Using Cooperative Learning Method for Literature Education in a Malaysian Secondary School

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the effectiveness of the cooperative learning method in supporting students' comprehension, appreciation, and interpretation of literature, with a specific focus on poetry. Conducted at a public secondary school in Sabah with 36 Form Two students, data was gathered through pre-tests, post-tests, and a Likert-scale questionnaire, which evaluated students' perceptions of their comprehension, appreciation, and interest in poetry. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 12.0, and the results demonstrated that cooperative learning significantly enhances students' understanding, appreciation, and grasp of poetry. This is reflected in the considerable increase in the mean score from 24.47 during the pretest to 45.42 in the posttest, with statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$). The findings contribute to the existing literature on cooperative learning in literature education and provide practical implications for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers, while also suggesting potential directions for future research on the integration of cooperative learning and poetry in the Malaysian secondary school context.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning has emerged as a critical component of English education, particularly in the study of literature. Literature plays a central role in the English curriculum, not only to enhance language proficiency but also to elicit an aesthetic response from students. Through the incorporation of literary works, learners are exposed to diverse cultures, emotional experiences, and thought-provoking perspectives that promote self-reflection and intercultural awareness. It is thought that reading literature, especially for English language learners (ESL), can increase the enjoyment of learning the language (Arafah, 2018).

Literature was introduced and used in education as an integral part of English Language reading programs as early as the 1970s, and it was formally included in the Malaysian English Learning syllabus by the Ministry of Education in 2000 (Ganakumaran et al., 2003). Initially intended for secondary school students, literature was later introduced to younger students, highlighting its vital role in language acquisition and holistic development. This historical evolution of literature in the Malaysian curriculum reflects the growing need to equip students with critical and reflective thinking skills. In this context, cooperative learning complements the literature curriculum by providing a collaborative environment that fosters deeper engagement with literary texts.

Cooperative learning, with its emphasis on group work, has become an integral part of the educational landscape. According to Padmini (2009), such exposure encourages reflection as well as action since literature allows students to comprehend, certainly sympathize with, and engage indirectly in a variety of cultures. However, it extends beyond mere collaboration, as it underscores the importance of individual accountability within the group context. In cooperative learning, students collaborate on tasks and exchange ideas, fostering a sense of interconnectedness while also encouraging social interaction. This dynamic approach benefits from the positive influence of teamwork and social engagement on students' overall learning experiences. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that cooperative learning may also present challenges, such as varying levels of participation among students and potential difficulties in group dynamics. Addressing these limitations is crucial for optimizing the effectiveness of cooperative learning.

Given Malaysia's unique cultural and educational context, investigating the impact of cooperative learning on English literature education becomes particularly significant. Malaysia's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape provides an ideal backdrop to explore how cooperative learning can enhance language proficiency, cultural awareness, and aesthetic appreciation. Thus, this research aims to investigate the impact of cooperative learning on students' engagement and critical thinking in the study of English literature, focusing on how group interactions and collaborative analysis enhance language proficiency, cultural awareness, and aesthetic appreciation among secondary school students in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cooperative Learning Method

Cooperative learning is a teaching approach in which students work together to achieve common group goals, fostering essential social skills like communication and collaboration. Johnson et al. (2014) identify five crucial components of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and group processing. These elements not only contribute to a productive learning environment but also enhance student participation and engagement. According to McManus and Gettinger (2016), additional cooperative learning objectives include taking on leadership responsibilities, equal and active participation in the therapeutic alliance, positive behavior, increased learning, and improved self-esteem.

One of the key benefits of cooperative learning is its ability to improve students' English communication skills. By working in groups, students practice important verbal abilities, such as active listening, taking turns, and making eye contact, in a natural and supportive environment. This interaction also encourages students to explain their thoughts, ask questions, and provide feedback to peers, which deepens their understanding and reinforces their language use. The positive, collaborative environment boosts students' confidence and promotes language proficiency. In this way, cooperative learning serves as a valuable teaching strategy that encourages student growth in an engaging and inclusive setting.

