The Effect of Using Cooperative Learning Strategies on Learning Grammar by Iraqi EFL Learners: Simple Present and Present Continuous in Focus

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims at examining the effect of using cooperative learning strategies on learning simple present and present continuous by elementary Iraqi EFL learners. For this purpose, 60 Iraqi EFL students of the seventh grade (first grade of high school) from two intact classes were selected from among the female Iraqi high school students studying in Maysan, Iraq. They attended the pre-test of the target grammar points. Then, the treatment started and continued for 12 sessions. In the experimental group, first the teacher assigned the students into 6 groups including 4 to 6 members and asked them to do the grammar exercises cooperatively in groups while in the control group, the students did the exercises individually, on their own. The teacher of both groups was the same; so, she tried not to have any peer or group practice in the control group. The treatment lasted for about 3 months. Then, the same test of the target grammar points was administered as the post-pest and the participants' performance on the pre-test and post-test was compared in order to see which group performed better after the treatment. The results indicated the outperformance of the experimental group who used cooperative techniques for learning simple present and present continuous over the control group. Findings recommend that Iraqi English language teachers and material designers can make use of communicative tasks and activities like cooperative learning techniques in their classes.
Key words: cooperative learning strategies, grammar, Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)

1. Introduction
1.1. Theoretical framework

Cooperative learning has roots in Communicative Language Teaching, which promotes students' cooperation, interaction and participation in classroom activities in order to guarantee communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Cooperative learning as a kind of classroom practice, refers to the instructional activities through which students work in groups in order to achieve common learning goals (Woolfolk, 2004).

In support of cooperative learning, it has been suggested that when EFL students work in groups together, they will learn from each other, especially the less proficient learners will learn new ideas from the more proficient members of the group. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding within the framework of sociocultural theory. According to this theory, learning happens through social interaction. In other words, students will learn if they interact with each other and negotiate meaning in pairs or in groups. In this way, the less proficient learners will find the opportunity to learn new ideas and concepts from their peers in a friendly, cooperative manner. This perspective supports cooperation and group work as the best instructional techniques since in this way, the learners are provided with opportunities to interact, negotiate meaning, communicate and learn from their peers. Along the same lines, Swain (2001) believed that learners who participate in collaborative activities are able to think at higher levels compared with the time that they do the task or activity individually.

This study can also be theoretically supported by Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990) and Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) highlighting the point that EFL students fail to learn grammar by mere exposure to the comprehensible input. Rather, they need the grammar point to be focused on and highlighted in one way or another. Through cooperative learning, the teacher can provide the students with different types of grammar tasks and activities that they are supposed to practice until they master them in groups and in cooperation with their peers.

The problem which was the impetus of this study was that mastery of English grammar is one of the great concerns of EFL learners. Previous studies reveal that Iraqi students experience a lot of problems while learning English grammar and they do not master it fully even at later stages of language learning (Kadhim, 2019). Based on some second language learning theories like Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) and Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985), learners need to focus on grammar as just being exposed to the comprehensible

input does not guarantee learners' grammatical competence. Rather, some kind of focused instruction of grammatical structures is required.

In the last two decades, cooperative learning techniques have been widely used for teaching different language skills and components and the previous research shows their effectiveness. Cooperative learning refers to the classroom practice through which the students with different abilities and different proficiency levels work in groups and are rewarded based on the achievement of the whole group (Woolfolk, 2001). Co-operative Learning has also been defined as "an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task or create a product" (Albastroiu & Felea, 2013). Slavin (2008) highly supported cooperative learning as a reform in education and said that when learners with different abilities work in small groups, they feel more secured and more confident. In this way, they could learn better due to the lower affective filter and also they will learn from each other (peer-learning). In collaboration with their peers, the students will explain ideas, develop arguments, repeat key words, practice pronunciation, and use words in real contexts. Some non-linguistic skills like organizing group work and managing group activities will also be developed in collaborative learning (Hill & Flynn, 2006). In such aspects, cooperative learning does not merely refer to the traditional group work because besides the language skills, it also develops their social skills.

Communicative language teaching promotes cooperative learning in order to maximize students' interaction and participation. Cooperative learning has been defined as the kind of classroom practice in which students work in mixed ability groups, share the responsibilities, accomplish the task together and are rewarded based on the success of the group (Woolfolk, 2004). In this way, cooperative learning is in line with the principles of communicative language teaching (Liang, 2002).

