflection made on February 20, 2004 E.C)

As for the comments on the control group, his observations explained why the control group did not perform as well as the experimental group. He felt exhausted in the class because he was the only one to carry all teaching/learning responsibilities in this class. He had to do

all the work by himself: trying hard to elicit student task by appointing some students to do and trying hard to maintain students' attention. He said:

"About two third of the students were afraid to do the activities in class. I had to try very hard to elicit their activity, sometimes by appointing someone to answer the questions. They were very passive and quiet. Maybe it was because they sat individually facing each other's back and that made them feel uneasy or insecure to do. They were more nervous about making mistakes in front of their classmates. There was hardly any student-student interaction in and after class in this conventional learning context... In such conventional classroom; I felt separated from my students... I needed to call so many students' names to get their attention back to class. Many of them felt asleep or started inattention in the middle of class while I was lecturing." (Teacher's written reflection made on February 20, 2004 E.C)

Hence, the teacher's impressions about the students' passivity and difficulty of paying attention in class in the control group might serve as a good explanation of why the control group did not gain significant mean difference in the reading comprehension post-test(see table 2).

2. What did you observe in the classroom among the three levels of students?

In order to triangulate the statistical findings presented in the reading comprehension test scores, the teacher was asked to reflect for his observation of the high- and low- achievers in the experimental class. The teacher's reflection supplemented the positive statistical results presented in the previous sections.

The teacher also noticed some positive effects of reading comprehension achievement on the low-achievers as well as the high-achievers in the experimental group. He said that the high, medium and the low-achievers in the experimental group were eager to participate in reading classes; especially the low-achievers were animated to learn reading in class.

The teacher reflected that Performance is improved among weaker students when they are grouped with higher achieving students because the stronger students model successful reasoning processes. As the teacher reflection report indicated that when students work cooperatively in groups the more knowledgeable students are able to help the less knowledgeable students understand new concepts. High achieving students also benefit because they are expressing their ideas and actually teaching others. (Teacher's written reflection made on March 20, 2004 E.C)

From teacher's reflections, it seemed that both the high, medium and low-achievers in the experimental group were able to progress at their own pace and at the same time, helped one other grow and learn in their groups.

3. How did you get the advantages of CL in EFL reading comprehension classroom?

The teacher commented that students that are involved in cooperative learning achieve many social and academic benefits. In cooperative classrooms students are grouped together to accomplish important cooperative activities. They are classrooms where students are likely to attain higher

levels of achievement, to increase time on task, to build cross-ethnic friendships, to experience enhanced self-esteem, to build life-long interaction, and help to promote positive race relations. (Teacher's written reflection made on March 30, 2004 E.C)

In sum, the overall experimental group with its achievers of various English performances gained striking improvement after the CL intervention, in contrast to the control group's no effect in their English reading comprehension achievement with the conventional teaching method. On the other hand, the findings suggest the value of stressing learning through cooperation, and that cooperative learning model STAD can be effective with all learner groups.

3.2. Discussions of Findings

This study aimed at investigating the effect of cooperative learning on grade nine high school students in EFL reading comprehension. The findings of the reading comprehension pre- and post- tests were presented in the previous section. Thus, the results of this study indicate that CL can help students improve their English reading comprehension and elevate students' outlook toward English learning as well. Students and the teacher in this study highly reflected CL as a helpful and interesting learning method, thus allowing them to have more opportunity and to interact and cooperate with peers in group work. This, section however, discusses the findings with the prevailing literature.

Effects of cooperative learning on students reading comprehension

The CL program on improving students reading comprehension was tested by interpreting the statistical analysis presented in the previous section. It is worth reminding that the experimental group was treated with CL intervention and the control group learners were those who were not provided with such intervention.

Therefore, the independent sample t-test as the pre intervention phase showed no significant mean difference between the experimental and control groups. That means the students reading comprehension in experimental and control groups was not noticeably different before the treatment. However, the same test in the post phase showed significant difference between comprehension scores of experimental and control groups (see Table 3).

