



USE OF GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

To exercise using the target language, users must engage in interactive activities that enable them to exchange ideas with one another. The study concentrated on the effective use of group work activities as a teaching strategy in English instruction. This study included two sections of Grade 8 junior high school students from Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental. Comparing the level of difference in pre- and post-test performance between students exposed to group work activities (the experimental group) and those who were not (the control group), a quasi-experimental design was used. Both groups received the same eight (8) learning competencies in a one-month period. In this study, descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, such as the Z-test, were used to determine whether a significant difference was found between the means of the two groups. The findings revealed that group work activities or cooperative learning as an intervention and learning approach for students were effective in improving learning, and the data demonstrating their positive attitudes toward its use in classes illustrated their interest in interaction among their classmates while engaging in language use. As a result, English teachers are encouraged to use cooperative learning to engage students while they authentically communicate in the language.

Keywords: group work activities, cooperative learning, attitudes, junior high

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1. Introduction

Despite the established effectiveness of direct instruction (DI) in research and in practice among teachers, time constraints, student engagement, and affective filter levels are just a few of the difficulties that teachers and students encounter during the teaching and learning process. Although DI is structured with lesson plans where time is also a key factor for consideration (Ashman, 2021), the aim of targeting the participation of all the students in a class session has become a stumbling block for almost all teachers. Many students are still hesitant or lack the confidence to participate in class, and most of the time, the teacher has to wait for their answers or participation for a long time especially in speaking. That would, in effect, consume the allotted time for the entire class. There is a rising need for more successful, innovative, and efficient methods of learning foreign languages. There is a growing interest in innovative ideas for learning a language in a participatory and collaborative environment (Namaziandost et al., 2020). To maximize the time of the class, teaching strategies such as group work can be employed to better facilitate teaching and learning in the classroom. Group work can be used in classroom activities to boost student engagement and lessen apprehension about speaking in front of the entire class.

According to Gillies (2016), cooperative learning (CL) entails the creation of groups that enable students to collaborate to motivate learning. It is based on the social interdependence theory (Johnson et al., 2014). In the group work strategy of instruction, small groups of students, whose performance levels vary, are created for collaboration in order for them to accomplish a common goal. The achievement of one member is an achievement of all members because learners assume accountability for their own learning as well as that of the others in the group (Badache, 2011). Students who collaborate with one another develop deeper levels of learning, higher standards of reasoning, and more precise long-term memory (Bukunola & Idowu, 2012). It is generally thought that language is better acquired when students collaborate in groups to complete tasks, study material, or address problems from real life with the exception of situations that require the need for emphasis on language structure (Alipour & Barjesteh, 2017; Alrayah, 2018).

Considering that the researcher is a language teacher, the social element of language remains an important reality that needs to be emphasized and should be considered when designing learning plans. Due to its significance, language teachers cannot disregard this social component of language use. Since language is social in nature, communication happens when members of a society share the arbitrary rules of the language. As authentic communication requires interacting with other people, working in groups is a simulation of real-world circumstances. They can also have a small taste of reality in their lessons through engagement in language play with their peers such as bargaining, taking turns, making suggestions, and coming to a decision, which demonstrates what they have learned (Ramirez, 2005). Indeed, meaningful learning comes from interaction (Hall & Verplaetse, 2014).

The researcher is inspired to conduct this study to determine the attitudes and performance of Grade 8 Junior High School students in the municipality of Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, in group work activities. In particular, this study attempts to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and treatment groups on the pre-and post-tests following a month's worth of English lessons. Then, the students' attitudes toward group work activities were determined through the conduct of a survey using an attitudinal questionnaire.

2. Statement of the Problem

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of junior high school students' performance and attitudes when learning with group work activities during English classes.

The present study answered the following questions:

- 1) What is the performance of the respondents before and after group work activities in class?
- 2) Is there a significant difference between the student's performance levels of the control and the experimental groups?
- 3) What are the attitudes of the Junior High School students in group work activities?

