

Implementing Cooperative Learning in Algerian Middle School EFL Classes: Some Potential Problems and Solutions.

**Mise en Œuvre de l'Apprentissage Coopératif en Classe de
Langue au Collège en Algérie : Quelques Problèmes Potentiels et
Solutions.**

Madjid CHETOUANE *

University of Tizi-Ouzou –Algeria chetmadjid@hotmail.fr

Med Sadek FODIL

University of Tizi-Ouzou –Algeria fodil_sadek@hotmail.com

**Received:
24-12-2022**

**Accepted:
13-06-2023**

**Publisher online :
26-01-2024**

Abstract: Cooperative learning (CL) is believed to have positive effects on learners as it improves their academic achievement and their social skills. Yet, despite its widespread acceptance and proven efficacy, CL implementation has not received the attention and consideration it deserves in many schools across Algeria. This study explores and discusses some major problems inherent to CL practice and enactment in EFL classes at the middle school level in Algeria, and provides some solutions to enhance pupils' learning in two selected rural middle schools within the region of Tizi-Ouzou. Two classes: 2M3 from Boudjima and 4M2 from Tizi Rached together with their teachers were chosen for the empirical aspect. The study adopts a qualitative approach; while its method is descriptive and exploratory in nature. The main instrument used for data collection is classroom observation. As for data analysis, Qualitative Content Analysis is used as a relevant method of inquiry. Results indicate that CL at the middle school is poorly implemented as EFL teachers lack adequate preparation, knowledge of and familiarity with CL, and this implies that much professional training is highly required to overcome these impediments.

Keywords: Algeria; challenges; cooperative learning; EFL classes; implementation process.

* Corresponding author

Résumé: L'apprentissage coopératif (AC) reste incontestablement une approche efficace ayant des effets positifs sur les apprenants en termes d'amélioration de leur rendement scolaire et de leurs compétences sociales. Cependant, malgré sa généralisation et son efficacité reconnue, son processus de mise en œuvre demeure un domaine méconnu dans de nombreux établissements scolaires en Algérie. Cette étude vise essentiellement à explorer et discuter certains problèmes liés à l'application de cette approche en classes de langue au niveau du collège et propose des solutions afin d'améliorer le rendement des élèves en matière d'apprentissage, notamment dans deux collèges ruraux situés l'un à Boudjima et l'autre à Tizi Rached, dans la région de Tizi-Ouzou. A cet effet, deux classes : 2M3 et 4M2 respectivement ainsi que leurs enseignants ont été choisis pour l'aspect pratique de la recherche. L'étude s'appuie sur une approche qualitative; tandis que sa méthode est de nature descriptive et exploratoire. Le principal instrument utilisé dans cette étude pour la collecte de données est l'observation en classe. Par contre, en ce qui concerne l'analyse des données, le choix est porté sur l'Analyse Qualitative de Contenu. Les résultats indiquent que l'AC n'est pas suffisamment appliquée en classe à cause du manque de préparation et de connaissances des enseignants ainsi que la familiarité avec l'approche, ce qui requiert une formation adéquate des enseignants afin de surmonter ces obstacles.

Mots clés : Algérie ; défis ; apprentissage coopératif ; classes de langue ; processus de mise en œuvre.

1. Introduction: Previous studies on Cooperative Learning (CL) during the last three decades, have highlighted and demonstrated the effectiveness of this pedagogy in foreign language teaching/learning and the benefits that accrue to students who work in CL groups in contrast to those who work individually or competitively in conventional teaching (Foky and O'Donnell, 2002; Slavin and Madden, 2001; Slavin, 2013; Johnson et al., 2006). Crandall (1999) believes that an effective implementation of CL strategies may help students stimulate their motivation and autonomy, reduce their anxiety and build their confidence. Within the same year, that is 1999, Johnson and Johnson, who believe in the efficacy of this educational approach, have classified CL outcomes into three broad categories: CL promotes academic achievement; CL experiences promote more positive relationships among students; CL experiences result in greater

psychological adjustment, higher self-esteem, and increased motivation and social competence.

