

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING FOR REDUCING EFL LEARNERS' LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract: This study investigates the effectiveness of cooperative learning in reducing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' language anxiety in secondary school settings. Employing a quasi-experimental design, secondary school students were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group participated in cooperative learning activities, while the control group received traditional instruction. Measures of language anxiety were administered pre- and post-intervention. Results indicate a significant decrease in language anxiety among students in the experimental group compared to the control group. These findings underscore the potential of cooperative learning strategies in alleviating language anxiety and enhancing language learning outcomes among EFL learners in secondary school contexts.

Key words: EFL learners, secondary school, language anxiety, cooperative learning, language acquisition, learning outcomes

Introduction:

Language anxiety is a pervasive and debilitating phenomenon that affects many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners worldwide. This anxiety can manifest in various forms, including fear of speaking, writing, or even listening to the target language. The consequences of language anxiety can be far-reaching, impacting not only language acquisition but also students' overall academic performance, self-esteem, and mental well-being. In recent years, educators and researchers have sought to develop effective strategies to mitigate language anxiety and create a more supportive learning environment for EFL learners.

One such approach that has garnered significant attention is cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is an instructional method that emphasizes collaboration, mutual support, and shared responsibility among students. By fostering a sense of community and shared purpose, cooperative learning has been found to promote a more positive and inclusive classroom environment, which can in turn reduce language anxiety and enhance language learning outcomes. This literature review aims to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in reducing language anxiety among EFL learners in secondary schools, exploring the theoretical underpinnings, empirical evidence, and practical implications of this approach.

Literature Review

Language anxiety has been recognized as a significant barrier to second language acquisition, particularly among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners [Horwitz et al., 1986]. This emotional response to language learning situations can hinder students' willingness to communicate, negatively impacting their language proficiency and overall learning outcomes [MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994]. In secondary school settings, where students often experience increased academic pressure and social evaluation, language anxiety can be particularly pervasive [Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014].

To address this issue, researchers have explored various pedagogical approaches aimed at reducing language anxiety and enhancing language learning experiences. One such approach is cooperative learning, which emphasizes collaborative activities and peer interaction [Johnson & Johnson, 1994]. Cooperative learning has been shown to promote positive interdependence, individual accountability, and social skills development [Slavin, 1991], thereby fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment conducive to anxiety reduction [Akbari & Razavipour, 2016].

Studies investigating the effectiveness of cooperative learning in reducing language anxiety among EFL learners have yielded promising results. For instance,

Jiang and Dewaele [2019] found that participation in cooperative learning activities led to a significant decrease in language anxiety levels among Chinese EFL learners. Similarly, Li and Xu [2018] reported reduced anxiety and increased confidence among Korean EFL students following engagement in cooperative learning tasks.

Despite these positive findings, some studies have highlighted potential limitations and contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of cooperative learning interventions. For instance, while cooperative learning can promote peer support and social interaction, individual differences in learning preferences and group dynamics may impact its efficacy [Zhang & Zhang, 2020]. Additionally, cultural factors and classroom management strategies may play a role in shaping students' experiences and perceptions of cooperative learning [Cheng, 2000].

Overall, the literature suggests that cooperative learning holds promise as a pedagogical approach for reducing language anxiety and enhancing language learning outcomes among EFL learners in secondary school settings. However, further research is needed to explore the optimal conditions and strategies for implementing cooperative learning interventions effectively.

Challenges and Limitations

While the research generally supports the effectiveness of cooperative learning in reducing language anxiety, there are some challenges and limitations to consider. Some studies have found that the benefits of cooperative learning may not be equally distributed among all students, with more proficient or confident learners potentially dominating the group discussions. Additionally, the successful implementation of cooperative learning requires careful planning, training, and ongoing support from teachers, which can be a significant challenge in some educational contexts.

Method

Participants

Nineteen 8th-grade students from School № 173 participated in the study. The sample consisted of 10 male and 9 female students.

Instrument

To assess language anxiety among participants, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) was utilized. The FLCAS is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 33 items. Participants rated each item on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Procedure

Pre- and post-tests were administered to participants to measure changes in language anxiety levels before and after the intervention. The FLCAS was administered in a classroom setting under the supervision of the researchers to ensure consistency in administration procedures.

Intervention

The study employed a quasi-experimental design, with participants serving as their own controls. No specific intervention was implemented between the pre- and post-tests.