3. Methodology

In this study, a quasi-experimental design was used to compare the degree of performance level variation of pre-and post-tests between students who were exposed to group work activities (the experimental group) and those who were not exposed to group work activities (the control group). A purposive sampling design was used in the selection of participants in the study. There are three sections in the Grade 8 level and this study focused on the two sections with 45 students each. Both groups underwent the same eight (8) learning competencies taught.

Quasi-experimental designs choose a comparison group whose baseline (pre-intervention) characteristics are as similar to the treatment group as is reasonably possible. The comparison group depicts the results that would have occurred if the program or policy had not been put into place. The programs or practice can therefore be held responsible for any variations in outcomes between the treatment and comparison groups (White & Sabarwal, 2014). This study focused on students who attended classrooms that had previously been set up. The quasi-experimental design was thus a practical choice to take into account.

In the lesson plan, the intervention (group work activities) served as the evaluation part for the treatment group, and it followed the formal cooperative learning type based on Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec's (1998) theory. Formal cooperative learning, which is structured, facilitated, and continuously observed by the teacher, is used to accomplish group task-work goals. This form of learning can be used for any course topic or task,

and groups can range in size from 2 to 6 people. In these groups, students learn about and apply the various cooperative working methods and it followed the five main factors that set CL apart from merely putting students in groups to learn; namely, “*positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, interpersonal and social skills, and group processing*” (Johnson et al., 2009). In the study, the experimental class was divided into nine (9) groups with five members each. They undertook eight (8) group work activities for a span of one month (2 group work activities per week, and each took up to 15 minutes in a 60-minute class).

After the intervention was conducted to the treatment group, a survey was distributed to gather data on their attitudes toward group work.

In contrast, the control group followed the conventional style of explicit teaching method known as a direct instruction to teach the lessons to the student participants. Teachers convey knowledge to students using direct instruction, a method of instruction that is particularly structured. Using this strategy, the teacher has considerable control over the instruction of the students. He/she develops the objectives of the lesson, explains the content that will be covered, and evaluates students' learning based on their ability to duplicate or recall particular facts or competencies (Johnson, 2015). It follows the eight (8) direct instruction components described by Johnson (2015): Clearly defined objectives—these are indicated in the lesson plans for the eight competencies; Orientation—students are informed of the learning goals of the day or the preliminaries of the lesson at the start of the class; Well-organized, sequentially planned lessons—learning plans are made; Input—the teaching of the competencies; Guided Practice; Questions/Probing—formative assessments such as answering worksheets and quizzes; Independent Practice—giving of assignments and worksheets at home as reinforcement; Revisit, review, and reapply of the lessons in the succeeding class meetings. Finally, it is noted that there were no cooperative learning activities or group work activities conducted in this group.

3.1 Implementation

The intervention, group work activities, were conducted in a span of a month. These are team presentations (2 activities), think-pair-share (1 activity), role-playing (3 activities), and jigsaw (2 activities). Two (2) group work activities were conducted every week. Each group work activity took up to 15 minutes in a 60-minute class. It was treated as the evaluative part of the teaching-learning process. There were eight (8) group work activities implemented for eight learning competencies, which were based on the K–12 English Curriculum Guide May 2016 implemented by the Department of Education, Philippines (DepEd); namely, “*EN8V-IIa-24.1: Distinguish between and among verbal, situational, and dramatic types of irony and give examples of each; EN8V-IIb-24.1: Distinguish between and among verbal, situational, and dramatic types of irony and give examples of each; EN8V-IIc-24.1: Distinguish between and among verbal, situational, and dramatic types of irony and give examples of each; EN8V-IIf10.1.4: Identify figures of speech that show emphasis (hyperbole and litotes); EN8V-IIg10.1.4: Identify figures of speech that show emphasis (hyperbole and litotes); EN8V-IIe-*

24: *Discriminate between literal and figurative language: Simile; EN8V-III-24: Discriminate between literal and figurative language: Metaphor; EN8G-III-9: Use appropriate grammatical signals or expressions suitable to each pattern of idea development: • general to particular • claim and counterclaim • problem-solution • cause-effect • and others.*"

