

# Investigating Iraqi EFL College Students' Attitude towards Using Cooperative Learning Approach in Developing Reading Comprehension Skill

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**Abstract**—This study aims at investigating Iraqi EFL college learners' attitudes toward using cooperative Learning approach on developing reading comprehension skill. The study is restricted to third-year college students of the English language in Misan Governorate during the second term of the academic year 2015–2016. The number of the whole population is (200) which is distributed into two types: pilot and main. The sample of the study consists of 40 students. To achieve the aim of the study, students' questionnaire consisting of (46) items is applied as an instrument. In order to get required data, a t-test analysis shows a statistically significant difference about learners' attitudes toward using cooperative learning approach on developing reading comprehension skill. The obtained results are that: which refer to (*Cooperative learning helps everyone reach the goal equally*) from cooperative learning and (*Reading in English is difficult for me*) form Reading comprehension. Gain the low effectiveness. They got a weighted mean 56% and 40%. Items number (11, 29, 37, 43) which refer to (*Cooperative learning requires much more time to study*) & (*I think reading the texts is easier if I study within a group*) from cooperative learning and (*I forward to coming to my reading class.*)& (*I m a afraid of making mistakes in my reading class*) form Reading comprehension. All got (96%).

**Index Terms**—attitude, cooperative learning approach, reading comprehension skill

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. The Problem of the Study and Its Significance

Nowadays many teaching methods appear and the successful teachers could choose the suitable methods that are in harmony with teaching practical subjects because they require great efforts especially on the practical side which consequently requires an extensive training to sharpen the students' performance. Therefore, using a new method in teaching Reading Comprehension, which depends on interdependence, searching for information, discussions in addition to practice teaching may improve their performance.

In the same way, Teacher should be well aware of the fact that although a major goal of most language programmes is to enable learners to use new language, there is not a method of teaching which is viewed as the best and can meet all learners needs at all times. For instance, there have been methods of teaching in the last quarter of the current century, yet we are still looking for the best method that can bring about the teaching of behaviour as complex as an Foreign Language with less time and effort (Stevens, 1977, p.15).

Meanwhile, Cooperative Learning Approach provides opportunities for students to develop skills in a group interaction and in working with others that are needed in today's world". Whereas the traditional ways of teaching, in which the instructor talks and the students may listen passively or may have a shrewd mind, show its failure as the student is out of the real involvement in the lecture (Abu and Flowers, 1997, p. 2).

Similarly, Cooperative learning method provides daily opportunities for students from different backgrounds to engage in meaningful interpersonal interaction and require them to get to know one another as individuals.

In addition, Mergan and John (1994, p.23) maintain that CL improves relations among groups; increases self-esteem; fosters positive feeling about learning and school. Students in comparatively structured learning activities take responsibility for both themselves and others; they give help when asked and are always generous for encouragement and support (Forest, 1987, p.121-4).

To sum up, In the domain of language learning and teaching, it is better to take account of any new method or programme. This is so because, as Allen and Davies, 1977,p.1) state, it may be that we shall always have to take account of changing fashion, simply because we have no way of finally establishing the best way to learn or to teach language.

### B. The Aim

The present study aims at:

Investigating Iraqi EFL college students' attitude towards using cooperative learning approach in developing reading comprehension skill.

### C. Values

The study can be useful in:

a- exploring learners' attitudes toward the use of cooperative learning approach on developing reading comprehension skill.

b- shedding light on the students' perceptions of the influence of such using cooperative learning approach on improving their language proficiency, in general, and on their reading comprehension, in particular.

c- giving insights to college instructors to use cooperative learning approach in teaching different courses.

### D. Limits

This study is limited to

1- University third year students at the Department of English during the academic year, 2015-2016 in Misan Governorate.

### E. Definitions of Basic Terms

#### 1. Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others" (Olsen and Kagan, 1992,p.8, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

#### 2. Reading Comprehension (RC)

Grellet (1981, p.3) defines RC as the extracting of the required information from a written text as efficiently as possible.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### **What is meant by Cooperative Learning Approach (CLA)?**

Slavin (1995) mentions that Cooperative learning is an instructional program in which students work in small groups to help one another master academic content."

Similarly ,Johnson, et al.(2000,p.99) state that cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning.

Generally speaking, cooperative learning approach defined as "better relationships among students, higher levels of self-esteem, acceptance of mainstreamed students, enhanced communication skills, growth in ability to work cooperatively, greater cooperation among students from different ethnic backgrounds, and improved attitudes towards school" (Maltby, Gage & Berliner, 1995, p.415). To sum up, Kagan (1989, p.12-15) states that in cooperative learning the teacher designs the social interaction structures as well as learning activities.

