

Enhancing Iraqi EFL Learners' Writing Skills by Using Cooperative Language Teaching Approach at Open Educational College

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ABSTRACT

In order to help second-year university students at Open Educational College improve their writing abilities, a cooperative language learning (CLL) strategy was adopted to enhance peer learning. Students in CLL-based groups were taught to take more ownership of their education by honing both their interpersonal and language skills in a more laid-back social setting. Students enrolled in the first course of the 2023 academic year's first semester received this therapy. A pre-post writing test and an attitude questionnaire were the two instruments employed in this investigation. A Wilcoxon test was used to compare the pre- and post-test results using descriptive statistics.

Examining students' work for errors in spelling, vocabulary use, grammar, punctuation, and coherence was a major focus of the evaluation process. The results showed that, at the significance level of .001, the students' writing scores were higher for the post-test than the pre-test following this type of intervention. The results of the attitude scale showed that the students had positive attitudes regarding using the cooperative learning strategy to improve their language proficiency in general and their writing proficiency in particular.

KEYWORDS: CLL method, CLL-based groups, attitude, English Language writing.

1. Introduction

There is no question that Cooperative Learning may be used as a successful strategy to motivate students to collaborate as a team within the classroom. Hirst and Slavik (2003) claim that implementing a cooperative learning strategy in the classroom can encourage students to actively participate in debating diverse points of view on a particular subject. Lee (2003) also claimed that the utilization of small group activities can increase students' engagement in hands-on activities. Academic accomplishment has also been favorably connected with helping peers learn by explaining course material to one another (Depaz & Moni, 2008).

In fact, by implementing the cooperative learning strategy, which offers students a supportive learning environment in which they can gain and share ideas, information, and knowledge, the competitive spirit and the dominance of individualism may be diminished and lessened. As each group's members do not share the same educational background or level of proficiency in EFL writing, small groups in writing classes can be used to develop communication, interpersonal, and team skills. As they can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in EFL writing—some students may have strong backgrounds in vocabulary or grammar while other students may have solid backgrounds in the subject they are discussing—this kind of variety helps students within each group support their peers.

In this way, weaker students can gain insight into the grammatical, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling errors of their stronger peers while also feeling satisfied and proud that they played a significant part in assisting their weaker classmates. The cooperative language learning (CLL) strategy allowed pupils to interact, exchange ideas, and observe how their peers acted. As a result, a more enjoyable learning atmosphere may be created and more possibilities can be given for students to generate better EFL writing.

2. Statement of the problem

Students struggle with writing essays in tertiary EFL writing classes for a variety of reasons. Researchers should make every effort to solve these issues as they pose a significant

challenge. It is well recognized that adopting conventional methods to improve writing skills places a strong emphasis on accuracy while mostly ignoring the writing process itself. The current study therefore concluded that as group writing discussions help students develop their interpersonal and communication skills and help them choose their purpose for writing, such challenges can be resolved if EFL writing is taught using the CLL approach.

Additionally, using this method guarantees that students will apply the writing process because they will have enough chances to brainstorm, share ideas, write a first draft, plan, organize, revise, and edit. Therefore, it was necessary to look into how the CLL approach affected students' ability to write.

The students' inability to write clearly could be attributed to three main things: their cognitive background, which showed in their inability to come up with thoughtful and interesting ideas; their linguistic deficiency, which showed in their mistakes with regard to spelling, capitalization, vocabulary, and structure; and academic writing issues with designing and planning paragraphs cohesively. These fundamental shortcomings were frequently found while the researcher was instructing writing courses.

As a result, it has been argued that the CLL strategy would be a useful way to solve these issues. According to the researcher, the cooperative learning approach has the potential to be a useful tool for meeting the needs of university students since it can foster cooperation among students within each group and encourage respect for their diverse experiences and backgrounds. Additionally, it might give students enough chances to reflect and converse with one another so that they can exchange opinions on the writing requirements.