3.2 Instrument

Two instruments that were tested for validity and reliability were used in the study. For validity, content validation was conducted. The degree to which a measuring tool accurately captures the construct being assessed is known as content validity. It is seen as crucial proof of the tool's validity, such as a questionnaire (Yusoff, 2019). Three experts reviewed the instruments for accuracy and relevance. For reliability, internal consistency is measured. If the Alpha (α) value is larger than .70, a survey questionnaire set is considered credible (Hair et al., 2013). Survey reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The software Statistical Package for Social Science was used to compute the data results to verify their reliability (SPSS). The reliability analysis revealed that the attitudinal questionnaire had a reliability value of $\alpha=.828$, while the pre-and post-test yielded a reliability coefficient of $\alpha=.807$. Both instruments are found to be reliable.

The pre-and post-tests are researcher-made instruments, and the attitudinal questionnaire is adapted from Chan and Pheng (2018) about group work activities. The following instruments are utilized to assess the level of performance of both groups and their attitudes towards group work activities.

a. Pre- and Post-Test

The test has 40 items. It evaluates answers to questions that assess understanding of the learning competencies taught to the students. There are five (5) items per learning competency. The pre-test was jointly distributed to the groups on the first day of the study before the intervention is employed in the treatment group. After the administration of the intervention, post-tests were conducted with both groups. Moreover, a range was used to assign the equivalent achievement levels to the scores obtained by the students: 33-40 (Outstanding), 25-32 (Very Satisfactory), 17-24 (Satisfactory), 9-16 (Unsatisfactory), and 0-8 (Failed /Needs Improvement).

b. Questionnaire

The attitudinal questionnaire is adapted from Chan and Pheng's (2018) research, "University Students' Attitudes Towards Group Work." It consists of a student profile and 10 objective items on a five-point Likert scale that primarily target the students' attitudes toward group work activities from the treatment group. It was administered after the intervention and post-test.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 On the Performance of the Respondents before and after Group Work Activities in Class

The table below details the data on the students' performance levels in the control and experimental groups as they took the pre-test for the learning abilities that the teacher had previously discussed.

Table 1: English Competency Test of Students
 in the Pretest Both the Control and Experimental Groups

Control Group Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage	Experimental Group Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage
Outstanding	0	0.00%	Outstanding	0	0.00%
Very Satisfactory	6	13.33%	Very Satisfactory	4	8.89%
Satisfactory	22	48.89%	Satisfactory	25	55.56%
Unsatisfactory	17	37.78%	Unsatisfactory	15	33.33%
Failed /Needs Improvement	0	0.00%	Failed /Needs Improvement	1	2.22%
Total	45	100.00%	Total	45	100.00%
Mean	18.91		Mean	18.24	
Standard Deviation	5.07		Standard Deviation	4.98	
Interpretation	Satisfactory		Interpretation	Satisfactory	

Legend: (Scoring Procedure) 33-40 (Outstanding), 25-32 (Very Satisfactory), 17-24 (Satisfactory), 9-16 (Unsatisfactory), and 0-8 (Failed /Needs Improvement)

It shows that, as to the Control Group pre-test scores, ($\bar{x} = 18.91$, $SD = 5.07$), is slightly above the Experimental pre-test scores, ($\bar{x} = 18.24$, $SD = 4.9$). This implies that most of the students in the Control Group scored slightly above the Experimental group scores in the pretest. Thus, students in the control group performed a little better than those in the experimental group in the pretest. The data also shows that the students in both groups have a satisfactory interpretation of their scores, which further illustrates the finding that they already have some background knowledge of the competencies that were taught after the diagnostic test. This is explained by the spiral-progressive strategy used in the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines (R.A. 10533, 2013) where spiraling through grade levels, subjects are taught from the most basic concepts to the most complex. There is an emphasis on the "*smooth transition between grade levels and continuum of competencies*," which contributes to the curriculum's seamless nature (SEAMEO-INNOTECH, 2012).