However, in spite of its well-established benefits, which are acknowledged across different curriculum areas and classroom settings, many schools and practitioners are often reluctant to embrace this instructional strategy due to several problems and difficulties when trying to implement it. Thus, the scope of its use or application in the classroom does not always constitute an integral part of classroom practice (Baloche and Brody, 2017; Buchs, Fillipon, Pulfrey and Volpe, 2017). These impediments and limitations, according to Cohen (1994), are often the result of the mismatch between theory and practice, that is, the gap existing between what theoreticians say about CL and what practitioners do in their own classes. For Cohen, most scholars focus their attention on the advantages of CL methods, and thus pay less attention to the pitfalls that may hinder its application process. In this connection, Randall (1999:29), one of the opponents of CL, states that *“so popular has cooperative learning become that its benefits may blind us to drawbacks”*. To fill this gap, the present study is an attempt to identify and consider the factors that may affect and obstruct EFL teachers' implementation of the cooperative learning approach (when this is enacted) in their classes in two middle schools in the periphery of Tizi-Ouzou, a town located some 100 Kms East of Algiers (Algeria), and suggest ways to overcome the difficulties that may arise in the implementation process.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to identify and consider the factors that hinder the implementation process of CL in EFL classes at the middle school level within the region of Tizi-Ouzou, and provide solutions for a successful enactment of this pedagogy. Another objective of the study relates to classroom management and how to deal with group dynamics and behaviour issues in order to improve the teaching/learning process.

1.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study strives to answer the following questions:

Q1: Is cooperative learning successfully implemented in the middle schools under study? If not, what factors affect and hinder its effective implementation?

Q2: What solutions are suggested for its successful implementation?

In an attempt to answer the above research questions, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1: Cooperative learning is not successfully implemented in the schools under study because of several factors like teachers' lack of preparation, experience and familiarity with this teaching approach

H2: Several solutions are suggested for a successful implementation of CL in the schools under scrutiny like in-service workshops, professional training and teacher development.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Procedure of data Collection

The present study was conducted in two rural middle schools from two different dairas around the region of Tizi-Ouzou. A *daira* is an administrative subdivision of a *wilaya*; a *wilaya* equates more or less a district. The choice and selection of the two schools from two different localities was motivated by the fact that each school is a context-specific setting that allowed the researcher to observe, describe, and interpret meaning in context, that is, maintaining what Paton calls an "*empathic neutrality*" (1990:55).

The targeted population, the source of data in the study, were middle school EFL learners and their teachers from CHALLAL Med Said middle school of Boudjima (Makouda) and METREK Aomar middle school located in Tizi Rached (Tizi Rached). The distance separating the two localities is about 22 kms, and while the former is located in the north east of Tizi-Ouzou, the latter is in the south. The whole population in both schools is nine hundred forty-five (945) pupils, that is, five hundred and thirty-two (532) for the first school, and four hundred and thirteen (413) for the second. Due to this huge

number, only eight (8) classes (four per school) with a total number of one hundred and seventy- one (171) from all the four levels (M1,MS2,MS3,MS4) were selected randomly to participate in the study, and only two (2) classes (2M3 from Boudjima school and 4M2 from Tizi-Rached) with a total number of thirty-eight (38) pupils were chosen randomly as a sample for analysis together with their two teachers. Both teachers are females, experienced (20 years of experience for the teacher serving at Boudjima school and 14 years for the one teaching in Tizi Rached) and held a Bachelor or Licence degree. As for the pupils' gender and age, in the first class (2M3) there were twelve (12) females and eight (8) males, and in the second class (4M2) there were eleven (11) females and seven (7) males. Their ages ranged from twelve (12) to fourteen (14).

Classroom observation was used in order to elicit valuable data from observing both EFL teachers' and their pupils' daily practices on aspects of what went on in the classroom. The observation sessions took place between January 16th and February 11th, 2019), and the total number of the attended sessions is twenty four (24), that is, twelve (12) sessions for each class. Throughout the observation period, the researcher worked systematically in accordance with a detailed checklist which highlights all the relevant features and points to be observed.