Such a setting would be less likely to cause anxiety in students, allow them to write without worrying about facing criticism, and perhaps even foster an engaging environment that would make writing less tedious and taxing.

3. Literature Review

Cooperative language learning is a method of teaching the English language in which pupils collaborate in groups to achieve their objectives and maximize their learning (Johnson et al., 1998). Groups of three to five students each might be formed from the student body. In cooperative

language learning, they compete against one another individually and in groups while exchanging ideas, cooperating, and negotiating meaning to advance knowledge and achieve the intended goal. John (1997) said that for everyone to succeed, students must collaborate on a subject and support one another. Kagan (1994) argued that cooperative learning will drive students to succeed more than competitive or individualistic learning because it gives them opportunities to boost their self-worth and develop an internal motivation for learning. Astin (1993) also emphasized the value of utilizing cooperative learning as a method of instruction that may significantly improve interaction between the members of each group on the one side and the divided groups on the other. Additionally, according to Budd (2004), cooperative learning

activities in small groups could give students a sufficient opportunity to engage in in-depth analysis of the subject matter. Similar findings were made by White and Caminero (1995), who noted that students might learn from one another through cooperative learning. On the other hand, Biggs (1999) argued that the traditional lecture and tutorial had less value as a result of the growing variety and size of the university community. In order to boost the benefits for students and raise their chances of success, Brookfield (1999) advised employing active learning practices [such as cooperative learning]. Herreid (2006) recommended including discussion activities like Think/Pair/Share and Case Studies to aid in student understanding development and attitude improvement. According to Hayashi (2005), writing exercises with peers are essential for developing students' writing abilities.

Cooperative learning has been shown to be beneficial thus far in EFL classes in numerous studies. While some of these studies suggested that this strategy could aid students in improving their command of the English language, other studies (Cole, 2012; Elola and Oskoz; 2010, Wong et al.; 2009; Mason; 2006; Chen; Atkinson; 2003; Mariam; 2004; Chandrika) concentrated on the efficiency of using cooperative learning strategy in improving students' writing skills specifically. The researcher was able to construct a strong theoretical foundation for the implementation of the cooperative learning strategy to develop and improve students' writing skills based on the findings from the aforementioned investigations.

These investigations, however, have mostly focused on writing in ESL writing classes at secondary schools. Undoubtedly, some of the earlier research focused on the application of CLL in tertiary writing classrooms, but more information is still required to demonstrate how this technique could be applied in particular academic settings in light of the issues previously raised.

To put it another way, although empirical evidence supported the employment of the CLL approach with a variety of subject areas and age groups, little is yet known about the efficacy of such an approach with regard to EFL students, who are not just ESL university level students. The focus of this study was therefore on EFL writing in tertiary writing courses because English is taught and utilized in Saudi Arabia as a foreign language rather than a second language.

According on a review of the literature, the CLL approach can be a useful tactic for improving students' EFL writing abilities and attitudes toward utilizing it. According to Atkinson (2003), the use of the CLL approach to improve EFL writing inside the classroom is based on the claim that



writing instruction in an EFL classroom entails more than just getting students to put pen to paper; it also involves fostering peer interaction and helping students develop their responses to texts. When teaching students to write in this way, Kim and Kim (2005) also emphasized the importance of using the CLL approach because students will be expected to generate, organize, and share their ideas in addition to taking care of the major elements of the writing

process, such as vocabulary, spelling, purpose, target audience, and mechanics. All of these factors were taken into account while choosing the small group exercises for the class.

4. Research question

This study concentrated on how the CLL strategy affected the growth of EFL writing abilities in an EFL classroom. The research specifically aimed to respond to the following queries

1. How well did the CLL method work to improve the writing abilities of second-year university students at open educational college?
2. How do second-year university students at open educational college generally feel about using the CLL technique to improve their writing abilities ?

