

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING
IN AN
ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

by

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the
Master of Education in the School of Education
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DECLARATION

I, ..NOMALUNGVELO ISABEL NGUBANE, declare that:

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DEDICATION

TO MY LATE MOTHER
MILDRED THOKOZILE RADEBE (GAMEDE)

THE PILLAR OF MY STRENGTH í í .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe many thanks to my two remarkable supervisors, Ansurie Pillay and Andrias Bheki Mthembu. This work would be impossible without their immense patience, dedication, guidance, and academic support throughout all the stages of this report.

I am also thankful to Catherine Harrison who attended to every minute detail in her proofreading of this thesis and gave me valuable corrections and suggestions.

I am also indebted to my friends and colleagues for their keen interest in my project and professional support and invaluable encouragement. I would also like to thank the Principal, for allowing me to collect data in the school, and learners who participated in this study.

Finally, my warmest gratitude goes to my family, my husband, my daughter and my two sons, for their understanding, love, and support through the long and sometimes difficult academic journey I have taken.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to investigate whether the implementation of cooperative learning strategies improved learner-learner interactions and teacher-learner interactions and enhanced the relationships between the teacher and learners and amongst the learners in an English First Additional Language (EFAL) grade 10 classroom in a township secondary school. The sample population, of forty learners, was from one class of grade 10 EFAL. Cooperative learning strategies were implemented into the EFAL curriculum and learners were observed throughout the study on how they used cooperative learning. In addition, interviews were used to determine learners' perceptions and experiences of using cooperative learning. The results indicated that learner-learner and teacher-learner interactions improved when EFAL learners were engaged in cooperative learning activities. The results from this study concluded that cooperative learning, when used effectively in an EFAL classroom, enhanced interactions, developed positive relationship between the teacher and learners and amongst learners, supported EFAL skills, and improved learners' motivation towards their learning.

Key Concepts: Cooperative Learning, Second Language Acquisition, Communicative Language Teaching, Zone of Proximal Development.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Quality teaching and learning is the cornerstone of education and no education system can function without effective teaching and learning. It has been almost two decades since South Africa obtained its political liberation and created new educational policies, laws and curriculum to cater for the diverse democracy. Teaching and learning, however, still remain a challenge in the township schools (Bloch, 2009). With few classrooms, poor teaching and learning resources, high learner: teacher ratios and inadequate pedagogical support for teachers, learners struggle to achieve. In addition to the above mentioned challenges, township secondary teachers and learners also face the additional disadvantage that teaching and learning is carried out in English and not their first, indigenous languages in which they are most competent, and in which they feel most comfortable. This exacerbates the previously mentioned problems.

Township is a South African term that usually refers to the often underdeveloped urban living areas that, from the late 19th century until the end of apartheid, were reserved for non-whites (black Africans, Coloureds and Indians). Townships were usually built on the periphery of towns and cities (Huchzermeyer, 2011, Mvunganyi, 2011). According to Nongxa (2010) many township children are learning in impoverished schools. He further says that half of the township schools in South Africa have a shortage of classrooms, and only a third of secondary schools in the townships have recreational or sport facilities (Ramphela, 2012). Many learners in the township schools are not only heads of households, but face social problems including hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS and violence (Spren & Vally, 2010). According to Howie (2004) these socio-economic problems have a devastating impact on the academic achievement of learners in the township schools.

However, much has been achieved by the education system in the last 18 years. Eighteen racially divided departments of education were restructured into nine provincial departments of education with an over-arching national department to provide coherence of policy and philosophy (Chrisolm, 2004; Harley & Wedekind, 2004; Jansen, 2001). A new curriculum

for the new dispensation was designed and implemented in all schools in the country. Nutrition programmes for school children from poverty-stricken communities were established. The national government initiated and affected a no fee policy for schools in financially disadvantaged communities. Despite all these achievements and more by government, education in township schools remains a challenge. The use of an outmoded teaching and learning pedagogy in the teaching and learning of English First Additional Language (EFAL), mostly in secondary schools, undermines efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to realise the potential of every learner.

The new Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS, 2011) advocate and promote learner-centred classroom environments and the use of advanced teaching and learning styles to enhance learning. However, many teachers were trained in the apartheid era, in teacher training colleges which fostered rote learning for black learners and they are most comfortable using the traditional approach. Learners' prospects remain poor unless an urgent intervention is made to find ways or techniques to improve the teaching and learning in township schools. There is an acute need for innovative and appropriate teaching and learning strategies for use in township large classroom contexts, a teaching method that does not require expert knowledge in order to be successfully implemented and that can be used by teachers in ordinary school settings. One technique to improve the teaching and learning in any educational context around the world is cooperative learning.

1.2 Background and Rationale of the Study

I have been teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in a township secondary school for the past ten years. The school is an English medium school but it is situated in an IsiZulu speaking community. There is no school language policy which restricts the use of the first language in the teaching and learning, hence, many teachers use both IsiZulu and English to explain concepts in different subjects. Most of my learners come from poverty-stricken families with very limited or no reading resources like magazines and newspapers, and dictionaries to help learners develop their second language skills. The school has no library or resource centre in which learners can obtain additional reading material to help them acquire second language skills they need to achieve in their curriculum. Lack of educational resources like books, magazines, newspapers and dictionaries at home as well as at school puts these learners at a disadvantage of limited second language skills.

I have noticed that my learners are passive during English lessons, for example those dealing with poetry and advertisements. I have also observed that by teaching in a whole-class instruction method I fail to accommodate the diverse talents and academic levels in my class. The traditional teacher-centred approach hinders me from reaching those quiet, shy and weak learners individually. According to Evans, Kilfoil, and Van der Walt (2012) interactive activities improve English communication skills of second language speakers. My teacher-centred style does not encourage learner-learner interaction. Individual learners sit quietly and finish their daily tasks without asking for or offering help to each other. In most cases learners are shy to ask me for help because they fear being ridiculed by peers.

Even though Outcomes Based Education (OBE, 1996) and the new Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS, 2011) advocate a learner-centred classroom environment in which learners cooperate in teams, I continued to use the whole-class teaching method because this is the strategy used in my school and I also feel comfortable using the method.

It was not until I registered for my Honours Degree in Education that I discovered that in the EFAL classroom the teacher-led method is not always the ideal pedagogy. Firstly, it restricts effective learning since the teacher cannot reach all learners in the classroom. Secondly, this method does not facilitate active participation between the teacher and the learners and among the learners. Thirdly, I have come to realise that certain EFAL tasks are too complex for individual effort and they require cooperative effort. My studies exposed me to different English teaching and learning approaches that I can utilise in my classroom to change the teaching and learning activities into a more active and interesting experience which is beneficial for everyone.

After accessing numerous national and international readings on cooperative learning and how it merits tremendous positive learning outcomes for all learners and in many learning contexts across the world, I decided to implement cooperative learning in my classroom. This study, therefore, brings together the fields of cooperative learning and EFAL teaching and learning to maximise learning experiences for grade 10 learners in a township secondary school.

The traditional method that I use requires that I teach learners as a single, large group. In whole-class instruction, the emphasis is on the uniformity, rather than on the diversity, of learners. The teacher presents all the factual knowledge with learners seated passively and quietly listening to the teacher. In this approach the weight is on the teacher explanation and

encouragement to promote learning. The success of the teaching and learning activity stands or falls by the teacher's creativity or lack of it in creating an active learning environment. A lot of teaching and learning time is spent on the teacher writing on the chalkboard and the learners transcribing these notes.

The structure of the traditional classroom gives one person at a time the chance to speak and provides little opportunity for learners to express themselves to teachers or peers. As a result, many of the learners in my class struggle with interaction skills. Some learners feel distant from their peers, have problems with forming friendships, and are reluctant to ask questions. According to Sharan (2010) opportunities for talk are very important for second language learners. Lack of proficiency in the language of instruction is an important factor in the lower academic performance of English second language learners (Sharan, 2010). Sharan (2010) attributes the failure of many English second language learners to develop the language skills to achieve academic success to the teacher-centred methodology. An interactive cooperative learning environment, on the other hand, develops higher cognitive skills and communicative language skills (Cohen, 1994).

