

# The Effect of Group work Techniques on the Developing of Language and New Talents Acquisition among Iraqi First Year Students at the Colleges of Medicine

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## Abstract

Hess (2001) comments on the challenges a teacher faces while handling large classes. The class may get out of control, or have management problems. Teachers are often overburdened by excess work in large classes and they do not have much time to provide individual attention to students.

It is possible for teachers to be affected by any bad experiences they had with group work and form a negative attitude towards it (Chapman et al., 2010). However, Hess (2001) notes that if group work does not work well one day, there may be hope for a different performance another day.

The main objective of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in that language. Improving the learners speaking ability in English is one of the most important challenges that teachers try to achieve. The problem we are confronted with here is that the importance of classroom participation is almost neglected and of little interest and the learners are just passive consumers of the knowledge.

**Keywords:** Group Work, Acquisition of language, Learning medical language, Medical students

تأثير تقنيات العمل الجماعي في تطوير واكتساب اللغة الانكليزية وتعلم اللغة والمصطلحات الطبية لدى طلبة المرحلة الأولى في كليات الطب - العراق  
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## انتساب الباحث

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## المستخلص

يعلق هيس (2001) على التحديات التي يواجهها الأستاذ أثناء التعامل مع الفصول الكبيرة. قد يخرج الفصل عن السيطرة، أو يواجه مشاكل إدارية. غالباً ما يكون الأساتذة مثقلين بالعمل الزائد في الفصول الكبيرة وليس لديهم الكثير من الوقت لتوفير الاهتمام الفردي للطلاب. من الممكن أن يتأثر الطلبة بأي تجارب سيئة مروا بها مع العمل الجماعي وأن يشكلوا موقفاً سلبياً تجاهه (Chapman et al., 2010). ومع ذلك، يلاحظ هيس (2001) أنه إذا لم يعمل العمل الجماعي بشكل جيد في يوم من الأيام، فقد يكون هناك أمل في أداء مختلف في يوم آخر. الهدف الرئيسي من تعلم لغة أجنبية هو أن تكون قادراً على التواصل بتلك اللغة. يعد تحسين قدرة المتعلمين على التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية أحد أهم التحديات التي يحاول الاساتذة تحقيقها. المشكلة التي نواجهها هنا هي أن أهمية المشاركة في الفصول الدراسية تعتبر قليلة وقليلة الاهتمام نوعاً ما والمتعلمين هم مجرد مستهلكين سلبيين للمعرفة.

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## معلومات البحث

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**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تقنيات العمل الجماعي، اكتساب اللغة الانكليزية، تعلم المصطلحات الطبية، طلبة كلية الطب

## Introduction

The main objective of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in that language. Improving the learners speaking ability in English

is one of the most important challenges that teachers try to achieve. The problem we are confronted with here is that the importance of classroom participation is almost neglected and of

little interest and the learners are just passive consumers of the knowledge.

It is generally accepted that knowing a language and being able to speak it are not synonymous because speaking is a skill which has to be developed and practiced inside and outside the classroom. We all know that speaking is one of the four macro language skills. For students who learn English as a foreign language in Iraq, speaking can be seen as the most challenged task for them. This is because of some reasons. Firstly, the class size is large.

There are often 60 to 80 students in a class or group that makes it impossible for teachers to take care of them individually. Secondly, students lack of background knowledge of the topic to be discussed. Thirdly, they might feel insecure about their performance in the target language or they do not want to lose face in front of their classmates so they are reluctant to speak in English. This can be solved by participation in speaking activities in groups that can limit the embarrassment while speaking English. The use of group work has become more appealing in the teaching and learning process, as it is interactive and encouraging. Group work can be used in teaching varieties of language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Group work offers students opportunities to refine their understanding through discussions with members. It is often recommended for developing social interactions and language skills. It is also a means by which students can support, challenge and extend their learning together, for example by searching for information or through problem solving or working on creative tasks.

## **Group work**

Group work can develop the students to interact with other students. It means that group work can develop quite warm, friendly atmospheres in which members feel comfortable and accepted in their membership. The appropriate use of group work in language classroom brings several benefits for the students. First, group work demonstrates the ability of students to communicate, discuss, and cooperate with other students. Second, group work is an effective means of dividing the workload.