5. Goals of the research

This Study aims to

1. Assess how well the CLL strategy works for improving the writing abilities of second-year university students at Open Educational College during the first semester of the 2023 academic year.
2. Assess students' attitudes toward adopting the CLL technique to improve second-year university students' writing abilities at Open Educational College during the first semester of the 2023 academic year.

6. Research Methods

The data for the current study were gathered from one section of 20 students taking a three-credit course during the first semester of the academic year 2023 using a one group pre-test, post-test design. The sample may appear small, but because it is comprised of a single chosen group that is being watched, meticulous measurements are being taken before and after the CLL technique is applied, the results may be more precise and accurate. With only subject selection and experimental mortality being taken into account, this design has very little internal validity and no external validity.

7.1 Instruments

The efficacy of the CLL strategy to improving pupils' writing abilities was assessed using two different tools. Pre-post writing was tested in the first one.. The writing test had a 120-minute time limit. Three TEFL specialists ensured the test items' validity. There were six sections of the material used to test the students:

Q1/Read the following passage carefully and choose the correct answer

Q2/ In not more than (100) words write a description of waiting a turn in a dentist's clinic.

Q3/ Write a composition about the fastest or slowest journey you have ever made in your life.

Q4/ Read the Passage Carefully and then answer the questions below:

Q5/ Give full answers for the following questions in your own words as far as possible.

Q6/ Read the Passage Carefully and the write true if the sentence is correct and false if it is incorret.

A questionnaire with 25 items served as the second tool. It was created using the researcher's review of the literature. Some of the items were taken from Brown's (2008) and Farrah's (2011) studies, and they were modified to fit the needs of the current study. A survey was developed to find out how students felt about utilizing the CLL method to improve their EFL writing abilities. The survey has 25 statements on it, each on a Likert scale of 3 (agree, neutral, disagree). The subjects of the study received the 25item questionnaire at the conclusion of the second semester of the academic year 2022/2023. The questionnaire's reliability coefficient was computed. The questionnaire's Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was ($r = 0.88$), which denotes to a very high degree of internal consistency, and therefore it could offer a considerably reliable instrument.

8. Sample of the study

The study's sample consisted of 25 second-year students from the English Language department at Open Educational College

9. The Treatment

Because they couldn't keep up with the other students, some students in my previous writing classes developed a negative attitude toward studying EFL writing. The CLL approach was employed to deal with this problem due to its previously mentioned fruitful outcomes. To ascertain whether this tactic was effective in encouraging higher achievement with regard to General instructions for the key topics that should be covered in essays were provided to the students. The researcher clarified to his pupils what is cooperative writing in order to ensure that they work efficiently on such cooperative writing exercises.

The option for each student to select their own group and group leader was given. The group leader was in charge of overseeing and planning the writing exercises. A, B, C, D, or E letters were assigned to each group to indicate how well they performed in the writing assignments. As some students were unable to attend all of the classes, the number of



students in each group was lowered from four to three. In several lectures, the students were instructed to generate ideas by writing them in a list, cluster, or two-column format. They were also instructed to write the outline of their essays on their own before working in groups to compare their work to that of others.

A three-hour lecture was consistently attended by 20 students on average each week, while the other five frequently skipped lectures, thus the researcher avoided mentioning their results. The procedure for the treatment was as follows:

1. The first hour of the presentation was devoted to outlining how the CLL approach will be used in the classroom by the students. The second two-hour lecture of the same week included the pre-test for the students .
2. Support skills for writing one-paragraph essays were developed over the course of four weeks (eight lectures), including indenting, capitalizing, using quotation marks, and creating an outline.
3. A three-paragraph essay was organized and written over the course of four weeks (eight lectures). It had an introduction, a body paragraph, and a conclusion.
4. A specific writing technique—comparing, classification, comparison and contrast—was the focus of four weeks (eight courses).
5. In week fourteen, students took the post-test during the two-hour lecture, and during the second one-hour lecture of the same week, they were required to complete an attitude questionnaire.

