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An Investigation into Organic Language Absorption: Examining Cooperative Language Learning Efficacy among Students in Government Schools in Kerala, India

Lakshmi B

Research Scholar

Department of English

Bharathiar University, Coimbatore

Email: lakshmibchirackal@gmail.com

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Abstract: In the context of Kerala education, there is a clear linguistic divide between students in government schools and those in aided and CBSE schools. This divide is especially pronounced regarding the difficulties these students face when learning English as a second language. The main goal of this research is to improve the language proficiency of students in government schools. Specifically, it will look at the value and efficacy of interventions related to cooperative language learning (CLL). The conventional classroom teaching approach, which is frequently used within public schools, seems to be less efficient for children who are having difficulty with languages, particularly learning English. The solution to overcoming these challenges lies in providing learners with an environment similar to that of learning their native language at an early stage. The CLL method offers learners the opportunity to naturally absorb the language similar to acquiring their mother tongue. In laying the theoretical foundation of this study, the researcher has chosen the Socio-cultural theory, with a specific emphasis on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). "CLL is a teaching approach where students work together in small groups to achieve a common learning goal" (Cledys, 2023). It provides opportunities for peer interaction and collaboration. The concepts of CLL align well with Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective. In CLL, more proficient peers can support the learning of their classmates, facilitating language development within the ZPD. The convenience sample method was used by the researcher to identify fifteen eighth-grade students from government schools in Kerala. The researcher has established an experimental group and implemented teaching methods rooted CLL for them. The language abilities of the experimental group improved noticeably after the CLL approaches were applied. It suggests that specific strategies can be helpful in addressing the challenges faced by students who are not proficient in learning English as a second language. These results illustrate the potential effectiveness of CLL method as a useful tool for assisting government school children who struggle to learn the language. The research scope

indicates that this method is effective for all students and has broad applicability in the realm of school education.

Keywords: Cooperative language learning (CLL), ELT, ZPD, School education, language skills.

Introduction

The Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) approach is a teaching methodology that prioritizes student collaboration in order to improve language acquisition. In CLL, students actively participate in conversational activities with one another and it creates a nurturing atmosphere for language acquisition. Through engagement and mutual support, this approach enables students to gain confidence in speaking the target language. CLL is a comprehensive approach to language learning since it focuses on the social and cognitive abilities in addition to linguistic ones. As the approach is learner-centered it allows students to actively participate in their language learning process through group projects and shared responsibility. In comparison with the conventional teacher-centered approaches, the CLL method has proven to be more fruitful in the classroom. While passive learning and one-way communication are common features of teacher centered methods, CLL promotes a dynamic learning environment in the classroom. The students actively participate in group projects in CLL and they indulge in deep discussions as a team. This helps them think critically and solve problems, in addition to improving their language skills. The transition from an approach that is teacher centric to one that is student centric enables customized learning experiences that adapt to individual requirements and different learning styles. In contrast to the conventional teacher centered approaches, the CLL method stresses on the active participation of students to develop a more productive learning environment.

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), CLL approach has shown to be very effective. CLL promotes interactive language acquisition and collaborative learning significantly as contrast to traditional approaches. This approach has shown to be successful in ELT in enhancing communication abilities and language proficiency. CLL simulates real world language use by including students in group projects, conversations and cooperative activities. This develops learners' linguistic skills as well as their appreciation for the cultural nuanced aspects of language. The capacity to accommodate a variety of learning preferences, encourage student engagement.

This research study explores the use of cooperative language learning (CLL) techniques to bridge the language competence gaps among Kerala government school students, especially those who are having difficulty with English as a second language (ESL). The empirical research study is grounded in Sociocultural theory, with a specific emphasis on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as its theoretical framework. By exploring the possible benefits and beneficial outcomes connected with this strategy, the study seeks to provide insights into the advantages of using CLL approaches. The paper also critically analyses the difficulties of applying CLL in language learning environments, recognizing the additional tasks that teachers must do. In addition, the study provides future options for research in this area, opening the door for further study and development of CLL techniques in the context of language instruction. The research article provides a case study that focuses on examining the effectiveness of the CLL technique in improving the general language competency and comprehensive abilities of Kerala government school students. The paper aims to present empirical evidence of the beneficial effects of CLL interventions on students' language learning results through a thorough analysis of the case study. This study offers important insights that can guide pedagogical practices and educational policies targeted at enhancing language instruction in government schools by examining practical uses of CLL in a particular educational setting.