The overall results of the pre-and post-tests revealed that the students adopting CL (STAD) achieved far better than both their previous achievement and the students adopting the conventional method on the English reading comprehension. These findings are consistent with earlier studies conducted by (Webb, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1997; Chiu, 2002; Lai, 2002). In particular, the simultaneous marked progress among three-leveled achievers in experimental group confirmed the point that CL is designed for promoting academic achievement and for meeting all achievers' needs (Coelho, 1992; Kagan, 1993; McGroarty, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1997). Of the three-leveled achievers, the students of Medium and

low levels obtained better achievement than the high achievers. That the high achievers obtaining the marked progress correspond to what Webb (1992), Johnson and Johnson (1994), and Slavin (1997) have stated that when the high achievers give instruction to their teammates, they actually repeat and reorganize what they have learned previously so as to profit themselves. The low achievers' striking performances in this study also evidence that cooperative learning (CL) is particularly suitable for the slow learners (Ballard & colleagues, 1987; McGroarty, 1993; Slavin, 1997) because they benefit greatly by observing and modeling competent peers' behaviors, attitudes and reactions in the CL process.

Likewise, the findings suggested that the CL model STAD is more effective than the conventional method in improving EFL reading achievement of high school students which confirms the findings by Wilson (1991), Ghaith (2003), and Myers (2006) who reported similar results with regard to the positive effects of CL in improving reading comprehension achievement. However, what makes the present study significant is the effectiveness of STAD as one model in cooperative learning among high school learners.

It is possibly that positive interdependence among all group-mates motivates students to help each other and apply more effort to achieve group success while in the non-cooperative classroom negative interdependence is discouraging since the success of some students, especially high achievers, may result in decreasing the opportunities for their low achieving counterparts.

Students in cooperative groups receive peer encouragement and personalized support from their more competent partners. They may feel that their contributions are expected and valued for the success of the group. Their partners are available to help them when they need a customized answer to a question or solution to a problem. When one student generates wrong response, the more capable students in the group can explain.

In addition, team rewards, in terms of average individual improvement points (see appendix H & I) and as one of the central concepts of STAD, as opposed to conventional instruction, may have a strong impact on learners' performance toward reading comprehension (Jallifar 2009). So the model of CL (STAD), as Johnson and others (1998) argue, can be explained from a behavioral learning theory which maintains that students will work hard on tasks that provide a reward, and students will fail to work on those tasks that provide no reward or punishment. It is likely that the certificates which were awarded to each group based on super, great, and good criteria reinforce the expansion of group process skills.

The experimental group students' reflection report towards CL

The results of written reflection open-ended questions showed that the students in this study highly valued the cooperative learning instruction. The students felt accepted and needed by their peers during group work of the CL instruction, thus engaged them in the passion for helping

each other. It is the positive interdependence and individual accountability ((Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Slavin, 2006) known as the core of CL among group members that makes the method popular among the students. The experimental group's enhancement of both English reading comprehension performance and interpersonal relationships due to supportive environment is in accord with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of Scaffolding. Furthermore, compatible to Piaget's (1965) view of learning through interaction, the students in this study solved their problems through frequent interaction and discussion with their teammates in group work. They have experienced the learner-centered method and therefore their interest in reading comprehension learning was high. The above mentioned effects resulted from meaningful communication within group members also echo the theory of which language acquisition is stimulated by comprehensive input, output and context (Swain, 1985; Kagan, 1995), and relate to Affective Filter Hypothesis (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982) about the language development due to less fear in small-group discussion.

Teacher reflection reports towards CL

On the other hand, the overall results from the teacher written reflection reports demonstrated that performance is improved among weaker students when they are grouped with higher achieving students as the stronger students' model successful reasoning processes Vygotsky (1978) hypothesizes that the social interaction among students extends the students' zone of proximal development (the difference between a student's understanding and their potential to understand). While students work cooperatively in groups, the more knowledgeable student is able to help the less knowledgeable students to understand new concepts. High achieving students also benefit because they are expressing their ideas and actually teaching others. As mentioned earlier, the process of expressing thoughts helps to further promote understanding of the material.

4. Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

4.1. Summary

The aim of this study was to see whether EFL students' reading comprehension can be improved as a result of treatment, hence the study was carried out on Meshentie High School of grade nine students. From 8 sections of grade nine students, two sections were selected randomly and assigned as one experimental and the other was control groups using random assignment technique. The participants consisted of 80 students in two sections of 40 each.

Nonequivalent pre-test post-test control group quasi-experimental design was conducted to see the effect of cooperative learning method on EFL learners reading comprehension.

4.2. Conclusion

In the light of statistical analysis and the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Cooperative learning is a feasible and practical teaching method that puts student-centered teaching method into action. Such a student-centered teaching method helps improve the students' reading comprehension of the target language, which includes understanding the general idea in the text (e.g. information, gist, argument) and recognizing and interpreting the linguistic features of the text (e.g. referents, word meanings) because cooperative learning creates a more friendly and supportive learning environment within which students have more opportunities and enjoy more freedom to explore and practice the target language. Cooperative learning creates interactive contexts in which students have authentic reasons for listening to one another, and asking questions. Such frequent interaction among the learners, in turn, increases the amount of student comprehending of the material and student participation in the classroom. Hence, Students in the cooperative group showed better performance in reading comprehension than that of students in conventional learning situation.

Cooperative learning is a powerful teaching instruction that can boost the students' motivation through a supportive climate of caring and sharing in the classroom that makes reading comprehension learning more enjoyable, lively, and encouraging, which, in turn, enhances the students' motivation toward learning English as a foreign language. In such a cooperative learning context as the experimental class, motivationally appropriate feedback, praise, and rewards are generously granted through the incentive structure of positive reinforcement like the super team, great team and good team.

Cooperative learning is a possible teaching method that may address the various needs of the students with mixed levels of English ability in a heterogeneous class. Both the high- and low-achievers are able to progress at their own speed and, at the same time, contribute to their peers' learning. Thus, the result of this research leads to conclude that cooperative learning instruction is equally useful for improving the reading comprehension of low achievers, medium and high achiever students.

The pedagogical implications of findings call for using the dynamics of the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) of cooperative learning model to teach reading comprehension because it engages learners in meaningful interaction in a helpful classroom setting. This is favorable for learning of reading comprehension. It is found that in cooperative learning environment, students cooperate with each other to maximize their own and each other's learning.

On the whole, since cooperative learning model STAD is a feasible teaching model, thus, it is highly recommended for EFL teachers in the school in reading classrooms.

4.3. Recommendations for Classroom Practice and Further Research

In the light of findings and conclusions of the study,

following recommendations were made:

1. This study proves that cooperative learning is better for reading comprehension than conventional method of teaching. Therefore, the school teachers of English subject should use cooperative learning to improve the academic achievements of students reading comprehension through the CL model of STAD.
2. This study examined only the reading comprehension of students' achievement in English. Hence, the results of the study reveal that cooperative learning has increased students' English reading comprehension. Therefore, a replication of the study could be conducted with other groups at the elementary, junior, and college level students in other skills such as writing, speaking, or listening. It would be valuable to investigate how effective is cooperative learning on other skills so that teachers can use findings for improving and developing their teaching process.
3. As this research is mainly based on STAD model, future research should focus on comparisons between different models of cooperative learning in order to determine if other cooperative learning models are equally effective in producing desired students.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep and heartfelt thanks to my advisor Dr. Girma Wossenie, for his tireless reading, and constructive comments that have shaped this research work immeasurably.

Second, I also owe a great deal to Dr. Abiy Yigzaw, Prof. Yalew Endaweke and Dr. Mulugeta Teka for their fruitful comments on some parts of this research.

Third, I would like to thank Arba Minch University and Bahir Dar University who is financially helped me.