10. Data Gathering

To demonstrate how the students' writing abilities improved, the post-test results were compared to the pre-test results. A student attitude survey was given out to see how the students felt about learning in this manner. The majority (20 students) of the twenty five students who participated in the treatment looked to be inspired and encouraged to finish the writing course and complete the post-test and questionnaire.

11. Research Outcomes and Descusion

a) To compare the mean scores of the students' responses on the pre/post test, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was utilized for the study's first question. The test was used to determine whether the CLL method of improving students' EFL writing skills was effective. The pre/posttest means for pupils about the writing test are contrasted in the following table.

TABLE 1:
A wilcoxon test results for the students in the writing test comparing the pre-test vs. post-test means,

	n	mini	maxi	Mean	Std.Deviation	Z	sig
Pre test	20	11	33	21.80	6.516	-3.415	.001
Post tes	20	20	42	33.33	6.543		

The findings indicated that the post-test's mean score was higher than its pre-test counterpart. It was evident from the considerable change at the .001 level that the CLL technique utilized in the classroom was rather successful. In the post-test, pupils' maximum score increased to 42 from 33 in the pre-test. The following table compares the number and percentage of students in the pre-posttest in great detail in order to determine precisely how the treatment was successful in improving students' writing skills.

Table 2
A Comparison between the number and the percentage of the students and the pre- post writing test

	No.	failed		passed		From 50 to 59		From 60 to 69		Fom 70 to 79		From 80 to 89		From 90 to 100	
		No.	pre	No.	pre	No.	pre	No.	pre	No.	pre	No.	pre	No.	pre
Pretest	20	14	70%	6	30%	3	15%	2	10%	1	5%	0		0	
Posttest	20	1	5%	19	95%	2	10%	4	50%	4	50%	5	25%	4	50%

The findings presented in the previous table made it abundantly evident how well the CLL technique worked to improve students' writing abilities. Six pupils in total passed the pre-test, but 19 students passed the post-test. There was only one student who failed the writing test, bringing the overall success rate of students to 95%. This outcome demonstrated the efficacy of the CLL strategy in improving students' EFL writing abilities, especially when compared to the pretest percentage of 30%. (9)students were able to achieve a grade of over 80% in

post test, but no student was able to achieve a mark higher than 79% in pretest, according to an analysis of the findings shown in the previous table. Additionally, it was noticed that there was little variation in the number or proportion of students scoring between 50% and 69% on the pre-posttest. Due to the fact that their levels remained the same, this result demonstrated that the CLL strategy was of little service to them. This might have been as a result of their incapacity to interact with their group successfully or their lack of motivation to seriously contribute in the small groups.



Regarding individuals who scored higher on the posttest than the pretest, it must be acknowledged that they valued the CLL method and thought it was both engaging and effective. This was clear from their concern for each step and desire to know every little detail about how this method was being used in the classroom.

With regard to the study's second question, the means and standard deviation were calculated for each item in the attitude questionnaire in order to ascertain how the participants felt about adopting the CLL strategy to improve their EFL writing abilities. The findings from delivering the attitude questionnaire to the pupils were displayed in the table below.