Cooperative learning has also been defined by Macpherson as "part of a group of teaching/learning techniques where students interact with each other to acquire and practice the elements of a subject matter and to meet common learning goals" (2007, p. 1). This means that cooperative learning requires students to assist each other to interact and practice the language in order to achieve one common goal, that is learning. Along the same lines, Dornyei (2001, p.101) claimed that "cooperation is motivating because the knowledge that one's unique contribution is required for the group to succeed increases one's effort". In other words, when the students work together and assist each other to develop their knowledge, their motivation will enhance and they will try harder to achieve their

common goals. Another advantage is that in cooperative learning, students will get free from anxiety and take the risk of the their wrong or uncertain answers (Cohen et al, 1994). In the group, learners practice different strategies in order to negotiate meaning. They discuss, describe, argue, repeat, recite, write, read aloud, summarize, role-play, etc. in order to do an activity or a classroom task (Hill & Flynn, 2006). They have a shared goal that is accomplishing an activity and then work together in order to achieve that goal. Previous studies revealed that learners learn better and achieve more through cooperative learning compared with traditional, individual learning (Gambrell, 2007). It has been believed that such kind of practice in language classes is very effective because it promotes participation and engagement, that are cornerstones for effective communication in the class (Haynes, 2007). Besides, it promotes the feeling of respect for others' ideas and a sense of gratitude to what others do in a group (Hohn, 2005). Such kind of feeling can be even extended to out of classroom contexts, to the social contexts in which the learners are engaged.

1. 2. Literature review

Previous studies mentioned different strategies for implementing cooperative learning in the classroom. Slavin (1991) mentioned Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, Jigsaw, and Team-Games Tournament as the three typical strategies. In the first strategy (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions), which is mostly appropriate to grammar activities, students with different proficiency groups (and in cases with different genders) work in a group to achieve a specific goal. They work together to do different classroom activities until all of them master the lesson. However, the tests and quizzes are individual. In the next cooperative strategy, Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), students are supposed to play games and gain their team scores. This strategy is appropriate for all language skills and components. In the last strategy (Jigsaw), which is mostly appropriate for vocabulary and reading, there are certain information gaps to be filled by the whole group. Different studies have investigated the effects of collaborative learning strategies on language skills and components. For instance, Shiri Aminloo (2013) attempted to investigate the effect of group work and collaborative tasks on elementary EFL learners' writing ability. Using convenience sampling, he assigned 64 EFL learners into two groups of experimental and control. The Learners in the experimental group did their writing tasks collaboratively while the control group did the writing tasks individually. Their writing tasks were scored using TOEFL iBT task 2 scoring rubric. The results indicated the over-

performance of the experimental group who did the writing tasks cooperatively in groups.

Along the same lines, Tajeddin and Jabbarpoor (2014) examined the effects of individual and collaborative focus-on-form tasks on EFL learners' acquisition of English inversion structures. They selected 60 homogeneous EFL learners and assigned them to the control (individual) and experimental (collaborative) groups who were exposed to inversion structures for 12 sessions. The learners were required to construct the structures either individually or collaboratively. Results indicated that using collaborative tasks in the classroom was advantageous over using individual tasks both in the post-test and in the delayed posttest.

In a similar vein, Eskandari and Abbasnasab Sardareh (2016) attempted to examine the effect of collaborative activities on learning grammar by Iranian elementary EFL learners. They selected 58 adult male Iranian EFL learners from three intact classes of language institutes and used the grammar part of Cambridge Michigan Placement test for homogenizing the participants. The grammar pre-test was used then to check the unfamiliarity of the participants with the target grammatical items (irregular past tense of the verbs). As the treatment, the experimental group practiced collaborative form-focused activities while the control group followed regular classroom practice. After the treatment, the participants took the grammar post-test. The results revealed a significant difference between the groups in grammar learning in favor of the experimental group who practiced collaborative form-focused activities. Similarly, Zarifi and Taghavi (2016) investigated the effects of cooperative learning activities on grammatical competence of Iranian intermediate EFL learners in a quasi-experimental study. 50 male and female intermediate English language learners studying English at Shokuh-e-Danesh Institute, Iran participated in the study. The experimental group used cooperative learning activities while the control group practiced traditional grammar learning activities. The results of t-tests comparing the grammar performance of the participants on the pre-test and post-test revealed a significant difference between the two groups in favor of the experimental group who learned grammar through cooperative learning techniques in the classroom.

