

Effectiveness of Group Work Strategy on the Achievement of EFL Secondary School Students in Ma'rib City

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the effectiveness of group work strategy on the achievement of secondary school students in Ma'rib City. To achieve the objectives of the study, the research was organized according to a quasi-experimental design with experimental and control groups. The experimental (n=30) and the control group (n=30) were purposefully chosen to participate in the experiment among the 10th grade students in Al-Methaq secondary school in Ma'rib City in the first semester of the study year (2021-2021). The study instrument was an achievement test administered before and after conducting the experiment. The validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The obtained data were calculated and tabulated for analysis using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation, and rank mean). The results of the study showed a positive effect of using group work strategy on students' achievement in English. In addition, the results showed that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the two groups in the achievement of English. The researcher attributed this result to the use of group work strategy. In conclusion, the study recommends the need to implement active learning strategies in teaching and learning English to ensure better outcomes for students.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language has become an essential language due to its enormous significance and advantages. The advancements in technology and globalization have further emphasized the significant role of the English language as a key factor for success in the 21st century. Teaching English as a foreign language aims to enhance students' ability to effectively communicate in real-life situations.

A significant part of being human involves learning and engaging with others in society or group settings. Recently, higher education institutions are paying more attention to the development of students' communicative abilities and critical thinking. Today, the necessity of educating people who are creative and open-minded who are willing to work with others and able to forward bring new ideas has inspired everyone's attention on schools. Teachers must be aware of the strategies used. This awareness allows them to design and implement learning strategy instruction and helps them become more aware of their effective learning techniques. Nowadays many teachers move away from traditional teaching methods and embrace modern strategies. There are various active learning strategies and techniques that can be used to achieve educational aims and help teachers in creating a successful atmosphere in classrooms as a group work strategy. Group work can be implemented in both small and large classes, and numerous recent studies have highlighted its importance Leou and Liu (2004) suggested that learning can be enhanced if the learning involves interaction, student-centred and engaging activities to help learners construct their understanding rather than depending on more traditional methods of teacher-centred method and direct instruction in order to make learning organized. Learning in groups is known as co-operative or collaborative learning and it has been shown many times that students who get actively involved in what they are studying learn more than those who are passive. The teacher applies a group to make students active rather than passive. (Brown, 2000, p.177).

Based on what is mentioned, some researchers found that focusing on active learning strategies in teaching and developing English skills and performance among students is considered an important issue. Consequently, the related previous literature was reviewed and found that this paper becomes a more important task. The current study agrees with the previous studies regarding the importance of active learning strategies in the achievement and increasing performance of students. Accordingly, the researcher has a strong desire to seize the opportunity of conducting this study to fill the gap in previous literature.

Many studies have confirmed that the poor level of academic achievement in English is due to the use of the traditional method and the failure to make the learner the centre of the educational process (Khaleel & Alrefae, 2018). Searching for an effective method of teaching still occupies the minds of researchers. The teaching method is the basic pillar upon which the educational process depends. Based on the discussion of the findings and conclusions of previous studies, group work strategy is considered a modern teaching method that helps teachers and lecturers in their teaching. Students learn to listen to different ideas and learn to discuss and negotiate. Modern trends in learning also emphasize the role of the learner in bearing responsibility for his learning, and this responsibility falls on him, and adopting this responsibility contributes to increasing the learner's ability to recall experiences stored in memory.

Through his experience in the field of teaching and supervision, the researcher noticed a weakness in students' achievement that may be attributed to the strategies used by the teacher, which are based on teaching knowledge without paying attention to developing thinking, motivating students and encouraging them to learn.

Based on the above, the problem of this study emerged, which is to answer the following main question: What is the effectiveness of group work strategy on the achievement of secondary

school students in Marib City. The study also is guided by the following secondary research questions:

- 1- Is there any statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups at the level of 0.05?
- 1- Is there any statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the post-test at the level of 0.05?
- 2- Is there any statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pre and post-test of the experimental group at the level of 0,0 ?".

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of group work strategy on the achievement of secondary school students in Ma'rib City. Group work can positively impact student performance by promoting active learning, collaboration, critical thinking, and the development of important social and communication skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper sheds light on the literature of related previous studies conducted by both native and non-native speakers of English particularly on EFL students using a modern educational strategy as group work to improve the performance among students. Using modern strategies in general and those based on group work strategy, in particular, could motivate EFL students and develop their achievement. Students who achieved success made efforts to utilize effective strategies. In contemporary educational practices, group work or cooperative learning has become an essential component. While group work is a comprehensive concept that encompasses various teaching methods, collaboration is a specific aspect that falls within the broader scope of cooperation (Chiriac, 2014).