I decided to investigate the extent to which cooperative learning can change my teacher-centred classroom into a cooperative learner-centred environment. My goal for this action research study is to promote and increase teacher and learner interaction and learner-learner interactions during the learning activities in my EFAL classroom setting. Miller (2007) believes that action research is an ideal research design for classroom investigation by teachers attempting to solve problems and improve professional practices in their own classroom. Sharing the same sentiments about action research is Pillay (2008) who argues that action research is constantly used by teachers who are trying to discover and understand different and new pedagogical styles in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning thus enabling them to make informed professional decisions that have immediate and long term effects on learners. As a teacher and a researcher, I see myself as an agent of change in my teaching and learning context.

1.3. Brief Overview of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is defined by Johnson & Johnson (1989) as an instructional strategy which utilises small groups so that learners work together to accomplish individual and shared learning goals. During cooperative learning activities, individual learners seek

outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members. Cooperative learning is in contrast with competitive learning where learners work against each other to achieve an academic goal that only one or few learners can achieve and individual learning where learners work by themselves to accomplish learning goals unrelated to those of other learners.

According to Johnson et al (1989) the first research study on cooperative learning was published in 1898, and since then, there have been over 600 experimental studies on cooperative learning across the world. The results on these studies typically show that cooperative learning has a number of positive outcomes: academic achievement, enhanced motivation for learning, improved social development, improved positive relationship among learners (Johnson et al, 1989, 1994, 2003; Kagan, 1995, Sharan & Sharan, 1990; Sharan, 2010; Slavin, 1990, 1996, 2010).

There are five basic principles of cooperative learning:

- positive interdependence
- individual accountability
- face-to-face interaction
- social skills
- group processing

These key elements of cooperative learning will be explained in detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. In addition to the five original pillars of cooperative learning, Johnson & Johnson (1989), Slavin (1990) and Kagan et al (1995) discovered five broad cooperative learning techniques, each of which has been developed over the years by many scholars. The following cooperative techniques utilise learners in pairs while others utilise small groups of four to five learners:

- Think-pair-share
- Student Team Learning
- Jigsaw
- Learning Together
- Three-Step-Interview
- Roundtable
- Numbered Heads Together

Three-Step-Interview and Jigsaw strategies were incorporated into the EFAL grade 10 curriculum and implemented in this study over a period of five days. Cooperative learning is one of many teaching strategies that can easily be adapted and used in South African teaching and learning contexts while adhering to the DoE curriculum. Learner-centred classroom environments in which learners cooperate in groups or teams foster the development of social skills as well as academic skills and prepare learners to participate meaningfully in the society. Cooperative learning does not necessarily require expensive teaching and learning resources and can easily be adapted to suit large classroom contexts. Cooperative learning is also appropriate for the South African multi-racial and multi-cultural society. It helps to promote cooperation, interpersonal skills, racial integration and effective communication skills (Pillay, 2000, Sharan, 2010; Bafile, 2008). Cooperative learning has also been shown to develop a liking for school, reduce absenteeism and promote discipline, self-esteem and better understanding of the curriculum (Pillay, 2000).

1.4. Research Questions

- What strategies can be used to implement cooperative learning in a grade 10 English First Additional Language classroom?
- What factors promote or hinder the implementation of cooperative learning strategies?
- What are learners' perceptions and experiences of using cooperative learning to improve interactions and relationships amongst learners and between the teacher and learners?
- What are learners' perceptions and experiences of using cooperative learning to improve teaching and learning?

1.5. Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore whether the implementation of a cooperative learning strategy can improve the teaching and learning in an English First Additional Language classroom. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate ways of improving my teaching practice through action research. Also, the study determines learners' perceptions and experiences of using cooperative learning.

1.5.1. Specific Aims of the Study

- To investigate strategies that can be used to implement cooperative learning in an English First Additional Language grade 10 class.
- To determine factors that promotes or hinders the implementation of cooperative learning in an EFAL grade 10 classroom.
- To determine learners' perceptions and experiences of using cooperative learning

1.6. Limitations of the Study

This study is faced with some limitations. This is not necessarily negative, as awareness of limitations can be a cause for enrichment.

Firstly, the study is limited to a population of one class of grade 10 learners in a particular teaching and learning context. A more comprehensive overview of the impact of cooperative learning would have been gained if other grades were also included in the sample. Secondly, due to time constraints, the implementation of cooperative learning was limited to five lessons and to one learning area, English First Additional Language. A broader view of the influence of cooperative learning would have been increased if it was applied to other learning areas as well. The study is also limited to one schooling context. Results have not been sought in primary schools or in schools with different resources. In addition, my roles as researcher as well as a teacher in this study could have been a limitation to the study because of implicit and unequal power relations between me and the participants. My limited experience in cooperative learning and the participants' limited knowledge and experience of cooperative learning methods could also have affected the results.

Notwithstanding the limitations, the study could serve as a foundation for further research in the field of cooperative learning in secondary schools in South Africa.

1.7. Summary of the study

1.7.1. Research methodology

Under qualitative research methodology, the purpose of this study was to explore whether the use of cooperative learning strategies can improve the teaching and learning of EFAL in a grade 10 class, and can enhance the relationships between the teacher and the learners and among the learners. The essential processes included investigating, implementing, observing and documenting, in detail, the experiences of learners in their natural setting of a real

classroom. I undertook all these processes and the analyses of data as a participant in the study. Thus, this approach gave me as researcher the opportunity to take into account the views of the participants and the details of the group interactions as well as multiple interpretations in the group's natural environment.

1.7.2. Research design

To answer the research questions an action research design was employed in this study. Schmuck (2000) defines action research as a recursive process of systematic investigation in which teachers examine their own teaching and learners' learning through descriptive reporting, purposed conversation, collegial sharing and critical reflection for the purpose of improving classroom practice. Miller (2007) argues that action research is a natural part of teaching. She says that teachers are continually observing learners, collecting data, and changing practices to improve learners' learning and the classroom environment. Action research provided a framework that guided me towards a better understanding of why, when, and how cooperative learning can improve the teaching and learning in an EFAL classroom (Miller, 2007).

1.7.3. Research paradigm

Interpretivist paradigm underpins the framework for this study. According to Henning (2012) interpretivists believe that there is no single correct route or particular method to knowledge. In the interpretivist tradition there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories. Instead, the theories should be justified according to how interesting they are to the researchers and to those in the research context. In addition, interpretivists draw their meaning from the context through an in-depth examination of the phenomena of interest. Since interpretivism is directly linked to access to reality through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings, this study investigates shared meanings of learners in small cooperative learning groups, observes to collect information about the events and interprets to make meanings of the information gathered. As an interpretivist researcher, I did not use positivist ideas of objective measurement methodology, but I used meaning orientated methodology of participant observation and interviews which relied on a subjective relationship between myself, as the teacher/researcher, and learners as participants.

1.7.4. Population and Sample

The participants in this research were grade 10 EFAL learners. I also played a significant role of participant observer in the study. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. According to Warrican (2006) purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling in which the researcher selects information rich cases for study in depth. For this study, one grade 10 EFAL class was selected in which the phenomena could mostly be investigated. The class and the learners are well known to me as I am the EFAL teacher and the class teacher as well.

1.7.5. Data collection instruments

Interview, focus groups and observation were the primary data collection tools for this study. Semi-structured interviews (APPENDIX C) were used to elicit learners' perceptions of using cooperative learning in their EFAL teaching and learning. Eight learners, consisting of two high achievers, three average learners, and three slow learners were selected to participate in the individual interview. All interview sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed immediately after the session.

Focus group interviews were also used in this study to supplement individual interviews and to explore group perceptions. The primary objective of a focus group interview in this study was to collect high quality data in a natural setting where participants provided their insights, perceptions and opinions in the context of the views of others.

Observing learners in their natural setting was the primary goal of this action research study because it allowed me as the researcher to collect first hand data, contrary to reporting another person's interpretations. An observation schedule (APPENDIX D) with categories was used to record observations.

1.7.6. Data analysis

In this research, the process of data analysis began with the categorisation and organisation of data in search of patterns, critical themes and meanings that emerged from the data collected through observation and interviews. The interviews, both individual and focus group, were recorded and transcribed. The useful information gathered from both open and closed questions was analysed, compared and categorised and triangulated with data from observation to draw conclusions.