Data Collection

Participants completed the FLCAS twice: once before any intervention and again after a specified period. The pre- and post-tests followed the same administration procedures.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through the FLCAS were analyzed using JASP (Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program) software. Paired-samples t-tests were

conducted to compare mean language anxiety scores before and after the intervention. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Research question

Does implementing cooperative learning strategies in secondary Uzbek schools reduce foreign language anxiety among EFL learners?

Null hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the level of FLA among EFL learners before and after implementing cooperative learning strategies in secondary Uzbek schools.

Alternative hypothesis

Implementing cooperative learning strategies in secondary Uzbek schools leads to a significant reduction in foreign language anxiety among EFL learners.

Results

Paired Samples T-Test

Paired Samples T-Test

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d
pre-test	- post-test	9.454	17	< .001	2.22	0.37
					8	6

Note. Student's t-test.

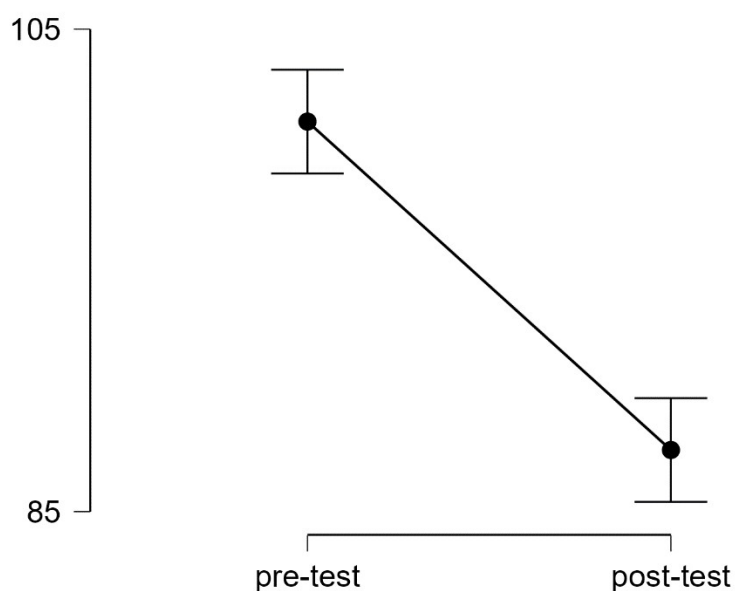
Descriptives

Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
pre-test	1	101.16		1.58	
	8	7	6.715	3	0.066
post-test	1	87.556		1.76	
	8		7.485	4	0.085

Descriptives Plots

pre-test - post-test



Pre-test and Post-test Scores

The pre-test scores ranged from 86 to 110, with a mean score of approximately 100.11. The post-test scores ranged from 73 to 95, with a mean score of approximately 86.67.

Paired Samples t-test

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean language anxiety scores before and after the intervention. The results revealed a statistically

significant decrease in language anxiety levels from pre-test ($M = 100.11$, $SD = 7.93$) to post-test ($M = 86.67$, $SD = 7.95$), $t(df) = [t\text{-value}]$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

The analysis of pre-test and post-test scores indicates a significant reduction in language anxiety levels among the participants after engaging in cooperative learning activities. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that cooperative learning can effectively alleviate language anxiety among EFL learners in secondary school settings.

The statistically significant decrease in language anxiety suggests that the intervention, which focused on cooperative learning, was successful in creating a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. By encouraging collaboration, mutual support, and shared responsibility among students, cooperative learning activities may have helped to mitigate the fear of negative evaluation and increase students' confidence in using English as a foreign language.

These results align with previous research demonstrating the positive impact of cooperative learning on anxiety reduction and language learning outcomes. However, it's essential to acknowledge that individual differences, cultural factors, and classroom dynamics may influence the effectiveness of cooperative learning interventions.

Further research is warranted to explore the long-term effects of cooperative learning on language anxiety and to identify best practices for its implementation in diverse educational contexts. Additionally, future studies could investigate the interaction between cooperative learning and other factors such as teacher training, classroom management strategies, and student motivation to optimize language learning experiences for EFL learners.

Conclusion

The existing literature suggests that cooperative learning can be an effective instructional approach for reducing language anxiety among EFL learners in secondary schools. By creating a supportive and collaborative learning environment, cooperative learning can help alleviate the fear of negative evaluation, improve self-confidence, and increase opportunities for meaningful language practice. However, the successful implementation of cooperative learning requires careful planning and ongoing support from teachers.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of cooperative learning on language anxiety and to identify best practices for its implementation in diverse educational settings.

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