Third, this allows for small sections or units to be completed providing a sense of completion for everyone and allows better management of the project as a whole. As the result, group work can promote students' practice, the quality of their talk, their motivation, and positive classroom atmosphere in teaching and learning speaking

## **Aims of the Study**

The overall aims of this study are firstly to advance an understanding of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom to enhance speaking skill. Secondly, the researcher would like to explore teachers' awareness towards cooperative learning activities such as pair works and group works. Finally, we would find out the effect of using cooperative activities in enhancing speaking ability

## **The Teaching and Learning of speaking**

Speaking is an activity of delivering message, it occurs between speaker and listener orally. In other words, the main point of speaking activity is that speakers communicate their message to the listeners. In this case, the speaker and listener should be able to understand each other. The

speaker can produce the sounds that involved the massages and the listener can receive, process, and response the massages. Speaking is an activity involving two or more participants as hearers and speakers who react to what they hear and their contributions. Each participant has an attention or a set of intentions goal that he wants to achieve in the interaction. In speaking, there is a goal or a purpose to be achieved by the speaker.

Bygate (1987) distinguishes between language knowledge and language skills; knowledge is what enables people to talk and skills is knowledge actively carried out in interaction, something that can be imitated and practiced. He further states that language knowledge is basically a set of grammar and pronunciation rules, vocabulary and knowledge about how they are normally used; skills are considered to be the ability to use this knowledge.

**Cooperative language learning** Bygate (1987) distinguishes between language knowledge and language skills; knowledge is what enables people to talk and skills is knowledge actively carried out in interaction, something that can be imitated and practiced. He further states that language knowledge is basically a set of grammar and pronunciation rules, vocabulary and knowledge about how they are normally used; skills are considered to be the ability to use this knowledge.

### **Group work in language learning**

Brown (2000: 3) has offered the following minimalist, common-sense definition of groups: 'a group exists when two or more people define themselves as members of its and when its existence is recognized by at least one another.' In another words, a group qualifies as a 'group' when

it has become a psychological reality for insiders and outsiders alike. We can, of course, try and provide a more detail and more descriptive definition.

Cohen (2014: 66) defines group work as: students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a clearly assigned learning task.

### **Why use group work in language teaching?**

It is clear that in order to maximize the opportunities to learn in your classroom, student teachers should not just learn on their own, but engage in collaborative learning and support one another. Research shows that group work is one of the most effective ways of increasing learning outcomes. Slavin and colleagues (1995: 177) reviewed a great deal of evidence and concluded that "co-operative learning is one of the greatest success stories in the history of modern research.

The four main reasons for this success seem to be Motivation, Social cohesion, Personalization, Cognitive elaboration.

If students are to get the help they need, especially in a large class, they must be available to help one another. Student teachers teaching one another can be surprisingly effective.

### **1- Enhancing learning outcomes**

Group work can help students achieve better learning outcomes by allowing them to share ideas, perspectives, and skills, and to learn from each other. Group work can also promote higher-order thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, as students have to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information collaboratively. Additionally, group work can increase student engagement, motivation, and interest, as students have more autonomy, choice, and ownership over their learning.

## **2- Developing social and emotional skills**

Group work can also help students develop important social and emotional skills that are essential for academic and personal success. These skills include communication, cooperation, leadership, conflict resolution, empathy, and respect. Group work can also foster a sense of belonging, community, and diversity, as students interact with peers from different backgrounds, cultures, and abilities. Furthermore, group work can enhance student self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-regulation, as students receive feedback, support, and recognition from their group members.

## **3- Saving time and resources**

Group work can also benefit teachers by saving time and resources in the classroom. Group work can reduce the amount of planning, preparation, and grading that teachers have to do, as they can assign one task or product to a group instead of individual students. Group work can also make use of existing or easily accessible materials, such as books, posters, or online tools, that students can share and collaborate with. Moreover, group work can free up some time for teachers to monitor, facilitate, and assist students more effectively and efficiently.

## **4- Improving classroom climate**

Group work can also improve the classroom climate by creating a more positive, supportive, and fun learning environment. Group work can reduce boredom, frustration, and anxiety among students, as they have more opportunities to interact, socialize, and have fun with their peers. Group work can also increase trust, rapport, and respect between students and teachers, as they

have more chances to communicate, listen, and understand each other. Additionally, group work can foster a culture of collaboration, feedback, and celebration, as students and teachers work together, learn from each other, and acknowledge their achievements.

## **5-Preparing for the future**

Group work can also prepare students for the future by equipping them with the skills and competencies that are in high demand in the 21st century. Group work can help students develop the four C's of 21st century learning: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. These skills are essential for adapting to the changing needs and challenges of the global society and economy. Group work can also expose students to different perspectives, cultures, and technologies that can broaden their horizons and enhance their global awareness and citizenship.