Many teachers are using group work as a teaching strategy in their courses. Collaborative learning is a key teaching strategy to use to develop these skills. Collaborative learning or group work is an instructional approach in which students work together in small or large groups to accomplish a common learning goal or a well-defined learning task (Rezaei, 2017). Group work is a collaborative approach where multiple individuals work together to accomplish a task or assignment. The primary objective of group work is to encourage students to interact and collaborate with one another to successfully complete the given task or assignment.

Accordingly, the present study provides support for the positive impact of a modern teaching strategy on the development of students' performance. The findings of this study are associated with previous research that has also demonstrated the effectiveness of group work strategy in enhancing student outcomes. The consistent results across multiple studies further emphasize the importance of utilizing group work strategies in educational settings. (Holloway, 2004; Tuan & Neomy, 2007; Ulatifah , 2014 ; Lonning, 1993; Penic & Foster, 1985; Larcombe et al., 2013 ; Tuan & Neomy, 2007 ;; Arumugam et al., 2013).All of them agreed with the researchers' perception in conducting a study on such big topic as an important area. They all gave more support and went in line with the findings of the current study emphasizing that group work strategy was effective strategy in teaching and learning English.

Group work has been extensively studied in educational settings, and the majority of research has shown positive outcomes in certain contexts abroad. However, it's important to consider that the effectiveness of group work can vary across different countries due to their unique educational environments and the way teachers implement this method. To ensure successful implementation of group work, teachers should have a clear understanding of the necessary steps involved. This includes defining clear objectives for the group work, assigning roles and responsibilities to each group member, providing guidelines for effective communication and collaboration, and monitoring the progress of each group. However, the current research presented a different perspective compared to previous studies that utilized group work as a strategy to enhance learning progress and develop achievement. One such study conducted by Neomy (2007) examined the influence of group work on students' language skills. The results indicated that engaging in group writing activities motivated international students to enhance their writing skills, boosted their self-assurance as writers, and provided them with assistance throughout the writing process. Ulatifah (2014) found that using the group work method had a notable influence on students' reading comprehension. Lonning conducted a study to investigate the consequences of learning in small cooperative groups on verbal communication and academic performance. The findings of the study revealed that students who participated in small cooperative group learning demonstrated higher levels of achievement in comparison to those who learned in larger groups. (Lonning, 1993).

In a study conducted by Ning (2013) at a university in northern China, the results of this study suggested that the cooperative learning approach was more successful in improving students' social skills compared to traditional instructional methods. The study conducted by Tuan and Neomy (2007) indicated that when students engaged in group work and had more interaction, they were able to generate a greater number of ideas and acquire more knowledge. Al-Sheedi (2009) conducted a study exploring the impact of group work on students' learning. The findings revealed that an overwhelming majority of teachers, 98% believed that group work had a positive influence on students' achievement. However, Taqi and Al Nouh (2014) reported that students who engaged in collaborative tasks enjoyed working in groups and expressed a preference for group work. Similarly, a study conducted by Daba, Ejersa, and Aliyi (2016) found that second-year biology students had a positive perception of the advantages of group assignments. These students preferred working on assignments as a group rather than individually or through classroom tests.

Previous literature has extensively explored the differences in performance between group-level and individual-level work. It has consistently shown that group work can have several advantages when it comes to learning and knowledge retention compared to individualistic learning. (Tuan & Neomy, 2007; Nihalani et al., 2010, 2011; Arumugam et al., 2013)

Hendry et al. (2005) conducted a study to investigate the impact of study groups on students' academic achievement. The findings revealed that study groups were beneficial in enhancing students' understanding of challenging concepts and addressing any misconceptions they had. On the other hand, Alkhateb and Jumaa (2002) examined the effects of cooperative learning on the academic performance of eighth-grade algebra students. However, their results did not demonstrate any significant differences in the performance of students who participated in group cooperative learning compared to those who followed traditional learning methods. Winston (2002) found that cooperative learning had a beneficial effect on students' attitudes

towards mathematics lessons and academic achievement. Nichols (2002) conducted a study on the impact of implementing cooperative learning in a geometry class. The findings revealed that students who participated in the cooperative learning group demonstrated higher levels of efficiency and a stronger focus on goal-oriented learning. Additionally, the study observed significantly greater educational achievements among these students. Ghaith (2003) conducted a study to investigate the impact of cooperative learning on the improvement of English reading skills and self-esteem among students. The findings of the study indicated that cooperative learning had a significant positive effect on students' reading skills.

