Using a Program Based on Cooperative Group Activities for Developing 1st Year Secondary School Students' Language Proficiency and Attitudes Towards Learning English

Dr. Omnia Latif Ibrahim Abdel Latif ,Dr. Howida Mostafa A.Masoud
A Lecturer of Curricula & TEFL

Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the effect of using a program based on cooperative learning group activities on developing language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English of first year secondary school female students at Minia Secondary School for Girls. A pre-post control group research design was used to achieve the research objectives. Sixty students were randomly divided into two groups: the experimental and the control groups. The experimental group students were trained in cooperative learning group activities based program to enhance their language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English. Control group students were taught following the regular method of teaching. Instruments of the study included a language proficiency test and an attitude scale to measure their performance before and after implementing the program and as a means of calculating the pre and post performance of the students. A training program was built to train the experimental group. Analysis of data obtained by students (using t- test) revealed that the experimental group significantly surpassed the control in the post performance. Discussion of these findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research are presented.

Key words: cooperative Learning- language proficiency- attitudes

Introduction:

Cooperative learning is widely recognized as a pedagogical practice that promotes socialization and learning among students from pre-school through advanced level and across different subject matters. It involves students working together to achieve common goals or complete group tasks that they would be unable to complete by themselves (Gillies, 2016).

Cooperative learning (CL) as mentioned by (Felder & Brent (2003) is an approach to group work that minimizes the occurrence of unpleasant situations and maximizes the learning and satisfaction that result from working on a high-performance team. A large body of research confirms the effectiveness of CL in learning English. Compared to students taught traditionally, cooperatively taught students tend to exhibit higher academic achievement, high-level reasoning, critical thinking skills, deeper understanding of learned material, greater time on task, less disruptive behavior in class, lower levels of anxiety and stress, greater intrinsic motivation to learn, greater ability to view situations from others' perspectives, and more positive and supportive relationships with peers.

McKeachie (2002) mentioned that there are several reasons why CL works as well as it does. The idea that students learn more by doing something active than by simply watching and listening has long been known to both cognitive psychologists and effective teachers. Cooperative Learning is by its nature an active method. Beyond that, cooperation enhances learning in several ways. Weak students working individually are likely to give up when they get stuck. When working cooperatively, they keep going. Strong students faced with the task of explaining and clarifying material to weaker students often find gaps in their own understanding and fill them in. Students working alone may tend to delay completing assignments or skip them altogether, but when they know that others are counting on them, they are motivated to work.

Slavin (2014) mentioned that an effective cooperative group is not a collection of kids thrown together for a brief activity. It's a team composed of diverse students who care about helping one another learn—and about the success of the team itself. All members must know they can depend on one another for help. He added That " A team goal is a target product, or indicator that shows a team has done a good job of getting every member to perform at his or her personal best. A team goal could be increasing the average score on a quiz that all students take individually after they help one another prepare.

The Theoretical Background behind Cooperative Learning:

Johnson et al.(1998) clarified that the use of CL has its roots in the creation of social interdependence cognitive-developmental, and behavioral learning theories.

The basic premise of social interdependence theory is that the way social interdependence is structured determines how individuals interact, which in turn determines outcomes. Positive interdependence (cooperation) results in promotive interaction as individuals encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to learn. Negative interdependence (competition) results in oppositional interaction as individuals discourage each other's efforts to achieve. In the absence of a functional interdependence (that is, individualism) there is no interaction as individuals work independently. Cognitive-developmental theory views cooperation as an essential prerequisite for cognitive growth. It flows from the coordination of perspectives as individuals work to attain common goals. Jean Piaget stated that when individuals co-operate, healthy socio-cognitive conflict occurs that creates cognitive disequilibrium, which in turn stimulates perspective-taking ability and cognitive development.

Vygotsky (1974) in David (2014) believed that cooperative efforts to learn, understand, and solve problems are essential for constructing knowledge and transforming the joint perspectives into internal mental functioning. For both Piaget and Vygotsky, working cooperatively with more capable peers and instructors results in cognitive development and intellectual growth.

The behavioral learning theory assumes that students will work hard on those tasks for which they secure a reward of some sort and will fail to work on tasks that yield no reward or yield punishment. Cooperative Learning is designed to provide incentives for the members of a group to participate in the group's effort.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), there are five basic elements that allow successful small-group learning:

- **Positive interdependence:** Students feel responsible for their own and the group's effort.
- **Face-to-face interaction:** Students encourage and support one another; the environment encourages discussion and eye contact.
- **Individual and group accountability:** Each student is responsible for doing his part; the group is accountable for meeting its goal.
- **Group behaviors:** Group members gain direct instruction in the interpersonal, social, and collaborative skills needed to work with others.
- **Group processing:** Group members analyze their own and the group's ability to work together.

Cooperative learning changes students' and teachers' roles in classrooms. The ownership of teaching and learning is shared by groups of students, and is no longer the sole responsibility of the teacher. The authority of setting goals, assessing and facilitating learning is shared by all. Students have more opportunities to actively participate in their learning, question and challenge each other, share and discuss their ideas, and internalize their learning. Along with improving academic learning, CL helps students engage in thoughtful discourse, examine different perspectives, and has been proven to increase students' esteem, motivation, and empathy.