The following data reveals the performance level of the students in the control and experimental groups as they took the post-test of the learning competencies. The intervention was applied to the experimental group using group work activities.

Table 2: English Competency Test of Students in the Post-Test of Both the Control and Experimental Groups

Control Group Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage	Experimental Group Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage
Outstanding	14	31.11%	Outstanding	15	33.33%
Very Satisfactory	16	35.56%	Very Satisfactory	28	62.22%
Satisfactory	12	26.66%	Satisfactory	2	4.45%
Unsatisfactory	3	6.67%	Unsatisfactory	0	0.00%
Failed /Needs Improvement	0	0.00%	Failed /Needs Improvement	0	0.00%
Total	45	100.00%	Total	45	100.00%
Mean	27.49		Mean	30.58	
Standard Deviation	6.61		Standard Deviation	3.86	
Interpretation	Very Satisfactory		Interpretation	Very Satisfactory	

Legend: (Scoring Procedure) 33-40(Outstanding), 25-32 (Very Satisfactory), 17-24 (Satisfactory), 9-16 (Unsatisfactory), and 0-8 (Failed /Needs Improvement)

It shows that the Control Group post-test scores ($\bar{x} = 27.49$, $SD = 6.61$) are slightly below the Experimental post-test scores ($\bar{x} = 30.58$, $SD = 3.86$). Given the wide range of ratings, the data shows that the Experimental Group performed better than the Control Group. On the post-test, students in the Experimental Group outperformed those in the Control Group by a little margin. Students in the experimental group did marginally better than those in the control group on the post-test. The findings also show that both groups have "Very Satisfactory" performance with and without the intervention. This means that the teaching of the teacher is found to be effective using the DI approach, however, incorporating group work activities as illustrated in the Experimental Group yielded a higher level of performance among students. Thus, this indicates that teaching with group work activities as evaluation is more effective than teaching alone with no cooperative learning activities.

4.2 Pre- and Post-test Differences between the Experimental Group's and Control Group's Performance Levels

The following table shows the mean and standard deviation of the performance of the control group.

Table 3: Difference of the English Performance of Control Group

Variable	N	Mean (X)	SD	z-computed	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Pretest	45	18.91	5.07	6.909	<.0001	Reject H ₀	Significant
Post Test	45	27.49	6.61				

Using an alpha level of .05, a paired sample z-test shows that the mean difference, 8.58, is statistically significant, and the z-computed value of 6.909, $p < 0.0001$, is greater than the z-critical value, so the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that the post-test score

in the Control Group is much greater than the pre-test score. This result shows that the competencies taught by the teacher over the course of the month were recalled by the students as evidenced by the results of their scores, despite the absence of group work activities performed as reinforcement or evaluation. It is found that direct instruction was found to be effective, which is consistent with Stockard (2018) Meta-analysis of direct instruction research.

The next table indicates the mean and standard deviation of the experimental group's performance.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of the English Performance of Experimental Group

Variable	N	Mean (X)	SD	z-computed	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Pretest	45	18.24	4.98	13.138	<.0001	Reject H ₀	Significant
Post Test	45	30.58	3.86				

Using an alpha level of .05, a paired sample z-test shows that the mean difference, 12.34, is statistically significant, and the z-computed value of 13.138, $p < 0.0001$, is greater than the z-critical value, so the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that compared to the pre-test results, the post-test score is much greater. This further implies that the student's academic performance improved after the intervention. Group work activities are effective in reinforcing the acquisition of the competencies taught in the class. The results demonstrate agreement with the findings of Odehova et al. (2022) and Keskin (2011) whose research confirms the positive effects of cooperative learning on students' grammar and reading comprehension abilities.

The following table depicts the differences of the performances of the treatment and control groups.