1.8. Outline of the Study

This dissertation has been organised in the following way:

Chapter One outlines the context of the study, motivation for the research, research goals and provides a description of the research site. Chapter Two begins by laying out the theoretical framework of this study, and looks at the elements, methods, and benefits of cooperative learning. This chapter also presents cooperative learning studies carried out nationally, as well as internationally. Chapter Three describes and justifies the research design and procedures that were used to carry out this study. Chapter Four presents the research process. Chapter five presents data from observations (Appendix D) and interviews (Appendix C). Chapter Six analyses data from observations and interviews and discusses the findings. Chapter Seven comprises a conclusion and makes recommendations.

1.9. Conclusion

This chapter provides the background and rationale for this study. It also highlights some research on cooperative learning with some focus on the elements and methods of cooperative learning. Finally, research goals and questions are presented followed by an outline of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter begins by laying out the theoretical framework of this study, and looks at the elements, methods, and benefits of cooperative learning. This chapter also presents cooperative learning studies carried out nationally, as well as internationally.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The general theoretical perspectives that have steered this research and which are overviewed in this section with an aim to answer the research questions are:

- Socio-cultural theory
- Constructivism theory

2.2.1. The Socio-cultural Theory

Social interaction and mediated learning are central to Vygotskian (1978) socio-cultural theory, particularly with respect to the role played by adults in instructing and guiding learners, which helps develop the language of learning and which in turn enables the learners to acquire knowledge voluntarily (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) also argues that there exists strong link between formal learning (one that takes place in school) and informal learning (one that takes place in the home) and he stresses that an effective link should be established between the two in order for learning to be perceived as significant, relevant and of practical value by the learners.

Vygotsky (1978) points out that a prerequisite to developing learning that engages everyday life is the interdependence between teachers, learners and peers where the three must interact in order to share ideas and experiences and solve problems. In explaining the zone of proximal development (ZPD), Vygotsky (1978) suggested that learners should be challenged to undertake tasks that appear to be beyond their current level of development. These seemingly difficult tasks can be completed with the assistance and guidance from the teacher and peers and in time the necessary skills required to perform the tasks could be internalised (Vygotsky, 1978).

This study seeks to move away from traditional classroom teaching and learning environments in which the teacher is the only fountain of knowledge and learners do not have the opportunity of interacting with their peers and thus have limited opportunities for receiving assistance through guided learning, modelling, and feedback which is crucial in the second language acquisition and learning environment. Collaborative learning contexts with more emphasis on co-participation, cooperative learning and joint learning in which a teacher brings existing knowledge to learners by co-constructing it with them was used in this cooperative learning study to stimulate EFAL learners' skills.

2.2.2. Constructivist Theory

Bruner (1966), like Vygotsky (1978), highlights the social nature of learning, stating that other people in a child's environment should assist the child develop skills through the process he refers to as scaffolding. The concept of scaffolding refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill he is in process of acquiring (Bruner, 1966, p.19). The concept of scaffolding is similar to Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the ZPD in that both theories involve helpful, structured interaction between expert peers or an adult, and a child with the aim of helping the child achieve a specific goal (McLeod, 2008).

Bruner's constructivist theory proposes that the outcome of cognitive development is thinking and that the intelligent mind creates from experiences "generic coding systems that permit one to go beyond the data to new and possibly fruitful predictions" (Bruner, 1966, p. 234). In simple terms, Bruner (1966) says that as children grow they must continuously acquire new ways of representing the recurring regularities in their environment. Bruner (1966) contends that important outcomes of learning include not only the concepts, categories, and problem-solving procedures developed by a socio-cultural environment, like Vygotsky, but also the ability to create these things for oneself (independent learning).

To relate his theory to learning contexts Bruner (1966) uses ideas of a spiral curriculum to argue that any child of any age is capable of independent learning and understanding complex information. He contends that any subject can be taught effectively to any learner at any age and stage of development. He explains this idea through the concept of the spiral curriculum which illuminates how information is being structured so that complicated knowledge can be taught at the simplified level first, and then re-visited at more complex levels later on. This means that learning topics can be taught at levels of gradually increasing difficulty which

leads to learners being able to solve problems independently. Bruner (1966) also refers to this process as discovery learning because it allows learners to construct their own knowledge and they do this by organising information using their own coding system. According to Bruner (1966) the most effective way of developing learners' coding systems is for them to discover it rather than being told it by the teacher.

Bruner's concept of discovery learning implies and informs teachers that learners in any learning context, at any age, irrespective of subject under study, are cognitively capable of constructing their own knowledge without teachers feeding the knowledge to learners. Discovery learning discourages rote learning in which the teacher transfers knowledge to learners. Instead, Bruner's constructivist approach promotes the idea that teachers should facilitate the learning process. Teachers can achieve this by designing lessons that help learners discover the relationship between bits of knowledge by giving learners information without organising it for them. Bruner (1966) refers to this process as the process of discovery learning.

This study concurs with Bruner's ideas in that in all the teaching and learning activities designed for the intervention, the teacher's role was that of the facilitator of the learning process instead of imparting the knowledge to learners. Through creative cooperative learning activities learners constructed their own knowledge by using different individual abilities and skills in their groups. Big tasks were divided into smaller bits of knowledge among group members so that each member was individually responsible and accountable for learning his smaller part of the bigger topic and sharing the knowledge with the entire group. This promoted the cooperative learning principles of interdependence and accountability.

In a learning context where a large number of learners come from social circumstances like child-headed families or poor living conditions where there are no educational resources which are conducive to quality learning, classrooms are the only environments in which learners obtain learning opportunities. Therefore it is imperative that our classrooms provide maximum opportunities for these learners to acquire all the skills they need. Teachers are, largely, the only adults in the learners' lives that can support their learning. For these reasons, this study argues, cooperative learning classrooms are an ideal environment in which learners can obtain maximum support from the peers and the teacher through collaborative and discovery learning.

2.3. Key Concepts explained

2.3.1. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT) informed the teaching and learning in this study. Richards & Rodgers (1986), and Liang (2002) argue that communicative language teaching is based on the notion that the primary function of language use is communication or communicative competence. According to Liang (2002) CLT entails that the teaching and learning of language make use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. These real communicative situations are very important for learners who are learning a second language because through expressing their opinions and views, they develop oral fluency and accuracy which are essential for the success of the second language communication (Liang, 2002).

In line with the above arguments on the importance of classroom contexts which promote communication skills of learners is the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (2011) which advocate that language teachers should utilise different current teaching and learning approaches to equip learners with adequate communicative competence. CLT suggests that when learning a language a learner should have a great deal of exposure to the target language and many opportunities to practice or produce the language. This study provided EFAL learners with extended opportunities of using the target language in real-life situations through interactive learner-centred EFAL activities such cooperative learning strategies of Three-Step-Interview and Jigsaw (which will be explained in detail later in this chapter) embedded in the EFAL curriculum to enhance their competency skills in the language. Such learning opportunities are not available in traditional classes in which learners do not actively participate in their learning but rely on the teacher to provide all the teaching and learning.

The features of CLT are explained by Kagan (1995), Liang (2002), Nunan (1991) and Canale & Swain (1980). They argue that CLT entails that:

- The focus is on all the components of communicative competence and is not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
- Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes.

- Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
- In the communicative classroom, learners ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

In support of these positive outcomes of CLT Nunan (1991), cited in Kagan (1995), asserts that in CLT learners assume active, negotiating, and contributing roles. He further argues that in CLT classrooms, teachers attend to the input, interaction, and output in the target language and, as a result, learners ultimately use the target language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts, to achieve communicative competence in the target language (Kagan, 1995).

Communicative competence is defined as the ability to interpret and enact appropriate social behaviours, and it requires the active involvement of the learner in the production of the target language (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrel, 1995). Such a view of communicative competence encompasses a wide range of abilities which includes the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (linguistic competence); the ability to say the appropriate thing in a certain social situation (sociolinguistic competence); the ability to start, enter, contribute to, and end a conversation; the ability to do this in a consistent and coherent manner (discourse competence); and the ability to communicate effectively and repair problems caused by communication breakdowns (strategic competence) (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Long & Robinson, 1998; Liang, 2002).

Seen from the above mentioned perspectives, CLT is a learning concept that is worth utilisation in language classrooms to move away from traditional language classrooms. Kagan (1995) asserts that the maximum effectiveness of CLT for language learners can be experienced when it is employed in learner-centred classrooms in combination with teaching strategies that promote learner autonomy like cooperative learning (Liang, 2002). The embodiment of CLT through cooperative learning is not new. Johnson & Johnson (1994) point out that cooperative learning activities are often used to produce communicative competence of second language learners. Kagan (1995) also claims that CLT and cooperative learning are a natural match in additional or second language teaching in a sense that the two components of CLT (socially oriented lessons and small group interaction) also correspond with the principle of cooperative learning.