Some challenges of using CL include releasing the control of learning, managing noise levels, resolving conflicts, and assessing student learning. Carefully structured activities can help students learn the skills to work together successfully, and structured discussion and reflection on group process can help avoid some problems.

Cooperative Learning Role in Language Development:

The field of language teaching has experienced great change during the past fifty years. In spite of all changes abroad,

foreign language teaching remains mainly traditional. Thus comparing cooperative language learning with traditional language teaching may help in understanding its principles and superiority. Here, traditional language teaching refers to the teacher-centered method in which many ingredients of Grammar-translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method are used in the language teaching and learning. Teaching has traditionally concentrated on making the students aware of certain aspects of the code without providing adequate practice. Language learning is viewed as memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the FL. Most interactions in the classroom are teacher-to-student or teacher-to-students, and student-initiated interaction. Student-student interaction is minimal. Students are seen as acquiring knowledge of language rather than communicative ability directly and they simply passively acquire the new knowledge. The comparison between cooperative learning and teaching illustrates the characteristics of cooperative language learning, which shares some characteristics with communicative language teaching. They both give high light to the interaction and communication between students and students and teachers.

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) cited research showing that organizing students in CL groups can lead to a gain as high as 28% in measured student achievement. Other researchers reported that CL typically results in higher group and individual achievement, healthier relationships with peers, more metacognition, and greater psychological health and self-esteem (Johnson and Johnson 1999).

When implemented well, CL encourages achievement, student discussion, active learning, student confidence, and motivation. The skills students develop while collaborating with others are different from the skills students develop while working independently. Using cooperative groups to accomplish academic tasks not only provides opportunities for students to develop interpersonal skills but also gives them authentic

experiences that will help them be successful in their future careers.

In fact, Johnson and Johnson (2009) maintained that students need to be taught the social skills needed for high quality cooperation and they must be motivated to use them if they are to facilitate learning in themselves and others. Furthermore, providing students with feedback on how they use these skills not only helps to create more positive relationships among group members, but it also helps to increase students' achievement.

Secondary school students need the maximum amount of time for comprehending and using the English language in a low-risk environment in order to approach the language proficiency level of their peers. Cooperative learning provides the structure for this to happen. With approximately 30 students in a classroom who can interact and negotiate meaning, a teacher needs to take advantage of this environment for language acquisition. Reading and writing answers to questions can be done at home, thereby providing more time in the classroom for interactive, cooperative structures in which students are learning from each other. (Holt; Chips; and Wallace, 1991).

Literature Review

Research about CL finds that its strategies improve the achievement and interpersonal relationships of students. Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne (2000) mentioned that CL techniques are widely used because they are based on theory, validated by research, and almost any teacher can find a way to use CL techniques that are consistent with personal philosophies. In a meta-analysis of 158 studies, Johnson & Johnson (1999) report that current research findings present evidence that CL activities are likely to produce positive achievement results. The studies included eight activities of CL: Learning Together and Alone, Constructive Controversy, Jigsaw Procedure, Student Teams Achievement Divisions, Team Accelerated Instruction, Cooperative Integrated Reading & Composition, Teams-Games-Tournaments, and Group Investigation. In each case, the

achievement levels were significantly higher when CL was used as compared to individualistic or competitive methods of learning.

A study conducted by Sparapani, Abel, Easton, Edwards, & Herbster (1997) found that most teachers who use these activities have been self-taught and are likely to use a combination of methods. This resulted in very few activities that involved higher-level thinking skills and most of the observations were of drill and review or routine activities. Nath & Ross (1996) used Student Teams-Achievement Divisions and found that if teachers did not strictly adhere to the framework of CL, the method was unsuccessful and students spent more time on disagreements or conflict management than they did on academic tasks.

Providing students with an incentive to help and encourage each other to put forth maximum efforts increases the likelihood that all group members will learn. There is strong evidence that group grades and team rewards are mostly motivating (Slavin, 1995). Others argue that the group grades and team rewards allow greater effect on students who do not participate to the fullest extent of their abilities (Joyce,1999). In two studies (Nelson & Johnson, 1996; Prater, Bruhl, & Serna, 1998) found that students with behavior disorders who did not receive social skills instruction performed better with direct instruction methods rather than cooperative group methods and that students who did receive social skills instruction performed better with cooperative group methods.

Johnson and Johnson (2002) examined the effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning on a number of academic, personal and social dependent variables (i.e. achievement, interpersonal attraction, social support, self-esteem, perspective taking, learning together, and controversy) and found strong effect sizes between cooperative learning in comparison to competitive and individualistic learning. Mohan and Liang (2003) examined CL in relation to goals for L2 development, L1 maintenance, and content learning. They

investigated how students perceive these goals, and how they use L1 and L2 to acquire content knowledge during CL activities.

In a meta-analysis of 148 studies that compared the effectiveness of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic goal structures in promoting early adolescents' achievement and peer relationships, Roseth, Johnson and Johnson (2008). found that higher achievement and more positive peer relationships were cooperative rather than competitive or individualistic. Furthermore, cooperative goal structures were strongly associated with early adolescents' achievement and positive peer relationships.

A paper by Zhang (2010) tried to show the positive effects of cooperative language learning on foreign language learning and teaching. Compared with traditional language teaching, cooperative language learning conforms to the developmental trend of language teaching method and possesses considerable advantages and provides students with the necessary academic and social skills. The paper reveals that cooperative learning benefits language learning in many aspects.