The checklist (see appendix), which has been adapted from Carol B. Furtwengler's (1992) checklist entitled "How to observe cooperative learning classrooms", comprises four main themes with their associated categories that have close relevance to CL enactment. The first theme in section one of the checklist, which relates to classroom management and organization, concentrates on both students' learning (grouping patterns and group composition) and the physical environment (seating arrangement and furniture), which, according to the Johnsons' (1999a) *Working Together* model, are all important requirements for any lesson to be successful and cooperative. The second theme of section two deals with pupils' familiarity with the topic of the lesson of the day, their motivation and the type of interaction encouraged by the teacher in the classroom. It also alludes to the key components of CL, which are the

backbone of the Johnsons' framework. The aim is to discover whether the teachers observed put these elements into practice or ignored them totally. Finally, the third and fourth themes which are highlighted in sections three and four respectively, focus more and shed light on group facilitation or cohesiveness and the teacher's role in monitoring groups to check their progress and to help them manage or resolve conflicts constructively within their groups.

1.3.2 Procedure of data Analysis

The present research is descriptive and adopts a qualitative research method as it investigates the implementation of cooperative learning in Algerian Middle School EFL classes in terms of cooperative group work activities, group formation and cohesiveness, classroom interaction, teacher's role and language behaviour, and the incorporation into lessons of the cooperative learning five components. The research is also exploratory as it seeks to identify features of the observed phenomenon (Borg and Gall, 1989), such as teachers' attitudes towards the use of cooperative learning in the EFL classroom to identify a certain number of obstacles and challenges that might obstruct its successful enactment at a given level and period of time and think of ways to remedy the situation. Furthermore, the study relies on Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as a relevant method of inquiry to categorize and analyze the data obtained from classroom observation sessions. The procedure is as follows: the data are coded into themes to create categories and sub-categories, then they are visually displayed in a table for interpretation and analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of CL

Although scholars and educationists have tried to define CL differently, there is at least one important common aspect in their definitions which is emphasized. It is the idea of students working together and helping one another (contrasted with learning alone) to perform tasks and accomplish shared goals, and they are motivated to increase their own learning and the learning of their peers. Therefore,

for the purpose of this study, Johnson and Johnson's (1999) *Working Together* model is borrowed. The Johnsons (1999:5) define CL as the “*instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning*”. For these authors (1994), groups, apart from being small, must be structured or guided by the instructor and should be heterogeneous, reflecting cultural, social, and ethnic diversity. Parkay and Stanford (2007:334) offer a similar definition, and they define CL as “*an approach to teaching in which students work in small groups, or teams, sharing the work and helping one another complete assignments*”. Thus, in the context of the study CL should be understood as an instructional method through which students are encouraged to function together as a group and are all held accountable so that the group succeeds.

2.2 Components of CL

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), for any cooperative learning lesson in the EFL or ESL context to succeed, it should comprise five (5) essential components or principles that are: (a) *positive interdependence*, (b) *individual accountability*, (c) *face-to-face promotive interaction*, (d) *appropriate use of social skills*, and (e) *group processing*.

2.2.1. Positive interdependence

Positive interdependence is the perception and awareness among group members that in order to succeed, they should function as a group, that is, they should depend and rely on one another to solve a problem, perform tasks, and to achieve shared goals (Gillies, 2003; Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 2006; Mc Cafferty, Jacobs and Iddings, 2006). For the Johnsons (1994), ‘positive interdependence’ is a technical term or phrase which refers to two students’ responsibilities in the cooperative classroom: the first one is the fact that groupmates learn the assigned material, and the second one is to make sure that all the group members have all mastered the assigned material as they share a common fate, that is, either they “swim or sink” together (Johnson and Johnson, 1999).

2.2.2 Individual accountability

This component is as important as the first one as it refers to the groupmates' personal responsibility towards their group as they are held accountable for their individual contributions to the group's collective effort by doing their share of the work, which is essential for the fulfillment of shared tasks and learning goals (Gillies, 2003; Mc Cafferty, Jacobs and Iddings, 2006). For Johnson and Johnson (2003), in case any group member fails in his/her duty towards his/her group and does not provide his/her fair share of the work load, it is the group's morale which suffers, and group assessment will be difficult for the instructor who must evaluate all group members, including the 'free loaders', or the lazy learners who do nothing for the group to succeed.

2.2.3 Face-to-face promotive interaction

Promotive interaction is broadly defined by Johnson and Johnson (1994:3) as "individuals encouraging and facilitating each other's efforts to achieve, complete tasks, and produce in order to reach the group's goals". This means that groupmates are doomed to assist and trust each other and to provide each other with feedback so as to raise their performance and to complete the group's assignment. In face-to-face promotive interaction, according to the Johnsons (1994), learners work in close proximity and are seated 'knee-to-knee' and 'eye-to-eye', which allows them to see each other, communicate easily and to provide opportunities for oral practice.

