

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the significance of cooperative learning as an instructional approach in English language teaching. Cooperative learning represents a pedagogical shift from traditional teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning, where learners work collaboratively in small groups to achieve shared academic goals.

The research explores the theoretical foundations of cooperative learning, highlighting five essential elements: positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, promotive face-to-face interaction, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. The study demonstrates that cooperative learning, when properly implemented with group goals and individual accountability, significantly enhances academic achievement, particularly in reading and language skills, while simultaneously improving intergroup relations, social skills development, and student attitudes toward learning.

The research determines the transformed roles of both teachers, who become facilitators rather than transmitters of knowledge, and students, who evolve into autonomous learners directing their own educational

process. While acknowledging certain challenges such as group dynamics and classroom management, the study concludes that cooperative learning offers substantial advantages including higher academic achievement, improved interpersonal relationships, increased student engagement, and enhanced attendance.

This pedagogical approach proves particularly effective in elementary and secondary education settings when research-validated strategies are systematically implemented.

**Keywords: cooperative learning, student-centered instruction, positive interdependence, social skills development, pedagogical strategies.**

### أهمية التعلم التعاوني في تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية

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#### الملخص

تُفحص هذه الدراسة أهمية التعلم التعاوني كنهج تعليمي في تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية. يُمثل التعلم التعاوني تحولاً تربوياً من التدريس التقليدي المرتكز على المعلم إلى التعلم المرتكز على الطالب، حيث يعمل المتعلمون بشكل تعاوني في مجموعات صغيرة لتحقيق أهداف أكاديمية مشتركة.

يستكشف البحث الأسس النظرية للتعلم التعاوني، مع تسليط الضوء على خمسة عناصر أساسية: الاعتمادية الإيجابية المتبادلة، المسؤولية الفردية والجماعية، دعم التفاعل وجهاً لوجه، المهارات الشخصية ومهارات المجموعات الصغيرة، والمعالجة الجماعية. تُظهر الدراسة أن التعلم التعاوني، عند تنفيذه بشكل صحيح مع أهداف جماعية ومسؤولية فردية، يعزز بشكل كبير الإنجاز الأكاديمي، خاصة في مهارات القراءة واللغة، مع تحسين العلاقات بين المجموعات، وتطوير المهارات الاجتماعية، وتحسين مواقف الطلاب تجاه التعلم في الوقت نفسه. يحدد البحث التحول في أدوار كل من المعلمين، الذين يصبحون ميسرين بدلاً من ناقلي المعرفة، والطلاب، الذين يتطورون إلى متعلمين مستقلين يوجهون عملية تعليمهم الخاصة. وبينما تعترف

ببعض التحديات مثل ديناميكيات المجموعة وإدارة الصف الدراسي، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن التعلم التعاوني يقدم مزايا كبيرة تشمل إنجازًا أكاديميًا أعلى، وتحسين العلاقات الشخصية، وزيادة تفاعل الطلاب، وتعزيز الحضور. يثبت هذا النهج التربوي فعاليته بشكل خاص في بيئات التعليم الابتدائي والثانوي عند تنفيذ استراتيجيات مدعومة بالبحث بشكل منهجي. الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم التعاوني، التدريس المرتكز على الطالب، الاعتمادية الإيجابية المتبادلة، تطوير المهارات الاجتماعية، الاستراتيجيات التربوية.

### 1.1 Introduction

The availability of models that can be used in speaking, listening, reading, and writing at every grade level has made it possible to plan an elementary school around the concept of everyone's working together to improve all aspects of the school (Slavin, 1991:11).

Teachers and administrators are discovering an untapped resource for accelerating students' achievement: the students themselves. There is now substantial evidence that students working together in small cooperative groups can master material presented by the teacher better than students working on them own. The idea that people working together toward a common goal can accomplish more than people working by themselves is a well-established principle of social psychology. What is new is that practical cooperative learning strategies for classroom use have been developed, researched, and found to be instructionally effective in elementary and secondary schools (Brandt,1991:11).

Once thought of primarily as social methods directed at social goals, certain forms of cooperative learning are considerably more effective than traditional methods in increasing basic achievement outcomes, including performance on standardized tests of reading and language (Slavin,1983:1).