A study was carried out by Bolukbas ; Keskin, and Polat (2011) to identify the effects of CL techniques on students' reading skills. Participants were (20 subjects in the experimental group, and 20 in the control group)."pre-test post-test control group" design was used. In the experimental group, CL activities were used with reading comprehension activities, while the control group followed the traditional teaching. The data were gathered through the "Reading Comprehension Skills Achievement Test". Results were in favor of the experimental group

Azizenezahad (2013) investigated the effects of CL on EFL learners' language learning, motivation toward English, and the high- and low-achievers' academic achievements. The major findings of this study suggested that CL helped significantly to enhance the junior high school learners' oral communicative competence and their motivation toward learning English.

Nezami , Asgari , and , Dinarvand (2013) studied the effect of CL on the critical thinking of high school students. The semi-experimental research method was used. 116 students (64 students in the experimental group, 52 students in the control group), were chosen randomly. Critical thinking test was utilized. The experimental group students were educated by the cooperative method, while those in the control group followed the usual method. Results demonstrated the significant effect of CL on critical thinking of students.

Hosseinian (2014) looked into the possible effects of Competitive Team-Based Learning (CTBL) vis-à-vis Group Investigation (GI) method of (CL) on the language proficiency of EFL intermediate students. Seventy students were selected. The results indicated the advantage of CTBL over GI in terms of its effect on improving the target group's language proficiency.

Marzban and Alinejad (2014) studied the effect of CL on reading proficiency. A standardized proficiency test was conducted on pre- intermediate learners. Sixty learners were chosen to participate. They were randomly divided into two groups of 30. A pretest was administered.. After the treatment, the posttest was conducted. Analysis of data showed that the experimental group had better results. Al-Tamimi &Al-Tamimi (2014) investigated the effectiveness of CL in English language classrooms to enhance students' speaking skills and attitudes. The sample's speaking skills were first examined through an English oral test prior to and after some CL instructional activities. The findings showed a remarkable development in the students' speaking skills and attitudes, Nejad and Keshavarzi (2015) investigated the effect of CL on L2 reading comprehension ability for pre-university students. They also tried to figure out the students' attitudes after providing CL intervention. The findings showed that CL method had a higher effect on reading comprehension skills when compared with the traditional teaching methods. The purpose of CL activities is to show how a variety of cooperative structures and activities can be used together to facilitate students' English language

development. Each collaborative activity focuses on a different language skill, such as listening, speaking, reading, or writing. In planning CL, teachers take several roles. First, teachers make pre-instructional decisions about grouping students and assigning appropriate tasks. They have to be able to explain both the academic task and the cooperative structure and then monitor and intervene when necessary. The teacher is also the one who is responsible for evaluating students.

Seng (2017) conducted a study in a rural secondary school. A total of 59 respondents have participated. The experimental group received a teaching method using CL strategies, while the control group received conventional lecture method. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using four types of instruments: pre-test and post-test questions, questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews. It was found that all respondents showed a low and moderate performance in English Literature before the treatment. However, after the treatment, respondents from the experimental group showed a significant improvement. Those from the control group did not show similar improvement. Thus, the use of CL played an important role in acquiring English language in an English literature class.

Attitudes towards Learning English:

There is a number of researches that have been carried out to investigate learners' motivation and attitudes towards the English language.

Importance of Attitudes

Reid (2003, p. 33) declared that attitudes are important because they cannot be neatly separated from study. An Attitude is considered as an essential factor influencing language performance (Visser, 2008). Achievement in a target language relies not only on intellectual capacity, but also on the learner's attitudes towards language learning. This means that learning language should be approached primarily as a social and psychological phenomenon rather than as a purely academic one. Kiptui and Mbugua (2009, cited in Tella et al, 2010) stated that

negative attitude towards English is the most affective and psychological factor that results in the students' poor performance in English among the secondary school students.

Aspects of Language Attitude

The learning process is regarded as a positive change in the individual's personality in terms of the emotional, psychomotor (behavioral) as well as cognitive domains, since when one has learned a specific subject, he/she is supposed to think and behave in a different manner and one's beliefs have been distinguished (Kara, 2009). Furthermore, learning process has social as well as psychological aspects besides the cognitive approach. Attitude concept can be viewed from these three dimensions.

The attitude concept has three components i.e., behavioral, cognitive and affective. These three aspects are based on the three theoretical approaches of behaviorism, cognitivism and humanism respectively.

The behavioral aspect of attitude deals with the way one behaves and reacts in particular situations. Kara (2009) stated that, "Positive attitudes lead to the exhibition of positive behaviors toward courses of study.

Cognitive Aspect of Attitude involves the beliefs of the language learners about the knowledge that they receive and their understanding in the process of language learning. The cognitive attitude can be classified into four steps of connecting the previous knowledge and the new one, creating new knowledge, checking new knowledge, and applying the new knowledge in many situations.

Emotional Aspect of Attitude: Feng and Chen (2009) stated that, "Learning process is an emotional process. It is affected by different emotional factors. Attitude can help the learners to express whether they like or dislike the objects or surrounding situations. It is agreed that the inner feelings and emotions of FL learners influence their perspectives and their attitudes towards the target language (Choy & Troudi, 2006).