The researcher's attempt to improve language skills in school children using the CLL method commences with a thorough literature review, aiming to understand existing methodologies and identify gaps in current practices. Following the study of relevant literature, the researcher develops a research plan that outlines goals, theories and the chosen methodology, which is a mixed methodology.

Socio-cultural theory offers a solid theoretical foundation for integrating Cooperative Language Learning activities in the classroom. It pinpoints the significance of social interaction and cultural context in language acquisition. In this context, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) becomes highly relevant. Vygotsky explains ZPD as, "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Within the ZPD, learners engage in activities with the guidance of more knowledgeable peers or instructors to achieve tasks

that they could not accomplish independently. The concept is put into practice in CLL's collaborative learning environment, where students collaborate to finish language-related assignments like role-playing, rehearsing dialogues, and finishing group projects. With the help of their peers, learners can push their language skills when they are exposed to language input that is beyond their present competency level through these activities. CLL activities build dynamic learning environments that support language acquisition, social interaction, and cognitive development in learners by utilising the socio-cultural concepts of Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky asserts that education should offer children experiences that align with their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), aiming to both encourage and propel their individual learning forward. Dixon explains it as, "From a Vygotskian perspective, the teacher's role is mediating the child's learning activity as they share knowledge through social interaction" (Dixon-Krauss, 1996, p. 18).

The research article employs a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The fulfillment of required authorization from school officials is necessary prior to any involvement, since ethical issues take precedence. The researcher chooses a representative sample of students attending government schools and, in accordance with ethical guidelines, gives them pre-assessment exams to determine their present level of language as well as comprehensive skills. The pre-assessment findings are used to guide the careful modification of the CLL approach to meet each student's specific needs. As part of implementation, instruction must be continuously assessed and modified accordingly. The success of the CLL approach is then quantitatively measured by post-assessment and in order to derive significant findings, statistical analysis is conducted on the collected data. In order to give a thorough assessment of the intervention's impact, the researcher takes a holistic approach, taking into account characteristics like learning styles, socioeconomic background, and other potential influences.

The study's participants included eighth grade students from a specific government school in Kerala. All the 15 participants have exhibited noticeable challenges with language skills. The experimental group comprised eight male and seven female students, all from Kerala and having Malayalam as their primary language. English served as their second language and the participants shared similar social, cultural and economic backgrounds. To evaluate the students' language abilities, the researcher employed a combination of

questionnaires and interactive methods. The convenience sampling method was utilized by the researcher to select participants for the study. The experimental group underwent the implementation of the CLL method for 2 weeks.

The researcher has generated qualitative data through questionnaire, observations, interviews, and student reflections to understand the social interactions, collaborative processes and language development within the CLL context as a second language. In order to get the background data a questionnaire was distributed among teachers in government schools with the goal of determining the unique learning requirements of students who are having difficulty acquiring a second language. The questionnaire probed these students' learning objectives, identifying their areas of weakness, preferred study techniques and necessary English proficiency. The background data gathered was helpful in determining the intervention's main points of emphasis. This was a crucial stage because the objective of the intervention was to help students who didn't have strong language abilities overcome barriers to learning English.

The Pre-Assessment and Post-Assessment

Quantitative evaluation of participants' language skills progression before and after implementing the CLL method was conducted through pre-and post-assessments. These assessments were created especially to measure the experimental group's (students who were having difficulty with language) language acquisition. They also measured the extent to which students interacted with the CLL technique and related course materials. The data collected from these assessments not only identified individuals in need of additional support but also highlighted specific areas where teaching and learning approaches might require adjustment or enhancement. The intervention was designed employing predetermined criteria for both pre and post-assessments as follows:

1. Listening skills
2. Speaking skills
3. Decoding skills
4. Critical thinking
5. Interpersonal skills

The Pre- Assessment Questionnaire

The researcher employed five direct closed-ended questions to collect data, while ensuring the anonymity of the students to uphold authenticity.