Recently, a small but growing number of elementary and secondary schools have begun to apply cooperative principles at the school as well

as the classroom level, involving teachers in cooperative planning, peer coaching, and team teaching, with these activities directed toward effective implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom. Many of these schools are working toward institutionalization of cooperative principles as the focus of school renewal.

### **1.2 The Concept of Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning is an educational approach designed to organize classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences (Gillies, 2016:39–51).

There is much more to cooperative learning than merely arranging students into pairs or groups and it has been described as "structuring positive interdependence. Students must work in pairs and groups to complete tasks collectively toward academic goals. Unlike individual learning, which can be competitive in nature, cooperative learning students can capitalize on the resources and abilities of each other (asking each other for knowledge, evaluating the ideas of each other, monitoring one another's work, etc.). In addition, the task of the teacher shifts from providing information to facilitate students' learning.

Larson–Freeman (2000:164) argued that cooperative learning means that learners learn from others in groups. She highlights the issue that the way learners and teachers who work in the group make an activity cooperative not merely the group configuration. She adds "in cooperative learning, teachers teach students collaborative or social skills so they can work together more effectively".

Among the most extensively evaluated alternatives to traditional instruction in use today are Cooperative learning methods. Outcome evaluations include academic achievement, intergroup relations, mainstreaming, self–esteem, attitudes toward schools, and acceptance of children with the special educational need (Slavin,1987:11–17).

According to Johnson, et al (1994:25), there are five essential elements that are identified for the successful incorporation of cooperative learning in the classroom.

- positive interdependence: students work as cohesive groups to achieve shared learning objectives.
- individual and group accountability: students do their best work, shared ideas, and help the group function efficiently.
- promotive interaction (face to face): students assist and interact with each other to solve problems.
- teaching the students, the required interpersonal and small group skills: Students work together, trust each other, and resolve conflicts constructively to achieve a common goal.
- group processing: by reflecting on the learning process the effectiveness of contribution of the members in the group improves.

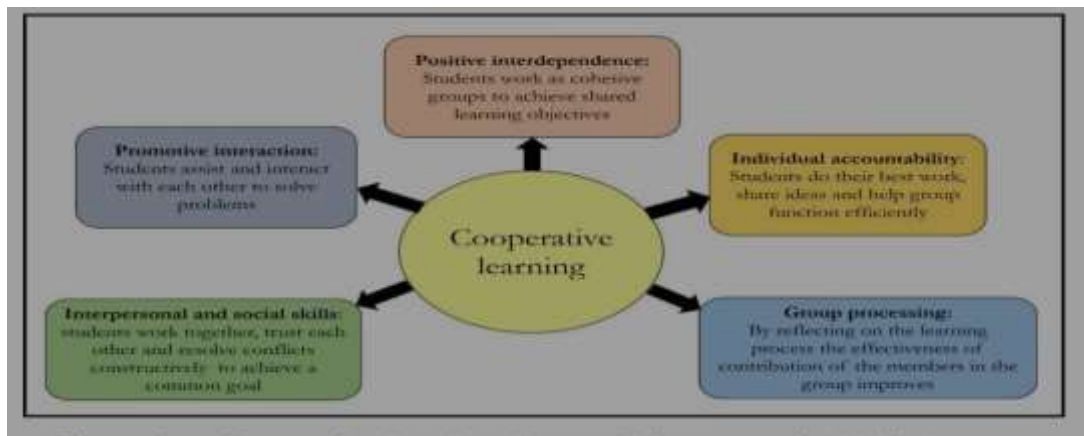


Figure 1 Cooperative learning elements Johnson, et al (1994:25)

Generally, cooperative learning requires that mixed-ability students work together to accomplish a set of tasks. The size of the cooperative learning group differs, depending on the task to be accomplished. In general, cooperative groups are given considerable autonomy. Team members are permitted a great deal of freedom as they decide how to deal with the task given. Some teachers assign responsibilities and roles to students to encourage cooperation and full participation.

### 2.1.1.2 Definitions of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is defined as “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 & Kagan, 1992: 8). Thus, cooperative learning has taken on the meaning of a set of highly structured, psychologically, and sociologically based techniques that help students work together to reach learning goals (Oxford, 1997: 443–456).

### 2.1.1.3 Pedagogical Approach in Cooperative Learning

Teachers who plan to use cooperative learning successfully will wish to base their classroom practices on research-validated theory. To do so, they must: –

**first** recognize the nature of social interdependence (that is, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic efforts).