Literature Component

The term "literature" can vary depending on its context of use. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, literature refers to written works valued for their artistic form and emotional impact, engaging readers through aesthetic and emotional qualities. In education, literature plays a key role in developing students' critical thinking, reading, and analytical skills.

Literature takes various forms, such as fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama, written in different languages and styles. It can range from serious to lighthearted, realistic to imaginative, while addressing a wide array of themes. Fundamentally, literature reflects the complexities of human experience, offering valuable insights into the diversity of our world. By studying literature, students not only enhance their reading comprehension but also explore different cultures, customs, and traditions. For instance, when reading a story set in a different cultural context, students can develop empathy and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives (Sidhu et al., 2010). Literature broadens students' horizons and enhances their appreciation for the richness and diversity of life.

According to Rafik-Galea and Kaur (2015), finding the right teaching methods that enable students to comprehend the underlying meaning of a literary text is essential for educating them to read and understand literary works. By using methods that help students engage with literature in a meaningful and impactful way, teachers can help students develop their language skills and improve their understanding of the English language. Overall, the inclusion of literature in

language curriculum is a valuable and important aspect of language learning that can help students develop their language skills and foster a love of reading and learning.

Poetry

Poetry is a unique literary form known for its use of figurative language, rhyme, meter, and other literary devices that enrich its expressive power. A poem, according to Seng and Yong (2014), is a creative type of writing. It is often written in verses. Poets employed rhyme and rhythm in their poetry to create a musical impact. They are often filled with figurative language such as metaphors, similes, personification, and so on to bring the poetry to life. However, in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, poetry is often underutilized due to its perceived complexity, compared to other genres like prose or drama.

The study of poetry, including its figurative language and literary devices, can indeed be challenging for ESL learners. Poetry is often laden with critical notions and abstract concepts that are difficult to grasp, particularly when students lack familiarity with the cultural or linguistic references embedded within the poems. Despite these challenges, poetry can be an invaluable tool for language learning. Cooperative learning can play a crucial role in overcoming these difficulties. For example, students working in groups can collaboratively discuss and interpret the meaning behind figurative language or cultural references, making complex ideas more accessible. By sharing insights and working together, students are better equipped to appreciate and understand poetry. This cooperative approach not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a deeper engagement with the text, ultimately improving their English proficiency, especially in classrooms where language barriers may exist.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research explores the impact of incorporating cooperative learning in teaching Form 4 Literature in English poetry, following the principles of action research. Action research is a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Calhoun, 2002), which actively engages the researcher in addressing real classroom challenges. By using action research, this study allows for continuous adaptation, promoting professional development and collaboration between educators and students. The research was carefully planned, including selecting the research location, identifying participants, developing research instruments, and analyzing data. The findings aim to contribute valuable insights into the field of English language education, particularly in the context of cooperative learning and poetry instruction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Vygotsky's Social Constructivism theory, which posits that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Cooperative learning methods align with this theory by emphasizing collaboration, peer assistance, and group processing, which are essential for students' cognitive and social development. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that students learn best when they

work with others who can provide guidance just beyond their current capabilities. This theory supports the use of cooperative learning in teaching poetry, where students help each other navigate complex figurative language and literary analysis. By scaffolding each other's learning, students can achieve a deeper understanding of poetry that they may not have reached independently.

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted among Form 4 students in a public school in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. The sample consisted of both male and female students across various ability levels, particularly focusing on those with lower abilities based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The inclusion of students from different CEFR levels and gender groups was aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of how cooperative learning impacts diverse learners in poetry instruction.

Research Instrument

Three key instruments were used to collect data: pre-tests, post-tests, and a student questionnaire. These tools were designed to assess changes in students' poetry comprehension and gather insights into their experiences with cooperative learning.

