

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON THE READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN TURKISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Dr. Fatma BÖLÜKBAŞ

Istanbul University Foreign Language Department  
fbolukbas@istanbul.edu.tr

Funda KESKİN

Istanbul University Foreign Language Department  
fyamac@istanbul.edu.tr

Mustafa POLAT

Bahçeşehir University English Preparatory Program  
mustafa.polat@bahcesehir.edu.tr

### ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning is a process through which students with various abilities, gender, nationalities and different level of social skills carry out their learning process by working in small groups and helping each other. Cooperative learning is a pedagogical use of small groups which enable students to maximize both their own and others' learning.

This study was carried out in order to identify the efficiency and the effects of cooperative learning techniques on the reading skills of the students who learn Turkish as a second language. A total of 40 students (20 subjects in experimental group, 20 subjects in control group), who learn Turkish as a second language at Istanbul University Language Center, participated in this study which was done in accordance with the 'pre-test post-test control group' model as one of the experimental research designs. In the experimental group, cooperative learning techniques were used for reading comprehension activities, while traditional teaching model was followed in the control group. The data were gathered through the 'Reading Comprehension Skills Achievement Test' developed by the researchers, and a number of suggestions were made to develop reading skills in teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** cooperative learning, reading comprehension skills, teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to communication and information technologies, the disappearance of the borders with the spread of globalization, and the world's getting smaller make it necessary to learn a foreign language. In accordance with these advancements, the interest in Turkish language also increases.

Upon a boom in the interest in Turkish language, those working in the field mostly focus on how to teach Turkish more effectively or how students can learn this language on their own. In other words, the innovations in the field of education have started to be applied in teaching Turkish as a second language.

As it has already been known, teaching a language is a multidimensional task which requires different techniques and methods compared with teaching other subjects. In order to study a language either as a first or second language, one makes an effort to develop and integrate four basic skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, it is difficult to improve all these skills all at once in terms of teaching a foreign language since proficiency in learning a foreign language differs from an individual to another, whereas a native language can be learnt by all the members of a society to some extent. Therefore, it is necessary to make use of various methods and techniques which will minimize the differences within a classroom and help learners to participate in lessons equally. Cooperative learning which is the focus of this study is one of these methods which help learners to participate in lessons equally and effectively.

#### 1.1. Cooperative Learning

As a learner-centered method, cooperative learning is a teaching method by which learners study by helping one another in small groups in their learning process in order to achieve a common objective (Açıkgöz, 2003). Cooperative learning as a concept consists of several instructional methods in which learners study a language in small groups of 4-6, and group performance is rewarded in several different ways (Slavin, 1988).

Cooperative learning is an in-class learning approach which is used to help learners develop a positive image both for themselves and their peers, and to improve problem solving and critical thinking skills in order to encourage learners in terms of social skills based on cooperation (Gömleksiz, 1993). Cooperative learning is a

learning method in which learners help each other in terms of their learning process by making up small homogenous groups to achieve a common goal; and in which group performance is rewarded in several different ways.

There are differences between learners' studying in groups and cooperative learning method. In group-work, learners can sit around a table while studying, but they cannot communicate with each other independently while studying together. Therefore, small study groups cannot affect each other positively. That's why, their communication can be considered to be individual learning. Then, in cooperative learning, learners' efforts are rewarded as a group. To illustrate, if learner groups are to do an assignment, if only one student does that whole task, and studies without the help of the others, this cannot be considered as a group work based on cooperative learning method. In cooperative learning groups, sense of responsibility means that group members should know that materials prepared by all group members are for the sake of the success of the group. The learners in these groups do not need to learn how to cooperate since teachers manages the organization and the structure of the groups (Johnson and Johnson, 2002).

In order for a group work to be a cooperative one, learners should be aware of the fact that they need to study so as to maximize the learning of both their own and their friends. In these groups, learners make an effort to maximize their own and other group members' learning since the performance of cooperative learning groups is possible only when each individual struggles for the benefit of all group members.

