



## THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON GENERAL SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT'S READING COMPREHENSION ACHIEVEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research was to investigate the effects of cooperative learning method on general secondary school students' reading comprehension achievement. The pre – test post – test comparison group quasi – experimental design was employed for the research. The sample population was 104 students from sections of Grade – 10 students at Baso General Secondary School in North Shoa, Ethiopia. Data of the research were collected through reading comprehension tests, and focus group interview. The statistical tools of the T – Tests, comprising independent samples test and paired samples test were utilized in data analysis to determine whether there were significant inter and intra – group differences on achievement in reading comprehension at 0.05 alpha level. Data analysis reveals that both the experimental and control groups were almost equal in reading comprehension at the beginning of the experiment. Nevertheless, after the treatment, the analysis of data indicate that the experimental group outscored significantly ( $p < 0.5$ ) the control group on reading comprehension post – test showing the supremacy of cooperative learning method over the usual method. Therefore, the major findings of the study suggest that cooperative learning helped significantly to enhance the general secondary school students' reading learning is, thus, recommended to be used in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms to teach reading comprehension. Pedagogical implications of cooperative learning in teaching reading comprehension are forwarded.*

**Key Words:** Cooperative learning, learning together, reading comprehension, achievement, General Secondary

## 1. Background of the Study

English language has been playing a crucial role in almost all aspects of human communication over the last couples of decades. Globalization, a development trend, which is now becoming one among the top claims in the agenda of international community, seems to create a more pressing need to have a common medium of communication in our times than in any other era in human history. This emerging need appears to have the potential to give the English language the opportunity to play an important role in almost all fields of human endeavor.

English language has been playing a significant role in the Ethiopian secondary schools. In our secondary schools, English is used as the language of instruction for all subjects, except Amharic (Local language), and given as a compulsory subject. These being the role of English in secondary schools in our country, students in Ethiopian secondary schools still seem to have inadequate command of the language. This surely would result in poor understanding of other subjects that they learn in English. Besides, secondary school students' learning of English is considerably limited to what they learn in the classroom. Mekeasha (2005) <sup>[16]</sup> clearly expressed that students are not in a position to be able to use the English language outside the system for various reasons such as the inadequacy of print materials in English specially for students who live in the country side and the fact that the students are still able to meet most of their primary needs by communicating the local languages.

In the Ethiopian secondary schools, students have little ability to understand what they read, and express themselves in clear, simple English. Sisay (1999) <sup>[23]</sup> has prove that the quality of English language instruction suffers mainly from lack of qualified English language teachers, inappropriate and inefficient teaching methodology, overcrowded classes and lack of sufficient books and facilities. Having taken such problems into consideration, the New Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia has changed the old textbooks in primary and secondary schools of Ethiopia. Alemu (2004) <sup>[1]</sup> discusses that the *English for Ethiopia* series differs greatly from the *English for New Ethiopia* series both in content and approach. Therefore, following this change, it has been claimed that the ELT (English Language Teaching) syllabuses have been designed with communicative orientation and are being put into implementation.

Even though the old English textbooks have been replaced by the new ones, and it has been claimed that New Policy focuses on a student – centered approach, the English language proficiency of the students is still very low, and in our secondary schools, English language teachers follow the old teacher – centered approach in spite of the seminars and workshops they have been exposed to Sisay (1999) <sup>[23]</sup>

Haregewoin (2008) <sup>[11]</sup> also mentions that there is a common belief among many college and university instructors that the language proficiency of many preparatory students who have recently joined colleges and universities of the country is found to be below the expectation levels when compared to that of the former freshman origin students. This clearly shows that most of the Ethiopian secondary school students are not proficient and competent enough in their command of English in general and in their reading comprehension ability in particular. That is the main reason why the present researcher was prompted to investigate the effects of cooperative learning on the reading comprehension achievement of students at the general secondary level especially in Grade – 10 in government school.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Reading is one of the English language skills which secondary school students are expected to learn. For countries like Ethiopia, where English is used as a medium of instruction and a written language for academic texts and materials at secondary and tertiary levels, reading is by far the most important skill for students Andargachew (2004) <sup>[2]</sup>. He added that examination designed to evaluate achievement in different subject areas also require mainly the students' reading competence. Besides academic values, being competent in reading skill is also of great help for students for particular purposes outside the school. That is why general secondary school students, in Ethiopia are made to learn reading as a subject.