Studies on Attitudes towards Language Learning

Karahan (2007) tried to find out the relation between attitudes and language learning. More specifically, he tried to identify the relationship among language attitudes, the starting age of language learning, and the place where the individual started to learn language. The only method of inquiry used was a questionnaire on language attitudes. The sample included (94 females and 96 males) eighth graders. The findings indicated that they had mildly positive attitudes; especially female students.

Shams (2008) investigated students' attitudes, motivation, and anxiety toward learning English. The findings showed that the students had affirmative attitudes and high enthusiasm toward English. This also highlighted that most of them showed positive attitudes toward English.The findings of investigating the secondary stage students' attitudes toward learning English indicated that the respondents had positive attitudes toward learning English Momani (2009).The purpose of a study by Gömleksiz (2010) was to explore students' attitudes towards learning English in terms of gender, grade level and department variables. Statistically significant differences were observed in terms of gender, grade level and department variables.

Yu's study (2010) had explored the attitudes of college students towards English. They had been examined in relation to the factors that were likely to explain their attitudes, namely, gender, age, grade in college, major, starting age for learning English, years spent in English learning, experience with native English-speaking teachers and friends who were native English speakers, English knowledge of parents, and international experience. The study found that college students had positive attitudes towards the English language.

Abidin,et al.(2012) investigated secondary school students' attitudes toward learning English in terms of the behavioral, cognitive and emotional aspects. It also explored whether there is any significant difference in the students' attitudes towards English language based on their demographic profiles i.e.,

gender, field and year of study. A total of 180 participants in the study took a questionnaire as a measuring instrument.

Al Noursi (2013) outlined the results of a survey that was carried out to identify students' attitudes towards learning English. The study sample consisted of 196 students. A questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings showed that the majority of the students had positive attitudes towards learning the English Language.

Eshghinejad (2016) investigated attitudes of male and female (EFL) learners toward English language learning. A questionnaire survey was administered upon a total of 30 randomly selected samples. Results of qualitative and quantitative data analysis showed a positive attitude toward English learning in three aspects of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional.

The Effect of Cooperative Learning on Students' Attitudes

A study by McLeish (2009) was conducted to determine the attitude of students towards CL. Questionnaires were administered to ninety (90) students and twelve (12) lecturers, In-depth interviews were conducted with three lecturers and two classes were observed to investigate the students attitude towards CL methods, how it impacted on class participation and where or not cooperative CL had been practiced at the institution. The results indicated that due to various fears such as possible low grades students prefer to work on their own rather than within groups. There are numerous benefits that can be attributed to CL such as an enhancement in class participation as well as improvement in student academic performance.

Er & Ataç (2014) investigated ELT students' attitudes towards CL. A questionnaire was given to 166 (F=100, M=66) university students whose ages were between 18-20. A questionnaire inquiring on the students' attitudes on CL was administered. The collected data was analyzed by using descriptive analysis method. Results showed that 66.9% of the

students are at the side of CL in ELT classes whereas 33,1% of them believed that if they work alone they would have better results and they thought working alone was more enjoyable. Titsankaew (2015) studied the effects of using CL strategy on student's achievement and attitudes towards learning . The sample consisted of 49 students in Grade 11. The CL strategy used was "Think Pair Share". The pre-test and post-test design, observation and questionnaire were employed. A pre-test was given at the beginning of the lesson. During discussion in the classroom, the researcher observed students when using planned Think-Pair-Share worksheet. A post-test was administered to measure the achievement of students. The results indicated that using this CL strategy had a positive effect on students' achievement and attitudes.

Ali (2017) focused on assessing students' attitudes towards (CL) in learning writing skills. The study involved 90 students. The data for the study were gathered through questionnaires. Interviews were conducted and classrooms were observed. The results of the study showed that the students who were administered questionnaires and interviewed understood the benefits of using CL during writing though the number of students in each class was large and they had poor background knowledge of English. Results indicated that female students had better attitudes towards CL in learning writing skills. However, their difference is not statistically significant. The summary of the findings indicated that the writing lessons in the students' English textbook should be taught through CL.

Context of the Problem:

Faced with globalization and international competition, it became urgent to promote secondary school students' English ability, which affects their future studies and career development. The English language proficiency is the most important component of English performance particularly in an academic setting. Thus, most secondary schools offer compulsory English courses to improve instruction and to promote students' English competence. Conventional EFL courses are typically

taught in large classes by teacher-centered instruction, which mainly involves text explanation, vocabulary illustration, grammar instruction, and intensive drills on language forms. These methods emphasize linguistic accuracy and rote learning. Teachers serve as the sole providers of language knowledge, and students are treated as passive recipients rather than active learners. Upon contact with the majority of secondary school students (during teaching practice), the researchers noticed that their language proficiency as well as their attitudes toward learning English were-in most cases- unsatisfactory.

To ascertain the existence of the problem, a language proficiency diagnostic test and an attitude scale were administered to 1st year secondary school students to check their level in English and their attitudes towards learning it. Results revealed that 80% of students lacked the satisfactory proficiency level and had low attitudes towards learning English. Furthermore, the researchers conducted an informal interview with (TEFL) staff members who assured that students were in bad need of opportunities to practice language and consequently to enliven their attitudes towards learning it.