In the Turkish EFL context, Yildiz and Senel (2017) investigates the effects of task-based language teaching techniques on EFL students' grammar knowledge. 32 students attended the experiment over a two-and-a-half-month period in an experimental and a control group. The participants took the grammar pre-test and post-test to examine their grammar knowledge prior to and after the treatment. The results indicated that task-based language teaching

techniques improved the grammar knowledge of the experimental students.

In the EFL context of Iraq, Kadhim (2019) described, compared and contrasted approaches and methods used to teach grammar in Iraqi textbooks. The textbooks used for first intermediate students entitled Iraq opportunities and English for Iraq were examined. It was revealed that the textbooks follow different approaches to grammar teaching. The similarities and differences between the books in their approaches to grammar teaching as well as the weaknesses and strengths were examined. In a similar study, Anggraini, Rozimela, and Anwar (2020) investigated the effects of collaborative writing on EFL learners' writing skills and examined learners' perception of the strategy. 80 students from an Indonesian public senior high school were selected using cluster random sampling and assigned to the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught using collaborative writing strategies and the control group was instructed using conventional teaching strategies. The writing test scores and the results of the interviews' which respectively were used to measure the learners' writing skill and perceptions of collaborative writing' revealed that collaborative writing strategies assisted students in brainstorming their ideas and activating their background knowledge of the topics. It was also revealed that the students had positive perception towards using collaborative writing strategies.

In an attempt to review the previous studies on the use of communicative language teaching strategies in EFL classes and their effects on different language skills, Yucailla Tixi (2020) made use of two electronic databases over a period of forty years, reviewed a total of 32 articles and found that communicative language teaching provides the teacher with the opportunity to teach language skills in a contextualized, real life manner. He concluded that although communicative language teaching may have been criticized for giving more weight to communicative aspect of language and ignoring accuracy, the use of this language teaching method in Ecuador improves EFL learners' academic performance and develops their overall reading proficiency.

In another study on grammar learning, Elizalde-Rivera and Criollo-Vargas (2020) attempted to examine the improvement of EFL learners' English grammatical competence through collaborative learning techniques among eighth year students at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla. Some field notes, tests, questionnaires as well as observation were used to collect data. The results indicated students' improvement in their English grammatical competence. It was concluded that using collaborative learning techniques developed students' team work skills and their grammatical performance.

In the EFL context of Turkey, Berzener and Deneme (2021) stated that using cooperative learning techniques, which paves the way for the students to cooperate in order to achieve common learning goals, has become so popular in English language classrooms. Berzener and Deneme conducted an experimental study to examine the effects of using cooperative learning strategies on EFL learners' reading comprehension. 169 students took part in the study. In the experimental group, techniques of the cooperative learning were used for 4 weeks and in the control group, traditional direct instruction was employed. The mean scores of both groups on the post-test revealed the over-performance of the experimental group indicating the success and effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies on Turkish EFL learners' reading comprehension compared with the traditional direct instruction.

In Thailand, Moonma (2021) examined students' writing errors in online collaborative context Google Docs vs. face-to-face collaborative writing in classroom context as well as their satisfaction with either of the two modes. For this purpose, purposive sampling was used and 32 Thai 2nd year EFL students passing their Writing II course were selected. Grammar points were presented in both modes. As the instruments, Norrish's (1983) error checklist, a questionnaire, as well as a semi-structured interview were employed. Findings revealed 346 errors in online mode and 389 errors in face-to-face mode. The most common error types of the online mode included sentence fragments and the most common error types of the face-to-face mode were misuse of determiners. Moreover, the results of the semi-structured interview indicated high satisfaction of the students with online mode using Google Docs.