However, local research findings conducted at different levels indicate that many high school and college students lack the required competence in reading Genene (1994) <sup>[8]</sup> and Andargachew (2004) <sup>[2]</sup>, and reveal that teachers often complain about the lack of reading comprehension ability of their students. The present researcher also observed that the teaching learning process was more of individual and competitive when the students were learning reading comprehension lessons. For this reason, students could not get the opportunity to discuss together so as to understand what they read properly in the English classroom.

In the research of Girma (2005) <sup>[10]</sup> findings strongly expressed that class time was dominated by teach – fronted mode of teaching while pair and group work activities were never used in most of the classes observed. As a result, the way of teaching reading comprehension lessons which does not encourage students to work together could make students unable to understand the reading text well. According to Dereje (2008) <sup>[6]</sup>, even though there are movements and achievements obtained so far, studies indicate that students’ reading engagement is still low. This may be as a result of the cumulative effect of the past trend in teaching and approaches teachers use in teaching reading.

The present researcher is motivated to conduct this study because of the failure to use cooperative learning to teach reading comprehension appropriately by EFL teachers and the absence of any experimental study to test its effects in EFL classrooms in our secondary schools. The local researchers did not also go beyond assessing whether the different activities in the English textbooks enhance cooperative learning or not. No one tried to check the effectiveness of cooperative learning in promoting students’ reading comprehension in EFL classrooms in the local context which could be taken as methodological solutions that could be used to alleviate the reading comprehension problems of the students.

## **1.2 Objective of Study**

### **1.2.1 Main Objective**

The main objective of the study was to investigate the effects of cooperative learning on the reading comprehension achievement of grade ten students in EFL classrooms in general secondary schools in Ethiopia.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objective**

The specific objectives were to find out effect of cooperative learning in promoting:

- The students’ ability in getting main ideas and identifying details from the text using skimming and scanning skills.
- The students’ understanding of pronoun referents and guessing meanings of unfamiliar words in the text

## **1.3 Hypotheses of the Study**

Based on the research objectives, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1.  $H_0$ : There is no significant difference between mean scores of the experimental and control group with regard to achievement in reading comprehension on post – test
2.  $H_0$ : There is no significant difference between mean scores of the experimental group on pre – test and post – test with regard to achievement in reading comprehension.
3.  $H_0$ : There is no significant difference between mean scores of the control group on pre – test and post – test with regard to achievement in reading comprehension.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study could be important because it may offer an alternative teaching method for EFL teachers who find that they are not successful in helping students with reading difficulties in their classes. As a result, this research will have clear pedagogic purpose which is hoped to provide a pedagogical solution that can help alleviating the English language problems in general and the teaching off reading comprehension in particular. This research could also broaden the EFL teachers' and learners' understanding and implementation of cooperative language learning. This is one contribution of the study as far as the practice of cooperative learning is concerned. Moreover, since there is no study conducted to examine the effects of cooperative learning in our general secondary schools' context, this study may serve as a springboard for those who want to do further research into the same area.

#### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

As the study attempted to find out the effects of cooperative learning on students' reading comprehension achievement in EFL, the researcher employed a quasi experimental research. The researcher also delimited the scope of the study to one general secondary school and one grade level, Grade – 10 in Debre Berhan, North Shoa – in Ethiopia. Of all Grade – 10 classes in the selected general secondary school, only two Grade – 10 sections were randomly selected for the purpose of the main study. Hence, other general secondary schools and grade level were not included in the study due to time constraints.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **1.6 Research Design**

The quantitative research approach was employed in this study. Based on this, the study employed a quasi – experimental research design, especially the pre – test and post – test

comparison group design whereby one group received a treatment while the other representing the same population as the experiment means that at least one independent variable is manipulated and its effect is measured by dependent variables while other factors are controlled in various ways Seliger & Shohamy – pp: 142 1999 <sup>[22]</sup>.