1. Prior to participating in the Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) intervention, how would you rate your confidence in using English for communicative purposes?

- a) Very confident
- b) Confident
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat confident
- e) Not confident

2. Before engaging in CLL activities, how often did you collaborate with peers to complete language-related tasks?

- a) Always
- b) Often
- c) Sometimes
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

3. How would you describe your current level of vocabulary knowledge in English?

- a) Extensive
- b) Above average
- c) Average
- d) Below average
- e) Limited

4. Prior to the intervention, how frequently did you engage in critical thinking and problem-solving activities in English language learning?

- a) Very frequently
- b) Frequently

c) Occasionally

d) Rarely

e) Never

5. Before the CLL intervention, to what extent did you feel supported by your classmates in your English language learning endeavors?

a) Fully supported

b) Mostly supported

c) Somewhat supported

d) Minimally supported

e) Not supported at all

Intervention Design

The researcher has developed and conducted a CLL intervention designed for high school students that incorporates Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory for two weeks. The intervention plan is as follows:

Week 1: Building Foundations

Day 1-2: Introduction to Cooperative Learning

- Brief introduction to CLL principles and the concept of ZPD.
- Formation of small groups (3-4 students per group) with diverse language proficiency levels.
- Icebreaker activities to develop group cohesion and establish rapport. The icebreaker activities is designed to improve the interpersonal skills of the students.

Day 3-4: Diagnostic Language Assessment

- Administer a diagnostic language assessment to identify students' current language proficiency levels.
- Analyze assessment results to group students with similar proficiency levels together.

Day 5-6: Collaborative Task Design

- Each group collaboratively designs a language learning task aligned with their proficiency level and interests (e.g., creating a dialogue, designing a poster on a specific topic, writing a short story). The task will help the students to develop their critical thinking skills

- Emphasize the importance of cooperation, communication, and peer support in completing the task.

Week 2: Cooperative Language Learning

Day 7-9: Implementation of Language Tasks

- Groups work together to complete the tasks they designed.
- Encourage students to provide peer feedback, offer support, and scaffold learning for each other within their ZPD.
- Monitor group interactions and provide guidance as needed to ensure productive collaboration.

Day 10-11: Peer Review and Reflection

- Groups present their completed tasks to the class.
- Classmates provide constructive feedback and suggestions for improvement.
- Facilitate a reflection session where students discuss their collaborative experiences, challenges faced, and lessons learned. The decoding skills are refined through this activity.

Day 12-13: Revision and Finalization

- Groups revise their tasks based on peer feedback and reflections.
- Finalize and prepare the tasks for a showcase or presentation.

Day 14: Showcase and Evaluation

- Groups showcase their completed tasks to the school community (e.g., presentations, displays).
- Appreciate students' achievements and the collaborative effort involved in the language learning process.

The educational strategy of cooperative language learning encourages student participation to improve language acquisition, and it can have a big impact on schoolchildren's English language development. The establishment of a dynamic and captivating learning environment is one of the main benefits. Students are exposed to a variety of viewpoints and linguistic styles through group exercises, conversations, and cooperative projects, which broadens their language repertoire. In comparison to traditional techniques, this promotes a more active and immersive language learning experience since students actively engage in real-world communication scenarios that reflect language use in everyday life.

Additionally, cooperative language acquisition encourages students to speak and negotiate meaning with their peers, which promotes social interaction. Collaborating in pairs or small groups enhances not just language proficiency but also self-assurance and social abilities. Students gain the ability to express themselves clearly, offer helpful criticism, and take in input from others—all of which support enhanced language development. The cooperative learning environments accommodate diverse learning courses and speeds, enabling learners to take advantage on the combined expertise and encouragement of their classmates. In addition to improving language proficiency, this cooperative approach fosters a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment that values linguistic diversity and promotes a sense of community among students.