#### 1. Principles and models of Cooperative Learning Method:

Cooperative Learning according to (Kagan ,2011, p.2; Macpherson, 2007; Johnson, eta. 1,2000, p.99) consists of many models such as Positive Interdependence; Individual Accountability; Equal Participation Simultaneous Interaction; Promotive face-to-face interaction; Collaborative skills; and Group processing (See table 1).

TABLE (1)  
SHOWS THE PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING METHOD

<b>P</b>	<b>Positive Interdependence</b> Positive Interdependence occurs when gains of individuals and teams <i>positively</i> correlate. “Is my gain your gain?” Helping, encouragement, and tutoring blossom. Similarly, <b>Positive interdependence</b> : shared goal, rewards, resources, functional roles in group
<b>I</b>	<b>Individual Accountability</b> : Individual Accountability requires that all students are actively involved and responsible for their own learning. “Is individual public performance required?” in the same way, Individual accountability: responsibility for own and group's learning
<b>E</b>	<b>Equal Participation</b> : In a traditional classroom, only one student out of the entire class will be participating at any one time. By working in teams, all students are encouraged to contribute allowing all students the chance for growth. Stahl (1994:2) declares that CL shows many ways for equal participation for all group members like the use of rotating roles in a group such as facilitator, checker, questioner, praiser, encourager, reader, writer, paraphrase, and the use of multiple ability tasks which require variety of abilities like <u>singing , drawing , acting and categorizing</u>
<b>S</b>	<b>Simultaneous Interaction</b> : Cooperative Learning is fundamentally a simultaneous approach. Discussions and activities both take place all at once. “What percent of the students are overtly active at once?” Stahl (1994, p.2) states that in CL, students engage in interactive abilities such as constructive criticism, encouragement, compromise, negotiation, and clarifying.
<b>P</b>	<b>Promotive face-to-face interaction</b> : shared decisions about materials, Johnson and Johnson (2001,p.2-3) state that this principle helps in checking for understanding, teaching one’s knowledge to others, and in explaining orally how to solve the problems that the group may meet.
<b>C</b>	<b>Collaborative skills</b> : decision-making, trust, communication, conflict- management
<b>G</b>	<b>Group processing</b> : reflection on goal-achievement, fostering group working relations. Johnson and Johnson (2001,p.1) claim that group members discuss with each other how well they are achieving their shared goals and establish effective working relationship. Students also describe what actions are helpful or not helpful and make decisions concerning what behaviour they want to change or adopt.
<b>T</b>	<b>Team Competition</b> : Snowman (1997,p.3) says that though this principle seems to be an odd component of CL because it focuses on competition rather than on cooperation but, there is no contradiction. The problem is that competition is not used effectively and appropriately, for example, when competition occurs among groups this can be an effective way to motivate students to cooperate with each other in their groups.

Cooperative Learning(Kagan ,2011,p.2)

**2. The Importance of Cooperative Learning (CL):**

Cooperative Learning method should be useful in many ways such as:

1. The students get excited about learning.
2. Knowledge is obtained from the student rather than solely from the teacher.
3. Fosters positive attitude in the students, such as cooperation, tolerance.
4. Trains students to express or convey ideas.
5. CL also provides formative feedback. As to the social relationships between students, CL develops social and group skills which are necessary for success outside the classroom for their own life. Finally, it promotes positive interaction between members of different cultural and socio-economic groups (Mills, 1996).
6. It promotes high levels of achievement, especially in children who have not traditionally done well in school (Sharan, 1980, p.241; Towson, 1985, p.263).
7. It promotes positive interpersonal social behaviour among children; good community (Solomon et al., 1985, p.371).
8. Comparative strategies provide learners with natural setting in which they can derive and express meaning from academic content (Swan, 1985, p.235).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Population and Sample

The sample of this study includes 40 third – year college students of the English language in Misan Governorate. The total number of the College students’ population is 206 distributed among male and female students.

B. Instruments

In order to gain information about the EFL college students’ attitudes toward using cooperative learning approach in developing reading comprehension skill in Misan, a questionnaire has been constructed to be the main instrument used.