## **1.7 Sample and Sampling Technique**

### **1.7.1 Selection of the School**

There were 26 general secondary schools in North Shoa Zone in Ethiopia. As it was very difficult to include the general secondary schools which were far, the researcher decided to select one general secondary school randomly from those general secondary schools which were found around Debre Berhan where the researcher had some acquaintance with the areas. Therefore, for the purpose of this study Baso General Secondary School (BGSS) was selected using simple random sampling technique, by lot.

### **1.7.2 Selection of Grade Level**

As mentioned above, a quasi – experimental study was conducted at BGSS at Debre Berhan town, in North Shoa Zone in Ethiopia. In this general secondary school there were Grade – 9 and Grade – 10 students. Although the results of the study might be applied to any group of learners at different levels of learning, for this study, Grade – 10 was selected for different reasons. The researcher, thus, selected Grade – 10 because the students at this grade level should at least minimize the problems they face

### **1.7.3 Selection of Subjects**

#### **1.7.3.1 Selection of Students**

The participants of the study were 104 (53 Female, and 51 Male) Grade – 10 students who were selected randomly from BGSS at Debre Berhan town, in North Shoa Zone, in Ethiopia. There were almost 550 Grade – 10 students in 10 sections in the academic year when the research was conducted. The participants were, therefore, from two sections comprising 52 students each that were selected randomly from the 10 sections using a lottery system. The name of the each section (e.g. A, B, C, ...) were written on pieces of papers, and then the papers were scrolled, mixed up and the lots were drawn. The pieces of papers (lots) which had the names of the two

sections occurring on the papers were taken as selected participants for the study, and all the students from the selected two sections participated in the study.

### **1.7.3.2 Selection of Teachers**

There were experimental and control group classes. In order to control for the “Teacher Quality” variable, both groups were taught by one EFL teacher who was teaching English language in the selected general secondary school. After getting permission from the school administrators, the English language teacher was selected from the selected general secondary school by using random sampling technique to avoid a researcher bias. Furthermore, as teacher readiness in cooperative learning could be a vital variable that might affect the outcomes of the study, the researcher provided training on how to implement CL (Class Learning) for almost two weeks to the selected EFL teacher before investigating the effects of cooperative learning on students’ reading comprehension achievement.

### **1.7.4 Procedure of the Research**

The researcher first elaborated and discussed the objectives, nature, and procedures of the study with the selected school, BGSSS, principals and English language teachers and got their acceptance. After getting permission, the English language teacher was provided the appropriate training to implement cooperative learning in the experimental class. Then, with the help of the English language teacher, the samples, two Grade – 10 sections, were selected randomly and administered a pre – test on reading comprehension which was intended as measures of the dependent variable to the research participants. Third, the researcher assigned the two sections into experimental and control groups randomly by lot on the basis of their scores on the pre – test measures. Fourth, the researcher exposed the experimental group to the experimental treatment and administered no treatment to the control group. During the treatment, the experimental group was taught the reading comprehension lessons from the Grade – 10 English textbook through the Learning Together Model of cooperative lessons while the control group was taught the same reading comprehension lessons through the usual methods of teaching other than the cooperative learning method used in the experimental class. Throughout the study, both groups were taught by the same English language teacher. At the end of the treatment, the researcher administered post – tests on reading comprehension as a measure of the dependent variable to the experimental and control groups. Finally, a semi – structured focus

group interview was conducted with the treatment group only to get their opinions on learning reading comprehension through cooperative learning and the researcher compared the performance of the experimental and control groups on the post – test using tests of statistical significance.