Therefore, the present study was undertaken to investigate the effect of using some CL instructional group activities to promote English language proficiency and enhance students' attitudes towards learning English.

Statement of the Study:

Students in Secondary schools face a lot of problems in learning English in terms of the language skills i.e. (listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary). The level of their English proficiency is low. Continuous observation by their teachers revealed that this situation existed due to the lack of exposure to English in their daily life, as well as lack of interest in learning and using English. They performed badly in their examinations. Therefore, it was hoped that cooperative learning group activities could enhance their English language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English.

Objectives:

The present study was undertaken to:

1. Identify the effect of a program based on some CL group activities on developing English language proficiency of 1st year secondary school students.
2. Identify the effect of a program based on some CL group activities on enhancing 1st year secondary school students' attitudes towards learning English.

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. There would be a statistically significant difference (favoring the experimental group) between mean of scores obtained by subjects of the experimental and the control groups on the post English language proficiency test.
2. There would be a statistically significant difference (favoring the experimental group) between mean of scores obtained by subjects of the experimental and the control groups on the post attitude scale towards learning English.

Significance:

The present study was undertaken to examine the effect of a program based on CL group activities on developing 1st year secondary school students' English language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English.

Research shows that CL activities are a viable and potentially successful mode for professional development and are gaining more and more ground among foreign language learners and teachers. This positively contributes to the learning of foreign languages. Aspects of this contribution are:

- Helping students strengthen their language skills by positively affecting their learning attitudes and by helping

them build learning strategies and promote their self-confidence.

- Making it possible for students to learn by doing things actively on their own instead of being too dependent upon their teachers. They become the creators of their own learning.
- Departing from the traditional over-dependence upon textbooks.
- Constructing a program particularly directed to secondary school teachers to enhance their students' English language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English.
- Introducing a program to course designers and instructors who will find it useful and effective in the programs of language learning.

Delimitations:

1. Only 60 1st year secondary school students participated in the study. The program would help them have sufficient practice during second and third years and would help them to better perform the tasks required for studying English.
2. Only 10 cooperative learning activities were used through the training program.

Definition of Terms:

Cooperative Learning:

Cooperative learning is an instructional method whereby students in small groups collaborate to maximize one another's learning and to achieve mutual goals (Johnson, Johnson,1998). Cooperative learning has been widely used to teach various language skills, such as reading comprehension (Law, 2011), oral English (Pattanpichet, 2011), writing (Roddy, 2009), and EFL courses (Morgan, Rosenberg, Wells, 2010).

In the present study CL is operationally defined as a teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of

different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English.

Attitudes:

Based on the theory of planned behavior, Montano and Kasprzyk (2008: 71) stated that," Attitude is determined by the individual's beliefs about outcomes or attributes of performing the behavior weighted by evaluations of those outcomes or attributes.

Attitude is operationally defined in this study as " the students' perceptions, understandings, beliefs or experiences of learning English as a foreign language as assessed by a specially designed questionnaire".

Method:

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of using CL group activities on 1st year secondary school students' language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English. The experiment started in the start of the first term till the end of December in the academic year 2017-2018.

Research Design:

The study followed a quasi experimental pre-post control group design. An experimental group and a control one were exposed to pre-post means of getting data. The experimental group was instructed using the proposed cooperative activities program while the control one followed the regular methods of teaching English. Sixty 1st year female secondary school students voluntarily participated in the study (30 students in each group). It was supposed that training through CL group activities would enhance their language proficiency and construct positive attitudes towards learning English.

Variables of the Study:

The independent variable

The cooperative learning group activities program.

The dependent variables

- Developing students' language proficiency level.
- Constructing positive attitudes towards learning English.

Control Variables:

- Age: The age level of the participants ranged between 17 and 18.6 years old with approximately the same number in each group.
- Years of Studying English: Students in both groups studied English for 9 years, from primary one till the end of the prep school.
- Level of performance in the pre-language proficiency test

Instruments of the study :

- A Language Proficiency Test
- An Attitude towards English Scale

The language Proficiency Test Objectives: This test was designed to:

1. assess 1st year secondary school students language proficiency .
2. equalize the two groups before carrying out the program.
3. measure the degree of improvement after implementing the program

Construction of the Test:

The test has six parts. These are:

- Part 1 Listening (10) items = 10 marks
- Part 2: Speaking (10) items = 10 marks
- Part 3 Structure (20) items = 20 marks
- Part 4 Vocabulary (20) items = 20 marks
- Part 5 Reading (10) items = 10 marks
- Part 6 Writing (10) items = 10 marks

The total score of the test is (80):

The writing part was scored according to a writing rubric. The criteria included: organization of ideas, sentence structure,

word choice, grammar usage, and mechanics. The rating scale ranged from 5 to 1.

The speaking part was scored according to a speaking rubric. The criteria included are comprehensibility, pronunciation and intonation, language control, topic development. The rating scale ranged from 5 to 1.

Validity of the test

The test was judged by TEFL specialists. Their suggestions were taken into consideration. They confirmed its suitability to the participants

The Internal Consistency of the Test Items

The validity of the test was determined by computing the internal consistency of each domain using (Pearson Correlation formula). Correlation ranged from 0.42 to 0.67, and eta squared (η^2) from 0.96 to 0.99 as shown in Table (1) below.