**1. Face Validity**

Ebel (1972, p.78) claims that face validity is secured if the items appear to be measuring what is intended to be measured. a questionnaire has been exposed to a number of specialists in the fields of linguistics and methodology of teaching EFL as shown in table (2) below:

TABLE (2)  
THE ACADEMIC RANKS, NAMES, AND LOCATIONS OF THE JURY MEMBER

N	Academic Rank	Name	College
2	Asst. Prof. (Ph.D in Linguistics)	Bushra Ni'ma Rashid	College of Education, University of Baghdad.
3	Asst. Prof. ( M.A. in ELT)	Alaa Ismail Chaloob	College of Education University of Anbar
4	Asst. Prof. (M.A. in ELT)	Saadon Salih	College of Basic Education, University of Misan
5	Instr. (Ph.D in ELT)	khansa Hasan	College of Art, University of Al.ImamAL Kadhim
6	Instr. (Ph.D in ELT)	Liqaa Habeeb	College of Education University of Diayla
7	Instr. (M.A. in ELT)	NajimAbdulah	College of Education, University of Misan
8	Instr. (M.A. in Linguistics)	Iqbal S. Disher	College of Basic Education, University of Misan
9	Asst Instr. (M.A in ELT)	Hyfaa Kahadim	College of Basic Education, University of Misan

The final form of the students' questionnaire consists of 46 items distributed among two components: (30) for Cooperative Learning and (16) for Reading Comprehension (see table 3)

### **2. Pilot Administration**

After ensuring the validity of the questionnaire, a pilot version is administered to a sample of (20) College students who are taken from Colleges of Basic Education at University of Misan. Regarding the time allotted for answering the items, it has been found that students need 40 minutes to respond to the questionnaire items.

### **3. Reliability**

Reliability refers to how consistent evaluation results are from one measurement to another (Grolund, 1976, p.102).

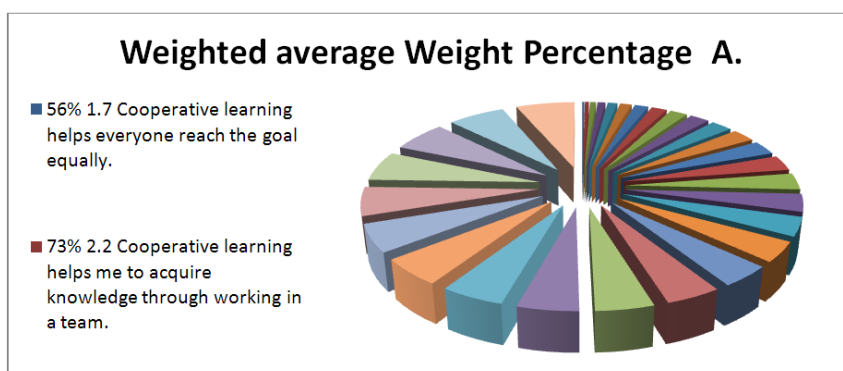
### **4. Scoring Scheme**

Accurate scoring procedures should be adopted in order to get proper results to ensure objectivity and reliability (Harrocks & Schannover, 1968, p.76).

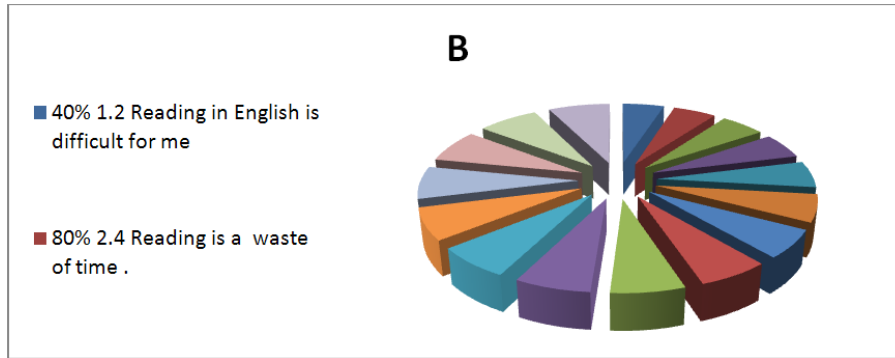
In order to achieve aim of the study, the questionnaire is intended to be answered according to a three points scale (always, sometimes, never) .The marks are assigned as follows: always 3, sometimes 2, never 1 as shown in table (3) below:

TABLE (3)  
SHOWS QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT IRAQI EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING APPROACH IN DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION SKILL