During the course of the research study, a deliberate selection process led the researcher to choose a subset of 15 students from an initial pool of 38. The researcher implemented the CLL method on a daily basis over a two-week period. Initially, the researcher crafted and employed unique instructional materials, gradually transitioning to the utilization of the students' prescribed syllabus materials in the later phases. Continuous assessment of the student's progress was consistently carried out throughout this process. Within a few days, students started responding well, despite their initial lack of enthusiasm. Due to their increased interest in participating in activity-based learning, their language abilities, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL), significantly improved over a short period of time. The small group sizes, usually with fifteen students, made it easier for the researcher to keep a close eye on every student. With a focus on individualised instruction, the researcher employed activity-based strategies to help students reach their maximum potential. This method was crucial in promoting student active participation because they had varying learning styles and speeds. All of the students showed clear improvements in their skills by the end of the research period, indicating a significant shift from the first week when completing tasks on their own was difficult to the last week when they completed tasks without any assistance.

The Post-Assessment Questionnaire

Following the intervention, the researcher administered a post-assessment questionnaire comprising an additional set of five closed-ended questions to assess the effectiveness of the Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) intervention.

1. Following the Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) intervention, how would you rate your overall improvement in English language proficiency?
 - a) Significantly improved
 - b) Improved
 - c) No change
 - d) Slightly declined
 - e) Declined significantly

2. After participating in CLL activities, how frequently do you now collaborate with peers to accomplish language-related tasks?
 - a) Always
 - b) Often
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Rarely
 - e) Never

3. How would you assess your current level of vocabulary knowledge in English compared to before the intervention?
 - a) Expanded significantly
 - b) Expanded
 - c) No change
 - d) Reduced
 - e) Reduced significantly

4. Since engaging in the intervention, how often do you employ critical thinking and problem-solving strategies in your English language learning?
 - a) Very frequently
 - b) Frequently

- c) Occasionally
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

5. Following the CLL intervention, to what extent do you feel supported by your classmates in your English language learning endeavors?

- a) Fully supported
- b) Mostly supported
- c) Somewhat supported
- d) Minimally supported
- e) Not supported at all

Pre-Assessment and post-Assessment Results

Before the pre-assessment, members of the experimental group displayed lower confidence level and hesitated to actively participate in the English assessment. Discomfort with group activities was evident, leading to comparatively lower assessment scores and indicating a need for targeted support and personalized instruction. Following the interventions and subsequent post-assessment, a significant transformation occurred among the students. Their confidence levels improved, and a passion for learning emerged. The students showed an increased willingness to engage in various activities, including both group exercises and comprehension assessment tests, demonstrating a positive response to the implemented strategies.

The researcher observed that all the students in the experimental group benefited from the CLL method over the traditional classroom approach. They found the CLL method to be more effective than the teacher-centered method. After the intervention period, visible changes were noted in their LSRW skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) and communication abilities. During interactions, one student expressed a sense of acknowledgment, highlighting that in conventional classrooms, there was limited opportunity to articulate personal thoughts. The experimental group systematically progressed through different stages of desired development in comprehension abilities as evident from the pre and post assessment results. The data collected underwent analysis utilizing Excel software, where the mean of each

section was calculated separately and subsequently compared. The researcher computed the mean of responses for both the pre-test and post-test groups, thereafter interpreting these values to ascertain the central tendency of responses. The mean value for each section was represented in the table as well as in the given bar diagram.

Skills Evaluation	Pre- assessment data	Post-assessment data
Listening skills	7	14
Speaking skills	8	19
Critical thinking	4	12
Decoding	2	14
Interpersonal skills	10	20

As depicted in Figure 1, illustrating the statistical results, noteworthy changes were noted in the overall language proficiency of the students. They exhibited improvements in listening skills, speaking skills, decoding skills, critical thinking abilities, and interpersonal skills.