In a quite similar study, Fathi, Saharkhiz Arabani and Mohamadi (2021) examined the effect of using Google Docs in collaborative writing on EFL learners' writing proficiency and self-regulation. Like the previous study, the purpose of this piece of research was comparing the effects of cooperative writing using Google Docs in an online environment with collaborative writing in traditional classroom on EFL learners' writing proficiency and writing self-regulation. 38 homogeneous intermediate learners participated in this study. The experimental group practiced collaborative writing using Google Docs in an online environment while the control group practiced collaborative writing in traditional, face -to -face classroom. The participants were supposed to do two timed writing tasks and fill in the *Second Language Writing Self-regulation* (SLWS) scale. The results of paired -samples t -tests indicated that the students in the experimental group who experienced collaborative writing using

Google Docs outperformed the participants of the face to face classroom both in writing performance and in writing self-regulation.

In a similar vein, Kurniawan and Sumani (2022) examined the potential benefits of communicative language teaching and its techniques for language learners in terms of the scope and orientation of materials, pedagogical processes, as well as teachers' orientations and students' competence. They recommended materials related to real-life or daily contexts to be used for teaching purposes instead of artificial materials. It was also suggested to the English teachers to develop their skills and potentials for enhancing classroom interaction. Students were also advised to develop their communication skills and enhance their interaction and participation in classroom activities as the main purposes of communicative language teaching. Teachers should be equipped with different strategies in order to decide about the most appropriate strategy or a combination of strategies in order to develop students' communicative competence in the classroom.

The important point is that there is a difference between cooperative learning strategies and traditional classroom group work. Cooperative learning strategies are more than simple group work. In cooperative learning, the group has been organized purposefully by the teacher and it has a specific goal to be achieved and some rules to be followed (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). All the members are committed to achieve a single goal through different responsibilities. At the same time, negotiation will continue till all members, even the less proficient ones, master the language point at hand.

However, such kind of approach to teaching grammar, especially to elementary learners, has been neglected in the EFL context of Iraq (Kadhim, 2019). Therefore, this study followed two main objectives: First, it was an attempt to examine whether using cooperative learning techniques improves learning simple present and present continuous by Iraqi elementary EFL learners. Second, it investigated the probable difference(s) in using simple present and present continuous between the EFL students who learn grammar through cooperative learning techniques and those who learn grammar through traditional individual techniques.

In line with the above-mentioned objectives, the present study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does using cooperative learning techniques improve learning simple present and present progressive by Iraqi elementary EFL learners?
2. Is there any significant difference in using simple present and present progressive between the EFL students who learn grammar through cooperative learning techniques and those who learn grammar through traditional individual techniques?

2. Methodology

This study used a quasi-experimental (two intact groups, pre-test, post-test) design. Two intact groups of seventh grade (first grade of high school) female, high school students in Maysan, Iraq were selected. For cooperative language learning, it was needed to put the students into groups of 4 to 5.

The first intact group was assigned as the experimental group, who received instruction on grammar through cooperative tasks. The students of this class were assigned into 6 groups including 5 to 6 members. The second group was assigned as the control group, who received grammar instruction in a traditional, individual manner in the classroom. There was no grouping at work for the control group.

Both groups attended the pre-test and the post-test and their performances on the post-test were compared in order to examine the potential effect of the treatment.

2.1. Participants

Based on the convenience sampling, sixty Iraqi EFL students of seventh grade (first grade of high school) from two intact classes participated in this study. The sample of this study was selected from among the seventh grade, female Iraqi high school students studying in Maysan, Iraq.

2. 2. Material

The textbook used for teaching grammar in this study is *English for Iraq*, first intermediate student's book. This book is used nationwide for students of seventh grade (first grade of high school). The sentences, which included *simple present* and *present continuous* as the two target grammar points of this study, were all taken from this book.

2. 3. Instruments: Grammar Pre-test and Post-test

A grammar test including 10 "select the best choice" questions and 10 "fill in the blank" questions (both receptive and productive) was designed assessing simple present and present continuous as covered in *English for Iraq*, first intermediate student's book (see Appendix). This test was first piloted on a parallel group of high school students and its validity was checked by two other English teachers who had the experience of teaching this book for more than 5 years.

The same test used as the pre-test was also used after the treatment in order to see whether the grammatical knowledge of the participants improved after the treatment and in order to find out which group performed better on the post-test.