Pre-test
A pre-test was conducted to evaluate students' initial knowledge and understanding of selected poems before the introduction of cooperative learning. Students completed the test individually, without assistance, to establish a baseline level of their comprehension and identify specific areas where they struggled. This pre-test enabled the researcher to track progress and measure the impact of cooperative learning on students' learning outcomes in poetry.

Post-test
Following the cooperative learning sessions, a post-test was administered to assess improvements in students' poetry comprehension. The post-test mirrored the pre-test in format and content, allowing for direct comparison between the two sets of results. This comparison provided insights into how cooperative learning influenced students' engagement, understanding, and appreciation of poetry.

Questionnaire
To gather more nuanced student perspectives, a Likert scale questionnaire was used to assess their views on the effectiveness of cooperative learning in poetry instruction. The questionnaire also captured data on students' preferred methods of peer collaboration and any challenges they encountered. Using a 4-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), the questionnaire offered valuable insights into students' experiences, preferences, and the perceived impact of cooperative learning on their poetry learning process. This feedback was essential for identifying potential improvements in teaching strategies and informing future research.

Data Collection

Data was collected over the course of the researcher's internship from April 2023 to July 2023. The pre-test was administered prior to the introduction of cooperative learning, establishing a baseline understanding. After exposure to cooperative learning techniques, students completed a post-test to assess any changes in their learning outcomes. The results of these tests were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of cooperative learning in improving poetry comprehension. Additionally, the student questionnaire provided qualitative insights into how cooperative learning shaped students' experiences and engagement with the material.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed SPSS to analyze the data collected from the pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire. Statistical analyses were conducted to examine differences in poetry comprehension and engagement before and after cooperative learning. By comparing these results, the researcher assessed the impact of cooperative learning on students' exam performance, attitudes toward poetry, and overall learning experience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis unequivocally shows that implementing the cooperative learning method significantly enhances students' comprehension and appreciation of poetry. The pre-test mean score of 24.47 increased remarkably to 45.42 in the post-test, with 20 students achieving passing scores.

Table 1. Paired Samples Test for Pre- Test and Post- Test

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	Paired Differences				T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre - Post	-20.949	9.248	1.545	-24.077	-17.822	-13.601	40	.000

As indicated in Table 1, the paired samples test revealed a p-value of 0.000. This finding leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. In other words, there is a significant disparity in the level of poetry comprehension and appreciation before and after implementing the cooperative learning approach. This result reinforces the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing student learning outcomes in the English literature component, particularly in the area of poetry.

Table 2. Result of Pre Test and Post Test

No.	Respondents	Pre-Test	Post-Test	No.	Respondents	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1.	Student A1	29%	29%	19.	Student A19	25%	50%
2.	Student A2	13%	37%	20.	Student A20	25%	55%
3.	Student A3	33%	45%	21.	Student A21	45%	65%
4.	Student A4	50%	70%	22.	Student A22	45%	61%
5.	Student A5	35%	50%	23.	Student A23	33%	50%
6.	Student A6	45%	65%	24.	Student A24	13%	35%
7.	Student A7	21%	37%	25.	Student A25	41%	57%
8.	Student A8	33%	59%	26.	Student A26	13%	45%
9.	Student A9	21%	29%	27.	Student A27	21%	22%
10.	Student A10	19%	37%	28.	Student A28	33%	50%
11.	Student A11	9%	37%	29.	Student A29	41%	55%
12.	Student A12	55%	75%	30.	Student A30	55%	89%
13.	Student A13	33%	45%	31.	Student A31	13%	75%
14.	Student A14	29%	40%	32.	Student A32	25%	45%
15.	Student A15	23%	45%	33.	Student A33	29%	55%
16.	Student A16	13%	25%	34.	Student A34	45%	65%
17.	Student A17	23%	45%	35.	Student A35	53%	69%
18.	Student A18	13%	30%	36.	Student A36	25%	55%

**Passing mark is 45%*

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that the implementation of the cooperative learning approach did not lead to a significant improvement in students' comprehension and appreciation of poetry. The pre-test and post-test scores show no substantial difference, supporting the hypothesis that the cooperative learning approach had little impact on students' academic performance in poetry.