Table (1) Correlation Coefficients & η2 between each domain and the total score of the language proficiency test No=27 (Validity)

Domain	R	η2
1- Listening	0.66*	0.96*
2- Speaking	0.4 8*	0.97*
3- Grammar	0.67*	0.99*
3- Reading	0.50*	0.95*
4- Writing	0. 47*	0.96*
5-Vocabulary	0.42*	0.99*

*Significant at 0.01 level

Reliability of the Test:

The reliability of the test (0.98) was determined by test re-test reliability coefficient method. t-value is (0.047) .See table (2) below.

Table (2) Test-Retest Reliability Coefficient of The language proficiency test

No	Treatment	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	R
27	Test	42.26	2.89	52	0.047*	0.98**
27	re-test	42.30	2.77			

* Not Significant at 0.05 ** Significant at 0.01

The Scale of Attitudes towards English:

Objectives:

This scale was used to :

1. assess students attitudes towards English.
2. ensure equality between the two groups.
3. measure the degree of improvement in students' performance.

Validity of the Scale:

Face Validity:

The scale was judged by a group of TEFL specialists. They confirmed its suitability,validity and applicability.

The Internal Consistency of the scale:

The validity of the attitude scale was determined by computing the internal consistency of each domain by using (Pearson Correlation formula). Correlation of the behavioral aspects of the scale is 0.88, of the cognitive aspects is (0.87),and of the emotional aspects is (0.79). See Table (3) below.

Table (3) Correlation Coefficients between each domain and the total Score of the Attitude Scale No=27

Domain	R
1- Behavioral Aspects of Attitudes	0.88*
2- Cognitive Aspects of Attitudes	0.87*
3- Emotional aspects of attitude	0.79*

*Significant at 0.05 level

Reliability of the Scale:

The reliability of the test was determined by Cronbach Alpha. It is (0.74) as shown in Table (4) below. This shows that the scale enjoys a high degree of reliability .

Table (4) Cronbach Alpha's reliability Coefficient of the Attitude scale

Variable	Alpha
Attitude Scale	0.74

*Significant at 0.05 level

1- Pre-testing of the Language Proficiency Test

The researchers administered the language Proficiency Test on both the experimental and the control groups. The results of the pre-testing showed that both groups had almost the same level of performance in language. Table (4) below shows no significant difference between the two groups in the pre- language proficiency test since t-value (0.202) is not significant at 0.05.

Table (5) t-value Between Mean Scores of the Experimental & Control Groups in the Pre- Language Proficiency Test

No	Group	Mean	SD	DF	t-value
30	Experimental	42.20	2.60	58	0.202*
30	Control	40.77	2.80		

*Not Significant at 0.05 ,Total score = 80

2- Level of performance in the pre scale of Attitudes Towards learning English

Table (6) below shows no significant difference between the two groups in the pre attitude scale since t-value (0.25) is not significant at 0.05 level.

Table (6) t-value between mean scores of the Experimental & Control groups in the Pre Attitude Scale

No		Mean	SD	DF	t-value
30	Experimental	145.03	13.07	58	0.25*
30	Control	139.07	17.85		

* Not Significant at 0.05 level

The Training Program

A cooperative learning group activities program was prepared by the researcher. The different activities utilized in the present study were adopted from Macpherson (2007). The activities were chosen to suit the age and language levels of students and were judged by staff members to be suitable to the participants. These activities include:

1. Preparatory Activities- Participants (Icebreaker – Find Someone who…..)
2. Icebreaker – Three Part, Four Step Interview

3. Team builder – Treasure Hunt
4. Develop and Share Personal Goals
5. Share Experiences and Feelings
6. Constructive Communication Strategies
7. Paraphrasing
8. Perception Checking
9. Numbered heads together
10. Think-Pair-Share

Procedure of Teaching

1. The instructor explained the rules which include: contributing to the team effort; listening to teammates; helping other team members; and asking the instructor for help. The researchers tried their best to reduce complaints from high achievers. They arranged students into teams.
2. The instructors clearly explained the assignment that would probably take several class periods to complete. (Emphasized that positive interaction and cooperation will result in a group reward. to motivate further cooperation.)
3. For cooperative interaction to be more fully assured, the instructors gave only one copy of materials to each group,
4. The instructors allowed groups that finish early to assist slower groups. This helpful support of other teams could be promoted through the understanding that if all groups reached a certain level, more bonus points would be given. The evaluation level was judged against a certain standard.
5. The instructors could successfully avoid the temptation to "lead" the groups as their role had changed from transmitters of knowledge to mediators of thinking.
6. They praised and encouraged the less skilled team members.
7. They could monitor and assist as needed and move among the groups to assure that they were actively engaged in their roles following cooperation procedures.

8. They did not answer students' questions unless the group members were unable to resolve the issue by themselves. They intervened as necessary to promote positive interdependence among group members. Frequently reinforce positive group interaction.
9. They evaluated each group's performance. Grades were assigned to promote positive interdependence. Each group's work was judged separately from other groups. When inter-group interaction was involved, the winning teams received a prize. Attention was also given to groups that were the quietest, quickest, and most creative, etc.

Findings:

The findings of this study were obtained from the language proficiency Test, and the attitude scale. The data were analyzed to find out whether using the cooperative learning activities program with the experimental group was effective.