2. 4. Procedure

In this study, first 60 Iraqi EFL students of the seventh grade (first grade of high school) from two intact classes were selected from among the female Iraqi high school students studying in Maysan, Iraq. The treatment continued for 12 sessions. In the experimental group, first the teacher assigned the students into 6 groups. As mentioned in Chapter One, in this study, Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) model of cooperative learning was used in which students work in groups of 4 to 6 members and they know that their final achievement score depends upon the learning and achievement of all team members (Slavin, 1995). Students with different language abilities were put in one group and they were informed that the final achievement of individual members depends on the achievement of all of them.

Therefore, in the experimental group, the teacher asked the students to do the grammar exercises cooperatively in groups while in the control group, the students did the exercises individually, on their own. The teacher of both groups was the same; so, she tried not to have any peer or group practice in the control group. The treatment lasted for about 3 months. Then, the same test of the target grammar points was administered as the post-pest and the participants' performance on the pre-test and post-test was compared in order to see which group performed better after the treatment.

3. Results

3. 1. The Results of Comparing Experimental Group's Pre- and Post-test Scores

To answer the first research question regarding the effect of using cooperative learning techniques on learning simple present and present continuous tenses by Iraqi elementary EFL learners, a paired-samples t-test was used. In detail, the performance of the experimental group was compared on two occasions of pre- and post-tests. As Tables 4.1 and 4.2 indicate, there is a statistically significant increase in the experimental group's scores from pre-test ($M = 8.53$, $SD = 1.77$) to post-test ($M = 16.73$, $SD = 1.25$), t (29) = -18.61, p <0.0005 (two-tailed) (Consider that the negative value of t reflects the fact that the post-test had a higher mean than the pre-test).

Table 4.1 Paired samples statistics for experimental group's pre- and post-test scores

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pretest	8.53	30	1.77	.32
	posttest	16.73	30	1.25	.23

Although the results presented above reveal that the difference obtained in the two sets of scores was unlikely to occur by chance, they do not indicate the magnitude of the cooperative learning techniques' effect on learners' post-test scores. Therefore, eta squared (one of the most commonly used effect size statistics) was calculated. The eta squared statistic (0.92) indicated a large effect size considering the guidelines (proposed by Cohen 1988) for interpreting this value as: 0.01 = small effect, 0.06 = moderate effect, and 0.14 = large effect.

Table 4.2 Paired samples test for experimental group's paired pre- and post-test scores

	Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		T	df	
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest - posttest	-8.20	2.41	.44	-9.10	-7.29	-18.61	29	.00

3. 2. The Results of Comparing Experimental and Control Groups' Pre-test Scores

An independent samples *t*-test was run to figure out whether there was any significant difference between the experimental and control groups regarding pre-test scores at the beginning of the study. As Tables 4.3 and 4.4 indicate there was no significant difference between the experimental group (*M* = 8.53, *SD*= 1.77) and control group (*M* = 8.10, *SD* = 1.26); *t* (58) = 1.08, p = 0.28 in terms of pre-test scores.

Table 4.3 Experimental and control group statistics for pre-test scores

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Experimental	30	8.53	1.77	.32
	Control	30	8.10	1.26	.23

The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.43, 95% CI: -0.36 to 1.23) was very small. Therefore, as the mentioned two groups' performance did not differ significantly in the pre-test, it can be concluded that their performance is comparable on the post-test.

Table 4.4 Independent samples *t*-test for experimental and control groups' pre-test scores

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
pretest Equal variances assumed	2.27	.13	1.08	58	.28	.43	.39	-.36	1.23
Equal variances not assumed			1.08	52.49	.28	.43	.39	-.36	1.23

3. 3. The Results of Comparing Experimental and Control Groups' Post-test Scores

In order to answer the second research question, after ensuring that the experimental and control groups did not differ significantly at the beginning of the study, an independent samples *t*-test was run to examine whether there is any significant difference in using simple present and present continuous tenses between the EFL students who learn grammar through cooperative learning techniques and those who learn grammar through traditional individual techniques at the end of the study. As Tables 4.5 and 4.6 demonstrate there was a significant difference between the experimental group (*M* = 16.73, *SD*= 1.25) and control group (*M* = 13.03, *SD* = 1.71); *t* (58) = 9.54, p = 0.00 in terms of post-test scores.