## **1.8 Instruments**

### **1.8.1 Reading Comprehension Tests**

In this study, pre and post tests were administered for both experimental and control group students to measure their reading comprehension skills. To equate the two groups, a pre – test was administered before the allocation of the students into the experimental and control groups. The test comprised 30 multiple choice items accessing the students’ ability to identify main ideas, details, references, and guess meanings from a reading text. Immediately after the treatment, a researcher made reading comprehension post – test was administered. The post – test also comprised 30 items focusing on the same issues as that of the pre – test. The purpose of this test was to examine the effect of the treatment on the dependent variable. In other words, both experimental and control classes. Both tests were piloted with Grade – 10 students ( $N = 104$ ) who were the same with participants of the main study. Using Cronbach’s Alpha, the reliability of the reading comprehension pre – test was 0.69 and the post – test was 0.53 for the pilot study.

The reliability of the reading comprehension tests for the main study was calculated using Cronbach’s Alpha, and it was found that the reliability for the pre – test was 0.78 and the post – test was also 0.78. It was, therefore, accepted that both test had good reliability and discriminatory power.

### **1.8.2 Interview**

A semi – structured focus group interview was used with the students because it allowed some elaborations in the question and answers. Dornyei, pp: 122 (2007) <sup>[7]</sup> and Kayrooz & Trevitt, pp: 192 (2006) <sup>[14]</sup> state “A semi – structured interview offers a compromise between the two extremes, and “In the semi – structured interview, most of the questions will be open – ended and there will usually be flexibility in the order in which group of questions are asked”. For this

reason, the researcher used a semi – structured interview as the students could have the confidence to interact and express their opinions on the issues.

The focus of the interview was asking students to share what they feel towards learning reading comprehension through cooperative learning, to comment on the benefits they got and the problems they faced while they were learning in cooperative learning groups, to express their feelings about the participation of group members, etc. Therefore five students were selected based on their post – test results from the experimental group to get their opinions. The composition of the students was: Two high achievers, Two average achievers and one low achiever. The focus group interview was recorded with the permission of interviewees as simply taking notes may not be enough as it might be unlikely to be able to catch all the details of the nuances of personal meaning.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS**

### **1.9 Analysis and Finding of Reading Comprehension Tests' Scores**

#### **1.9.1 Effects of Cooperative Learning on Reading Comprehension**

In this section, the analyses and results of the pre – post reading comprehension test have been presented to examine the effects of cooperative learning on Grade – 10 students' reading comprehension achievement. Statistical analyses are conducted using SPSS version – 15. The statistical method for analyzing the reading comprehension tests is T – test. To determine if there are any significant differences between the groups, an alpha level of 0.05 and a two – tailed test are used for analyses as the hypotheses are non directional. Moreover, the test results are analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The following sections focus on detailed analyses of the reading comprehension tests.

**Table – 1.1:**

#### **Significance of difference between mean scores of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension pre – test (N = 104)**

Students	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Max	Min	Range
Control Group	14.65	4.814	0.668	27	6	21
Experimental Group	15.52	5.669	0.786	28	6	22

Sources own data in Annex – I and II

The results of the reading comprehension test in Table – 1.1 indicate that the two classes obtain almost similar scores on the pre – test. The mean scores of the control and the experimental groups are 14.65 and 15.52 respectively. The table also shows that the standard deviation of reading comprehension achievement scores for the control and experimental groups are 4.814 and 5.669 respectively. In addition, the table reveals that the students in both groups got almost similar maximum and minimum scores in the reading comprehension pre – test.

**Table – 1.2:**

**Independent Samples of T – test for Equality of Means**

Reading Comprehension Pre – test	<i>t – test</i> for Equality of Means						
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2 – tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
	–0.839	102	0.403	–0.865	1.031	–2.911	1.180

Sources own data in Annex – I and II

Table – 1.2 shows the independent samples *t – test* of the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension pre – test. As can be seen from the table, the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension pre – test are the same. That is to say the [re test scores ( $t = -0.839, df = 102, p = 0.403$ ) reveal that there is no significant difference in reading comprehension performance between the two groups before the treatment: The effect size for this comprehension is *weak/trivial* (0.166) which implies that the two groups have similar reading comprehension performance.