2.2.4 Appropriate use of social skills

Working in a cooperative group learning requires some knowledge of the basic social skills, essential for the group to be cooperative (Johnson and Johnson, 1997). Social skills, according to Sharon and Cynthia, are "behaviours that promote positive interaction with others and the environment" (2010:12). These behaviours, according to Webb et al., include "*effective leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communicating and interacting with others, showing empathy, and conflict-management*" (2002:10). Johnson and Johnson (1994) insist that social skills must be taught and monitored by

the instructor in the same way as other skills such as academic skills, and learners must be encouraged to use them in the classroom.

2.2.5 Group Processing

The last crucial component of cooperative learning is ‘group processing’. Regarding this element, the Johnsons (1999) explain that group members need to discuss and evaluate their performances to see how well they have achieved their shared goals. Group processing offers learners a good opportunity to give and receive feedback on their contribution to the group and about what decisions to make concerning the type of behaviours to continue or alter.

2.3 The Learning Together Model

The *Learning Together* model of cooperative learning is a learning technique developed by Morton Deutsch’s students D.W Johnson and R.T Johnson at the University of Minnesota (USA) in 1989. The main characteristics of this technique, according to Johnson and Johnson (1989, 1999a), are: (a) the existence of group goal, (b) sharing and exchanging opinions respectfully among mixed ability group members to reach consensus, (c) division of labour, (d) social skills training, and (e) conflict resolution.

Johnson and Johnson (1999a) argue that *Learning Together* provides a conceptual framework for applying cooperative lessons in any subject area for learners of all ages, and it requires elements of positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, appropriate use of group skills and group processing (see components of CL), essential for any cooperative lesson to be successful.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

On the basis of the research literature on CL, the following codes and categories are selected for classroom observation results. Note that a cross (×) is used to report the results.

Items/Questions	Results			
	<i>Group : 3</i>	<i>Group : 4x</i>	<i>Group : 5x</i>	<i>Othe</i>
1. Group size				
2. Group composition	<i>Homogeneous</i>	<i>Mixed-ability</i> x		
3. Are chairs, tables and teacher's desk arranged so that all group members can see and hear one another?	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		
4. Are pupils working face-to-face and knee-to-knee?	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		
5. Do pupils discover what the topic is about?	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		
6. If pupils have prior knowledge about the topic	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		
7. If learners demonstrate a high level of motivation and enthusiasm for the assigned task(s) and the accomplishment of the common goal	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		
8. If lesson is teacher or learner-centred	<i>Teacher-centred</i> x	<i>Learner-centred</i>		
9. If the CL five elements are applied or ignored	<i>Applied</i>	<i>Ignored</i> x		
10. If pairs/groups show support for each other	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		
11. If groupmates are participating and exchanging views	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		
12. If most pupils display the CL skills required for the assigned task	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i> x		
13. If the teacher intervenes to monitor group progress	<i>Yes</i> x	<i>No</i>		

14. If the teacher helps groupmates to resolve conflicts alone when arising	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i> ×	
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Table1: Observation Checklist Results of 2M3(MS2), Middle School of Boudjima

<p>Date:Wednesday, January 16th, 2019 Name of School:Challal Med Said Middle School of Boudjima Grade Level:MS2 Class: 2M3 Class Size: 25 Activities/Tasks:Lesson8/Sequence2:Vocabulary associated with names of clothes andthe seasons during which these clothes are worn. Task: I read and do, p.68 (group work) Observation Session Number:01 Schedule and Duration:9 to 10 am (1h00)</p>

Information Box (2M3)

During the first classroom session which took place on Wednesday, January 16th, 2019 (from 9 to 10) as the information box above shows, the following facts were observed: concerning item one in the first category of section one about group size, it was noted that except for one group which was composed of five (5) members, the five remaining groups were all made up of four (4) members each. These groups were teacher selected, mixed-ability, and they were all working face-to-face and knee-to-knee. As regards the next item which informs about the class furniture, the main feature characterizing it was that both the tables and chairs were placed in such a way that all groupmates can see and hear one another. However, it is worth noting that the teacher’s desk was not facing all the groups.

