

# Attitude of Pupils towards Cooperative Learning in an ESL Context

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**Abstract**— English language plays a vital role in the lives of many Malaysian. Students in Malaysia learn English as a second language from the time they enter primary school up to tertiary level. Therefore, effective and fun learning strategies which are parallel with the 21st century learning have been implemented by the teachers to make the teaching and learning process more engaging and lively. This paper was conducted to investigate the attitude of pupils towards cooperative learning in an ESL context. Therefore, this survey employed 29 participants whom are lower and upper primary pupils from one of the schools in the district of Pasir Gudang, Johor. The data was collected via a questionnaire which was adapted from McLeish (2009). The findings suggested that pupils were highly motivated in learning English through cooperative learning approach. Based on the findings, pupils have shown positive responses towards cooperative learning which facilitated greater participation in an ESL context. The results of this study provided an insight that numerous benefits can be attributed through cooperative learning such as improvements in social skills, leadership skills as well as conflict management skills.

**Index Terms**—attitude of pupils, cooperative learning, ESL context, effective, greater participation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gearing towards the era of globalization, acquisition of English as a second language (ESL) has been considered as a gateway to a sea of knowledge in Malaysia. Early exposure to the English language is very important as the learners must acquire the language at an early stage because it is known as a global language that is used in all levels of education from preschool to university [1]. The Minister of Education has launched a document containing the roadmap entitled “English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025” in 2016. The aims of undertaking this reform in the teaching and learning of English are for the benefits of the nation’s children and also to bring about substantial improvement in our pupils’ proficiency in English language.

Our Ministry of Education (MOE) has decided to adopt international standards for teaching and learning of English in the form of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) [35]. Second language learners are accommodated with liable and detailed descriptions by CEFR-aligned curriculum on the six levels of proficiency based on four skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

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Therefore, appropriate teaching methods have the potential to produce more positive attitudes towards leaning among students [9]. To seize ESL context, effective and active learning methodology should be incorporated through various ways in teaching and learning process such as project-based learning, self-directed learning, collaborative learning, task-based learning, cooperative learning and so on.

Having a group of diverse pupils with different learning styles in a classroom, the teacher should prepare various learning strategies to increase pupils’ engagement throughout the lesson. It is also known that teachers should inculcate and nurture social skills in pupils by providing them with a range of learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom [6]. One of the learning methods that the teachers can use to help pupils develop those necessary skills is cooperative learning method [28]. Cooperative learning is one of the teaching methods that improve language learning, academic achievement and social skills through group interaction [18][32]. However, despite its importance, from a study by Salmiza and Afik [29], they have concluded that teaching and learning process applied in Malaysian schools still take place in a condition whereby the teachers still dominate over the pupils. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the attitude of pupils towards cooperative learning in an ESL context precisely among primary school pupils at a primary school in the district of Pasir Gudang, Johor.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Cooperative Learning and Pupils Attitude

Cooperative learning is a teaching method based on a combination of instructional strategy in which the pupils work together to upgrade their own and each other’s learning to achieve their goals [13]. Likewise, Farzaneh and Nejadansari [8] declared cooperative learning as a successful teaching approach where the learners from diverse backgrounds, learning needs, abilities and talents work together in small groups to attain common goals.

As widely known, a pupil’s success or failure is determined by how responsible they undermined their strengths and weaknesses. According to Eric, Chiungshui and Chun [7], pupils used to independent learning and competitive environment in a traditional learning setting. Hence, the pupils were not exposed to their friends’ failures while their friends’ developments were seen as an obstacle to their success. Conversely, in a cooperative learning setting, pupils are able to cooperate and collaborate with their group members through shared learning and productive discussions. Johnson and Johnson [12] defined cooperative learning as a strategy that develops healthy interaction skills, promotes the

success of the individual pupils and group members, and forms personal and professional relationships. It is also a structured learning activity where five basic components must be carefully structured in order for a lesson to be cooperative [13]. Positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills and group processing are the five important basic elements that needed to be in any cooperative lessons for better engagement in learning.

### *B. Studies related to Cooperative Learning in an ESL Context*

Many studies have shown the effectiveness of cooperative learning approach in an ESL context. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century learning classroom, cooperative learning is one of the most prominent methods and has been shown to have positive effects on various outcomes [27]. A few studies also have encouraged the use of cooperative learning in lessons to increase pupils' attention span throughout the lessons, increase pupils' achievement and improve social skills [22][10]. To make it comprehensible, a study by Chandravathani and Hadina [5] believes that cooperative learning has the potential to become an useful tool for an active teaching and learning process. The findings of the study revealed that it provided the opportunity for the pupils to take charge of their learning through pupil-centered approach and make the learning fun and enjoyable without feeling stressed.