However, the input, interaction, and output perspective of CLT that Nunan (1991) cites above has not always been easy to achieve in township schools where most teachers are second language teachers of the target language, and this study views this as the challenge of this theory.

The above mentioned similarities between the CLT and cooperative learning prompted me to incorporate CLT in my teaching of the EFAL cooperative learning tasks, firstly, to afford learners an opportunity to acquire second language communicative competence in the less threatening environment of cooperative learning, secondly, to complement cooperative learning with a more similar learning approach to achieve the maximum learning environment, and thirdly, to move away from teacher-centred language teaching.

2.3.2. Cooperative Learning and Communicative Language Teaching

Cooperative learning within the CLT framework is defined as an approach which encourages and promotes the maximum use of cooperative activities based on pair work and group work of learners in classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Johnson et al (1994) argues that as cooperative learning emerged from CLT, it encourages the development of critical thinking skills and communicative competence, by means of carefully structured activities of social interaction.

Both cooperative learning and CLT highlight interaction and communication between teacher and learners and among learners. A teacher takes the role as a guide, facilitator and negotiator in the additional language classroom. Mutually, cooperative learning and communicative language teaching promote the idea of active learning in a second language classroom where learners work cooperatively on learning tasks by achieving the learning goals through communicative use of the target language. If the learning tasks are designed to require active and true communicative interaction among learners in the target language, the learners have numerous benefits.

The incorporation of CLT into cooperative learning is not new since cooperative learning applied many CLT techniques (Kagan, 1990). The two major components of CLT that were embraced in this study are: socially oriented lessons and small group interaction. For this study, both of these components correspond to the essence of cooperative learning and demonstrate the embodiment of a set of techniques and the spirit of CLT.

Basta (2011) investigated the role of the CLT and cooperative learning in a university classroom. The aim of the study was to examine the attitudes of students at the higher education on the use of CLT and cooperative learning in their language curriculum. The data about the students' perspectives on cooperative learning, and particularly on their experiences about working in pairs and groups in their English second language classes was collected through questionnaires and analysed. The results obtained indicated that cooperative learning within the CLT framework had academic, social, and generic benefits.

2.3.3. Differences between cooperative learning and group work learning

Because both cooperative learning and group learning involve learners seated in groups, teachers often assume they are the same. Although studies reveal much success of cooperative learning as compared to group learning, the major differences between cooperative learning and group learning lie in the features or principles of cooperative learning which are: positive interdependence, accountability, group processing, small group skills and social skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 1990, 1994; Liang, 2002). Alternatively, group learning simply involves arranging learners to sit and work in groups with no particular structure in place to make group work become team work. The differences between cooperative learning can noticeably be seen when illustrated by means of a table as follows:

2.3.3.a. Differences between cooperative learning and group work learning

COOPERATIVE LEARNING	GROUP LEARNING
1. Heterogeneous grouping	Homogeneous grouping
2. Positive interdependence with structured goals	No positive interdependence with structured goals.
3. A clear accountability for individual's share of group's work through role assignment and regular rotation of the assigned role.	No accountability for individual's share of work through role assignment and regular rotation of the assigned role.
4. Sharing of leadership roles.	Few being appointed or put in charge of the group.
5. Sharing of the appointed learning tasks.	Each learner seldom responsible for others' learning.
6. Aiming to maximise each member's learning	Focusing on accomplishing the assignment.
7. Maintaining good working relationships, process-oriented.	Frequent neglect of good working relationships, product-oriented.
8. Teacher observation of learner interaction.	Assuming that learners already have the required skills.
9. Teaching of collaborative skills	Little, if any at all, teaching of collaborative skills.
10. Structuring of the procedures and time for processing.	Rare structuring of procedures and time for the processing.

(Adapted from Johnson & Johnson, 1989, p. 38)

The above illustration of cooperative learning and group learning shows that the implementation of cooperative learning in this study will not be merely an alternative to the teacher-centred traditional method, but will be based on the potential the approach has of yielding enormous positive academic results in my EFAL secondary school context. As a researcher, I argue that if all township schools in South Africa aim at quality EFAL teaching and learning, cooperative learning is a necessary approach.

2.3.4. Cooperative Learning and Second Language Acquisition

The success of cooperative learning as an effective teaching method in the second language acquisition arena has been claimed by scores of scholars internationally (Krashen, 1985; Kagan, 1995; Chaudron, 1999; Cohen, 1994; Liang, 2002).

Krashen (1985) and Kagan (1995) examined cooperative learning and language acquisition and discovered three vital variables of input, output and context. Their investigation showed that cooperative learning had positive effects on almost all domains of language acquisition.

In terms of input and output theory, Krashen (1985) asserts that consistent hearing of the target language 'comprehensible input' at the level slightly above that of the learner's current level of comprehension is the key factor in acquiring a second language. In support of this idea are Canale & Swain (1980) who added that not only 'comprehensible input' is important for language acquisition, but speaking the target language 'comprehensible output' is as necessary as comprehensible input for a learner to acquire a new language more completely.

Another researcher who also found evidence that learners gain both comprehension and output of second language through cooperative learning is McGroarty (1989). She discovered that cooperative learning tasks foster various types of verbal exchange. According to McGroarty (1989) cooperative learning provides more possibilities for fluent speakers to model speech and interaction so that the less fluent speaker can understand. McGroarty (1989) further points out that even in second language contexts where all learners in a group lack fluency in English, the learners can correct each other and attempt to fill in the gaps of their understanding by correcting and rephrasing what their partners say in order to come to agreement.

The above arguments, however, have met with conflicting ideas from the opposing research views when it comes to the best classroom context that has the potential to maximise second language acquisition. Some researchers (Chen, 1999; Liang, 2002; Long & Robinson, 1998) believe that a language classroom in which first speakers of the target language interact with second speakers of the target language provides extended opportunities for language acquisition of the target language. This is based on the idea that first language speakers of the language can provide a higher level of language input than that of the second language speakers, hence increasing both comprehensible input and comprehensible output. The writers above further argue that if second language speakers and target language speakers are allowed to interact with each other, they may learn each other's language errors which may be detrimental to the effective acquisition of the target language.

Chaundron (1999) and Liang (2002) claim in many traditional language classrooms teacher talk dominates the classroom and this limits the opportunities of learners to speak the target language. This claim is further supported by Cohen (1994) who considers language classroom contexts like these as a limiting factor to second language acquisition. Studies by Cohen (1994) found that traditional classrooms spend about 90% of classroom instruction time on teacher's explanation of linguistic structures and grammatical forms, and only 10% of the class time is devoted to learners' active use of English in communication. Cohen (1994) asserts that classes like these are a waste of learning time, since, only 25% to 50% of the learners may be actually be actively listening to the teacher when instructing.

Not only dominating teacher talk is seen as a setback to second language acquisition in traditional classrooms, the quality of this teacher talk also poses a huge challenge. Cohen (1994) found that most teacher talk in teacher-centred second language classrooms relates to discrete analysis of linguistic elements, translation to mother tongue, classroom management, organisation of learning and instruction on homework and assignments. Sharan (2010) also found that in classrooms where the teacher and learners share a common first language, code switching and translation often occurs, which further limits the input and output in the target language for learners. Furthermore, Sharan (2010) found that if the teacher's English proficiency is not high enough, the shared first language is probably used for classroom communication, and this makes matters worse (Sharan, 2010).

It stands to reason that if the teacher is the only source of comprehensible input for learners in the language classroom context described above, learners are deprived of the opportunity of

acquiring and learning a second language. These negative language situations decrease learners' motivation to acquire a second language.

Cooperative learning, however, when compared to traditional classrooms discussed above, provides an alternative for language teachers to maximise the amount of second language output for learners. Kagan (1995) maintains that cooperative learning activities maximise learners' talk, over teacher talk, and engage all learners in speaking the target language. Interaction that occurs in group discussions as learners mark each other's worksheets, exchange ideas, and make corrections and improvements in collaboration, provide learners with extended opportunities to practise the target language (Kagan, 1995). Canale & Swain (1980) and that second language acquisition within cooperative learning classrooms is fostered by input that is functional and communicative output that is frequent, superfluous, and consistent with the identity of the speaker.

