

Diala University
College of Teachers

**THE EFFECT OF USING GROUP
WORK IN TEACHING ORAL
PRACTICE ON THE ACHIEVEMENT
OF PREPARATORY SCHOOL
STUDENTS**

*A Thesis Submitted to
the Council of the College of Teachers, Diala University
in partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Education
In Methods of Teaching English as
a Foreign Language*

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1423 H

2003 A.D

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 The Problem and its Significance

Teaching is the process by means of which learning is expected to take place. Brown (1980:8) states that teaching is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling learners to learn and setting the conditions for learning.

Shulman (1987:26) believes that teaching necessarily begins with a teacher's understanding of what is to be learned and how it is to be taught. It proceeds through a series of activities during which the students are provided with specific instructions and opportunities for learning.

Since language is a means of communication, the aim of LT is to train students for developing communication efficiency. Whereas the grammatical patterns play a crucial role in communication, the prim need of most students is the ability to understand and to be understood in that language within the context (Canale, 1980: 2).

Most foreign language teachers want their students at the center of communication. Savignon (1983:65) demonstrates that “communicative competence is acquired through communication”, and communication in the foreign language is “the single greatest challenge in the profession”.

Nowadays a new goal has been set around the world, that is, to develop the students' communicative competence. The

idea is no longer more linguistic correctness, but the development of communicative and linguistic abilities of learners. Larsen Freeman (1986:131) states that communicative competence involves being able to use the language appropriate to a given social context; to do this, students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings and functions.

They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from among these the most appropriate form that needs social context, and must also be able to merge the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors.

Harmer (1983:33) asserts that in order to enable students acquire the communicative efficiency, they must be helped to learn items of the language that they study side by side with a great deal of language use in communicative situations. In other words, students should be given practice not only in the structures of the language but also in the process of using them in real daily situations.

In the NECI, teaching structures of English language is introduced through the oral practice which aims at introducing all the new words and grammatical points in the program (AL-Hamash and younis, 1985:120).

The current classroom procedures in teaching oral practice exercises as indicated in the Teacher's Guide are:

1. Presentation involves listening to the teacher's presentation and/or explanation.
2. Practice, involves repetition and drilling.
3. Production involves choral-individual performance under the guidance of the teacher, which enables the students to exhibit mastery of the material on their own.

From the researcher's point of view, this method does not achieve the anticipated improvement in the students general command of the language, since students are not given a chance to use the patterns in spontaneous conversation and out of the drills.

To support this idea, Dyrne (1967:2) believes that no real learning can be assumed to have taken place until the students are able to use the language for themselves. Thus, the study suggests using the group work as one of the techniques used by the teacher in the light of modern trends of teaching English as foreign language.

It has been demonstrated that this technique allows for physical activity, i.e. to break the routine of sitting in the same place throughout the whole class period. Another advantage is that students always know that they are moving into groups, which will be congenial.

Using group work technique, teachers should have no difficulties in finding enough procedures in teaching the activities; the important point is that the group should be small and each group member has frequent opportunities of taking part in the exchange.

Larsen Freeman (1986:105) states that there are different activities that could occur with students working in a small group. Teachers who use small group activities believe that students can learn from each other and can get more practice with the foreign language. Moreover, small groups allow students to know each other freely and carefully. This can lead to the development of a community among class members.

A Group work technique is intended to improve students learning through providing them with opportunities to ask questions and communicating with each other. In this respect, Gray (2000:1) believes that a group work is an effective activity for teaching English as a foreign language; even those students who have no prior experience with this type of task in the classroom can quickly learn to use it.

Furthermore, objectively, there is one major advantage of using group work in language teaching, that is the opportunity for practice. Group work allows students to full use of language that they have learned, participating in the communicative process throughout the group work; with practice progress, with

progress comes motivation, and with motivation comes more learning.

Dickinson (1981:382) states that motivating student and creating an atmosphere of enjoyment and interest are the most important elements in teaching a foreign language by a group work technique. Students should be given practice not only in the forms of language but also in the process of using it in real situations.

Alexander et al. (1992), in their discussion paper on curriculum organization and classroom practice in primary schools, note that the practice of organizing the class into group is common in all schools. Teaching group pupils can be achieved by various ways: by comparable ability, by mixed ability, by friendship, by gender, and randomly. Some use groups for some of the time; others for all the time; some maintain the same groupings whereas others vary the group according to the task or subject.