**Table – 1.3:**

**Significance of difference between mean scores of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension post – test (N = 104)**

Students	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Max	Min	Range
Control Group	15.37	5.095	0.707	27	7	20
Experimental Group	17.85	5.278	0.732	28	6	22

Sources own data in Annex – I and II

Table – 1.3 depicts that the control and experimental groups obtain different mean scores in the reading comprehension post – test. The mean score of the control group looks less than the experimental group. However, the maximum and the minimum scores for both groups are almost the same.

**Table – 1.4:**

**Independent Samples of T – test for Equality of Means**

Reading Comprehension Post – test	<i>t – test</i> for Equality of Means						
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2 – tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Differenc e	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
	-2.438	102	0.016	-2.481	1.017	-4.499	-0.463

Sources own data in Annex – I and II

Table – 1.4 indicates the mean score difference of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension post – test. The post – test reading comprehension mean scores ( $t = -2.438$ ,  $df=102$ ,  $p=0.016$ ) reveal that there is a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups favoring the latter. The effect size, which is 0.48, shows that the magnitude of the difference between the control and experimental groups is modest or small.

**Table – 1.5**

**Significance of difference between mean scores of the Experimental reading comprehension pre– test (N = 52) (Sources own data in Annex – I and II)**

Contents	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading Pre – Test	15.52	5.669	0.786
Reading Post – Test	17.85	5.278	0.732

Table – 1.5 reveals the mean scores of the pre – post reading comprehension results of the experimental group. The experimental group’s mean scores on the pre and post reading

comprehension tests are 15.52 and 17.85 respectively. The table reflects a higher result in the post reading comprehension test compares with the pre – test score. The standard deviation of the group on the pre and post reading comprehension tests are 5.669 and 5.278 respectively. This shows that the difference among the students’ post score is smaller than that of the pre – test score. Thus, the experimental group’s pre and post reading comprehension mean scores are somewhat different

**Table – 1.6**

**Paired Samples Test: T – test for Equality of Means**

Contents	Paired Differences 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t – test</i> for Equality of Means		
	Lower	Upper	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2 – tailed)
Reading Pre – Test – Reading Post – Test	-3.196	-1.457	-5.373	51	0.000

Sources own data in Annex – I and II

Table – 1.6 indicates the experimental group’s paired differences on reading comprehension pre and post – tests results. The paired samples test in table – 1.6 shows that ( $t = -5.373, df = 51, p = 0.000$ ) that the experimental group has made a significant improvement in the reading comprehension post – test. That is to say the experimental group’s post – test reading comprehension mean score is higher than that of the pre – test reading comprehension mean score. Thus, a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the experimental group subjects in the pre and post – testing of the reading comprehension indicates a significant difference between the pre and post – testing favoring post – testing. The effect size is also 0.426 which is modest or small

**Table – 1.7:**

**Significance of difference between mean scores of the Control group on reading comprehension pre–post – test ( $N = 52$ )**

Contents	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading Pre – Test	14.65	4.814	0.668
Reading Post – Test	15.37	5.095	0.707

Sources own data in Annex – I and II

Table – 1.7 indicates that the mean score of the control group on the pre and post tests reading comprehension is slightly different. As can be seen in the table, the pre – test mean score is 14.65 where as the post test mean score is 15.37. The Standard Deviation of the post reading comprehension test score for the control group is slightly higher than their own score in the pre – test. This shows there is a gap in the students’ score on the post – test.

**Table – 1.8:**

**Paired Samples Test: T – test for Equality of Means**

Contents	Paired Differences 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t – test</i> for Equality of Means		
	Lower	Upper	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2 – tailed)
Reading Pre – Test – Reading Post – Test	-1.835	0.412	-1.271	51	0.209

Sources own data in Annex – I and II

Table – 1.8 depicts a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the control group subjects in the pre – post – testing of reading comprehension. The table reveals that ( $t = -1.835, df = 51, p = 0.209$ ) there is not any significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post reading comprehension scores of the control group. The result, thus, shows that the control group students have not shown any significant difference in their reading comprehension

performance in the post – test. The effect size is *0.145* which means that the difference in the mean score of the pre and post reading comprehension is weak or trivial.