In the second section of the checklist four important points are comprised, and they all deal with pupils’ involvement in the lesson, their prior knowledge about the topic presented by their teacher, their motivation and the type of interaction developed by the teacher. The

results reached in this section demonstrate that most of the pupils were familiar with the topic, which they associated with their previous knowledge in the field, and many of them displayed a high level of motivation and enthusiasm with regard to the topic at hand. Nevertheless, it was observed that the five components of CL, except for the component of ‘face-to-face promotive interaction’ the remaining four, were totally ignored by the teacher.

The results obtained from sections three and four of the checklist indicate that groupmates supported each other, and they were participating and exchanging views. However, not many of them displayed the CL skills required for the assigned task(s). It was also observed that the teacher was going around in the classroom and intervened during the whole session in order to monitor group progress and to settle disputes when arising.

The next table (Table2) reports the results obtained from the observation of the second class from Tizi Rached middle school, which is 4M2 (MS4).

Items/Questions	Results			
	<i>Group: 3</i>	<i>Group: 4×</i>	<i>Group: 5×</i>	<i>Other</i>
1. Group size	<i>Group: 3</i>	<i>Group: 4×</i>	<i>Group: 5×</i>	<i>Other</i>
2. Group composition	<i>Homogeneous</i>	<i>Mixed-ability</i> ×		
3. Are chairs, tables and teacher’s desk arranged so that all group members can see and hear one another?	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>		
4. Are pupils working face-to-face and knee-to-knee?	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>		
5. Do pupils discover what the topic is about?	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>		

6. Do pupils have prior knowledge about the topic?	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>	
7. If learners demonstrate a high level of motivation and enthusiasm for the assigned task(s) and the accomplishment of the common goal	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>	
8. If lesson is teacher or learner-centred	<i>Teacher-centred</i> ×	<i>Learner-centred</i>	
9. If the CL five elements are applied or ignored	<i>Applied</i>	<i>Ignored</i> ×	
10. If pairs/groups show support for each other	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>	
11. If groupmates are participating and exchanging views	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>	
12. If most pupils display the CL skills required for the assigned task	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i> ×	
13. If the teacher intervenes to monitor group progress	<i>Yes</i> ×	<i>No</i>	
14. If the teacher helps groupmates to resolve conflicts alone when arising	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i> ×	

Table2: Observation Checklist Results of 4M2 (MS4), Middle School of Tizi Rached

Date:Monday, January 28th, 2019
Name of School:AomarMetrekMiddle School of TiziRached
Grade Level:MS4
Class: 4M2 (Group1)
Class Size:13
Activities/Tasks:Lesson10/Sequence3: Recipes and the related vocabulary
Task: Prepare a short recipe using the imperative and time sequencers (T's Task)
Observation Session Number:04 (Tutorial Session)
Schedule and Duration:9 to 10 am (30 mn)

Information Box (4M2)

As in table1, the results obtained from table2 with regard to group size demonstrate that groups were quite similar in size in the sense that they were constituted of four (4) and five (5) members, and they were mixed-ability groups, too. During this fourth observation session which took place in a different school and locality, it was observed that there was some classroom participation which was encouraged between the pupils and their teacher, but it was conducted in a very timid and chaotic way, and it was limited to a few pupils only. During the tutorial session which lasted thirty (30) minutes for each group, it was also observed that both the chairs and tables were arranged so that groupmates could see and hear one another and work face-to-face and knee-to-knee. However, this seating arrangement did not concern the teacher's desk as it was not placed to face the learning groups, and apart from the element of 'face-to-face promotive interaction', the other elements mentioned by the Johnsons were totally ignored.

Despite the fact that only few pupils were involved in the learning task and were motivated to discover what the topic was about, many of them were able to provide some words and phrases associated with the topic of 'Recipes' like the ingredients (eggs, milk, sugar, a pinch of vanilla, oil, flour, baking powder or yeast), the spices (saffron, ground ginger, turmeric, black pepper, salt) and the cooking instructions (chop, put, mix, pour, and cook).

The results reached in the last section of the checklist regarding the role of the teacher in monitoring groups, show that the teacher intervened to check group progress, but to whether he intervened when instances of teasing occurred, the answer chosen was 'No'.