In a more recent investigation conducted by Nihalani et al. (2018), The objective was to find out how students collaborate within a group and its effect on group work success. The study revealed that groups that achieved higher levels of success were those that engaged in cooperative efforts and reached a consensus on the correct answer. According to several studies (Greenop, 2007; Yazedjian & Kolkhorst, 2007; Li et al., 2010), it has been found that students generally enjoy and benefit from working in groups. For example, Li et al. (2010) conducted a study in Australia and found that students had positive attitudes towards group tasks. Similarly, Yazedjian and Kolkhorst (2007) conducted a study in Texas and discovered that group work activities in a large lecture class helped students become more interested in the topic, provided opportunities for social interaction, and improved their social skills. Ibnian (2012) conducted a study to investigate how group work influences the attitudes of 64 Jordanian university students who were not majoring in English towards learning English as a foreign language. The findings of the survey indicated that the utilization of group work techniques was effective in fostering positive attitudes among students towards learning English.

Based on the discussion of the findings and conclusions of previous studies, group work strategy is considered a modern teaching method that helps teachers and lecturers in their teaching. Students learn to listen to different ideas and learn to discuss and negotiate.

In contrast to previous studies, the present study differed in several aspects including the sampling method, location, time frame, number of participants, study methodology, and statistical techniques employed. While previous research has generally demonstrated the impact of group work on students' learning and attitudes, none of these studies specifically examined the effect of group work strategy on the achievement of secondary school students in Marib City, which is a central focus of the current study. Furthermore, the findings of the present study also differ from those of previous research, highlighting the unique contribution of this study to the existing literature.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design of the Study

During the first semester of the study year(2020 –2021), students were taught ten lessons using the group work strategy. Before applying the strategy, the teacher explained the meaning of the strategy, its principles, benefits and how to organize the groups. Five groups were formed, each group consisting of six students. The current study follows a quasi-experimental method for exploring the effectiveness of group work strategy on the achievement of secondary school students in Ma'rib City. A quasi-experimental design provides a number of facilities for the researcher to determine control and experimental groups. This design allows the choice of which class is the experimental group and which class is the control group, but the participants must have similar qualities.

3.2. Population and Sample of the Study

The target population for this study are the secondary school students in Ma'rib City in the first semester of the study year (2022-2023). The sample of the study includes 60 students in the 10th grade at Al-Methaq secondary school who were selected purposefully to participate in the experiment.

3.3. Instruments of the Study

In light of the relevant literature, the first instrument of the study was a pre-post achievement test to explore the effectiveness of group work strategy on Students' achievement in Ma'rib School. The second instrument of the study was a questionnaire prepared by the researcher to investigate the attitudes of the experimental group students towards the group work strategy.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The most important results obtained in the present study are based on its objectives. First, it showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups at the level of 0.05. Second, it showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the students' achievement at the level of (0.05) before and after conducting the group work strategy in favour of the post-experiment. Then, it showed the positive attitudes of the experimental group's students towards the group work strategy. The researcher illustrated the results as the following;

4.1. Answering the first question

The first question inquired about the following:

Q- Is there any statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups at the level of 0.05?

In order to answer the questions of the present study, the homogeneity of the experimental group and the control group should be assured before the treatment. This step was of great importance, because knowing this will help understand the performance of the groups before the treatment and will help to know the degree of improvement after it and whether or not this improvement is significant. Although the sample of the study was selected randomly to guarantee homogeneity, it would be better to establish this statistically. Hence, the first question which says; " Is there any statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups at the level of 0.05 ?" should be answered. Thus, to answer this question the null hypothesis which states " There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups at the level of 0.05", needs to be tested. Therefore, the researcher administered the pre-test of the study to the two groups to ensure that they were homogeneous and equivalent. After that, the obtained scores of the two groups in the pre-test were processed statistically to find out the means and the standard deviations of the experimental group and the control group. The following table illustrates this statistical process.

Table (1) The results of the independent sample T-test between the Pre-test of the experimental and control groups.