For a group work to be considered a cooperative learning process, following components and conditions should be taken into consideration:

1. Group reward: In order for members of a group to succeed, it is necessary for the group itself to become successful.
2. Positive interdependence: It creates a situation in which individuals make a common effort for the reward and their common goal which can in fact be possible via positive dependence, positive product dependence, and positive process dependence.
3. Individual accountability: It means that group success depends on the learning of each and every individual. Every learner has the responsibility to learn the subject and do whatever must be done.
4. Face-to-face promotive interaction: It means that group members motivate one another.
5. Social skills: It is about teaching learners how to build relations among individuals and encouraging them to use this.
6. Group processing: It is about identifying which behavior of the members benefit to the success of the group, and also which behaviors should continue and which ones should be modified.
7. The opportunity for equal success: It is about benefitting to the success of the group by developing their own behaviors and this can be achieved through a specific grading method (Açıköz, 1992).

In cooperative learning method, the realization of individual objectives is dependent on the overall success of the group. Therefore, the ones who want to be successful are forced to help other group members. Wilkinson (1994) states that cooperative learning enables fast learners to help respectively slow learners in terms of improving their skills. In other words, every learner struggles to develop both themselves and other group members because they are aware of the fact that the success of the group depends on the performance of each individual.

According to cooperative learning, group is a whole entity and all the members are responsible for the success or the failure of the group. As Senemoğlu (1998) quotes from Webb, Deering, and Melath, a group goal encourages learners to make an explanation in order to help their learning; to teach them learning strategies; and to communicate actively based on a theme, whereas it motivates low-level learners to ask for help. In cooperative learning groups, even though the success of the group is the focus, it should be noted that it is also based on individual performance of the learners.

## 1.2. Cooperative Learning Techniques

Within the framework of its basic principles, several cooperative learning techniques have been developed. Of all these, the most widely exploited techniques are presented below (Açıköz, 2007):

1. Learning Together
2. Academic Conflicts
3. Learners Teams
  - a. Learners Teams- Achievement Divisions
  - b. Team-Game-Tournament

- c. Team Pair Solo
- d. Cooperative Reading and Writing
- 4. Group Research
- 5. Co-op
- 6. Jigsaw I
- 7. Discovery
- 8. Jigsaw II
- 9. Ask Together - Learn Together

The learning techniques to be used in classroom environment need to be chosen considering lesson objectives, subject, learners' achievement levels, their skills and available amenities. If teachers and learners are not experienced in using cooperative learning techniques, they had better choose more well-structured techniques (Slavin, 1980; Yıldız, 1999).

In this study, of all those cooperative learning techniques, "Ask Together - Learn Together" is used because this technique consists of instructional tasks which help the development and evaluation of comprehension skills.

### 1.2.1. Technique of Ask Together - Learn Together

This technique has been developed by Açıkgöz (1990). According to Açıkgöz (1992), it is based on the principle of sheer cooperation among learners and it does not give the opportunity to do nothing. This technique gives utmost importance to positive interdependence within group, individual accountability, group processing, reward, and face-to-face promotive interaction.

In Ask Together - Learn Together Technique, the following materials could be exploited:

*Reading Texts:* Some excerpts or sections taken from books, stories or notes prepared by the teacher can be used as reading materials.

*Question-Response Cards:* These are the cards on which the questions and responses of the group and individuals might be written and its size might vary depending on the activity.

*Theme Sheets:* This is a paper on which important points to be considered during reading are listed.

*Group Presentation Evaluation Forms:* It is developed by the teacher to evaluate group presentations in terms of content and organization.

*Examination:* It consists of multiple choice or short-response questions which are about the subject. It must not exceed 10-15 minutes.

The following are the suggested steps to be followed while carried out the Technique of Ask Together - Learn Together:

1. *Organizing groups:* Groups ideally should consist of 3-4 learners. It is important to organize groups heterogeneously based on their skills, level of achievement, gender, and their socio-economic status. Finding a name for each group has a positive effect on motivating learners and attracting their attention into the lesson.

2. *Reading:* Each learner reads the related text or section individually and silently. The teacher might inform the learners about the important points to be considered during reading or the themes.