Moreover, Jacylin and Azlina [11] conducted a study on the use of cooperative language learning in teaching writing to primary ESL learners. The study indicated that the pupils showed enthusiasm and tolerance towards their group members when completing the task given by the teacher. They also felt confident by being in this kind of positive environment where they can learn and improve their language learning by sharing and expressing their ideas with group members. This is proven by Khaghaninezhad and Kaashef [19] whom stated that a supportive and positive environment could be created by cooperative language learning, which can help students to succeed in their course successfully, to improve their oral communication skills, to advance their motivation towards English learning context as well as to progress their interpersonal relationships.

Altamimi and Altamimi [3] executed a study to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in English lessons to enhance pupils; speaking skills and attitudes. Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to identify pupils' attitude towards the use of cooperative learning in ESL lessons. the results indicated that cooperative learning improves pupils' attitude better than traditional approach. Furthermore, a study by Odagboyi and Keni [26] aims to investigate pupils' attitude towards cooperative learning approach in some selected schools in Nasarawa state. Since the pupils' academic performances level was low, the researchers assumed that the pupils had an over-reliance on the teachers and developed negative attitude towards learning. They have used the Jigsaw Attitude Questionnaire (JAQ) which was adapted from Koprowski and Piego [21] to collect data. The findings showed that there was a significant development of positive attitude towards cooperative learning approach. This

is because the jigsaw cooperative learning approach is very encouraging and stimulates eagerness to learn. The pupils were able to build a good interpersonal relationship between their group members. Kain [14] recommended that pupils' attitude toward, and readiness for particular approaches should be evaluated and in general, learner-centered teaching approaches were found to produce positive results [17].

There is no denying fact that pupils enjoy and interact with their group members happily without feeling bored during cooperative learning lessons. Creating a safe, non-threatening, learner-centered and supportive environment is also vital for teachers to ensure all the pupils have the opportunity to contribute in achieving group goals [25]. Evidently, cooperative learning approach also creates an abundant and healthy English-learning environment which makes language learning more meaningful and increases acquisition amongst pupils [4].

## III. METHODOLOGY

### *A. Research Design*

This research aimed to use quantitative research of collecting data to study the result of attitude of pupils towards cooperative learning and their participation in an ESL context. Thus, this quantitative research employed a survey research design to derive the needed data.

### *B. Participants and Setting*

Sixty participants from a sub-urban school in the state of Johor were selected for this study. The school is located at Pasir Gudang district. According to Taherdoos [31], there are five sampling techniques such as Simple Random Sampling, Stratified Random Sampling, Cluster Sampling, Systematic Sampling and Multi Stage Sampling. Since a fair mixture from lower and upper primary school pupils from various classes were needed, simple random sampling was used to draw 30 participants from lower primary whereas another 30 from upper primary.

### *C. Instrument*

A questionnaire which was adopted from McLeish [24] was used as the instrument to collect data from the pupils within a short period of time. This questionnaire is based on close-ended questions that consisted of two sections which include demographic items and questions using Likert-scale to measure the objective of this research. The questions in the second section were designed using 5 likert-scales, where score 5 represented 'strongly agree', score 4 meant 'agree' and score 3 indicated that pupils are being neutral to item. The score 2 and 1 represented 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. As for the validity, the questionnaire had been sent to a TESL lecturer and it was proven valid to be used in this study.

### *D. Procedures*

There were a few procedures that the researcher followed when collecting the data from participants. First of all, the researcher obtained permission from the school headmaster. Once the permission was granted, the researcher sent the questionnaire link which was created in Google form to the

participants via social media, WhatsApp messenger. This link was sent via social media because of the Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented by our Malaysian government due to Covid-19. Thus, instructions on how to complete the questionnaire were recorded and sent to their WhatsApp messenger. Subsequently, the responses from participants were collected and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for further statistical analysis.

E. Data Analysis

The data collected from the participants via questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. The results involved descriptive statistics which comprise percentages and frequencies.

IV. FINDINGS

This research has answered the research question, “What are the pupils’ attitudes towards cooperative learning in an ESL context?”. Thus, the findings are described based on the research question.

A. Demographic Data

The demographic data is the first part of the questionnaire which included gender, age and year. In particular, the participants consisted of 29 male and 31 female pupils.