Table 4.5 Experimental and control groups' statistics for post-test scores

groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
posttest Experimental	30	16.73	1.25	.23
Control	30	13.03	1.71	.31

As indicated in the table, the magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 3.70, 95% CI: 2.92 to 4.47) was large:

Table 4.6 Independent samples *t*-test for experimental and control groups' post-test scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
posttest	Equal variances assumed	2.17	.14	9.54	58	.00	3.70	.38	2.92	4.47
	Equal variances not assumed			9.54	53.24	.00	3.70	.38	2.92	4.47

The eta squared (0.61) indicated a large effect size considering the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988) for interpreting this value. Therefore, the Iraqi EFL students learning grammar through cooperative learning techniques (experimental group) outperformed those learning grammar through traditional individual techniques.

4. Discussion

In line with the research questions posed in the study, discussion of the findings are presented in the following sections.

4. 1. The effect of using cooperative learning techniques on learning simple present and present continuous by Iraqi elementary EFL learners

As reported in chapter 4, the results of paired-samples t-test comparing the performance of the experimental group on the pre- and post-tests indicated a statistically significant increase in the experimental group's scores from pre-test (M = 8.53, SD = 1.77) to post-test (M = 16.73, SD = 1.25), t (29) = -18.61, p <0.0005 (two-tailed). In other words, it was revealed that using cooperative learning techniques was effective in learning simple present and present continuous by Iraqi elementary EFL learners.

This finding is in line with most previous studies which examined the effect of using cooperative learning techniques on learning different grammatical points like inversion structures (Tajeddin and Jabbarpoor, 2014), irregular past tense of the verbs (Eskandari and Abbasnasab Sardareh, 2016), and general grammatical competence (Yildiz and Senel, 2017). It seems that learning in groups helps the less proficient learners interact with more proficient members of the group and in this way, their learning would be guaranteed. It is noteworthy here that the researcher (the teacher of the classroom) tried to make the groups using learners with different proficiency levels and demanded the stronger members of the group to help the less proficient members. This requirement on more proficient students may have affected the results and led to improvement in grammar knowledge of all members of the groups. It also may have been due to the fact that cooperative learning strategies increase students' motivation for leaning (Cohen et al, 1994; Guangxiang, 2020) and it leads to their better performance and higher achievement.

4. 2. Difference in using simple present and present continuous between the experimental and the control group

As mentioned in chapter 4, the results of the independent samples *t*-test indicated no difference in using simple present and present continuous tenses between the EFL students of the experimental and control groups before the treatment. However, the results of the t-test examining the difference in the post-test scores of the experimental group and the post-test scores of the control group indicated that the students of the experimental group, who learn grammar through cooperative learning techniques outperformed those who learn grammar through traditional individual techniques at the end of the study. In other words, there was a significant difference between the experimental group in terms of post-test scores.

This finding indicates that employing the techniques of communicative language teaching method are really effective in EFL classrooms. This finding is in line with those of previous studies which confirmed the effectiveness of using cooperative language learning techniques as a sample of communicative language teaching techniques for teaching different language skills and components. This finding is supported by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson's (2011) idea about the development of EFL learners' communicative (and linguistic) competences through participating in communicative tasks and group works in the classroom. In this regard, Guangxiang (2020) stated that in communicative language teaching classes, teachers apply activities such as group work, discussion, and role-play to motivate students, which promote students' interaction with each other in small groups or pairs. In this way, their achievement will increase.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that using cooperative learning strategies is an effective tool for developing different language skills and components in EFL classrooms (knowledge of grammar in this case). EFL learners tend to learn better cooperatively in groups; this may be due to different psychological, social or affective reasons as mentioned in previous sections. Learning in groups in a cooperative way motivates the students. It lowers their anxiety because they do not blame themselves for their errors. This feeling gets them free from anxiety and helps them take the risk of the their wrong or uncertain answers (Cohen et al, 1994). This risk-taking attitude helps them learn and proceed in a much faster pace.

On the other hand, as previous studies revealed, EFL learners achieve more using cooperative learning techniques compared with individual learning (Gambrell, 2007) because it promotes participation and engagement. It also fosters the feeling of respect for others' ideas and opinions and gives a sense of gratitude to what other members of the group do (Hohn, 2005).