**Table – 1.9:**

**Comparison of the mean scores of the Control and Experimental Groups on each sub – skill of the reading comprehension Post – test (*N* = **104** ) (Sources own data in Annex – I and II)**

Control and Experimental Groups		<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Main Ideas	Control	52	3.71	1.786	0.248
	Experimental	52	4.52	1.506	0.208
Specific Details	Control	52	4.90	1.636	0.227
	Experimental	52	5.48	1.873	0.260
Guessing Meanings	Control	52	2.90	2.022	0.280
	Experimental	52	3.88	1.711	0.237
Pronoun Referents	Control	52	2.67	1.491	0.207
	Experimental	52	3.42	1.433	0.199

**Independent Sample Test**

Contents (Equal Variances assumed)	<i>t – test</i> for Equality of Means						
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2 – tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Main Ideas	-2.496	102	0.014	-0.808	0.324	-1.449	-0.166
Specific Details	-1.673	102	0.097	-0.577	0.345	-1.261	-0.107
Guessing Meanings	-2.670	102	0.009	-0.981	0.367	-1.709	-0.252
Pronoun Referents	-2.615	102	0.010	-0.750	0.287	-1.319	-0.181

Table – 1.9 depicts the descriptive statistics and independent samples test of the control and experimental groups on post – test reading comprehension results on each reading comprehension sub – skills. As can be seen from the table, the mean scores of the experimental group are somewhat greater than that of the control group. The independent samples test in 1.9 also indicates that ( $t = -2.496, df = 102, p = 0.014$ ) there is a significant difference between the control and experimental groups in their achievement in identifying main ideas. In addition, table – 1.9 reveals that ( $t = 2.670, df = 51, p = 0.009$ ) and also ( $t = -2.615, df = 102, p = 0.010$ ) there is again a significant difference between the two groups in guessing the meanings of words, and identifying pronoun referents, favoring the experimental group. However, the independent samples test in table – 1.9, shows that ( $t = -1.673, df = 102, p = 0.097$ ) there is no significant difference between the two groups in finding specific details from the text.

### **1.10 Analysis of the Results of Students\ Focus Group Interview**

As stated earlier, a semi – structured focus group interview was conducted with five students comprising four males and one female aged (16 – 17) from the experimental group in order to triangulate the statistical findings presented in the reading comprehension scores. As stated by the students, the purpose of learning reading comprehension in cooperative learning group is to develop the reading ability as well as listening ability of students.

They also reported that it helps the students to understand the main idea of the reading text clearly, to share the meanings of words, to use good reading strategies used by some good student, and to get some ideas about the kind of questions that could be asked. These ideas were taken as contributing to the enhancement of their reading comprehension achievement. The students also expressed their beliefs about cooperative learning mentioning that cooperative learning enables students to develop their reading skills and understand what they read in a group. Most of them felt that cooperative learning helps students to know the English language well and communicate with their friends and teachers. The informants also reported that students could get some information on how to read and get the meanings of words and understand the main ideas of the reading passage by helping one another.

The students also thought that cooperative learning benefits them by creating a situation to learn with friends or discuss in group which helps students to speak freely in the class and avoid their

fear. Besides, they stated that cooperative learning helps students to share different words they get with their meanings while they are reading. They could also discuss how they guess the meanings of words and how many words they could understand from the reading text. The informants added that cooperative learning could help them to understand how to answer different questions that are asked from different paragraphs and to identify the strategies that could help students to get the answers from each paragraph.