These additional opportunities for language acquisition within cooperative learning environments allow learners to employ the target language to negotiate meaning and increase their communicative competence (Liang, 2002; Lin, 2008 and Nunan, 1991). Nunan (1991) claims that learners achieve communicative competence by subconsciously acquiring the language through active participation in real communication that is of interest to them. According to Nunan (1991) this further substantiates the idea that output is just as important as input since most people learn how to speak a second language by actually speaking that language.

My own experiences of language teaching in a township secondary school brings forward another argument worth mentioning in the discussion of second language acquisition and learning. It is important, for this study, to highlight that the incompetence of the teacher in the language of teaching and learning negatively impacts on the learners who depend solely on the teacher to acquire all the language skills they need to achieve. Similarly, if a teacher is incompetent in the target language, the negative effect of this incompetence will impact negatively on the learners who depend on the teachers to acquire all the language skills they need to achieve.

2.4. Literature Review

2.4.1. Strategies used in cooperative learning

2.4.1.1. Elements of Cooperative Learning

From the above discussion it is clear that cooperative learning puts forward learners' interactions and active participation instead of passive listening in the classroom. To achieve this in this study, it was important for the teacher to switch the roles from being at the centre of the learning activities to being the facilitator of the learning to allow the learners to lead the learning activities and to develop independent learning. The switching of the roles did not however mean that the teacher became a passive participant in the classroom, it was important for the teacher to plan and structure the learning activities and to help learners whenever they needed assistance with their learning.

In general, there were five essential cooperative learning aspects that made cooperative learning successful: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, teaching of social skills, and group processing (Kagan, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 1994; Sharan & Sharan, 1990; Slavin, 1990). The following section will discuss each of these elements of cooperative learning.

2.4.1.1.1. Positive Interdependence

For a successful cooperative learning classroom, a feeling of working together for a common learning goal and caring about each other's learning was created among the group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Positive interdependence was fostered in three ways: firstly, group members were assigned learning material to learn together and to make certain that all group members understand the material. Secondly, each group member's effort was indispensable for the group's success and hence, each member of the group was encouraged to contribute to the learning. Thirdly, and lastly, to promote equal participation and contribution, each member of the group was assigned a unique role and responsibility within the group such that it was impossible for the group to succeed without the individual's accomplishment of his or her task (Johnson et al, 1989, Slavin, 1990). Cohen (1994) argues that without positive interdependence learners sometimes fall into the trap of 'hitchhiking' where they let one learner to do all the work for them.

Cole (2012) examined how teachers in different teaching and learning contexts can utilise their classrooms as learning communities in which each learner makes a significant contribution to develop understanding of tasks for all learners despite having unequal knowledge concerning the topic under discussion. When learning is interactive (Cole, 2012) learners can develop each other's understanding through guided scaffolding of the new knowledge until all the learners can independently perform the task.

This learning process is, however, not possible in traditional classrooms where there is little interaction between learners and between learners and the teachers. This study therefore, through cooperative learning strategies, intend to create opportunities for EFAL learners to maximise their learning through interactive and participatory learning activities by utilising collaborative mixed ability learning groups and teacher support so that expert learners can assist weak learners by means of supportive guided learning so that all learners in the classroom equally understand the material being studied and each learner can independently complete given tasks.

2.4.1.1.2. Individual Accountability

Individual accountability was the aspect which provided for each learner believing that it was important for him or her to learn the assigned material. This cooperative learning aspect entails that each member is in charge of his or her learning and is responsible for the learning of the teammates (Kagan, 1990). One way of fostering individual accountability is to randomly select one learner from the group to answer the question on the assigned material or to summarise the topic assigned to the group.

2.4.1.1.3. Face-to-face Interaction

To provide learners with opportunities for face-to-face interactions where they discuss, debate, argue, explain, and teach each other is important for cooperative learning. For effective face-to-face interactions, the classroom setting has to be arranged such that learners are clustered together into tight groups, facing each other in order for them to have the kind of verbal exchanges necessary to accomplish the common learning goal (Johnson et al, 1989). Johnson et al (1989) stress that the interaction within the cooperative learning groups is important for sharing of learning experiences, sharing of ideas and knowledge, feedback between learners during learning activities, and for supporting each other. Slavin (1990)

argues that placing learners in groups to work together does not ensure that they will engage in the positive interaction that promote learning.

2.4.1.1.4. Teaching of Social Skills

The teaching of social skills is essential. Placing socially unprepared learners in a group and instructing them to cooperate does not guarantee that they have the ability to do so effectively (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Learners might not naturally co-operate and must explicitly be taught the skills on how to cooperative with others. It was important for learners to learn leadership, communication, and conflict resolution skills so that they could cooperative effectively. Real-life situations like a self-introduction activity, interview games, and modelling created positive relationships among learners and motivated them to work together.

2.4.1.1.5. Group Processing

During cooperative learning activities, group members get the opportunity to reflect on learning experiences (Slavin, 1990). This activity can happen immediately after the learning experience or at a later stage. Group processing allows, firstly, the teacher to find out how much the learners had actually learned about the topic, and secondly, the learners to discuss their learning experiences of the learning and what strategies worked best for their learning as well as what techniques will help them move towards a higher level of understanding and of using cooperative learning (Kagan, 1991).

2.4.1.2. Cooperative Learning Methods

Johnson & Johnson (2003); Kagan, (1999); Liang, (2002); and Sharan (2010) claim that cooperative learning embraces different methods for organising and conducting classroom interaction. Johnson (2003) further insists that any teacher can find a way to use cooperative learning methods that agree with his or her teaching ideas, practice and learning context. Among many methods that research has developed, Johnson (2003) affirms that those discussed in the following section of this paper are the easiest to implement in any learning context and have received the most attention and popularity across the world. The rationale for the choice of cooperative learning methods discussed in the following section and to be employed in this study lies in the fact that as researcher I found these methods simpler for second additional language learners and undemanding in terms of learning resources.

2.4.1.2.1. Three- Step-Interview

Three-Step-Interview was developed by Kagan (1990) and can be used as an icebreaker to foster interaction, second language acquisition and learning and promote listening, speaking and summary skills (Kagan, 1995). In this method, learner A interviews learner B for a specified number of minutes while learner A listens attentively and asks probing questions (Kagan, 1995). At the end of the specified time, the pair reverses the roles and learner B will interview learner A for the same number of minutes. After a specified time, the pair will join another pair to form a group of four. Each member in the new group will introduce his partner, highlighting the most interesting points about him or her (Kagan, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Liang, 2002).

This method is one of the methods that was utilised in this study to help learners gain language competence and to get learners to know each other well enough for them to work cooperatively in groups.

2.4.1.2.2. Student-Teams-Achievement Division (STAD)

After investigating this method, as researcher I was attracted to its simplicity and easy-to - implement technique. STAD was developed by Slavin (1996) and developed by Johnson & Johnson (1999) to provide teachers with another method that can be used to nurture positive interdependence and accountability in cooperative learning classrooms (Kagan, 1994; Liang, 2002). In the STAD method, the teacher explains the topic to the whole class, and then assigns the material to heterogeneous groups to further discuss the material and to ascertain that each member understands the materials and that his or her group mates also understand the topic. This group discussion and peer tutoring prepare learners for a quiz. For the quiz, learners are scored individually, but each learner's score contributes to the overall score of the group. Teachers can use rewards to motivate group skills and to encourage positive interdependence and accountability among group members (Kagan, 1995; Liang, 2002).

2.4.1.2.3. Learning Together

Learning Together method was developed by Johnson & Johnson (1994). Like the STAD and Three-Step-Interview, Learning Together is also simple for novice cooperative learning teachers. Here the class divides into home groups and expert groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). In home groups or original groups, learners are assigned different topics to study and understand. Learners will then leave their home groups to find members with the same topics

as their expert group. Once they find them, these new groups learn their assigned topic before returning back to their home groups to teach their expert topic (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Liang, 2002).

Learners are tasked with the responsibility to learn the assigned material (their own learning) and to make home group mates understand the topic as well (each other's learning). This promotes positive interdependence, accountability and group skills.