In general, using cooperative learning techniques is very effective and useful for the students who have classroom anxiety or those who are shy or less proficient. Through cooperative learning activities, such students feel that their role in the achievement of the task is as important as the role of more proficient members and consequently, they feel committed to classroom activities and tasks.

6. Implications of the study

This study has important implications for English language teaching in the EFL context of Iraq. It has implications for language teachers first. They can provide the opportunity for the EFL learners to do the tasks and activities of the classroom in pairs or in groups in a cooperative manner. This means that the members of each group

should share common learning goals and do their best to achieve those goals. The members of the groups should have commitment to each other's learning and development. They should know that the success of the group depends on the success and achievement of all individual members of the group. In this way, the members are committed to each other's learning.

The findings of this study also have implications for EFL students. They should know that learning in a cooperative manner has a lot of advantages for them. It reduces their anxiety and enhances their motivation for learning. Through group work, the students find more opportunities to speak, discuss, and negotiate ideas. This increases their engagement and interaction and leads to achieving higher levels of communicative competence.

7. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

This study suffered from some limitations. First, the study focused only on two grammatical points. The results may have been different if learning more grammatical structures were investigated.

The second limitation was related to the setting of the study. This study was administered in high schools. The results may be different in private language institutes or in universities.

The third limitation is related to the level of proficiency of the Iraqi EFL students who participated in this study (elementary level). The results may be different with other proficiency levels. The final limitation was that due to the convenient sampling, all participants of this study were female. The results would have been different if the participants were from both genders.

In line with the limitations of this study, some suggestions for further research are provided here. The first limitation of the study was related to the small number of grammatical points under scrutiny in this study. Further studies can focus on a greater number of grammatical structures.

The second limitation was related to the setting of the study. Further studies can be administered in other language learning settings like private language institutes or in universities. Since the requirements of the settings are different, changing the setting may lead to differences in findings.

The third limitation is related to the level of proficiency of the Iraqi EFL students who participated in this study (elementary level). Further research can focus on other proficiency groups especially the advanced ones, who may have other learning strategies. Comparative studies can also be suggested for using cooperative learning strategies for learning grammatical points across different language proficiency groups or across different language learning contexts. Also, this study can be replicated using participants from both genders.

Finally, this study only focused on learning grammar; further research can examine the effect of using cooperative learning strategies for learning vocabulary, collocations, phrasal verbs or language skills like reading and writing in the EFL context of Iraq across different proficiency levels.

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Appendix

The grammar test used as the pre-test and post-test taken from *English for Iraq* (the first intermediate book)

  A. Fill in the blanks with the most appropriate form of the verb.

1. They often ………………. football in the evenings. (play)
2. My parents ………………. TV in the living room at the moment. (watch)
3. Fatimah ……………. TV in the afternoons every day (watch).
4. My mother ……………… the clothes on Wednesdays. (wash)
5. A group of students …………………… football in the school yard right now. (play)
6. My uncle always ……………….. dinner to help his wife (cook).
7. Yassir usually ……………….. to school by bus. (go)
8. Ahmed ………………. to his friend on the phone now. (talk)
9. Most visitors to Oman ……………………. a lot of jewelry. (buy)
10. My friend ……………… in a modern store with her husband now. (shop)

B. Choose the best answer:

1. Children in Japan ……….. their classrooms at the end of every school day.
a. are cleaning   b. clean

2. Reza …………… Fuad to work by his car on Mondays.
a. takes   b. is taking

3. There is a lot of noise outside. Children …………….. in the yard.
a. are playing   b. play

4. Muslims …………… their families on Eid Al Fitr.
a. meet   b. are meeting

5. I always ……………… January, the first. It is my mother's birthday.
a. am celebrating   b. celebrate

6. My sister ……………… the floor to help my mother now.
a. sweeps   b. is sweeping

7. When we …………….. about technology, we always remember the internet.
a. talk   b. are talking

8. Every morning, women and children in many parts of the world ……….. long distances to collect water.
a. walk   b. are walking

9. Noor ……………. her grandmother make a video call now.
a. helps   b. is helping

10. The students …………… their homework in the classroom at the moment.
a. are doing   b. do