Hypothesis (1) predicted that there would be a significant statistical difference (favoring the experimental group) between mean scores of the experimental and the control groups on the language proficiency test. Analysis of data obtained using t-test shows that the experimental group achieved higher than the control group on the language proficiency test since t-value (30.13) is significant at (0.01) level. Thus the first hypothesis is confirmed. Table (7) presents a summary of the analysis of the data obtained on the post language proficiency test.

Table (7) t-value & η2 Between Mean Scores of the Experimental & Control groups on the Post- Language Proficiency Test

No	Group	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	η^2
30	Experimental	66.27	2.54	58	30.13*	0.994*
30	Control	40.90	2.83			

* Significant at 0.01 , Total Score =80

Table (8) below shows a comparison between mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-post- language proficiency

Test. t-value of the pre-post listening (10.55) is significant at 0.01 level. Likewise, t-value of pre-post speaking is (11.75), of grammar is (16.58) of reading is (16.64), of writing is (17.17) and of vocabulary (20.02). These results indicate that the experimental group showed significant improvement in the post application of the test due to the cooperative learning program they are exposed to. It is also noticed from the results that vocabulary has the highest t- value followed by writing, reading, grammar, then speaking and listening.

Table (8) t-value & η2 between mean scores of the Experimental group in the Pre-post Language Proficiency test

Domain	Mean Pre	Mean Post	SD Pre	SD Post	t-value	η^2
1- Listening	4.57	7.20	1.06	0.83	10.55*	0.93*
2- Speaking	4.63	7.40	0.95	0.84	11.75*	0.95*
3- Grammar	12.23	17.63	1.28	1.20	16.58*	0.99*
4- Reading	4.17	8.00	1.04	0.68	16.64*	0.95*
5- Writing	4.50	8.13	0.85	0.76	17.17*	0.96*
6-Vocabulary	12.13	17.9	0.88	1.27	20.02*	0.99*

*Significant at 0.01 level

Table (9) shows the difference between mean scores of the total score of the experimental group in the pre and post language proficiency test. t-value (29.51) is significant at 0.01 level.

Table (9) t-value & η2 between mean scores of the Experimental group in the Pre-Post Language Proficiency test (Total Score= 80)

No	Treatment	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	η2
30	Pre	42.20	2.60	58	29.51*	0.997*
30	Post	66.27	3.54			

*Significant at 0.05

Hypothesis (2) predicted that there would be a significant difference (favoring the experimental group) between mean scores of the experimental and the control groups on the post attitude scale.

Analysis of data obtained using t-test shows that the experimental group achieved a higher degree of improvement than the control group on the attitudes towards English since t-

value (8.19) is significant at (0.01) level and beyond. This result indicates that the experimental group could achieve higher on the post attitude scale due to the application of the CL group activities program. Thus the second hypothesis is confirmed.

Table (10) presents a summary of the analysis of the data obtained on the post attitude scale of both groups.

Table (10) t-value & η2 between mean scores between the Experimental & Control groups in the Post Attitude Scale

No	Group	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	η2
30	Experimental	172.00	17.05	58	8.19*	0.988*
30	Control	139.30	13.12			

*Significant at 0.01 , Total Score = 225

Table (11) below shows a comparison between pre-post attitude scale results of the experimental group in the different domains of the scale. t-value of the behavioral aspects is (4.92), of the cognitive aspects is (5.92), and of the emotional aspects is (4.34).

Table (11) t-value & η2 Between Mean Scores of the Experimental Group in the Pre-Post Attitude Domains

Domain	Mean Pre	Mean Post	SD Pre	SD Post	t-value	η2
1- Behavioral Aspects of Attitude	48.67	58.03	8.05	6.37	4.92*	0.986*
2- Cognitive Aspects of Attitudes	48.03	57.47	5.39	6.67	5.92*	0.991*
3-Emotional aspects of attitude	48.33	56.50	7.25	7.09	4.34*	0.985*

Table (12) shows a comparison between mean scores of the control group in the pre-post- attitude scale. t-value of the pre-post test (0.068) is not significant at 0.05 level.

Table (12) t-value between mean scores of the Control group in the Pre-Post Attitude Scale (Total Score)

No	Treatment	Mean	SD	DF	t-value
30	Pre	139.07	13.12	58	0.068
30	Post	139.30	13.07		

*Not Significant at 0.05

Table (13) below shows a comparison between mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-post- attitude scale (Total Score). t-value of the pre-post test (5.88) is significant at 0.05 level.

Table (13) t-value & η2 between mean scores of the Experimental group in the Pre-Post Attitude Scale

No	Treatment	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	η2
30	Pre	172.00	17.85	58	5.88*	0. 998*
30	Post	145.03	17.05			

*Significant at 0.05

Discussion:

It is well recognized that students do not necessarily cooperate during group work and that groups need to be structured so that the five key components that mediate successful cooperation are evident. These include: establishing positive interdependence among group members; facilitating promotive interaction; encouraging individual accountability; explicitly teaching the appropriate social skills; and, encouraging groups to reflect on both the processes involved in managing the task and interacting with their peers. When these key components are embedded in groups, students are more likely to: feel motivated to work together to achieve both their own and the group's goals; accept personal responsibility for their contributions to the group and their behaviors towards group members; respect others' contributions: commit to resolving disagreements democratically: and, work constructively towards managing the task and maintaining effective working relationships.