2.4.2. Factors that promote or hinder the implementation of cooperative learning

2.4.2.1. Cooperative Learning and Classroom Interactions

Harmer (2009) agrees that learning anything involves participation. For example, you cannot learn to play a musical instrument without actually picking up the instrument. Similarly, it is difficult to learn a language without engaging with that language. Given that language primarily exists to facilitate communication, interaction in that language must have an important role to play in developing a learner's ability in that language. In other words, language teachers need to promote interactions in order to help learn the language skills (Harmer, 2009).

Using cooperative learning strategies in which learners engage in deep interaction with the learning material and with each other to argue, discuss, debate, explain, and summarise their ideas and opinions maximises the language practise and promote classroom learner-learner interactions. Harmer (2009) argues that collaborative activities, particularly through the use of small cooperative learning tasks foster language development since learners can see a reason to use language to interact.

Related to the concept of cooperative learning is that of socialisation. Interaction does not only promote language development but it also fosters the development of other important social skills such respect for others, politeness, and problem-solving. For this study three teambuilding activities (naming team, three-step-interview activity, and survival game) were planned and implemented within the cooperative learning context to develop learners' communication skills, team skills, and problem solving skills.

However, there are also problems that teachers face when trying to increase interaction in the language classrooms. It is unfortunate but true that some learners are not enthusiastic about

pair or group work, especially where learners are expected to communicate in the language they are less competent in. One major challenge of interaction within cooperative learning groups is the issue of self-consciousness among second language learners. Many learners become very nervous and embarrassed when asked to speak English and this may hinder interactions in the classrooms

Again, while theoretically the more students there are in a class the more possibilities for interaction there should be, however, this not the case in practice. The more learners there are, the more difficult developing interactions can be since there are more people to monitor, and, therefore more chances of problems like noise levels, simultaneous talking, excessive use of the first language, and some learners not participating in the interactions (Harmer, 2009).

Another common challenge in the cooperative learning classroom where learner-learner interaction is the main focus is the insufficient language to start the interaction. Sometimes learners in second language classrooms do not have the language needed to interact with their cooperative learning groups and, therefore, completing the task becomes an uphill struggle (Harmer, 2009).

2.4.2.2. Benefits of Cooperative Learning

The effects of cooperative learning on learners' attitudes, perceptions of learning and achievement in additional language or second language have been studied extensively with mostly positive results (Harmer, 2009; Liang, 2002; Kagan, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

One important study to mention is the one recently carried out by Hawker (2012) at the University of Serbia. The study investigated the role of cooperative learning on classroom interaction within three secondary foreign language classrooms, analysing spontaneous teacher-learner interactions in the three classes. The intervention strategies were primarily based on a synthesis of empirical interactions and the interactions generated by teacher interpretation and elaborations. Descriptive data on the patterns of interaction between the teacher and students were collected through teachers' and students' interviews. The results provided evidence that participation in classroom interactional activities initiated learners into a broader range of interactional practices that they enjoyed in the classroom. In addition, the study found that conversational classroom interaction afforded learners opportunities to

acquire lexis and to gain greater control over their existing linguistic resources. Strategic teacher-learner talk triggered increased and improved second language interaction.

Other studies that have investigated classroom interactions within cooperative learning classrooms (Bafile, 2008; Brady & Tsang, 2010; Byl, 2009; Chen, 1999; Liang, 2002,) found that cooperative learning provided six major benefits for additional and second language learners:

- small group learning provided more opportunities for interaction and negotiation for meaning that would not exist in a teacher-led classroom;
- cooperative learning provided bilingual learners with an opportunity of drawing on their primary language resources as they developed additional language skills;
- learners in cooperative learning groups could work together to complete a task by using learners who are advanced in the second language as their source of knowledge and skills;
- the teacher's role was extended from being an imparter of knowledge to a facilitator of discussion and a guide for learner interaction.
- learners in cooperative learning classrooms became more active in their own language acquisition, helping each other progress in their linguistic development and depended on the teacher less.
- learners in cooperative learning classrooms developed a sense of community as well self-esteem.

2.4.3. Learners' perceptions and experiences of cooperative learning

2.4.3.1. Teacher-learner Interaction

A study on classroom interaction conducted by Mohr (2007) in language classrooms found that using the teacher feedback can encourage learners' participation in classroom discussions, welcome their contributions, and motivate them by such practices. However in many second language classrooms teachers often face a situation where less proficient learners remain silent or participate less than their English-fluent peers.

In Mohr's (2007) study of extending English language learners' classroom interactions using the response protocol in a cooperative learning context, she discovered that learners became fully engaged in teacher-learner interactions when the teacher used the teacher-led questions-

and-answer. Data collected during the classroom observations revealed that teachers can maximise the opportunity to help language learners communicate in class by eliciting more from the less proficient learners through various response options and then enlarge the learners' responses repertoires in order to encourage students' participation and help develop their language proficiencies.

Data from learners' interviews indicated that learners perceived that cooperative learning improved their interactions with their teacher because they felt more confident in a group context to ask for more clarifications from the teacher if they did not understand the questions. Participants revealed using cooperative learning in their language learning provided them with more chances to use the target language because the teacher encouraged them to elaborate their responses to teacher, to explain their answers to their peers and to the teacher and to talk in pairs about their learning experiences and that provided them with more opportunities to practice the language.

Mohr (2007) suggests that language teachers can improve their interactions with learners by finding time to make small talk on a one-to-one basis with learners about different interesting topics. During cooperative learning tasks, teachers can frequently ask questions and listen carefully to student responses and focus on the content of the message rather than its grammatical structure. That way, learners feel more at ease to elaborate on the teachers' responses and are encouraged to participate more during learning.

Allowing sufficient wait time when asking the questions also helps second language learners to pause, and possibly code-switch if needed, also generate elaborated responses from learners and promote increased teacher-learner interactions. Praising learners correct interaction behaviours or correct responses gives learners motivation to interact with the teacher frequently and improve their self-confidence in the use of the target language (Kathleen, 2007).

2.4.3.2. Learner-learner interactions

Learner-learner interactions are increasingly becoming of major interest and concern for teachers in the language classrooms. Of the major studies on learner-learner interaction in a language classroom that have been conducted recently, one that had a profound correlation to this study is an ethnographic study conducted by Dass & Ferguson (2012) at the Malaysian undergraduate ESL setting. Similarly to this study, Dass & Ferguson investigated the manner

in which the students interacted with each other and with their teacher, verbally and non-verbally, and how they perceived the role of interaction in their ESL learning. Interactional group activities themed 'Exploratory Talk' were designed by the teacher and implemented within the curriculum to encourage second language students to talk, and to give opinions during learning.

The data from student interviews indicated that students perceived peer group activities as important as it presented them with a chance to practice and improve their English language skills as well as the skills essential to function in a particular context.

2.5. Conclusion

Literature reviewed in this chapter clearly indicates that cooperative learning, as a teaching and learning pedagogy, has the capacity to enable second language acquisition, learner-learner interaction, academic achievement, social skills development and motivation for learning.

With that in mind, the study seeks to establish that these benefits of cooperative learning can be extended to a township learning context in which learners study English as a first additional language subject and speak it as a second language. By this, this study aims to provide EFAL teachers with a basic tool for future investigations of cooperative learning in their EFAL classrooms and, it is hoped, will also contribute to the knowledge of EFAL learning and English second language acquisition.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology and design used in this study including strategies, instruments and data collection, as well as analysis methods whilst discussing the stages of the research process, validity of the study and ethical considerations. An interpretive paradigm was identified for the structure and context of the study.

3.2. Research Paradigm

According to Long & Robinson (1998) the term paradigm refers to the research culture with a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of the research. A paradigm, therefore, implies a pattern, structure and framework or system of scientific and academic ideas, values, and assumptions (Delpont, de Vos, & Strydom, (2012). In general, research paradigms reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and the world we want to live in. Based on these beliefs and ideas, Delpont et al (2012) classified research paradigms into three philosophical categories as positivism, interpretivism, and critical postmodernism.

Important to this study is the third category of research paradigm, the interpretivist paradigm, which underpins the framework for this study. According to Henning (2012) interpretivists believe that there is no single correct route or particular method to knowledge. In the interpretivist tradition there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories. Instead, the theories should be justified according to how interesting they are to the researchers and to those in the research context. In addition, interpretivists draw their meaning from the context through an in-depth examination of the phenomena of interest.