Table 5: Comparison for post-test in both Control and Experimental Groups

Variable	N	Mean (X)	SD	z-computed	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Control Group	45	27.49	6.61	2.707	0.007	Reject H ₀	Significant
Experimental Group	45	30.58	3.86				

A paired sample z-test with an alpha level of .05 reveals that the mean difference is statistically significant at 3.09, and the z-computed value of 2.707, $p = 0.007$, is greater than the z-critical value, rejecting the null hypothesis. This means that the Experimental Group's post-test score was substantially greater than the Control Group's. This further suggests that the performance levels of the control and treatment groups differ significantly. Group work activities as reinforcement can better enhance the performance of the students.

Overall, the statistics in the tables demonstrate a considerable performance gap between the treatment group and control group. The findings imply that utilizing group work activities as reinforcement or evaluation of the lesson is effective and it enables the

students to perform better and thus learn and acquire the competencies taught. This coincides with the studies of Odehova et al. (2022) and Keskin, (2011) whose findings yielded favorable results on the use of group work activities or cooperative learning in the classroom.

Table 6: Analysis of Covariance for Post-test by Groups with Pretest as Covariate

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Post Test						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pretest	858.299	1	858.299	43.365	.000	.333
Groups	274.869	1	274.869	13.888	.000	.138
Error	1721.923	87	19.792			
Corrected Total	2794.900	89				

a. R Squared = .384 (Adjusted R Squared = .370)

The one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was done to see if there was any statistically significant difference between the students who were taught using traditional teaching or Direct Instruction and those who had participated in group work activities. The posttest assessment's one-way ANCOVA showed a significant impact [$F(1, 87) = 13.888, p 0.0001$], demonstrating that the groups are comparable. Hence, there is significant difference between control and experimental groups. Also the covariate, pretest, was significantly related to students post test scores $F(1, 87) = 43.365, p < 0.0001$. This coincides with the study of Ning and Hornby (2010) and Yang (2005) that yielded favorable results on the effectiveness of the use of group work activities or cooperative learning in the classroom. The results further illustrated the benefit of improving the performance of the students through the utilization of group work activities as reinforcement or evaluation of their learning.

4.3 Attitudes of the Junior High School Students in Group Work Activities

As data from the questionnaires respondents completed were evaluated, attitudes about group work were found to be both favorable and negative. The following questionnaire used the five-point Likert scale in its data gathering and used the range adapted from Eski et al. (2020).

Table 7: Experimental: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Attitudes towards Group Work Activities

Questions		Experimental Group Attitudinal Questionnaire		
		Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	I enjoy working with other people.	3.71	0.968	Somewhat Favorable
2	I am more productive when working in a group.	3.42	1.011	Somewhat Favorable
3	I can share my opinions, knowledge, and skills without being judged.	3.36	1.004	Indifferent
4	It helps me identify my strengths and weaknesses.	3.67	0.769	Somewhat Favorable
5	Group work will help me get prepared for my future career. (teamwork, for example)	3.56	1.159	Somewhat Favorable
6	Group work slows down the whole process and produces low-quality works.	2.67	1.187	Indifferent
7	I spend less effort when working in a group.	3.36	1.048	Indifferent
8	Different ideas cause resentment and conflicts within the group.	2.78	1.064	Indifferent
9	It is time-consuming in decision-making.	3.49	0.968	Somewhat Favorable
10	Group works make it easier for the free rider (irresponsible members).	3.58	1.357	Somewhat Favorable
Overall X		Indifferent	3.36	Indifferent
Standard Deviation		1.106		

Legend: Ranges for 5-point scale options for item: (Score code, Range, Description) 1, 1.00–1.80, Very Unfavorable; 2, 1.81–2.60, Somewhat Unfavorable; 3, 2.61–3.40, Indifferent; 4, 3.41–4.20, Somewhat Favorable; 5, 4.21–5.00, Very favorable.