**Second**, the teacher needs to understand that social interdependence theory is validated by hundreds of research studies indicating that cooperation, compared to competitive and individualistic efforts tends to lead to greater achievement, more positive relationships, and greater psychological health.

**Third**, the teacher needs to understand the five essential elements that make cooperation work: positive interdependence, accountability for individuals, promotional interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing.

**Finally**, the teacher needs to understand the flexibility and many faces of cooperative learning, such as formal cooperative learning, informal cooperative learning, and cooperative learning, and cooperative base groups. (Johnson & Johnson, 2008 :9–37).

## 2.3 The Principles of Cooperative Learning

According to Oxford (1997:443–456) it points out that the principles are: –

1. Positive interdependence: Gains for one person are associated with gains for others; can be attained through structuring the goals, rewards, roles, materials, or rules.
2. Accountability: Every person is accountable through individual grading and testing; the group is accountable through a group grade; improvement scores are possible.
3. Team formation: Teams are formed in various ways—randomly; by students' interest; by the teacher using specific criteria (heterogeneously, representing different characteristics such as aptitude or gender; or homogeneously).
4. Team size: Groups of smaller than 7 members usually work best
5. Cognitive development: This is often viewed as the main goal of cooperation learning.
6. Social development: Development of social skills such as turn-taking, active listening, and so forth can be as important as cognitive development.

#### **2.4 Approaches to Cooperative Learning**

Three primary approaches are mentioned frequently in the research on cooperative learning. **The first approach** consists of multistep lesson planning process, **the second approach** is comprised of organized, repeatable classroom “Learning structures,” **and the third approach** involves the packaging of entire curricula.

**The lesson–planning approach**, called Learning Together, organizes cooperative learning for use in any grade or age level with any subject (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990, 1994).

Eighteen steps are divided into five categories, representing lesson–planning decision points: **(a) specifying objectives; (b) making decisions** (e.g., about group size and assignments, arranging the room,

planning materials, and assigning group roles); **(c) communicating the task**, the goal structure, and the learning activity. **(d) monitoring and intervening**; and **(e) evaluating and processing**.

Virtually any L2 activity or task can fit into this structure. What defines this model as cooperative learning rather than merely as group work—and as potentially valuable for L2 instruction—is the fact that interdependence, accountability, group formation, social skills, and structure are all built into the sequence and communicated with the students in multiple ways.

**The second approach**, sometimes called the Structural Approach, is based on the use of sequences of organized, content-free, repeatable classroom behaviors, known as “structures” (Kagan, 1989; Oken & Kagan, 1992; Sharan, 1990; Sharan & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1980; Slavin, 1990; Wade, Abrami, Poulsen, & Chambers, 1995). These are different from “activities,” which are defined as content-bound and cannot be repeated meaningfully many times. Multiple structures can sometimes be used within a given class period, depending on the learning objectives. There is little or no systematic L2 research on these particular structures with regard to effectiveness with students of different L2 proficiency levels.

The third approach consists of using existing, published cooperative learning packages that address one or more aspects of the curriculum. Each team member must complete the assignment before the team can move on, with rapid completers helping slower completers. Listening and Describing techniques (Palmer et al., 1988) apply discrete data in four kinds of pair work tasks for language learning: describing pictures, listening to descriptions of pictures, listening for a word, and listening to cues to a scripted dialogue. The package called All Sides of the Issue (Coelho, Winer, & Olsen, 1989) asks each group of language learners

to deal with four sides of a controversial issue, from which debates and discussions emerge.

### **2.5 The Steps of How to Work Cooperative Learning**

There is a large repertoire of cooperative learning strategies (Kagan 1989:77), also called methods, models, structures, or procedures, based on several common ideas. For example:

- The class is divided into small groups (typically with two to five members each), who work together cooperatively to discuss and complete an academic task.
- Tasks can be given at various levels of intellectual complexity: facts, skills, concepts, principles, problem solving, and creative thinking. A teacher presentation may or may not precede the group activities.
- The teacher states guidelines to foster cooperation and mutual interdependence within each group, circulating from group to group and noting progress and problems for later processing.