Table (3)
Means and standard for all items in the Questionnaire

No.	Statement	M	SD
1	The CLL technique improves performance when it comes to structuring and planning an article	1.53	.743
2	The CLL strategy enhances collaboration and teamwork	1.87	.352
3	The CLL strategy reduces individualism and competition	1.27	.799
4	Students' self-esteem rises as a result of the CLL strategy	1.80	.414
5	The CLL method gives students the chance to increase their intrinsic motivation.	1.33	.816
6	The CLL approach fosters a confident attitude	1.53	.640
7	The CLL method raises pupils' awareness of their writing abilities	1.67	.617
8	The CLL strategy is a highly rewarding experience	1.07	.884
9	The CLL method works well for coming up with new writing topic ideas	1.87	.352
10	Low level students may benefit from the CLL strategy in improving their writing abilities	1.40	.910
11	The CLL method improves spelling	1.40	.910
12	The CLL strategy improves punctuation.	1.80	.414
13	The CLL method improves gramma	1.47	.834
14	All language skills should be taught using the CLL method	1.33	.816
15	The CLL method cultivates critical thinking abilities	1.13	.834
16	The CLL technique offers opportunities for unrestricted idea expression	1.13	.834
17	The CLL strategy gives students additional chances to engage in practical tasks	1.47	.834
18	The CLL model encourages students to be accountable for both their own learning and that of their teammates	1.87	.352
19	The CLL method helps peers learn by having them describe the subject matter to one another	1.60	.632
20	The CLL method facilitates accomplishing several tasks	1.00	.926
21	Students might be encouraged to learn more by using the CLL strategy	1.60	.632
22	The CLL method promotes the sharing of thoughts, information, and experience.	1.67	.724
23	The CLL approach improves the writing narrative technique	1.53	.743

24	The CLL approach offers a great opportunity to receive insightful input.	1.33	.900
25	The CLL method generates more essay-writing supporting ideas.	1.53	.743

According to earlier findings, the attitude questionnaire items were mostly agreed upon by the participants in the current study, with a mean agreement rating of 1.48 out of 2.00. In the Likert scale's three categories, this percentage falls within category 3. It was in reference to the pupils' adoption of the CLL strategy for improving their writing abilities. Acceptance rates ranged from 1.00 to 1.87. According to the three-level Likert scale, this rate falls into the second and third categories, agree or neutral, respectively. Item 20 (The CLL method facilitates accomplishing several tasks), was generally the least accepted item in the order of acceptance, with a mean acceptance rate of 1.00 out of 2.00. While item 9 (The CLL technique is helpful in generating a variety of topic ideas for essays.) took first place with a mean acceptance rate of 1.87 out of 2.00. These earlier findings demonstrated the intimate connection between the CLL strategy and brainstorming since groupwork gave students more opportunity to generate new ideas. Each of them felt accountable for fulfilling their goal of gathering enough information to enable them to write an essay effectively, in order to be recognized as the class's top group. Item 20, which came in last, they claimed that because they spent so much time conversing and talking when working together, they were unable to complete more than one assignment.

The findings also demonstrated that students were pleased and impressed by the encouraging environment created by working in a group with their classmates. Since most students could work more comfortably and with enjoyment, the English writing class became more engaging. Although the students initially expressed concern about their poor writing abilities, they progressively gained confidence and stopped worrying about making mistakes since they found the exercises to be stimulating and encouraging. Students still made errors in their writing, particularly in the areas of grammar and spelling. When students needed clarification on their spelling or sentence structures, the researcher had to step in so that they could take advantage of the feedback and improve their grammar and spelling abilities.

The CLL approach's carefully chosen exercises allowed students to gain from their involvement in small groups, and they felt them to be important and practical in helping them improve their writing abilities and form favorable attitudes regarding using it in class.

12. CONCLUSION

The study's conclusions validated the application of the CLL strategy to improve students' EFL writing abilities. Their post-test performance improved, most likely as a result of the opportunity this strategy gave students at various levels to encourage, support, and provide feedback to one another. The application of this strategy produces a more engaging, inviting, and humorous learning atmosphere where students can discuss and exchange ideas in order to accomplish their intended objective. The processes that students go through when collaborating in small groups may be what



led to the students' remarkable increase in their EFL writing abilities. Instead of doing these procedures, these processes included brainstorming, talking, considering, planning, creating an outline, and coming up with answers to specific issues in groups. The results of this study also supported the use of the CLL approach in improving students' writing abilities, although it is important to pay greater attention to how the activities are organized and carried out. Therefore, it goes without saying that the CLL approach should be used with a maximum of three, four, or five students per group. In order to prevent pointless conversation and time wastage, the researcher believes that each group should be given the opportunity to select both its leader and group members. Additionally, they might collaborate well to advance and improve their EFL writing abilities.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings led the current study to suggest that every university writing course should include the CLL technique as a necessary component. By giving them engaging cooperative learning tasks that are both challenging and appealing to all of the students, lecturers may provide students with a more stimulating and delightful learning environment. It is necessary to review and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of employing the CLL strategy to improve EFL writing skills with a sizable student body in order to provide more thorough information.