## **6- Addressing challenges and limitations**

Group work is a powerful and versatile teaching strategy that can enhance student learning, development, and experience in the classroom. However, there are several challenges and limitations that teachers and students may face when using group work, such as forming balanced and compatible groups, determining the optimal group size, assigning roles and responsibilities, managing conflicts between groups, and evaluating group work fairly. To address these issues, teachers should establish clear goals and expectations for group work, provide adequate support and feedback for group work, vary the group size depending on the task, assign specific roles to group members, encourage positive dynamics within groups, and use various tools to

support group work. By using group work effectively and appropriately, teachers can create a more engaging, collaborative, and meaningful learning environment for their students.

### **Types of group work**

#### ***Collaborative group work***

##### **Student interaction**

One of the greater benefits of implementing group work in the classroom is that students have the opportunity to communicate and interact with each other.

##### **Classroom environment**

Providing all students with a safe and an inviting environment will encourage students to explore their learning. When students participate and are engaged in group work

##### **Teamwork skill**

Teamwork skills is a staple part of academic life and allows students to explore complex tasks that they otherwise wouldn't have done if they had been alone, enhancing both their individual and collective learning. This is because working in a group exposes students to new perspectives, styles of thinking, and disagreement.

This provides students with an opportunity to improve their communication skills, collaboration and provides a larger capacity for brainstorming different ideas. This not only contributes to a more holistic approach to learning but can help group productivity as well.

##### **Enhances learning**

A survey showed that 97% of students reported that working in a group environment has helped facilitate their learning and collaborative skills in some way. Some students suggested that group

work served as a learning process in itself; that is, they learnt about groups by working in a group.

Research also shows that learning in a group leads to better memory recall and understanding. This is because students remember more from group discussions than if they listened to the same content in a more instructional format.

However, these benefits are only felt if:

- Clear goals are set
- There is clear leadership
- Each member is assigned a specific role
- There's equal participation from all group members
- The task is relevant to syllabus content

Although this study was conducted with university students, these findings are still relevant to other educational levels.

### **DISADVANTAGES OF GROUP WORK**

Anyone who has done group work knows that it can have its fair share of disadvantages.

Let's take a look at why

#### **Presence of conflict**

When working with others, it's natural that disagreement will arise due to differences in opinions. Some students find it difficult to accept criticism from their peers and struggle to get on board with ideas that aren't their own.

Moreover, students who are quiet often have difficulty expressing their ideas in a group and may feel uncomfortable working with people they don't normally speak to. As a result, they may be seen as lazy, creating conflict.

Research shows that the presence of conflict in group work can negatively impact the students' enjoyment of that class, inhibit their individual

learning, and increase stress levels. This is because students felt that compromising and coming to an agreement was an extremely difficult and draining process. This led to many students developing a fear of conflict.

### **Unequal participation**

In group work, you'll often observe a large discrepancy in participation between the different group members. With a lot of group projects, it's common to find 1-2 students taking the bulk of the workload, whilst other members essentially freeload. This can lead to conflict and breed bitterness amongst the different group members – especially if the student feels others are being rewarded for their hard work.

Research shows that this is more evident in larger groups as individuals tend to diffuse the responsibility of tasks onto others as grades typically don't consider individual contribution. Other times, a student may just give their peers the answer without explaining how they worked it out. Consequently, no real knowledge and understanding have been gained.

### **Avoiding the task**

When working in a group, it's quite common for students to go off-topic, especially if the task involves discussion. Some students may use that time to gossip, do other tasks, or loaf around. This results in the group work session being less effective and productive.

As a teacher, it's difficult to make sure everyone is doing the task they're supposed to for the entire session, not just as you approach their table to see how they're doing. For some teachers, it feels that they have to micromanage the task in order for the

task to be effective, diminishing the purpose of working in a group.

### **Time consuming**

Working in a team can be extremely time-consuming as a student. Not only do meetings have to be scheduled outside of class hours but they have to co-ordinate with everyone's schedule. For sixth-form students in particular, this can be quite difficult due to already being overscheduled. Researchers have even argued whether the time-consuming nature of group work made the strategy ineffective. As a result, more research is emerging about when not to use group work in the classroom and suggest that for simpler tasks, students complete them individually.

### **Individual needs are dominated by the needs of the group**

Not all students learn at the same speed. Some may need more time to fully understand the task and process the information they're being taught. On the flip side, some students may grasp the material very quickly.