In working together, students use a variety of social skills; these are explicitly taught in some cooperative models but not in others. To illustrate how cooperative groups operate, we will briefly describe three well-known structures: Think-Pair-Share, Co-op Co-op, and Jigsaw.

1. In Think-Pair-Share, the teacher poses a question to the students in the class, who are sitting in pairs. Students think of a response individually for a given period of time, then pair with their partners to discuss the question and reach consensus. The teacher next asks students to share their agreed-upon answers with the rest of the class.

2. Co-op Co-op is a highly structured version of Sharan and Sharan's (1989:17-21) group investigation model. Elements of Co-op Co-op include:

- (a) student-centered class discussion,
- (b) selection of student learning teams.
- (c) teambuilding.

- (d) team topic selection.
- (e) mini–topic selection, preparation, and presentation.
- (t) preparation of team presentations.
- (g) team presentations; and (h) evaluation.

3. The elements of Jigsaw include:

- a. Task division: A task or passage of text material is divided into several component parts (or topics).
- b. home groups: Each group member is given a topic on which to become an expert.

## **2.6 Instructional Effects of Cooperative Learning**

According to Arends (1991:324) argues that cooperative learning model has been developed to achieve at least three important instructional objectives: –

### **1– Academic Achievement of Cooperative Learning**

At improving students’ performance on important academic task, the belief is that the models’ cooperative incentive structure raises the value placed on academic learning and changes the norms associated with achievement.

Cooperative learning can benefit both low–achieving and high–achieving learners who work on academic materials together. High achievers tutor low achievers. In the processing, high achievers academically because serving as a tutor requires thinking deeply about the relationship and meanings of particular subject.

### **2– Improved Race Relations**

Cooperative learning gives opportunities to students of varying backgrounds and conditions to work interdependently on common tasks and through the use of cooperative reward structure, learn to appreciate each other.

**3– Social Skills** Social skills are very important effect of cooperative learning that students learn skills of cooperation. These are important

skills in societies where much adult work is carried out in large, interdependent organizations, and where communities become more global in their orientations (ibid).

### 2.7 Comparison between Cooperative and Traditional Learning

The present study compared the effects of the cooperative learning model and the traditional learning model on academic achievement. The main questions included

(1) which learning model is more effective on school achievement (2) which has more consistency effects during the follow-up phase.

Ventimiglia (1993:7) states a comparison between the cooperative

Cooperative learning	Traditional learning
They have positive interdependence	No interdependence
They have individual accountability	No individual accountability
They have heterogeneous membership	They don't.
They have shared leadership	They have one appointed leader
They are responsible for each other	They are responsible only for self
Task and maintenance emphasized	Only task emphasized
Social skills are directly taught	Social skills are assumed or ignored
Teacher observes and intervenes group	Teacher ignores group
Group processing occurs	No group processing occurs

learning group and traditional learning group Which are: –

Table 1.1 Comparison between cooperative & traditional learning

### 2.8 The Role of Teachers and Students in a Cooperative Class

#### 1- The Teacher's Role in a Cooperative Class

The role of the teacher in the classrooms where cooperative language learning is implemented is significantly different from the traditional teacher-centered classrooms. Cooperative learning allows teachers to create more learner-centered classes and focus upon students' learning

needs. The teacher is no longer lecturer or transmitter of material, but rather a facilitator of learning who focuses on the learning process by encouraging cooperation among students. As a facilitator, the Teachers give students the opportunities to learn the material by themselves while helping them if a need arises (Crandall,1999:231).

Teacher interacts with students, encourages them to solve problems they encounter by using thinking skills, provides feedback, clarifies difficulties, and emphasizes as a facilitator (McDonell,1992:51–64).

In order to achieve the objectives of cooperative language learning and provide Maximum benefit, teachers have to create well–structured tasks, set the goals of activities clearly, organize groups and assign students to different roles, and select suitable material (Johnson & Johnson, 2002:136).

## **2– The students’ Role in a Cooperative Class**

There are significant differences between the roles of students in cooperative learning class and those in the traditional teacher–centred classroom. The elementary role of the learner is to contribute to the completion of the group tasks while cooperatively working with members of the group. Because they are taught how to organize their study, to keep their group working and to monitor and assess their learning process, they become the director of their own learning. Students organizing their own learning become autonomous learners (Richards & Rodgers,2001:87).