These compelling findings underscore the efficacy of cooperative learning in fostering student engagement and achievement in poetry comprehension. The results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis, providing strong evidence that cooperative learning significantly impacts students' understanding and appreciation of poetry. The responses to the questionnaire further validate this, with most students agreeing that cooperative learning had a positive effect. This method fosters a conducive learning environment, promoting active participation and task completion.

These findings align with previous studies. Ling and Eng (2016) demonstrated that cooperative learning improved students' performance in the study of short stories compared to traditional methods. Similarly, Lloyd et al. (2016) found that cooperative learning enhanced students' grasp of English grammar, with the treatment group outperforming the control group in both understanding and test scores.

Pre- and post-test comparisons clearly show the effectiveness of cooperative learning in this study. The pre-test revealed a mean score of 24.47, with only four students passing. After the implementation of cooperative learning, the post-test mean score increased significantly to 45.42, with 20 students passing. This improvement, reinforced by a p-value of 0.000, confirms the rejection of the null hypothesis and highlights the method's effectiveness.

Furthermore, the majority of students agreed that cooperative learning positively influenced their academic performance and created an engaging learning atmosphere. It also proved particularly valuable for non-English-speaking students by helping bridge language gaps and fostering academic enthusiasm. Additionally, cooperative learning supports social and emotional development, promoting teamwork and respect for diverse perspectives. These outcomes are consistent with those found in both Ling and Eng (2016) and Lloyd (2016), reinforcing the idea that cooperative learning can enhance students' comprehension across various areas of English literature and language.

Regarding data analysis, SPSS was chosen to process the pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire data due to its robust capabilities in handling educational research data. It allowed for the accurate calculation of statistical significance and provided clear insights into how cooperative learning impacted students' learning outcomes.

In conclusion, cooperative learning is a valuable pedagogical tool for enhancing poetry comprehension. Its implementation should be encouraged in English literature classrooms due to its broad applicability and positive impact on student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research explores the impact of cooperative learning on students' comprehension and appreciation of poetry. The initial findings from a questionnaire indicate that cooperative learning fosters meaningful communication and ignites students' curiosity for poetry. However, further investigation is needed.

To maximize the benefits of cooperative learning, teachers, especially language educators, should receive comprehensive training tailored to the Malaysian educational context, considering larger classroom settings. Equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills will enhance the overall learning experience and academic outcomes for students.

Additionally, teachers can prioritize developing their own social skills to create a supportive learning environment. Enhancing communication and facilitation abilities will foster active engagement among students during cooperative learning activities. As further research unfolds, cooperative learning's potential to revolutionize poetry education becomes evident, nurturing a love for poetry and empowering students in language and literature learning.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the cooperative learning method has proven to significantly enhance students' comprehension and appreciation of poetry. The pre-test mean score of 24.47, with only four students passing, improved remarkably after the post-test, where the mean score increased to 45.42, and 20 students successfully passed. This substantial improvement, supported by a p-value of 0.000, confirms the statistical significance and effectiveness of cooperative learning, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Cooperative learning encourages active participation, engagement, and collaboration, which are essential for skill development in language learning. By involving students in hands-on activities, it helps them grasp concepts more effectively and retain information longer. This method also promotes a sense of responsibility, fostering autonomy and lifelong learning.

While cooperative learning is widely recognized for its motivational and practical benefits, its success depends on tailoring the approach to meet the unique needs of students. Flexibility and adaptability are key factors in ensuring that this method supports diverse learning styles. Teachers should continue to explore and innovate strategies to optimize its impact on students' learning experiences.

In summary, cooperative learning is a valuable tool that enhances both academic performance and personal growth. Its implementation should be prioritized in language and literature classrooms to create an engaging and effective learning environment.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Authors' Contributions

Nurul Najwa binti Che Ab Aziz: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Writing – Original Draft.
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