In teaching oral practice, the students should be given practice of language in real communicative situations; without these situations, the students may be still unable to use language effectively in speech.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, it has been found that there is no study that has been carried out in our country to investigate the effective role of using a group work technique in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, therefore, the present study is an attempt to shed light on the effect of a new technique in teaching oral practice.

The significance of the present study stems from the effective role of using a group technique in teaching English as a foreign language and the importance of the oral practice as the major activity in NECI.

The study is expected to shed light on some EFL student problems in using oral practice particularly those concerned with the use of oral strategies and the employment of the logical group work in developing oral practice. In addition, it will outline those difficulties related to oral practice and the performance of the students.

The findings are expected to be useful for pedagogical implications, particularly in relation to the students' ability to produce four skills. This involves a reconsideration of some classroom practices and modification of existing teaching materials.

The study is also open for additional extension and re-examination. Accordingly, it is hoped that the findings will motivate some further relevant research in the area of EFL oral practice performance and production.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The present study aims at :

1. investigating empirically the effect of using group work in teaching oral practice on the achievement of Preparatory School Students ,

2. discovering the extent of awareness of the concept of oral practice among those students ,
3. specifying through analysis of students' written and oral responses the sources of the problems that they encounter in oral practice and that are responsible for producing poorly organized and ineffective sentences , and
4. outlining some pedagogical implications that are useful for teachers, learners , and textbook designers to overcome students' problems in oral practice and other oral activities when they learn English as a foreign language .

1.3 Hypotheses

The study is hypothesized that there are no significant differences between the mean scores of the achievement of the students who are taught by using group work and those who are taught according to the Audio- Lingual method as suggested in teacher's Guide on:

- 1- The written test used;
- 2- The oral test used; and
- 3- The total achievement of the two tests.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The following are the major limits of the present study:

- 1- the samples of the students are limited to daytime girl schools¹ in Diala Govenorate/during the academic Year 2001-2002,
- 2- the level of students is restricted to the fifth grade², the scientific branch³,and
- 3- the material selected is taken from Book 7 (NECI).

1.5 Definition of Basic Terms

1.5.1 Group work.

Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1986:219) define group work as “work in which the class broken into small groups of form three to eight students; they work simultaneously on the some task, or be given different tasks of varied types or levels”

Al-Hamash (1985:88) state it as “ more than one group of students can be engaged in language use simultaneously. The teacher just assists in facilitating the work and in solving some of the problems that might arise in the course of action”.

Group work is described by AL-Mutawa, Najat and Taiseer (1989:104) as follows:

“The teacher divides the class into appropriate groups and appointing a group leader for each, then assigns the activity or task. They think that this technique is more motivating and more useful for oral fluency”.

The operational definition of group work as that technique which is used in the classroom to provide the students with opportunities to participate in language activities. The teacher divides the students into six groups of five students with a leader selected according to certain criteria.

1.5.2 Oral Practice

It is the major activity, which presents oral drills and exercises on the bases of grammatical structures of language included in Book 7 of the (NECI).

1.5.3 Achievement

Webster's Dictionary (1971:16) defines it as "the performance of students in a certain academic course".

Good (1973:7) defines achievement as "knowledge attained or skills developed in the school subject, usually designated by test scores or by marks assigned by teacher, or by both".

Achievement is defined by Page et al. (1977:10) as "performance in school or college in a standardized series of educational tests. The term is used more generally to describe performance in the subjects of the curriculum".

The operational definition of achievement is the students' performance on oral and written tests given at the end of a ten weeks study to find out if students have learnt and acquired the language activities they are studying or are exposed to.

1.5.4 Preparatory School

Good (1973:434) defines it as “a school, the purpose of which is the preparation of students for entrance to another educational situation, especially college”.

In Iraq, it refers to a stage of a three-year study, which comes after the intermediate stage and prepares students for entry into college.

Notes:

1. The choice of the girls' schools is justified by the fact that male and female distinction, in the researcher's opinion is not an important variable for the present study.
2. The choice of the fifth grade rather than another level is justified by the fact that the fifth preparatory textbook is full of heavily loaded with structures; and from the researcher's point of view, the students at this stage, face difficulties in understanding the materials.
3. The scientific branch is chosen in this study on the basis that, the scientific and literary branches use the same English textbooks, therefore may choose any one of them.