Since interpretivism is directly linked to access to reality through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings, this study investigates shared meanings of learners in small cooperative learning groups, observes to collect information about the events and interprets to make meanings of the information gathered. This study is therefore

underpinned by the principles of interpretivism which are observation and interpretation to make meaning in an attempt to understand phenomena. As an interpretivist researcher, I did not use positivist ideas of objective measurement methodology, but I used meaning orientated methodology of participant observation and interviews which relied on a subjective relationship between myself, as the teacher/researcher, and learners as participants.

The relationship between the interpretivism and this cooperative learning study can be understood clearly by looking at the purpose of the study which was to investigate the cooperative learning strategies that can be used to enhance the relationship between the teacher and learners and among learners in a language classroom. An interpretivist paradigm informed this study in three distinctive ways. Firstly, the nature of interpretivism which implies that reality can be explored and constructed through human interactions and meaning actions informed the cooperative learning context of this study which was learner-centred, participative, and interactive for all activities during the intervention programme. Secondly, methods of data collection used in this study, which were participant observation and interviews, are in line with interpretivism which explains how people make sense of their social world by means of daily routines such as conversations and writing while interacting with others around them. Observations, discussions, feedbacks and daily interviews were undertaken in this study to solicit learners' behaviours, beliefs and perceptions about their new learning environment and about using cooperative learning strategies for their learning. Thirdly, and lastly, the alignment of the interpretivist paradigm with the idea that those active in the research process socially construct knowledge by experiencing the real life or natural setting, attracted the researcher to this paradigm. This reality is in line with constructivist and social cultural theories that strengthen and support this study.

3.3. Research Method

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) define research method as a strategy of enquiry which moves from the underlying assumptions and flows to research design and data collection. The research methods can be commonly classified into qualitative and quantitative methods, though there are other distinctive modes in between. At a theoretical level, qualitative and quantitative refers to the distinctions about the nature of knowledge and about how one understands the world and the purpose of the research. At a discourse level, qualitative and quantitative refers to the research methods which are the way in which data are collected and

analysed, as well as to the type of generalisations and representations derived from the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Qualitative approach, which underpins this study is naturalistic in nature, and attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and groups of people in their natural environment (Henning, 2012). Thus, this distinguishing feature of qualitative methodology was useful to the natural classroom setting and processes of this study. According to Henning (2012) qualitative research aims to explore and discover issues about the problem on hand because very little is known about the problem. The approach uses 'soft' data and gets 'rich' data (Delpont, et al 2012). In support of these ideas, Henning (2012) argues that qualitative research is designed to help researchers understand people, and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Qualitative data sources include participant observations and interviews, all of which were used to collect data in this study and will be discussed later.

Under qualitative research methodology, the purpose of this study was to explore whether the use of cooperative learning strategies can improve the teaching and learning of EFAL in a grade 10 class, and can enhance the relationships between the teacher and the learners and among the learners. The essential processes included investigating, implementing, observing and documenting, in detail, the experiences of learners in their natural setting of a real classroom. I undertook all these processes and the analyses of data as a participant in the study. Thus, this approach gave me as researcher the opportunity to take into account the views of the participants and the details of the group interactions as well as multiple interpretations in the group's natural environment.

3.4. Research Design: Action Research

To answer the research questions an action research design was employed in this study. Schmuck (2000) defines action research as a recursive process of systematic investigation in which teachers examine their own teaching and learners' learning through descriptive reporting, purposed conversation, collegial sharing and critical reflection for the purpose of improving classroom practice.

Miller (2007) argues that action research is a natural part of teaching. She says that teachers are continually observing learners, collecting data, and changing practices to improve

learners' learning and the classroom environment. Action research provided a framework that guided me towards a better understanding of why, when, and how cooperative learning can improve the teaching and learning in an EFAL classroom (Miller, 2007).

3.4.1. Rationale for Action Research

According to O'Leary (2004) action research influences change and solves classroom problems. It also promotes collaboration between a researcher as an innovator and his or her participants. O'Leary (2004) contends that this drive for collaboration is grounded in the belief that knowledge does not occur objectively but that it is subjectively created by experiences and that it is generated and formalised through the sharing of different perspectives about experiences.

This action research study aimed to enhance teaching and learning in an English First Additional Language (EFAL) classroom by using cooperative learning strategies and to observe whether the strategies can improve teacher-learner relationships, and learner-learner relationships. I used action research as a tool to improve my teaching practice by utilising new teaching and learning methods to solve problems associated with the traditional learning style in my own classroom. These actions are supported by Henning (2012) who says that action research can improve the current teaching situation in terms of boosting teachers' professional development, teacher training, teacher research, and presenting to school evidence of the need for change. Thus, through action research, I became an agent of change in my classroom as well as in my school.

In this study, I used action research procedures of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and revising to help me improve my teaching and learning of EFAL and to develop my professional knowledge and skills. Action research was also relevant for this study because it helped me to become a systematic and critical thinker and to reflect on expected and unexpected situations that happened in the English classroom.

Gillies (2007, p.39) argues that action research is:

A rigorous investigation which sets out to improve the quality of experiences and outcome available to participants in a given situation, while also enhancing their ability to articulate an understanding of what they have learned, thus increasing their potential to continue to develop in this and other situations, as well as contributing to the sources of knowledge available to others.

Gillie's views suggest that teachers can learn effectively and change their learning behaviours in their circumstances by engaging in identifying practical concern as the focus of their research, designing the study, taking action, collecting evidence, formulating conclusions and feeding these back to practice. This research process enables teachers to develop research skills. According to Warrican (2006) not only teachers benefit from action research, but learners also benefit from the research in a sense that as they become more engaged in action research discussion and critical reflection, learners develop into autonomous learners.

Clearly, the goals of action research are to create sustainable learning capacities and give participants the option of increasing control over their own learning situations. This idea is supported by Gillies (2007) who views action research as associated with a group of activities with the idea of reflective teaching, while Henning (2012) sees action research as task-based learning that promotes learners' communication skills.

Through interactive and participative cooperative learning group activities, learners had more opportunities to practise and to enhance their communication skills in this study.

3.4.2. Research Context

The school in which this study was conducted is located in a township. I am an EFAL teacher at the school and also a class teacher to the EFAL class in which the data was collected. Inadequate teaching and learning resources, poor infrastructure, poverty, a high learner pregnancy rate and absenteeism and the traditional teaching methods that are used in the school mitigate against quality teaching and learning and achievements of learners. The school as a research site was convenient for me as researcher in terms of easy access during school hours for data collection, and due to the fact that the research was conducted during EFAL teaching and learning time as allocated in the school time-table, thus, teaching and learning were not disrupted during the research process. Furthermore, undertaking research in my classroom afforded me an opportunity to investigate my teaching practice with an aim to discover solutions to the challenges in my teaching context. Pillay (2008) argues that as teachers we are constantly trying to discover and understand different and new pedagogical styles in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, thus enabling us to make professional decisions that have immediate and long term effects on learners, educators, parents and ultimately on community at large.

3.4.3. Research Participants

The participants in this research were grade 10 EFAL learners. I also played a significant role of participant observer in the study. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. According to Warrican (2006) purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling in which the researcher selects information rich cases for study in depth. For this study, one grade 10 EFAL class was selected in which the phenomena could mostly be investigated. The class and the learners are well known to me as I am the EFAL teacher and the class teacher as well.

In qualitative studies purposeful sampling is the most common sampling strategy because it seeks to deal with issues of central importance to the purpose of the research and it holds a benefit that common patterns emerging from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and are central, shared dimensions of phenomena (Gillies, 2007). The phenomena investigated in this study, which was transforming a traditional classroom into a cooperative learning environment to enhance teaching and learning of EFAL and to promote teacher-learner relationship and learner-learner relationships, was commonly shared by the participants of the study and was of particular interest to all parties. Thus, the study held learning and teaching benefits for the participants of this study.

The Study

The implementation of cooperative learning strategies was carried over five school days in the month of February 2013. The intervention programme consisted of a Team Building exercise, Naming the Team activity, Three-Step-Interview activity, Vocabulary Lesson, a Poetry Lesson and Grammar Lessons.

After each cooperative learning task learners were provided with an opportunity to discuss their experiences in groups and then as a class and what they felt should be modified for the next lesson, or should be replaced to improve the next cooperative learning task. Reflection time generated group discussions on positive aspects of the task, challenges and possible solutions. I recorded learners' reflections and used them to improve on the next cooperative learning task.