	<i>Components and Items</i>	Weighted average	Weight Percentage
<b>A.</b>	<b>Cooperative Learning</b>		
1.	Cooperative learning helps everyone reach the goal equally.	1.7	%56
2.	Cooperative learning helps me to acquire knowledge through working in a team.	2.2	73%
3.	Cooperative learning makes me understand the working process.	2.4	80%
4.	Cooperative learning enables me to participate in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems.	2.3	76%
5.	Cooperative learning trains me how to be a good leader and a good follower.	2.2	73%
6.	Cooperative learning creates a good relationship among group members.	2.2	%73
7.	Cooperative learning helps me to learn new thing easily.	2.7	90%
8.	The lessons become more interesting with cooperative learning	2.3	76%
9.	Cooperative learning inspires me to more active learning.	2.7	90%
10.	Cooperative learning helps me realize others' study methods that benefit me.	2.5	83%
11.	Cooperative learning requires much more time to study.	2.9	96%
12.	Cooperative learning brings more pleasure to study.	2.8	93%
13.	Cooperative learning increases my classroom participation	2.5	83%
14.	Cooperative learning helps me to share and help others which confirms my abilities.	2.1	7.1%
15.	During cooperative learning, I feel satisfied with the interactions with my partners.	2.4	80%
16.	I prefer Cooperative learning.	2.4	80%
17.	I feel actively involved in all activities through this approach	2.8	93%
18.	I feel intellectually challenged through this approach.	2.8	93%
19.	Cooperative learning reminds me of neglected key points from the text.	2.1	70%
20.	Cooperative learning helps me grasp more key idea from the text.	2.5	83%
21.	Cooperative learning helps me more comprehensive understanding of the text.	2.6	86%
22.	Cooperative learning helps me determiner the parts I don't really understand.	2.6	86%
23.	Working with other students on a problem gives me confidence to answer a question in the class	2.7	90%
24.	I think sharing information about different readings help me learn.	2.6	86%
25.	I prefer the teacher rather than another students teaches me.	2.5	83%
26.	I think working on questions with other students helps me learn	2.8	93%
27.	I think studying in class for an exam with other students is better than studying alone.	2.4	80%
28.	I think studying with other students can improve my English in the reading course more than studying alone.	2.3	76%
29.	I think reading the texts is easier if I study within a group.	2.9	96%
30.	Cooperative learning helps me improve my exam scores.	1.9	63%
<b>B</b>	<b>Reading Comprehension</b>		
31.	Reading in English is difficult for me	1.2	40%
32.	Reading is a waste of time.	2.4	80%
33.	Reading helps me in learning new vocabulary	2.7	90%
34.	In my teacher class, the teachers' instruction helps me learn the material	2.2	73%
35.	In my teacher class, the teachers' instruction is boring	1.9	63%
36.	my teacher class, makes me want to learn more English	2.4	80%
37.	I forward to coming to my reading class.	2.9	96%
38.	I have difficulty in learning new vocabulary in the reading course.	2.7	90%
39.	The students can learn a lot by reading.	2.7	90%
40.	The reading course helps me improve my reading in English	2.3	76%
41.	I like and enjoy reading comprehension	1.9	63%
42.	I often feel anxious about answering a question in the reading course	2.7	90%
43.	I m a afraid of making mistakes in my reading class.	2.9	96%
44.	I feel more relaxed if I work on an answer with other students	2.4	80%
45.	Working with other students on a problem gives me confidence to answer a question in the class.	2.8	93%
46.	I think sharing information about different readings help me learn.	2.6	86%



Graphic 1: Shows Students' Attitudes Toward Cooperative Learning



Graphic 2: Shows Students' Attitudes Toward Reading Comprehension

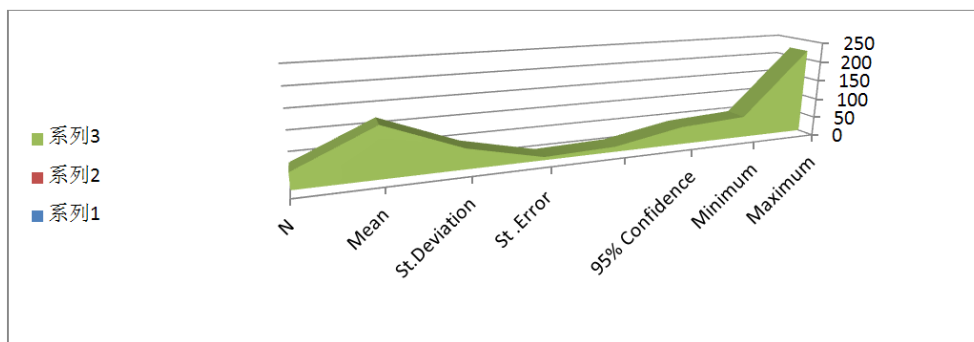
IV. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Results Related to the First Aim

In order to achieve the first aim to identify and classify effect of using cooperative learning approach in English language classroom. The descriptive statistics of participants' performance on post-test were shown in table 3.