Students also mentioned their views about the participation of students while they were learning reading comprehension in their cooperative learning groups. In their groups, they sometimes asked questions to check whether the group members were interested or not to learn with other group members. If the students answered the questions quickly, they said that they had good participation, but if they could not answer the questions quickly they might be taken as low participant students who might not be interested. Moreover, one informant mentioned that students who had low participation usually complained either by saying the questions were difficult or by giving their own false reasons not to participate. Therefore, he suggested that to solve these problems, it is good to support students to work hard and participate actively in the class. Another student added that there may be good participation in some groups, but in most cases, he thought that all students do not participate equally in most groups. Thus, the interview result displays that there are some students who might not be willing to participate in the group.

The interview result also reveals the challenges students face while they were learning reading comprehension in the cooperative learning classroom. For instance, three interviewees reported that some students did not give attention to what the other student was reading, and they never asked about what he/she was reading. The other problem that was mentioned was that some students came to the group discussion without genuine interest and unhappily. Some group members sometimes did unwanted actions, for instance looking at other group members and different things in the classroom while the group members were discussing. The other problem reported was that when they asked group members to do or discuss the task together, some students did their personal activity, for instance doing homework and copying notes.

The interviewees were also asked to express their suggestions for the betterment of cooperative learning in teaching comprehension in particular, in English language learning in general. Most students suggested that to improve the results of the students through cooperative learning, students should be first made to know their objective of learning. If they do not know their

objectives, they may not know why they are learning or coming to school. Therefore, we should try to bring this change in the students' mind. The other point mentioned was that teachers must change their methods of teaching. They should use a teaching method which is motivating and participatory to all students. Another student commented that to make a student achieve better results, the student himself/herself should have self initiation, and hence the students' effort is detective.

Furthermore, one participant of the focus group interview suggested that he believe that cooperative learning is necessary because there are different benefits, for example, sharing ideas, and helping one another, they get when they learn in groups. For this reason, cooperative learning should not be ignored. Moreover, when teachers give different questions for students, teachers should ask students repeatedly to identify who is participating or not. Taking all the analysis of the findings discussed above, the next section focuses on interpreting and discussing the results of the reading comprehension test, and interview.

#### 1.11 Discussion of Results on the Effect of Cooperative Learning on Students'

As stated earlier, a pre – test on reading comprehension was administered to see whether the students from the two sections had equal performance or not. Comparison of pre – test scores of both the experimental and control groups by applying statistical analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups and both groups were almost equal in their reading comprehension performance. The experimental group, however, performed significantly better than the control group on reading comprehension post – test. The result showed that the difference between the post – test mean scores of the two groups was significant at *0.05* level, as show in table 1.4. Thus, the null hypothesis that says “There is no significant difference between mean scores of the experimental and control groups with regard to achievement in reading comprehension post – test” was rejected at *0.05* level, in favor of the experimental group. This finding supports the research result of Ghaith (2003 <sup>[9]</sup>) which showed that cooperative learning was effective in improving the EFL reading achievement of Labeness High School Students. It is also consists that indicated the post – test scores after learning English reading using cooperative learning were higher than the pre – test at the *0.05* level of significance.

Besides, the data seem to provide some support for the claim of development researchers that when students interact with other students, they have to explain and discuss each other's perspectives which lead to greater understanding of the material to be learned Slavin, (1995) <sup>[24]</sup>, Damon, (1984) <sup>[5]</sup>. It could, therefore, be the exposure to share ideas among group members and the interaction the students had that helped the experimental group to outperform the control group in the post reading comprehension score. This idea was reflected by the experimental group students during the focus group interview.

The null hypothesis "There is no significant difference between mean scores of the experimental group on pre – test and post – test achievement in reading comprehension" is rejected because the comparison between the mean pre – test scores and post – test scores of the experimental group revealed that there was a significant difference at 0.05 level in table – 1.6. This shows that the experimental group scored a much better result during the post – test. The findings of this research support the implied hypothesis that "There is significant difference between mean scores of the experimental group on pre – post achievement in reading comprehension".