Therefore, when working as a group, certain students are either forced to hurry up their learning to the extent that they either learn nothing or resort to copying. Alternatively, those who work faster may actually be going too fast, attempting to move onto the next task before everyone is ready. This can lead to conflict as students may get frustrated by the learning process.

### **Implementing Group Work in the Classroom**

Group work can be an effective method to motivate students, encourage active learning, and develop key critical-thinking, communication, and decision-making skills. But without careful

planning and facilitation, group work can frustrate students and instructors, and feel like a waste of time. Use these suggestions to help implement group work successfully in your classroom.

### **Preparing for Group Work**

Think carefully about how students will be physically arranged in groups. Will it be easy for groups to form and for all students to be comfortable? Also think about how the layout of your classroom will impact volume. Will students be able to hear one another clearly? How can you moderate the activity to control volume?

Set clear guidelines on professional, civil conduct between and among students to respect people's differences and create an inclusive environment.

### **Designing the Group Activity**

Identify the instructional objectives. Determine what you want to achieve through the small group activity, both academically (e.g., knowledge of a topic) and socially (e.g., listening skills). The activity should relate closely to the learning objective(s) and class content, and must be designed to help students learn, not simply to occupy their time. When deciding whether or not to use group work for a specific task, consider these questions: What is the objective of the activity? How will that objective be furthered by asking students to work in groups? Is the activity challenging or complex enough that it requires group work? Will the project require true collaboration? Is there any reason why the assignment should not be collaborative?

Make the task challenging. Consider giving a relatively easy task early in the term to arouse students' interest in group work and encourage their progress. In most cases collaborative

exercises should be stimulating and challenging. By pooling their resources and dealing with differences of opinion that arise, groups of students can develop a more sophisticated product than they could as individuals. See our teaching tip "Group work in the Classroom: Small-Group Tasks" for some ideas.

Assign group tasks that encourage involvement, interdependence, and a fair division of labour. All group members should feel a sense of personal responsibility for the success of their teammates and realize that their individual success depends on the group's success. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2014) refer to this as positive interdependence and argue that this type of cooperative learning tends to result in learners promoting each other's success. Knowing that peers are relying on you is a powerful motivator for group work.

Allocate essential resources across the group so that group members are required to share information (e.g., the jigsaw method). Or, to come up with a consensus, randomly select one person to speak for the group, or assign different roles to group members so that they are all involved in the process (e.g., recorder, spokesperson, summarizer, checker, skeptic, organizer, observer, timekeeper, conflict resolver, liaison to other groups).

Another strategy for promoting interdependence is specifying common rewards for the group, such as a group mark. See the CTE teaching tip "Methods for Assessing Group Work" for more information.

Decide on group size. The size you choose will depend on the number of students, the size of the classroom, the variety of voices needed within a group, and the task assigned. Groups of four-five tend to balance the needs for diversity, productivity, active participation, and cohesion.

The less skillful the group members, the smaller the groups should be (Gross Davis, 1993.)

Decide how you will divide students into groups. Division based on proximity or students' choice is quickest, especially for large and cramped classes, but this often means that students end up working together with friends or with the same people.

To vary group composition and increase diversity within groups, randomly assign students to groups by counting off and grouping them according to number .

For some group tasks, the diversity within a group (e.g., gender, ethnicity, level of preparation) is especially important, and you might want to assign students to groups yourself before class. Collect a data card from each student on the first day of class to glean important information about their backgrounds, knowledge, and interests. Alternately, ask students to express a preference (e.g., list three students with whom they would most like to work or two topics they would most like to study), and keep their preferences in mind as you assign groups.

Allow sufficient time for group work. Recognize that you won't be able to cover as much material as you could if you lectured for the whole class period. Cut back on the content you want to present in order to give groups time to work. Estimate the amount of time that subgroups need to complete the activity. Also plan for a plenary session in which groups' results can be presented or general issues and questions can be discussed.

Design collaborative work in multiple forms: pairs, small groups, large groups, online synchronously, online asynchronously, etc. Some students might be better at contributing after they have had time to digest material, while others might be better at thinking on the spot. Other students will defer to

others in large groups but actively contribute in pairs. All roles should be valued and included.

### **Introducing the Group Activity**

Share your rationale for using group work. Students must understand the benefits of collaborative learning. Don't assume that students know what the pedagogical purpose is. Explicitly connect these activities to larger class themes and learning outcomes whenever possible.