### **2.8.1 Under What Conditions Will Cooperative Learning Be Effective**

Cooperative learning is always fun; it almost always produces gains in social outcomes such as race relations; and it has never been found to reduce student achievement in comparison to traditional methods. However, a substantial body of research has established that two conditions must be fulfilled if cooperative learning is to enhance student

achievement substantially. First, students must be working toward a group goal, such as earning certificates or some other recognition. Second, success at achieving this goal must depend on the individual learning of all group members (Slavin,1983:110).

Simply putting students into mixed-ability groups and encouraging them to work together is not enough to produce learning gains: students must have a reason to take one another's achievement seriously, to provide one another with the elaborated explanations that are critical to the achievement effects of cooperative learning (Webb, 1985:43).

If students care about the success of the team, it becomes legitimate for them to ask one another for help and to provide help to each other. Without this team goal, Students may feel shy to ask peers for help. For example, classroom studies in which students complete a common worksheet or project have not found achievement benefits for such methods. When the group task is to complete a single product, it may be most efficient to let the smartest or highest achieving students do most of the work. We can all recall being in lab groups in science class or in project groups in social studies in which one or two group members did all the work. To enhance the achievement of all students, then, group success must be based not on a single group product, but on the sum of individual learning performances of all group members. The group's task in instructionally effective forms of cooperative learning is almost always to prepare group members to succeed on individual assessments (ibid).

### **2.8.2 Enhancing Lesson Design**

Now let's look at some ways that cooperative learning can add to mastery teaching. Proponents of combining these models sometimes promote group work as guided practice, but we suggest there are many other opportunities for combination. Here we will expand each category of lesson design by adding contributions from cooperative learning.

- **Anticipatory** set may occur in cooperative brainstorming or in group discussions. Students can learn to pose key questions such as: What is this What about? Why would I wish to learn it? How would it be interesting or useful for me? What do I know about this already?
- Students in groups can talk about the lesson's objective and purpose to clarify the task, remind each other of why it's worth doing, and identify specific uses of the skill or learning outcomes.
- In addition to the teacher, text, or instructional media, the students become sources of input when they contribute ideas to the discussion in language familiar with their peers.
- After the teacher demonstrates his or her best modelling, the students themselves can also serve as models. Research in social learning it (Johnson and Johnson, 1989:43) shows the effectiveness of peer models (if properly validated). For example, the expert groups in Jigsaw help students learn effective modelling behaviours to use in their home groups.
- The teacher can check for understanding within each group and can also show students how to do so within their own groups, for example, by using the think–pair–share process. Peers often offer immediate feedback not readily available from the teacher.
- Guided practice is highly effective in small groups, as demonstrated by research. Additional cooperative strategies that can stimulate practice include colour–coded co–op cards, pairs check, roundtable, and numbered heads together (Kagan,1989).
- Independent practice takes place in the context of the group, for example, as students practice individually in their groups and periodically check each other's responses for accuracy.
- Closure occurs in a group summary or synthesis, addressing questions such as, "What are the key ideas we learned today?" "What social skills did we do well on today?" "Which skills do we need to improve?"

Responses can be shared within groups, between groups, or with the whole class.

## **2.9 Examples of Cooperative Learning**

James Coleman in *The Adolescent Society* (1961) and Urie Bronfenbrenner in *Two Worlds of Childhood* (1970) suggested that teams might work in the classroom, and a long tradition of research in social psychology has shown that people working for a cooperative goal come to encourage each one another to do their best, to help one another do well, and to like and respect one another (Slavin, 1977:630–650).

### **1. Team–Pair–Solo:**

In order to solve a problem, students work together in a group. Then, they work to solve a problem with a partner, and, eventually, they work to solve a problem by themselves. This strategy reflects the concept that students can solve more problems with help than they can alone. Students then progress to the point that they will solve the problem on their own only after first being in such a team and then matched with a partner (Reyes,2019:35–45).

### **2. Think–pair share:**

It serves as a simple, powerful thinking skills structure. In this technique, a problem is posed; students think alone about the question for a specified amount of time and then form pairs to discuss the question with. During the share time, students are called upon to share the answer with the class as a whole (Bookman et al, 2001:1).