TABLE 1. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

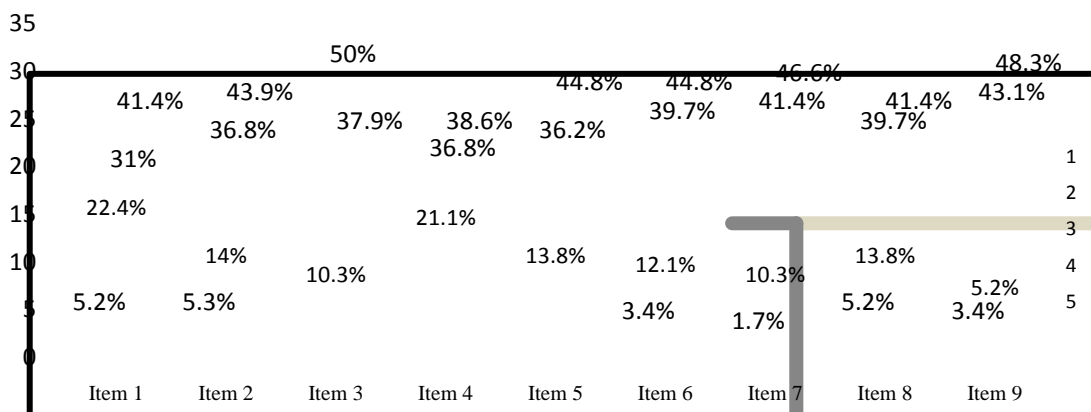
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
7-9 (lower primary)	30	50%
10-12 (upper primary)	30	50%

As can be seen in Table 1, equal number of frequency for both lower and upper primary pupils was participated in this study.

B. What are the attitudes of pupils towards cooperative learning in an ESL context?

The second part of the questionnaire consists of 10 items which aims to identify the attitudes of pupils towards cooperative learning in an ESL context. Items 1 to 9 contained 5 points likert-scale which were ‘strongly agree’(5 point), ‘agree’(4 point), ‘neutral’(3 point), ‘disagree’(2 point) and ‘strongly disagree’(1 point).

FIGURE 1. ATTITUDE OF PUPILS TOWARDS COOPERATIVE LEARNING



**Item 1: I willingly participant in cooperative learning activities.**

41.4% of pupils strongly agreed that they willingly participate in cooperative learning activities, 31% agreed and 22.4% remained neutral. However, 5.2% of pupils disagreed to the statement that they were willingly engaged in cooperative learning activities.

**Item 2: When I work together, I achieve more than when I work alone.**

43.9% of pupils strongly agreed that they achieve more when they work together with their group members than on their own. 36.8% agreed and 14% of pupils remained neutral. Even so, 5.3% of pupils prefer independent learning than working together with group members to achieve more.

**Item 3: I like cooperative activities being incorporated as part of the lesson.**

The majority 50% of pupils agreed that they like cooperative learning activities being integrated in ESL lessons. 37.9% strongly agreed and the other 10.3% of pupils

**Item 4: I feel motivated in learning English when cooperative learning is integrated in lessons.**

A large percentage of pupils (38.6%) have strongly agreed that integration of cooperative learning in lessons motivate them in learning English; 36.8% agreed and 21.1% of pupils remained neutral.

**Item 5: Cooperative Learning improves my attitude towards learning English.**

The highest percentage of pupils which is 44.8% has strongly agreed that cooperative learning improves their attitude towards learning English. 36.2% of pupil agreed and 13.8% remained neutral.

**Item 6: Using cooperative learning/ group activity in lessons, the experience of learning English is easier, enjoyable and fun.**

The percentage of pupils who strongly agreed that their experience of learning English is more and enjoyable using cooperative learning in lessons is the same as item5 which is 44.8% while 39.7% of pupils disagreed.

**Item 7: Cooperative learning helps me to socialize more with my friends or group members.**

It can be seen that nearly most of the pupils (46.6%) strongly agreed that cooperative learning guides them to interact more with their group members. 41.4% of pupils agreed, while 10.3% remained neutral.

**Item 8: Cooperative learning enhances class participation and good working relationships among group members.**

It is found that 41.4% of pupils strongly agreed and 37.9% agreed to this item where cooperative learning reinforces their class participation and increases their good working skills as well as relationships among group members. However, 13.8% of pupils remained neutral and the remaining three more pupils disagreed to this statement.

**Item 9: Cooperative learning helps me to be more confident in using and learning English.**

48.3% of pupils strongly agreed and 43.1% agreed that they feel more confident in using and learning English through integration of cooperative learning in lessons, while 5.2% of pupils remained neutral. Nevertheless, two pupils disagreed to the statement whereby they did not feel confident enough in learning English through cooperative learning strategy.