This study finding coincides with the studies conducted by Wichadee, (2004) <sup>[25]</sup>, and Rahvard (2010) <sup>[20]</sup> conclusion of which indicated that the students who learned reading comprehension through cooperative learning obtained higher reading comprehension scores for the post – test than the pre – test. Therefore, the finding provides evidence that cooperative learning could enhance general secondary school students' reading comprehension ability more than the individual learning which is commonly used as the usual method of instruction in EFL classroom.

The null hypothesis "There is no significant difference between the mean scores of the control group on pre – post with regard to achievement in reading comprehension" is accepted as the comparison of mean scores in tables 1.7 and 1.8 indicate that the control group subjected did not show any progress in the post – test on reading comprehension result. Therefore, the implied alternative hypothesis " There is a significant difference between the mean scores of the control group on pre – post reading comprehension" is rejected.

Therefore, the findings of the present study, as discussed above, reflected the benefits of the cooperative learning mentioned by McGroarty, (1989) <sup>[15]</sup>, Arnold, (1990) <sup>[3]</sup>, Pantiz, (1996) <sup>[19]</sup>, and Sadker and Sadker (2003) <sup>[21]</sup> in the review of the literature section.

## Conclusion and Implications

### 1.12 Conclusions

In the light of statistical analysis and the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn: The achievement in the post – test of reading comprehension of the experimental group significantly exceeded that of the control group. On the basis of this finding, it is possible to conclude that the effects of cooperative learning are better than that of the usual, non – cooperative method of teaching in the EFL class on general secondary school students’ reading comprehension achievement. Therefore, students in the cooperative learning classroom showed better performance in reading comprehension than that of students in the conventional learning situation i.e., control group.

Second, there was a significant difference in the experimental group students, reading comprehension achievement after the implementation of cooperative learning. This again indicates that the Learning Together Model of cooperative learning method seems to have enhanced more significant effects on the experimental group. As a result, cooperative learning method is more effective as a teaching learning technique for students of EFL at general secondary level.

Third, although the control group students’ mean score on answering details, which are literal questions, was similar to the experimental group in the post – test, they did not show any significant difference in the total mean score of their reading comprehension achievement. This finding implies that secondary school students’ might not show a better reading comprehension performance if they continue to learn competitively and individualistically whereby very few students can succeed. The result of this research leads to the conclusion that cooperative learning method is useful for improving the reading comprehension of students.

In general, cooperative learning is a feasible teaching method that can improve the students’ reading comprehension achievement in the EFL classroom in general secondary school. Teachers should engage students so that they retain and comprehend the subject matter taught in the classroom

### 1.13 Implications

It should be taken into account that using cooperative learning does not mean abandoning the teacher – fronted more; it means combining various modes of learning. Furthermore, cooperative learning cannot solve all the problems that students face Cohen, (1994) <sup>[4a]</sup>. Rather, cooperative learning is taken for granted for the fact that it provides teachers the chance to entertain students with different abilities and different educational as well as language backgrounds.

The finding of this study could help English language teachers for developing reading comprehension knowledge, small group cooperative skills, and abilities of students in accordance with the academic requirements. Therefore, this study supports that cooperative learning is better to teach reading comprehension, and teachers of English subject should use CL (Class Learning) to improve the reading comprehension achievement of students.

This study also reveals that cooperative learning looks to be a method of instruction that is suitable to the needs and levels of general secondary school students' in our context and it is the one that students, who were in the experimental group, respond to positively. The experimental group improved more through cooperative learning than non – cooperative learning in the control group. The findings of the present study and others also show that training teachers for using cooperative learning method is crucial and appropriate to engage the students in the learning process. Therefore, to encourage English teachers to use cooperative learning method in the classroom, they should be provided training to use the basic elements of cooperative learning method. Teacher expertise in using cooperative learning depends on the ability to structure those five basic elements in cooperative lessons. Teachers should, therefore, knowhow and when to assign learning objectives to learners and how to monitor each student within each small group. The implication here is that to learn and use cooperative learning strategies, it is relevant to create the opportunity for teachers to get the access to training on issues such as the theory and concept of cooperative learning, methods of cooperative learning, elements of cooperative learning, roles of students and teachers in cooperative learning, etc.,

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