Groups	Mean	N	Std. D	T-test	Sig.
Control group	6.47	30	8.495	0.220	0.827

Experiment group	6.56	30	8.591		
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Table (1) shows that there were no statistically significant differences at (0.05) level between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the students' achievement in the pre-test. Thus, both groups were approximately homogeneous before implementing the experiment.

As shown in the above table, the mean of the experimental group is (6.56) and the standard deviation is (8.591) whereas the mean of the control group is (6.47) and the standard deviation is (8.495). By comparing the means and standard deviation of the two groups, it can be inferred that there is no difference between them. The above table displays clearly that the difference in the means of the experimental group and the control group has no significance since the value of (t) is (0.220) at the level of significance (0.827) which indicates no statistical significance between the two groups. The table shows the mean difference between the control and experiment groups (0.425). In this case, it can be said that the experimental group and the control group were homogenous before the treatment.

Consequently, the null hypothesis which says; " There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups at the level of 0.05" is accepted and the alternative hypothesis which assumes that; "There are statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the pre-test of the experimental and the control groups at the level of 0.05" is rejected. Therefore, it could be safely concluded that the two groups were homogenous and highly equivalent before the treatment.

4.2.Answering the second question

The second question inquired about the following:

Q- Is there any statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the post-test at the level of 0.05?

The second question of the present study aims to investigate statistically the significant difference between the post-test of the experimental and control groups in order to find out the effect of group work strategy on the students' performance in English exam questions in Marib schools. This question states; "Is there any statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the post-test at the level of 0.05? " In order to answer this question, the null hypothesis which states that " There is no statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the post-test at the level of 0.05", should be tested. When the experiment was over, the groups of the study were given the post-test to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the post-test scores for students of the experimental and control groups. The obtained scores of the experimental and control groups in the posttest were processed statistically to find out the mean scores and standard deviation of the two groups and then compare them by using the inferential measure (t-test). The following table shows the results of the experimental group and the control group in the post-test.

Table (2)The results of the Independent sample T-test between the experimental and control groups' post-test.

Groups	N	Mean	Std.D	Sig.	T
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<i>Control group</i>	30	5.5	14.097	0.000	4.523
<i>Experimental group</i>	30	8.1	16.695		

Table 2 reveals that there was a significant difference between the two groups in the post-test at (.05) level. The result of the statistical analysis of the post-test scores shows that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The above table shows that the mean of the experimental group is (8.1) and the standard deviation is(16.695) whereas the mean of the control group is (5.5) and the standard deviation is (14.097). The difference mean between the groups is (26%). By comparing the means of the two groups in the posttest, using the t-test, it was found that the value of (t) is (4.523) at the level of significance (0.000) Sig. Therefore, it can be clearly concluded that there is a highly significant difference between the performance of the experimental group and the control group is in the post-test in favour of the experimental group since the mean of the experimental group (8.1) is higher than the mean (5.5) of the control group. Since the homogeneity of the experimental group and the control group[was maintained before the treatment, any difference noticed in the performance of the subjects in the posttest can be safely attributed to the use of the strategy. So, this high significant difference can be ascribed to the effect of the group work strategy. Thus, the null hypothesis which assumes that; " There is no statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the post-test at the level of 0.05" is rejected and the alternative hypothesis which says that; " There is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the post-test at the level of (0.00), is accepted.

4.3.Answering the third question

The third question inquired about the following:

"Is there any statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pre and post-test of the experimental group at the level of 0,0 ?" This question aims to investigate if there are statistically significant differences in the subjects achievement of the experimental group before the treatment and after it. To answer this question, the null hypothesis which states; " there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pre and post-test of the experiment at the level of 0,05" needs to be tested. Firstly, the scores of the experimental group subjects in the pre and post-test were processed statistically to find out the means and standard deviations. Then, the t-test was used to compare these means and measure if there are statistical differences in the mean scores of the same group in the pre and post-test. The following table illustrates this process.

Table (3) The results of the paired Sample T-test between the Mean Score Difference of the Pre and Post-test of the Experimental Group.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Test</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St.D</i>	<i>T-test</i>	<i>Sig</i>
<i>Experimental group</i>	<i>Pre-test</i>	30	6.56	8.591	-4.31	0.000
	<i>Post-test</i>	30	8.1	16.695		

Table (3) above reveals obviously that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the subjects of the experimental group in the pre and post-test since the mean scores

of the post-test (8.1) are significantly higher than the pre-test mean (6.56). In addition, the value of the t-test is (-4.31) at the level of significance (0.000) which reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the experimental group subjects in the pre and post-test in favour of the post-test. Consequently, the null hypothesis which assumes that; " there is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pre and post-test of the experimental at the level of 0,05" is rejected and the alternative one which says; "There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pre and post-test of the experimental at the level of 0,05" is accepted.