TABLE(3)  
RESULTS OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF TOTAL SCORES FOR STUDENTS

Item	N	Mean	St. Deviation	St .Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Students	40	124.30	50.241	7.944	13.23	45.37	55	222



Graphic 3: Shows results of Descriptive Statistics of Total Scores for Students

As Table 1 shows, the overall mean score for students is 124.30 and SD is 50.241. The descriptive statistics show that using cooperative learning approach has outperformed for the students.

B. Conclusion

Conclusion remarks can be clearly pointed out as follows:

1. Items number (1, 32) which refer to (*Cooperative learning helps everyone reach the goal equally*) from cooperative learning and (*Reading in English is difficult for me*) from Reading comprehension. Gain the low effectiveness. They got a weighted mean 56% and 40%.

2. Items number (11,29,37,43) which refer to (*Cooperative learning requires much more time to study*) & (*I think reading the texts is easier if I study within a group*) from cooperative learning and (*I forward to coming to my reading class.*) & (*I m a afraid of making mistakes in my reading class*) from Reading comprehension. All got (96%)

The Students show enthusiasm towards cooperative learning as it liberates them from the instructor's control and gives them a chance to teach each other, which is an interesting job for them.

C. Recommendations

1. New methods of teaching reading comprehension as cooperative learning must be applied in our classrooms.
2. Teachers of English in the secondary schools as well as instructors of reading comprehension in colleges should be trained on using new techniques for teaching reading comprehension.

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1. "Difficulties faced by Basic Education College Student in Essay Writing" Journal of Misan Researches. Vol. (2) No. (3) 2006. 2. "Assessment of the Techniques used in Teaching English syllabus of Fifth Grade at primary schools" Journal of Misan Researches. Vol. (3) No. (5) 2006. 3. Evaluating the Professional Efficiency of primary school teachers in teaching RECI Book I. Journal of Educational and Psychological Researches. N12 7006. 4- the Effect of Autonomous Learning Programme on EFL college Students' Performance in Writing. Journal. No. (525) 2011 5- The Impact of practicing autonomy on the writing proficiency of Iraqi college efl learners. 6- Analyzing the Errors Made by EFL College Students in Using 'Verb to be' at Recognition and Production level. 7-Comprehension and Production of Metaphor: Evidence from Horoscopes Translation 8- Investigating the Relationship between the Anxiety and Reading Comprehension and its Impact on Preparatory Schools Students' Performance in Misan. 9- Investigating EFL College Teachers' and Learners' Attitudes toward Using Authentic Reading Materials in Misan. 10- The Effect of the Directed Reading – Thinking Activity on EFL Students' Reading Comprehension. 11. Investigating Iraqi EFL College Teachers' Attitudes Towards Practicing Critical Friends Groups Model (CFGs), International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research .Vol. Iv, Issue 7, November 2015. 12. Investigating Iraqi Teachers' Attitudes toward Using TPR as a Teaching Method for " Iraq Opportunities textbook" at Primary Schools. The International Journal Of Humanities & Social Studies (ISSN 2321 - 9203) [www.theijhss.com](http://www.theijhss.com). 13 .The Effectiveness of Using YouTube Video on EFL Iraqi College Students' Performance in Grammar at Missan University Global Research & Development Services **19-november -2016** and finally she attended many **Conferences and scientific activities such as:** 1. Sharing with scientific conferences inside and outside Iraq. 2 - participated in the role global in Italy and certification has been awarded to journalists. 3 - Attending a special workshop introducing the new curriculum for English language sections of non- dedicated to the study of English in the College of Basic Education, Education and other faculties commensurate with the vocabulary approach the university and the universities of Iraq and held a workshop for new Iraqi Cutting Edge in Lebanon, and she has got a certificate of appreciation. 4. Participated in the training course for the development and implementation of education policies in Iraq for the period from 14-10 to 2-11-2012/10 in the College of Teacher Education, Zhejiang Normal University/china 5. Participated in the training course for the development and implementation of education in the Digital age – a multi- Regional Project in USA (International Visitor Leadership Program) for the period from 3 to 21 November 2014.