3. *Preparation of Learner Questions:* It is the step at which learners are expected to prepare questions about the reading or the themes. They write the questions on a card. The teacher grades each questions based on their level and accuracy, which is necessary to monitor the performance of each learner.

4. *Preparation of Group Questions:* Having prepared individual questions, members come together to prepare the group question. Learners are expected to explain the positive and negative aspects of each question to one another rather than tagging them as bad or good. In order to make sure learners' participation, learners are given roles in turns such as recorder, postman, reporter, debate leader, and invigilators or monitors.

5. *Sending Group Questions:* The question prepared by the group is written on a card and sent to another group chosen randomly by a student with the role of a postman.

6. *Responding to Group Questions:* This is another step requiring the cooperation of group members. The fact that each group has only one question card is necessary due to positive interdependence.

7. *Presenting Responses to the Class:* By means of spokespeople that they have chosen, the groups present their response to the question they have to the whole class. In order to guarantee the learning of everyone in the group, the spokespeople can also be chosen by the teacher rather than the group members.

8. *Evaluating Group Presentations:* The performance of the spokesperson is evaluated by the teacher or other students. The teacher might give a form for this; and after the evaluation process, a point is given to the spokesperson and the group.

9. *Whole-class Discussion:* After the groups have completed their presentation, the teacher can start a discussion by summarizing the subject. During this discussion, it is aimed to clarify the points that could not be focused on and not understood completely.

10. *Testing:* After the session is completed, all students take an exam individually. The points gathered from the exam and their presentations are summed up and a group point is measured. By comparing group points to previously defined criteria and a scale, groups are given rewards which are also decided in advance such as “very good”, ”good”, ”not bad”.

**2. METHOD**

**2.1. Design of the Study**

In the present study, experimental research model consisting of pre-test, post-test with a control group was applied. Experimental group was taught through Ask Together - Learn Together, whereas control group was taught through traditional teaching methods which involve lecturing and question-response.

The experimental research model is shown on Table-1:

Table 1: Experimental Research Model

| Groups             | Pre-test                               | Experiments          | Post-test                              |
|--------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| Experimental Group | Reading Comprehension Achievement Test | Cooperative Learning | Reading Comprehension Achievement Test |
| Control Group      |  | Traditional Teaching |  |

**2.2. Participants**

The study was carried out at Istanbul University Language Center and subjects were chosen from the learners who study Turkish as a foreign language in Turkey. For this study, a total of 40 students who learn Turkish at B1 level according to Common European Framework, and 20 of the subjects were in experimental group, while 20 students were in the control group.

**2.3. Data Collection Instruments and Analysis of the Results**

The data of the study were gathered through “Reading Comprehension Achievement Test” which had been developed by the researchers. Firstly, during an 8-week period until the experimental tasks were finished the objectives and skills which had been aimed to be taught were identified and a comprehension test was developed in order to test the level of achievement. The KR coefficient of the test was calculated as .7984. In this test composed of 24 multiple choice questions, there are 6 texts 2 of which are informative; and there are also 3 stories and a poem among these texts.

The data of the study were analyzed through software package SPSS 11.00 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). In order to understand the efficiency of cooperative learning method, pre- and post-test results were compared and t-test scores were analyzed to see whether the differences were significant or not.

**3. Findings and Discussion**

In order to analyze the effects of cooperative learning method and traditional teaching methods on reading comprehension skills and achievements of the students learning Turkish as a foreign language, first Reading Comprehension Achievement Test were carried out both in experimental and control groups and then the differences were compared.

Tablo 2: A Comparison of Reading Comprehension Achievement Pre-test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

| Group      | N  | $\bar{x}$ | Ss   | Sd | t    | P    |
|------------|----|-----------|------|----|------|------|
| Experiment | 20 | 14,15     | 4,46 | 34 | 0.59 | 0.55 |
| Control    | 20 | 13,97     | 4,44 |    |      |      |

p>.05 (insignificant)

When the mean scores of experimental and control groups (the mean score for the experimental group is 14.15; the mean score for the control group is 13.97), are compared, it can be seen that these scores are very close to each other, and the facts that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of these groups shows that groups were at a similar level of achievement at the beginning.