3.2 Discussion

This study is designed to investigate teachers' implementation of a CL approach in two different middle school EFL classes around the region of Tizi-Ouzou. It seeks to determine whether or not teachers in these two classes (2M3 and 4M2) embedded some CL elements into their lessons, and if the enactment of these elements is consistent and in line with the principles of the model borrowed from the Johnson brothers.

The results reached from the observed lessons show that the teachers in the concerned classes demonstrated a poor application of CL, and that their pupils were rather engaged in traditional group learning under the teachers' authority than in the CL pedagogy. There are many instances indicating teachers' application of CL with low fidelity, including the non-respect of the five dimensions informed by the key elements of CL (Johnson and Johnson, 1999); the lessons being more teacher-centred than learner-centred as the teachers proved to be dispensers of knowledge rather than facilitators of it. According to Murphy, Grey and Honan (2005), teachers who are trying to implement CL methods or activities, often manifest little knowledge and skills about their practices, and this affects negatively learners' achievement.

Apart from a lack of knowledge of CL implementation, Guskey (1988) adds that many teachers still stick to the traditional practices as they have been trained to be good managers of classrooms during their learning experience; therefore, they are often reluctant to change regarding their own attitudes and beliefs towards CL. On her part, Jolliffe (2007), maintains that many EFL teachers, who are unfamiliar with CL, lack self-confidence to try new teaching methods that may expose them to unexpected situations and unanticipated questions. Thus, EFL teachers need to have the skills and attitudes necessary to be able to teach mixed-ability classes. To this aim, professional training and teacher development are highly recommended. For Lieberman and

Miller (2000), they offer teachers opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to cope with CL unexpected situations in the EFL classroom. These authors (2000) propose professional training seminars that focus on two types of knowledge that every teacher should be equipped with: knowledge created by research on CL that needs to be implemented in the classroom and knowledge created in the process of action and reflection on practice. Thus, the role of the trainer in seminars or in-service workshops about CL is to help trainees develop a more reflective consciousness about how to bridge theory and practice.

During the observation sessions, some other potential problems arose, including student behaviour issues related to the domination of the groups by some members, and this concerned both classes: 2M3 and 4M2 (MS2 and MS4 levels); unequal participation in knowledge construction and classroom organization problems, including furniture arrangement, and this was also observed in both classes. To illustrate all these points, Brinton et al., in their 2000 study on group interaction difficulties, have found that a few learners show few sociable behaviours towards their partners. They have a preference to work alone, and very often, they are off-task, which means they indulge themselves in extra activities that have no relation with the group goal. Besides, Kagan and Kagan (2009) allude to the problem which inheres to power struggle within learning groups over a leadership role or position, exerted by some group members to dominate and influence the group, which impedes the participation of others. This conflicting situation, as they note, might yield unproductive results and cause conflicts and frictions within groups (ibid). To resolve these group conflicts constructively and to train learners to become peacemakers, it is necessary to establish in the classroom a cooperative context by structuring the majority of learning situations cooperatively in order to build positive relationships between disputants and to make groups safe learning environments (Deutsch, 1973; Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993).

Although there was some noticeable participation and exchange in the two classes observed, where learners showed some support for

each other, this participation, however, remained unfair and unequal as it was not productively structured. Slavin (1995) draws attention to this situation which might give rise to resentments within group sessions as a result of the mismatch in learners' interaction and exchange, where high achievers often complain about being held back by the low achievers, and the latter also complain about being totally ignored and dominated by the former. To promote equal participation in groups, CL experts propose the use of multiple ability tasks (Cohen, 1994; Gardner, 1993, 2000), that is, tasks that involve the use of a wide range of abilities, including drawing, singing and acting, rather than only language abilities. In this connection, Gillies (2003) and the Johnsons (2014) draw attention to the role of the instructor in fostering equal participation in the EFL classroom by responsabilizing and making group members accountable for their group through assigning each one of them a portion of the workload to accomplish individually within the group. The aim sought is to avoid the "free rider" effect in groups, where only *"some team members do all or most of the work while others go along for the ride and benefit from the situation by signing off to receive the same grade as those who have done the work"* (Slavin, 1995:19).