The findings of the study support the use of cooperative learning as a language learning method to construct positive attitudes and attain higher language proficiency. The reason why their attitudes developed was probably because this learning environment provided opportunities for students to support, encourage, and praise each other. In such an atmosphere, students may feel more comfortable to try out new ideas. This

result was in accordance with Hosseinian (2014), Al Tamimi & Al Tamimi (2014) whose results indicated the advantage of CL technique over the regular one in terms of its effect on improving the participants' language proficiency.

There are many techniques of making the students interested in what they are learning especially in learning language. Brown (1994:48) said that techniques are the specific activities manifested in the classroom that are consistent with a method and therefore, in harmony with an approach as well. Cooperative learning is known as one of the techniques which can be used to develop language proficiency and build positive attitudes towards learning English.

Analysis of the individual scores showed that there was an increase in students' scores in the post test as compared to the pre test. In addition to that there is a significant difference between and within groups. The study revealed that the use of CL technique in developing language proficiency provided an active role for students, while the instructors became facilitators and a coordinators, helping the students while working in groups. The most significant results of this study had shown that CL activities were useful for solving problems, brainstorming the ideas, learning new vocabulary, taking notes, and improving language skills.. If group mates feel positively interdependent with one another, a supportive atmosphere can develop their learning too (Johnson and Johnson (1999). The language development may be attributed to the fact that students felt more relaxed in this learning environment.

The results of this study can help the English teachers to apply this technique in class and change their old methods to newer ones that are more efficient and interesting. The results can motivate the students to improve their language skills. Using cooperative learning can make the students relaxed and funny in following the teaching learning process.

The researchers could get more information about the importance of CL in enhancing language skills and changing their attitudes towards learning English. Analysis of the individual

scores shows that there is an increase in their scores in the post test as compared to the pre test. In addition to that there is a significant difference in scores of participants between and within groups. There is an improvement in their marks in the post test as compared to the pre test. Comparison shows that participants in the experimental group performed well as compared to those in the control group.

The findings of this study also provide significant input to teachers and language practitioners on the importance of using CL for improving language skills. The study concludes that the use of CL had a significant impact on the students' language proficiency and attitudes towards learning English.. Undoubtedly, results gained from the quantitative data are clear empirical evidence that the program worked effectively.

Attitude is considered an essential factor influencing language performance and received considerable attention from EFL language teachers who argue that attitude is the feeling people have about their own language. Thus, attitude to language is a construct that explains linguistic behavior in particular. This study aimed at investigating the attitudes of secondary school students in terms of the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects. To this end, an attitude scale was administered upon a total of 27 randomly selected students to determine its validity and reliability. The scale was preferred since it is suitable for empirical research; collection of data is easily quantifiable; it provides participants enough time to give accurate and correct answers; and it is cost-effective and time saving. While preparing the scale, special care was given to ensure level and quality of the items as well as the reliability, clarity, and practicality. Results of post application showed a positive attitude toward English learning in behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects. In addition, there were statistically significant attitudinal differences between the two groups.

Immediately after assessment, a dialogue was conducted with the participants. Most of them indicated that they liked and enjoyed the CL classes. One of the students said, 'Working

cooperatively in class is fun and can help me memorize new words". They hoped that the CL technique could be adopted in the regular classes in future.

Students actively and lovely participated in all the activities of the Program. They were interested in practicing new activities different from the regular ones they used to. They liked learning cooperatively as competition between groups motivated them to exert their utmost effort to lead their group to success. They were excited to use new techniques such as those used in the present study. They liked the cooperative activities in the program and found them of great importance. They no longer feel shy or afraid of using English to express their ideas or view points. They mentioned that the activities helped them discover new abilities and skills in themselves which, consequently, increased their self confidence and highlighted their attitudes towards learning English.

Conclusion

Research in the foreign language (FL) classroom indicates that cooperative learning is potentially beneficial for EFL students in a number of ways. It can maximize foreign language acquisition by offering opportunities for both language input and output. It includes opportunities for the integration of language and content learning. Although the reported beneficial effects of cooperative learning in the foreign language classroom are impressive, more research needs to be done. Research also needs to be conducted to investigate first language maintenance in EFL.

To learn how the students felt about learning through cooperative activities, they were interviewed. When asked about their feelings of working with their peers, all of them were impressed and happy because of the supportive environment. The English class became more interesting. They liked the think pair share because they could work with more relaxation

Recommendations and suggestions of further research:

In the light of the results obtained in the present study, the following recommendations are hoped to be helpful in the field of TEFL.

1. The present study focused on the use of CL to develop English language of secondary school students and to construct positive attitudes towards learning it. This CL is recommended to be used in teaching different areas and subject matters.
2. EFL teacher preparation program designers are advised to include CL to first year secondary school students.

Colleges of Education need to provide their students with training in CL and instruction in teaching. If educational institutions wish to do more than pay lip-service to the importance of CL, they should consider providing their faculty with professional development workshops of at least 12 instructional hours .

Suggestions for Further Study:

1. The present study can be replicated on a larger sample of students.
2. Investigating the effect of using a cooperative learning based program o developing students' listening skills.
3. Investigating the effect of using cooperative learning technique on developing students' communication skills.
4. Investigating the effect of using cooperative learning technique on developing oral language skills.
5. Investigating the effect of cooperative learning on developing other subject matters.

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