The attitudes of the experimental group about group work activities in classes are displayed in the table above. The remarks about group work activities are broken down into positive statements (items 1-5) and negative statements (items 6-10). Very Unfavorable (1.00-1.80), Somewhat Unfavorable (1.81-2.60), Indifferent (2.61-3.40), Somewhat Favorable (3.41-4.20), and Very Favorable are the ratings used to categorize survey results (4.21–5.00).

The average results for the three sets of attitudinal statements are shown in the experimental group data and may be grouped into following categories: the high group that has a mean of over 4.0; the moderate group that has a mean between 2.5 and 3.99; and the average group with a mean below 2.5). The data don't contain any high groups. The responders in the moderate group demonstrated a moderate degree of advantage from their participation in the group work. The respondents agreed with the statements, "I enjoy working with other people" (\bar{X} = 3.71; SD = 0.968) and "It helps me identify my strengths and weaknesses" (\bar{X} = 3.67; SD = 0.769). Both are interpreted as "Somewhat

Favorable". However, it is also recognized that there are negative attitudes about group work activities, such as "Group work makes it easier for the free riders (irresponsible members)" with a mean score of 3.58, a standard deviation of 1.357, and an interpretation of "Somewhat Favorable." Overall, these results indicate that respondents from the experimental group have positive attitudes toward group work but also have negative attitudes toward it, particularly toward free riders. Remarkably, none of the statements obtained a mean value lower than 2.5 (for the average group). This further reveals that all of the respondents concurred with the statements.

The results after the intervention demonstrate that the experimental group outperformed the control group. This suggests that the intervention helps the students better understand the competencies taught and reinforced through group work activities rather than just having direct instruction alone. However, the higher performance of the treatment group does not mean that the control group had no significant improvement of its performance as data revealed that DI also resulted in an improvement of performance. Therefore, incorporation of the group work activities in a DI approach of teaching produces better results in student performance. Additionally, data show that students from the experimental group have generally positive attitudes toward cooperative learning, but it also reveals the major concern of "free riders." Consequently, to properly assign group work assignments in an ESL classroom, educators need to keep careful tabs on the students and ensure that there is no irresponsible behavior within the team. To help the teacher immediately spot the free riders, students should be obliged to specify their obligations (Chan & Peng, 2018).

5. Recommendations

The following suggestions are made in light of the findings and conclusion within the context of this study:

a. Teachers

The study's findings may be used by teachers, especially language teachers, as a student-centered approach to teaching the language. To inspire students to engage more in class and improve their academic achievement, teachers are encouraged to be creative in their lesson discussions, such as through the utilization of group work activities.

b. Students

Students are exposed to the use of cooperative learning as a method of learning the language and developing their learning habits by interacting with their classmates. They are encouraged to take into consideration the benefits of employing group work activities as an effective means of improving their academic success, learning and acquiring language skills, and building relationships with one another. This also extends to other disciplines.

c. School Principals

For teachers to learn how to incorporate group work activities into class discussions, school principals may offer training seminars and workshops.

d. Future Researchers

Researchers in the areas of teaching and learning may use the findings of this study to link another future research.

6. Conclusion

The Direct Instruction approach to teaching to both groups was found to be effective in this study, as the Control Group showed improvement in test scores; however, having this teaching approach incorporated with group work activities or cooperative learning in the evaluation part of the Experimental Group students' learning shows a better English language performance, as indicated in the results. This demonstrated that DI is still effective, but that the use of group work activities on students in the Experimental Group produced greater performance. Furthermore, the data demonstrating their positive attitudes toward its use in class showed their interest in interaction with their classmates as they engaged in language use. Teachers, particularly language teachers, must understand its significance and benefits. As evidence suggests that group work is a successful strategy for implementation in the classroom, incorporating group work activities alongside class discussion is found to be beneficial in this study, and it encourages academic success, student involvement, and learning motivation. Furthermore, it was discovered in this study that having only five members per group is beneficial for engagement, as the data show evidence of improvement in the treatment group.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have declared no conflicts of interest. All co-authors have read and approved the manuscript, and there are no financial conflicts to disclose. We certify that the submission is unique and is not currently under consideration by another publication.

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