Have students form groups before you give them instructions. If you try to give instructions first, students may be too preoccupied with deciding on group membership to listen to you .

Facilitate some form of group cohesion. Students work best together if they know or trust each other, at least to some extent. Even for brief group activities, have students introduce themselves to their group members before attending to their task. For longer periods of group work, consider introducing an icebreaker or an activity designed specifically to build a sense of teamwork.

Explain the task clearly. This means both telling students exactly what they have to do and describing what the final product of their group work will look like. Explaining the big picture or final goal is important, especially when the group work will take place in steps (such as in snowballing or jigsaw). Prepare written or visual instructions (e.g., charts, sequential diagrams) for students. Remember to include time estimations for activities.

Set ground rules for group interaction. Especially for extended periods of group work, establish how group members should interact with one another, including principles such as respect, active listening, and methods for decision making. Consider making a group contract. See Group



Decision Making, a CTE teaching tip prepared for students working in groups, and Making Group Contracts.

Let students ask questions. Even if you believe your instructions are crystal clear, students may have legitimate questions about the activity. Give them time to ask questions before they get to work.

### **Monitoring the Group Task**

Monitor the groups but do not hover. As students do their work, circulate among the groups and answer any questions raised. Also listen for trends that are emerging from the discussions, so that you can refer to them during the subsequent plenary discussion. Avoid interfering with group functioning — allow time for students to solve their own problems before getting involved. You might consider leaving the room for a short period of time. Your absence can increase students' willingness to share uncertainties and disagreements (Jaques, 2000).

Be slow to share what you know. If you come upon a group that is experiencing uncertainty or disagreement, avoid the natural tendency to give the answers or resolve the disagreement. If necessary, clarify your instructions, but let students struggle — within reason — to accomplish the task (Race, 2000).

Clarify your role as facilitator. If students criticize you for not contributing enough to their work, consider whether you have communicated clearly enough your role as facilitator.

### **Ending the Group Task**

Provide closure to the group activities. Students tend to want to see how their work in small groups was useful to them and/or contributed to the development of the topic. You can end with a

plenary session in which students do group reporting. Effective group reporting “can make the difference between students' feeling that they are just going through their paces and the sense that they are engaged in a powerful exchange of ideas”(Brookfield & Preskill, 1999, p. 107)..(

Oral reports: Have each group give one idea and rotate through the groups until no new ideas arise. Or have each group give their most surprising or illuminating insights or their most challenging question. You can record ideas raised to validate their value.

Written reports: Have each group record their ideas and either present them yourself or have a group member do so. One variation on this is to have groups record their conclusions on a section of the blackboard or on flipchart paper that is then posted on the wall. Students then informally circulate around the room and read each other's answers. Alternately, you can ask students to move around the room in small groups, rotating from one set of comments to another and adding their own comments in response. Another variation on written reports is to have students write brief comments on Post-it notes or index cards. Collect them, take a few minutes to process them or put them in sequence, then summarize their contents.

Model how you want students to participate. When responding to students' answers, model the respect and sensitivity that you want the students to display towards their classmates. Be ready to acknowledge and value opinions different from your own. Be willing to share your own stories, critique your work, and summarize what has been said.

Connect the ideas raised to course content and objectives. Recognize that groups might not come up with the ideas you intended them to, so be

willing to make your lecture plans flexible. Wherever possible, look for a connection between group conclusions and the course topic. However, be aware that misconceptions or inaccurate responses need to be clarified and corrected either by you or by other students.

Don't provide too much closure.

## Conclusions

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Group learning can be effective regardless of people's socioeconomic status or whether they're put into a group with the same people throughout the year. However, the advantages of this active learning environment are only observed when it is done right.

Group size, how groups are assigned and how the teacher manages the groups can have both a positive and negative impact on learning. Due to the potential disadvantages, some research suggests that group work should only be used in moderation by allowing simpler tasks to be completed individually and more complex tasks to be completed in groups .

## Recommendations

For tips on how to engage your students in the classroom, take a look on how to create a psychologically smart classroom and why you should interleave your teaching.

## Suggestions

preparing students with collaborative skills needed for the professional world.

a collaborative learning environment where students work through problems and assessments together. Students are able to delegate roles and responsibilities, pool their knowledge and skills and receive support from one another.

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[Group Work in the Classroom: Small-Group Tasks](#)

[Group Work in the Classroom: Types of Small Groups](#)

[Making Group Contracts](#)

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