### **3. Jigsaw:**

Jigsaw method, students are distributed to teams; academic material is broken down into five parts. Students work in four– to five–member teams, rather than each student having a unique part, all students read a similar narrative, such as a book chapter, a biography, or a short story. However, each student is given a topic on which to become an

expert. Students of the same subjects come together and discuss them in expert groups, then return to their teams to teach what they have learned to their colleagues (Slavin,1991:10).

#### **4. Numbered Heads Together:**

In this technique students number off in teams. Teacher asks questions, heads together—students literally put their heads together and make sure that everyone knows and can explain the answer. Teacher calls number and students with that number raise their hands to be called on, as in traditional classroom (Topping,2000:2).

#### **5. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition:**

The newest of the Student Team Learning methods is comprehensive programme for teaching writing and reading in the primary grades. In Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), teachers use readers and reading groups, much as in conventional reading programmes. However, students are distributed to teams composed of pairs of students from two different reading groups. While the teacher works with one reading group, students in the other groups are working in their pairs on a series of cognitively engaging activities, including reading to one another, making predictions about how narrative stories will come out, summarize stories to one another, write responses to stories, and vocabulary, decoding and practicing spelling. Students work in teams to master the main idea and other comprehension skills (Slavin,1991:12).

#### **6. Thinking Aloud Pairs Problem Solving (TAPPS):**

The idea behind TAPPS is that presenting aloud the problem-solving process helps analytical reasoning skills. The student's pairs receive series of problems as well as specific roles, problem solver and listener that switch with each problem (Barkley,2010:259–263).

## 2.10 Competitive vs. Cooperative Structures

In teaching, new structures continue to be developed, and old structures continue to evolve. They are based on distinct philosophies of education and lead to variations in types of learning and cooperation, student roles and communication patterns, teacher roles, and evaluation (Kagan, 1985). There are several dozen distinct structures, some with adaptations, such as the half dozen major variations on Jigsaw (Kagan, 1989). Among the most well-known structures are Jigsaw (Aronson et al. 1978); Student-Teams Achievement-Divisions, or STAD (Slavin 1980); Think-Pair-Share (Lyman 1987); and Group-Investigation (Sharan and Hertz-lazarowitz 1980).

One of the most common structures teachers use is a competitive structure called Whole-Class Question-Answer. In this arrangement, students vie for the teacher's attention and praise, creating negative interdependence among them. That is, when the teacher calls on one Student, the Others lose their chance to answer, a failure by one student to give a correct response increases the chances for other students to receive attention and praise. Thus, students are set against each other, creating poor social relations and peer norms against achievement (Brandt,1991:13).

In contrast to the competitive "Whole Class Question-Answer structure stands Numbered Heads Together, a simple four-step cooperative structure, Numbered Heads include teams, positive interdependence, and individual account ability, all of which leads to cooperative interaction among students. Positive interdependence is built into the structure: if any student knows the answer, the ability of each student is increasing. Individual accountability is also built in all the helping is confined to the heads together step; students know that once a number is called each student is on his or her own. The high achievers share answers because they know their number might not be called, and they

want their team to do well. The lower achievers listen carefully because they know their number might be called. Numbered Heads Together is quite a Contrast to Whole Class Question–Answer in which only the high achievers need participate and the low achiever can (and often do) tune out (ibid).

### **2.10.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Cooperative Learning**

According to Moore (2000:151–152) the advantages of Cooperative Learning are: –

- a. Higher academic achievement than is generally achieved by others' commonly used approaches.
- b. Development of better interpersonal relationships.
- c. Increasing time–on–task.
- d. Development of more positive student attitudes toward the subject and classroom.

According to Kral (1997:155), **the advantages of cooperative learning** are: –

- a. Improved attendance: because of their commitment to others in their group. Students in the cooperative classroom tend to have better attendance.
- b. Higher grades: because of their active participation in class. Students' self–esteem and understanding of the material are increased.
- c. Increased participation: because they are contributing to the group and participating in class. Students become more active.
- d. The teacher becomes a facilitator instead of a lecturer.

#### **– Disadvantage of Cooperative Learning**

- a. Not all students work well with others and may cause conflict within a group.
- b. Not all lessons are ideal for group work. Easy or straightforward concepts may not be as interesting or successful in a cooperative learning assignment.

c. Cooperative learning groups create a level of noise within the classroom that the teacher might not be comfortable with or know to manage well (ibid:161).

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