In order to analyze the effects of cooperative learning method on reading comprehension skills and achievements of the students learning Turkish as a foreign language, according to the Reading Comprehension Achievement Post-Test results of cooperative learning and traditional teaching method groups, their means scores, standard deviation scores were calculated and t-test was conducted.

Tablo 3: A Comparison of Reading Comprehension Achievement Post-test Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

| Group      | N  | $\bar{x}$ | Ss   | Sd | t    | p    |
|------------|----|-----------|------|----|------|------|
| Experiment | 20 | 20,46     | 4,28 | 34 | 2.41 | 0.02 |
| Control    | 20 | 15,27     | 3,88 |    |      |      |

$p > .05$  (insignificant)

Table 3 shows the difference between reading comprehension achievement post-test scores of experimental and control groups. The mean score of the experimental group is 20, 46, whereas the mean score of the control group is higher than 15, 27. As a results of the statistical 2-tailed t-test results, p value is lower than .05 and the t score is 2, 41. The results show that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups and it was observed that cooperative learning method applied in experimental group has a higher effect on reading comprehension skills when compared with the effects of traditional teaching methods.

Tablo 4: A Comparison of Pre and Post-test results of Reading Comprehension Achievement Test Scores of Cooperative Learning Group

| Experiment Group | N  | $\bar{x}$ | Ss   | Sd | t    | p    |
|------------------|----|-----------|------|----|------|------|
| Pre-test         | 20 | 14,15     | 4,46 | 18 | 4.42 | 0.01 |
| Post-test        | 20 | 20,46     | 3,28 |    |      |      |

$p > .05$  (insignificant)

Table 4 shows that the mean scores of post-test results (20, 46) of cooperative learning group is higher than their pre-test scores (14, 15). In order to analyze the significance of the difference statistically, t-test was carried out and it shows that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of pre-test results of the cooperative learning group when it is compared with their reading comprehension achievement post-test scores. ( $sd=18$ ,  $t$ -test=4,42,  $p < .05$ ).

Tablo 5: A Comparison of Pre and Post-test Results of Reading Comprehension Achievement Test Scores of Traditional Teaching Group

| Control Group | N  | $\bar{x}$ | Ss   | Sd | t    | p    |
|---------------|----|-----------|------|----|------|------|
| Pre-test      | 20 | 13,97     | 4,44 | 17 | 1.18 | 0.16 |
| Post-test     | 20 | 15,27     | 3,88 |    |      |      |

Table 5 shows that the mean scores of post-test results (15, 27) of traditional teaching group is higher than their pre-test scores (13, 97). In order to analyze the significance of the difference statistically, t-test was carried out and it shows that there is no significant difference.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Considering the results of the present study, it is obvious that cooperative learning is more effective in improving reading comprehension skills of learners who study Turkish as a foreign language when compared with traditional teaching methods. This finding of the present study support the findings of various other studies carried out through reading comprehension and cooperative learning both nationally and internationally (Adams, 1995; Ghaith, 2003; Güngör and Açıkgöz, 2005; Stevens, 2003). Moreover, the students expressed that they had fun during experimental studies; they did not get bored since they were active during almost the whole lesson, and finally they got to know their classmates more thanks to these activities.

Since reading is a multidimensional process covering various aspects such as communication, perception and cognitive, affective and kinesthetic process (Sever, 1995), carrying out reading comprehension activities through cooperative learning strategies has helped the process to be experienced more actively.

As a consequence, following suggestions can be made:

1. In this study, as one of the cooperative learning techniques, Ask Together - Learn Together technique was used. In parallel to lesson objectives, further research could be done to analyze the effect of other cooperative learning techniques on teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

2. Cooperative learning techniques could be benefited not only in terms of reading comprehension skills but also in respect to developing other language skills such as grammar, writing, and speaking.

3. Since studies covering a short period of time is restrictive and misleading, further studies covering a longer period of time could be carried out in respect to the effectiveness of cooperative learning model.

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