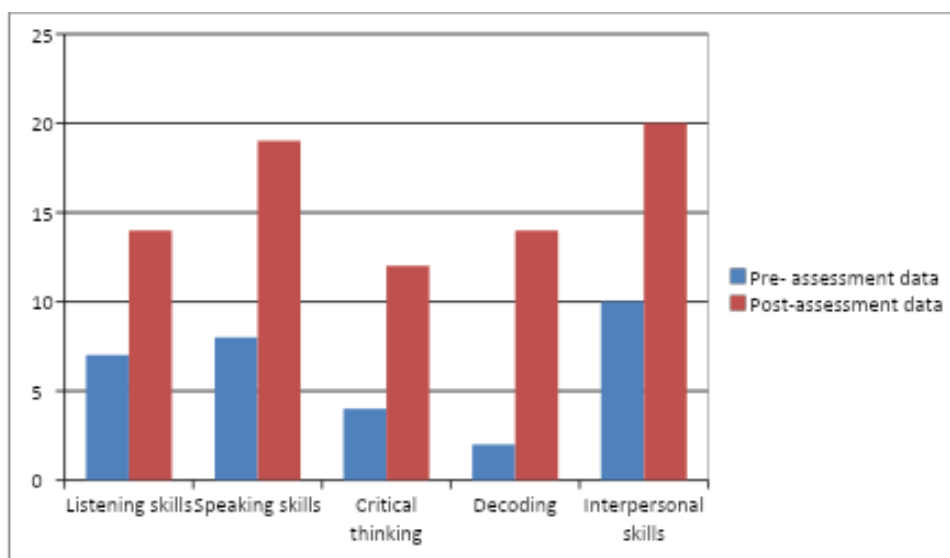


Figure 1

Findings and discussions

Participation in Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) activities resulted in notable outcomes among students. Firstly, there was a noticeable enhancement in language proficiency, with remarkable progress observed in vocabulary acquisition and communicative competence. Secondly, CLL facilitated enriched social interactions among peers, cultivating cooperative learning skills and nurturing a classroom atmosphere supportive of language acquisition. Lastly, students exhibited the development of higher-order language skills, engaging in critical thinking, problem-solving, and meaningful negotiation of linguistic meaning during CLL tasks. By applying Sociocultural Theory, specifically Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, to the evaluation of Cooperative Language Learning in government schools in Kerala, this case study can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of CLL as a pedagogical approach for enhancing English language learning outcomes in a sociocultural context.

Scope for further research

To improve language learning outcomes, there is a recommendation for the pedagogical practices of government schools in Kerala to support the incorporation of Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) techniques into the English language teaching methodology. This integration necessitates a concerted effort towards providing professional development opportunities for educators, so they can competently apply CLL approaches and efficiently support student learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Furthermore, in order to promote active student involvement and collaborative language learning experiences, it is necessary that the English language curriculum be reconfigured with cooperative learning ideas and activities incorporated. These kind of strategic efforts have the potential to foster a more dynamic and engaging learning environment that will help students in Kerala's government schools develop their language competence.

Conclusion

The research suggests that the implementation of a CLL method holds considerable potential for enhancing students' language skills. By implementing this Cooperative Language Learning intervention grounded in Vygotsky's ZPD theory, high school students can engage in meaningful collaborative activities that promote language development, peer interaction, and cognitive growth within a supportive learning

environment. The key to the success of this method lies in its activity-based approach, which considers each student's language barriers and addresses their specific challenges. While the method has proven effective in the current study, further research is necessary to understand its long-term impact on learners. Future investigations should delve into the precise characteristics of CLL that contribute to its efficacy, shedding light on even the subtle features that distinguish it from other educational approaches.

In a nutshell, this research article explored the promise of the CLL method blended with ZPD theory as a solution to the learning difficulties and as a means to elevate the overall language proficiency of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The results underscored significant improvements in language skills within the experimental group, supporting the effectiveness of CLL-based interventions in language learning. As education embraces the era of artificial intelligence, it becomes crucial to examine how AI can enhance support across various domains, including speech and language therapy. Subsequent studies should not only broaden the scope of these interventions by including larger sample sizes and extended intervention periods but also investigate how AI can be utilized to refine CLL methods in language classrooms, further improving educational outcomes for students, particularly those facing learning challenges.

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