5. FINDINGS

5.1.Findings Related to the First Question

1-There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups in the performance of the English exam. Both groups have approximately the same mean. The pretest total mean of the experimental group (32.80) is not significantly different from that of the control group (32.38). Since the significance value of the test (0.827), indicates no statistically significant differences between the two groups in the pre-test. This result is similar to the result of(Holloway, 2004; Tuan & Neomy, 2007; Arumugam et al., 2013), This result proves that the experimental group and the control group were homogeneous before the treatment. in the pre-test, which found that the subjects of the two groups were homogenous and equivalent.

5.2.Findings Related to the Second Question

2-The results of the post-test of the experimental group and the control group showed that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the two groups in achievement of English. This was obvious from the statistical differences between the mean (81%)of the experimental group in contrast to the mean (55%)of the control group and the value of (t) 4.523at the level of significance (0.000) That high level of significance between the post-test of the experimental group and control group in favour of the experimental group indicated that the subjects of the experimental group improved their performance in English exam better than the ones of the control group. Since the subjects of the two groups were homogeneous before the treatment; the great improvement in the subjects of the experimental group was safely ascribed to the exposure of the group work strategy to the subjects of the experimental group. The researcher attributed this result to the effectiveness of the group work strategy on the student's achievement in English. This result is identical to the results of (Chen & Hird, 2006; Arumugam et al., 2013). which found that the performance and achievement in English improved after the treatment.

5.3.Findings Related to the Third Question

In testing the third question assumed that "Is there any statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pre and post-test of the experimental group". It was found that the experimental group scored better in the posttest. According to this result, the second null hypothesis was rejected. In my opinion, the results of this study agreed with the results of almost all the previous studies like:(Holloway, 2004 ; Tuan & Neomy, 2007; Ulatifah, 2014; Lonning, 1993; Penic & Foster, 1985; Larcombe et al., 2013;; Tuan & Neomy, 2007; Nihalani et al., 2010; Arumugam et al., 2013). They showed the positive effect of the post-test of the experimental group in comparison to the pretest.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding the mentioned previous studies, all of them believe that the use of a group work strategy can bring numerous benefits to the learning and collaboration process. Group work allows for the sharing of knowledge, skills, and perspectives, promoting creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. It also helps develop important interpersonal and teamwork skills, such as communication, leadership, and cooperation. Students learn how to effectively communicate their ideas, listen to others, and work collaboratively towards a common goal. As a result, there are some recommendations for using the group work strategy:

- Implementing group work as a teaching strategy for different subjects is recommended.
- It is recommended to conduct additional research to explore the effects of using small groups on students' academic achievements.
- Enhance the Yemeni curriculum with different group work activities.
- Prepare and distribute instructional materials that increase teachers' awareness of the group work strategy significance and the necessity of using this strategy in teaching English.
- Conduct training courses that help teachers enhance their competencies in implementing the group work strategy in their classes.

Meanwhile, the current study concludes that all previous studies confirm that the group work strategy helps students learn better and improves their achievement. They also confirm the differences in performance between those who performed at the group level and those who performed at the individual level. It has been shown that group work helps students learn and remember knowledge better than individualistic learning. It has shown also the positive attitudes of students toward group work strategy. Based on the discussion of the findings and conclusions of previous studies, group work strategy is considered a modern teaching method that helps teachers and lecturers in their teaching. Students learn to listen to different ideas, learn to discuss and negotiate.

Therefore, the following major findings found:

- There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the pretest of the experimental and the control groups
- There is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the results of the test (pre/post-test).
- Group work can positively impact student performance by promoting active learning, collaboration, critical thinking and communication skills.
- Some researchers find that focusing on active learning strategies in teaching is considered a big and important topic.
- Using modern strategies in general and those based on group work strategy, in particular, could motivate EFL students and develop their achievement.
- Group work helps students learn and remember knowledge better than individualistic learning.

Considering these major findings and recommendations. Group work strategy allows individuals to learn from one another through the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and knowledge. It promotes active engagement and participation, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Group members can support and encourage one another, fostering a

positive and stimulating learning environment. Therefore, using modern strategies in general and those that are based on group work in particular could motivate students and develop their achievement.

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