Apart from group interaction difficulties, the physical arrangement of the concerned classes was another impediment to pupils' learning. It was not conceived of to establish a climate conducive to learning/teaching as the teachers' desks or boards were facing the front door, which made it difficult for the teachers to have a full view of all their pupils and vice versa. Research on classroom physical arrangement and how it affects the behaviour of both students and teachers (Weinstein, 1992; Stewart and Savage, 1999; Evans, 1997) has demonstrated that seating in the cooperative learning classroom should be arranged in such a way that it accommodates student groups and their frequent cooperative interaction. According to Kagan (2009), good seating arrangement tends to improve learning within groups as it triggers fewer behaviour problems and is conducive to group work; whereas, poor seating arrangement may be an obstacle to the achievement of group goals as it sets limits to what and how students

learn. For instance, if a learner finds difficulties to see and hear his/her teacher, he/she might not understand. In order to help EFL teachers determine the type of spatial lay-out or space configuration that is most appropriate when arranging the furniture for cooperative learning, Kagan (ibid) suggests the following guidelines:

- Students are seated four per team
- Students are physically close to all teammates
- No backs to the teacher, and all students have an unobstructed view of the teacher at the board
- Every student has easy access to his or her seat
- Team tables are far enough apart for easy movement within the class
- Teams are close enough for team-to-team interaction

It is important to notice that the previously stated guidelines meant for well-arranged classroom settings emphasize the idea of group size, close proximity and cohesiveness, which are essential aspects that facilitate group interaction or social exchanges among learners in cooperative learning tasks.

The aforementioned findings on the implementation of the *Learning Together* model of CL highlight the potential of this pedagogy in the EFL classroom among Algerian middle school EFL learners studying in a situation where competition and a limited number of meaningful opportunities for social interaction and exchange, are the dominant features. Yet, the implications of these findings suggest that there is still a need to investigate the efficacy of this instructional approach in the EFL classroom in order to improve EFL learners' achievement. These implications also call for the incorporation of this instructional framework as an integral part in the school curriculum as it yields positive outcomes with regard to learners' performances. This corroborates findings of previous studies on the positive effects of CL in improving EFL learners' achievement (Johnson and Johnson, 1999; Kagan, 1995; Kessler, 1992; Mc Groarty, 1989, 1993).

4. Conclusion

Although in the last three decades there has been substantial research in many countries on the effectiveness of CL in foreign language teaching/learning, little is known about how to use this new pedagogy in the EFL classroom. The aim of this study was to examine the implementation process for CL in Algerian middle school EFL classes within the region of Tizi-Ouzou.

The major finding of this study was that EFL teachers in the schools concerned lack adequate preparation, experience and familiarity with how to implement CL in their EFL classes; as a result, they encounter difficulties and challenges in handling pupils' learning and behaviour issues. For instance, how to avoid domination by certain pupils, how to manage the uncomfortable seating arrangement of pupils, and the non-respect or ignorance of the Johnsons' five key elements of CL, are all tasks that put pressure on these teachers. Some solutions have been provided to them, including professional training and development, however, considerable planning and monitoring are still needed to ensure their success.

5. Bibliography

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6. Appendix

Items/Questions	Responses			
I. Classroom management and organization -Group size (does it match the CL model?)	Group: 3	Group: 4	Group: 5	Other
-Group composition (is it homogeneous or mixed-ability?)	Homogeneous	Mixed-ability		
-Room seating arrangement (are chairs, tables and teacher’s desk arranged so that all group members can see and hear one another?)	Yes	No		
-Management of students’ learning (if the pupils are working face-to-face and knee-to-knee)	Yes	No		
II. Presentation of content of lesson -Topic: Do pupils discover what the topic is about? - if they have prior knowledge about it	Yes	No		
-Motivation: if learners demonstrate a high level of motivation and enthusiasm or the assigned task (s) and the	Yes	No		

accomplishment of the common goal		
-Interaction: if lesson is teacher or learner-centred	Teacher-centred	Learner-centred
-if the CL five elements are applied or ignored	Applied	Ignored
III. Group facilitation -cohesiveness: if pairs/groups show support for each other -if groupmates are participating and exchanging views -if most pupils display the CL skills required for the assigned task(s)	Yes Yes Yes	No No No
IV. Teacher monitoring of groups -if he/she intervenes to monitor group progress -if he/she helps groupmates resolve conflicts alone when arising	Yes Yes	No No

Appendix: Observation Checklist for Cooperative Learning Lessons (Adapted from Carol B. Furtwengler's 1992 checklist on how to observe CL classrooms)