References

- [1] Ali Khan, S. (2008). To Evaluate the Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning vs. Traditional Learning Method (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Islamabad, Pakistan
- [2] Chen, K. P. (2005). The Effects of Cooperative Learning on Vocational High School Students' English Reading. (Unpublished master's thesis). National Pingtung Institute of Commerce, Taiwan.
- [3] Chen, L. S. (2002). The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in an EFL Vocational Senior High Classroom. (Unpublished master's thesis). National Chung Cheng University, Chiayi, ROC.
- [4] Dick, K.A. (1991). Issues in Education: Cooperative Learning- Mastering the Bundle of Sticks. *Childhood Education*, 67(3), page 179-180.
- [5] Ghaith, G. M., and Yaghi, H.M. ((1998). Effects of Cooperative Learning on the Acquisition of Second Language Rules and Mechanics. *System* 26(2), 223-234.

- [6] Jalilifar, A. (2009). The Effect of Cooperative Learning Techniques on College Students' Reading Comprehension. Elsevier, System 38(2010) 96-108.
- [7] Jalilifar, A. (1990). Cooperative Learning and Achievement. In S. Sharan (ed), Cooperative Learning: Theory and Research (pp.23-37). NY: Praeger Publishers.
- [8] D. W., Johnson, R. T., Smith, K. A. (1998). Cooperative Learning Returns to College. Change 30 (4), 26-35.
- [9] Kagan, S. (1995). Cooperative Learning. San Juan Capistrano, Calif: Resources for Teachers.
- [10] Kessler, C. (1992). (Ed.), Cooperative Language Learning: A teacher's Resourcebook Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall
- [11] Liang, T. L. (2002). Implementing Cooperative Learning in EFL Teaching Process and Effects. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, ROC.
- [12] Long, Michael H., & Porter, P. A (1985). Group work, Inter Language talks, and Second Language Acquisition. TESOL, 19/2, 207-228.
- [13] Mesfin Derash. (2008). The Practice of Teaching Reading in English at First cycle Primary Schools: Grade Four in Focus (Unpublished master's thesis). Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa.
- [14] Slavin, R. E. (1995). Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice. (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- [15] Slavin, R. E. (1997). Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice: Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.
- [16] Slavin, R. E. (2006). Educational Psychology Theory and Practice (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- [17] Slavin, R.E., Hurley, E. A., & Chamblairlain, A.M. (2003). Cooperative Learning and Achievement: Theory and Research. Handbook Of Psychology: Educational Psychology, Volume 7 (pp.177-198). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- [18] Swain, M. (1985). Communicative Competence: Some Roles of Comprehensible Input in its Development. In S.M. Gass, & C.G. Madden, (Eds.), Input in Second Language Acquisition, (pp.235-253). MA: Newbury House.
- [19] Tesfamichael Getu. (2011). A Survey of Woldya Higher Education Preparatory Secondary School Eleventh grade Students Reading Comprehension Performance (un published Masters thesis).
- [20] Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes: Cambridge, MA: Harvard university
- [21] Amin Shahini & Majid Nemati. (2015). Internet Self-Efficacy in Writing Processes Task Performance : Education Journal, Published online June 4, 2015 (<http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/j/edu>) doi:10.11648/j.edu.20150403.16
- [22] Ahmad L. El Zein & Lobna Bou Diab. (2015). The Impact of Game Assessment on Enhancing Student's Performance : Education Journal, 2015; 4(3): 106-110 Published online May 12, 2015 (<http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/j/edu>) doi: 10.11648/j.edu.20150403.13
- [23] Webb, N.M. (1992). Testing a Theoretical Model of Student Interaction and Learning in Small Groups. Interaction in Cooperative Groups: The Theoretical Anatomy of Group Learning (pp.102-119). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [24] Wondowen Tesfamichael. (2008). A assessment of the Oral Group Lessons in English for Ethiopia Grade Seven in Promoting Cooperative Learning (Unpublished M.A thesis). Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa.
- [25] Yu, G. (1995). Implementing Cooperative Learning approach in an EFL class in Taiwan. NSC-83-0301-S-017-008.