Appendix

Q1/Read the following passage carefully:

Naval architects never claim that a ship is unsinkable, but the sinking of the passenger-and-car ferry Victoria in the Baltic surely should have never have happened. It was well designed and carefully maintained. It carried the proper number of lifeboats. It had been thoroughly inspected the day of its fatal voyage. Yet hours later, the Victoria rolled over and sank in a cold, stormy night. It went down so quickly that most of those on board, caught in

their dark, flooding cabins, had no chance to save themselves: Of those who managed to scramble overboard, only 139 survived. The rest died of hypothermia before the rescuers could pluck them from the cold sea. The final death toll amounted to 912 souls. However, there were an unpleasant number of questions about why the Victoria sank and why so many survivors were men in the prime of life, while most of the dead were women, children and the elderly.

Choose the correct answer:

.1-One can understand from the reading that

- A) the lifesaving equipment did not work well and lifeboats could not be lowered
- B) design faults and incompetent crew contributed to the sinking of the Victoria ferry
- C) 139 people managed to leave the vessel but died in freezing water
- D) naval architects claimed that the Victoria was unsinkable
- E) most victims were trapped inside the boat as they were in their cabins

It is clear from the passage that the survivors of the accident 2-

- A) helped one another to overcome the tragedy that had affected them all
- B) were mostly young men but women, children and the elderly stood little chance
- C) helped save hundreds of lives
- D) are still suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder
- E) told the investigators nothing about the accident

3-According to the passage, when the Victoria sank

- A) there were only 139 passengers on board
- B) few of the passengers were asleep
- C) there were enough lifeboats for the number of people on board
- D) faster reaction by the crew could have increased the Victoria's chances of survival
- E) all the passengers had already moved out into the open decks

4. The good title to this story is

- A. accident the ship of Victoria
- B. of the accident Victoria ship
- C. The Victoria ship accident
- D. the ship of Victoria accident
- E. Victoria the accident ship

Q2/ In not more than (100) words write a description of waiting a turn in a dentist's clinic.

Q3/ Write a composition about the fastest or slowest journey you have ever made in your life.

Q4/ Read the Passage Carefully and then answer the questions below:

Ever since humans have inhabited the earth, they have made use of various forms of communication. Generally, this expression of thoughts and feeling has been in the form of oral speech. When there is a language barrier, communication is accomplished through sign language in which motions stand for letters, words and ideas. Tourists, the deaf and the mute have had to resort to this form of expression. Many of these symbols of whole words are very picturesque and exact, and can be used internationally; spelling, however, cannot. Body

language transmits ideas or thought by certain actions, either intentionally or unintentionally. A nod signifies approval; while shaking the head indicates a negative other form of nonlinguistic language can be found in Braille (a system of raised dots read with the fingertips), signal flags, Morse code, and smoke signals. Road maps and picture signs also guide, warn, and instruct people. While verbalization is the most common form of language, other systems and techniques also express human thoughts and feelings.

Give full answers for the following questions in your own words as far as possible.

1. Why tourists sometimes utilize body language?
2. What are techniques human use to express thoughts and feelings?
3. What is the major used mode of connection?
4. Which motion do you make to express your dissatisfaction with someone's idea?
5. Give suitable title to this article.

Q5/ Give full answers for the following questions in your own words as far as possible.

Q6/ Read the Passage Carefully and the write true if the sentence is correct and false if it is incorrect.

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