**Item 10: Rate the extent to which teachers use group activities/ cooperative learning.**

**TABLE 2. THE EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS USES GROUP ACTIVITIES/ COOPERATIVE LEARNING**

	Never	Sometimes	Always
Pupils' Responses	3.7%	66.7%	33.3%

As indicated in Table 2, 33.3% of pupils acknowledged that their teachers always incorporate cooperative learning in the lessons, whereas, 66.7% of pupils agreed that teachers sometimes utilize cooperative learning strategies. A percentage of 3.7% pupils admitted that the teachers have never implemented cooperative learning in lessons.

V. DISCUSSION

The results revealed pupils have shown positive attitude towards cooperative learning method in an ESL context. The items that achieved the highest percentage for 'strongly agree' are 'Cooperative learning helps me to be more confident in using and learning English'(48.3%) and 'Cooperative learning helps me to socialize more with my friends or group members.'(46.6%). This results aligns with a study by Kiran, Qaisara, Sidra, Mehwish and Amna [20] where they have concluded that cooperative learning enhances pupils' learning and socialization with their group members in a fun learning environment. There also have mentioned that pupils learn English more effectively and efficiently through cooperative learning method compared to traditional learning. Furthermore, this promotes pupils' greater participation in English lessons, and improves their learning by working together in groups. From the findings of Kan [15], it is stated that pupils work well together and said that learning through cooperative learning was fun.

Moreover, the item 'Cooperative learning improves my attitude towards learning English' attained the second highest

percentage for the rating point 5 which is 'strongly agree'. Cooperative learning not only teaches some social and emotional skills, but it also allows pupils to learn from each other [16]. When it comes to pupils' attitude, they seem to prefer group activities where they can socialize with their group members and feel motivated to learn English. Pupils also have selected high scale for a few items such as 'Cooperative learning enhances class participation and good working relationships among group members', 'I like cooperative activities are being incorporated as part of the lesson', and 'I willingly participate in cooperative learning activities'. The results show that pupils love cooperative learning activities being integrated as part of ESL lessons and they are willing to participate in those activities which enhance their participation. This is similar to a study carried out by Valdez, Lomoljo, Dumrang and Didatar [32] where they found that cooperative learning appealed to young learners because it encourages pupils to be more engaged and participative throughout the lesson.

The participants in this study believe that cooperative learning helps them to be more confident in applying and learning English language. Zakaria, Solfitri, Daud and Abidin [34] affirmed that cooperative learning is the only reason for the pupils to show involvement and confident during lessons because it promotes mutual respect, responsibility, tolerance and most essentially, self-confidence. This is why most of the pupils agreed that they feel motivated, participative and interested in learning English by sharing ideas and opinions with their peers. By working together in groups, it enhances communications and interpersonal skills with group members. Through participation in cooperative learning activities, pupils discover about themselves, such as whether they are leaders or followers, if they struggle to share ideas or opinions and if they accept their peers' perceptions. These kinds of experiences lead pupils to improve their self-esteem and make them feel confident on their abilities. Akinbobola [2] acclaimed that it also increases positive attitude towards the instructional experience since pupils interact positively and resolve challenges and facilitate greater participation in an ESL context.

41.4% of pupils strongly agreed and 34.5% of pupils agreed that they achieve more when they work in groups. It is noteworthy that even though pupils feel comfortable to participate in group activities with their group members, some pupils prefer to work on their own as they can learn better through independent learning. Therefore, it is evident that while learning in groups has many benefits; some pupils have a fear of the disadvantages in regard to their assessments at school. In order to combat the fear, teacher can provide options for the pupils to choose other individual whom they are comfortable working with. Thus, teachers should incorporate cooperative learning activities as a part of the lesson where it can enhance language learning by creating a supportive learning atmosphere [23].

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research implied that pupils do believe that cooperative learning enhances the language learning and

creates a non-threatening environment for them. With regards to greater participation, pupils feel enjoyable, relaxed, inspired and motivated in learning English. This research reveals that lower and upper primary pupils have a positive attitude towards cooperative learning; therefore, the research question of this study has been answered. Slavin [30] supported this finding by stating that cooperative learning arouses pupils' interest in learning English and motivate pupils for better interaction with group members in achieving goals.

Integrating cooperative learning activities in ESL lessons for young learners is one of the effective ways to make teaching and learning more fun yet meaningful. Consequently, it is highly recommended as a victorious teaching technique in the pedagogical reform, especially in molding a more motivating environment for pupils.

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