All activities and tasks were assigned to learners in cooperative learning mixed ability groups of six learners in each group. For some activities learners were regrouped into pairs,

depending on the activity and task at hand. Each cooperative learning activity lasted for 60 minutes as allocated in the school time-table. The CAPS document for English First Additional Language Grade 10 Programme Guideline (2011) were consulted for Poetry, Vocabulary, and Grammar activities. Copies of the daily activities were prepared prior to the classroom teaching and learning. The EFAL Learner's Book, magazines, newspapers, dictionaries and other learning resources were also used to facilitate learning.

Different roles, like group leader, recorder, time keeper, checker, and reporter (Johnson & Johnson, 1999) were assigned to each group and were rotated among group members for each cooperative learning session. Allocation of individual roles fostered positive interdependence, individual accountability, interaction, and group participation (Johnson & Johnson, 1994) and minimised free riding during group learning.

My role was to divide learners into cooperative learning groups, ensuring that each group had at least two high achievers, two average learners and two slow learners and that all groups were gender balanced, as far as possible. Contrary to the traditional classroom, my role as teacher was to facilitate the learning programme by assigning the task to the learners, steering the learning process, motivating, encouraging, assisting when needed, promoting discovery learning, and to awarding a score to the learning group if needed. During the intervention of this study, another of my primary tasks, as teacher, was to observe how learners learn, how they interact with each in their learning groups and with me, how they solve learning challenges and achieve a common learning goal, how they explain and teach each other new learning material and how they make sense of their new cooperative learning environment. All the observations were recorded in the field notebook.

The role of the teacher in the cooperative learning classroom is to promote cooperation, interaction, interdependence, responsibility, respect and discipline among group members. As an expert in the subject content, the role of the teacher is to make certain that the knowledge and skills transferred to other learners during peer teaching and learning was correct and was always in line with the CAPS document for the EFAL grade 10 syllabus.

The Intervention Process

The intervention process included teambuilding activities of Three-Step-Interview, Team Naming, Survival, and EFAL lessons of vocabulary building, poetry, and grammar. Both the activities and lessons were 60 minutes long as allocated by the grade 10 EFAL school timetable.

Task 1-Teambuilding Activities

Three teambuilding activities were used to prepare learners for the cooperative learning classroom: Three-Step-Interview, Team Naming, and Survival Game. The teambuilding process was essential for the effective implementation of cooperative learning strategies in my classroom. It prepared learners for a group learning atmosphere and environment. It was the first time that learners had to learn using cooperative learning strategies and in cooperative learning groups. Teambuilding activities of Three-Step-Interview, Team Naming group activity, and Survival group activity helped them to prepare and to foster new skills like listening, conflict resolution, decision-making, self-control, communication skills, democracy, respect for each other's opinions, taking turns to speak, responsibility, accountability, self-discipline, companionship and so on that were essential for cooperative learning, skills.

Task 2-Three-Step-Interview

In a Three-Step-Interview activity (Kagan, 1995) groups were divided into pairs. The partners sat face-to-face to promote learner-learner interaction and communication skills. Learner A formulated five interesting questions (social questions) to ask his or partner, Learner B. The questions were based on things that the partner likes most or hates most, for example: What is your favourite subject? What is your favourite sport? What is your favourite TV programme/ holiday destination/ food? Who is your role model/ favourite teacher? The partners took turns to ask each other questions before they joined the other pair from their group to form a group of four members. Each pair then took turns to introduce their partners by mentioning all the important information they collected from their partners during the first round of introduction (in pairs). Again the two pairs were joined by another pair to form six members. Instead of pairs introducing each other, members from different pairs introduced each other. This teambuilding activity aimed to develop listening skills, face-to-face interaction skills,

language acquisition and communication skills and learners got an opportunity to know each other better.

Task 3 -Team Naming Activity

Before learners engaged in cooperative learning group tasks, it was important that they developed decision-making skills, and they learned how to discuss politely and to reach a consensus as a team. This activity aimed to develop tolerance, respect and discipline among group members. Learners were tasked with brainstorming an interesting name for their group. The groups were to be referred to by their team names for the entire intervention programme. To keep learners on the task, time was allocated for the task. Learners were encouraged to be creative and to come up with decent names for their teams. The eight groups named their teams Mighty Clouds, Champions, Lions, Eagles, All for One, Superstars, Freelancers and Smart Kids.

The activity prepared learners for cooperative learning as they had to listen to each other, take turns to speak, respect other's opinions, discuss ideas as a group, politely encourage each other to think, support each other's ideas, make decision as a group, reach consensus and cooperate. Team names were displayed on the wall closest to the group. Different coloured charts were used for different teams.

Task 4 - Survival Game

This activity was used to develop critical thinking, decision-making, imagining, interaction, listening, cooperative, leadership and presentation skills and team spirit.

Each was provided with a scenario in which they had to imagine themselves in an aeroplane crash in a cold desert. Each group was provided with a list of ten items that they managed to save during the air crash. The items that were available to them were: newspapers, compass, small canvas tent, steel wool, firelighter with very little gas, two cans of food, one litre of water, four shirts, a whistle and a two millimetre iron rod. They were tasked to rank the items according to their importance for their survival in the very cold desert until they found help. How learners used the items to find help, as well as how they used the available items economically until they could find help were important skills learners were to develop. Groups had to present their list of items to the whole class and explain why they decided to prioritise their items, and also how they decided, as a group, they were going to use the items listed to survive the freezing desert.

Task 5 - Vocabulary Lesson

Hedge (2000) argues that vocabulary teaching has an inevitable role in the development of second language acquisition. I wrote 15 words (five verbs, five nouns and five adjectives) on the chalkboard. The list of words contained new words and familiar words (to accommodate weak learners).

List of words: *stride, vanish, predict, obey, detain, mysterious, magnificently, surprisingly, quickly, neighbourhood, bandit, regulate, enforcement, concern, apprehend*

To reinforce the correct pronunciation for second language learners, I modelled the pronunciation of each word on the board by reading it aloud. The learners were also asked as a whole class to read the words aloud to practise the pronunciation. In cooperative learning groups, learners were tasked to use the words on the board to create sentences that led to one storyline for each group. Each word was used once and all words used to formulate a short narrative storyline. The concentration was not on the storyline but on using the list of words to develop sentences that formed a storyline. Thus, the most correct storyline was the one that used all words on the board.

To develop interdependence and individual accountability, each member had to come up with one line or sentence of the story. In a group of six, a storyline had six lines. I facilitated the group discussions by ensuring that each member of the group was on task and that members of the group were helping each other to formulate sentences that had a noun, a verb and an adjective from the list given on the board. Each line had to link with the previous line to formulate a cohesive story line for the group.

Task 6-Poetry Lesson

Poetry provides for authentic language use and stimulates language acquisition (Evans, Kilfoil, and Van der Walt, 2012). The poetry task consisted of three activities for cooperative learning groups. In the first activity, I asked learners to define the word poem in groups. Groups were motivated to use as many words as they could to explain the word. Each member of the group was motivated to think of at least one word that could describe a poem. Groups were given time to share their responses and to check for common ideas among the groups. With this activity I aimed to lead learners into realising that poetry was difficult to define because it is all-embracing, personal and extensive.

For the second activity, I provided each learner in the groups with the prescribed grade 10 EFAL poem. I modelled the reading of the poem once and asked expert learners from each group to read the poem aloud to his or her group. I moved around to ensure that all members were reading the poem when it was their turn to read. Each group was given a list of questions that stimulated the understanding of one section of the poem (structure, sound devices, poetic language etc). Each group discussed their questions and brainstormed the answers. Each learner in the group had to answer at least one question on the list. Groups presented their questions and answers to the whole class. This facilitated the Learning Together strategy of cooperative learning in which a topic is broken down into sections and each group learned their section and came back to teach the whole class.

For the writing task, learners were asked to write a one stanza poem about any topic. The poem did not have to make sense but it had to contain sound devices learned in the previous activity. Each member of the group read his or her aloud to the group. Members had to listen for the sound devices in each poem and had to provide support to each other by adding devices that were missing in the poem. Each group selected one poem from the group to read aloud to the whole class. The whole class listened to each group's poem and identified the poetic devices used and if they were used accurately.

Task 7 - Grammar Lesson

For this task, the Jigsaw technique (Johnson & Johnson, 1994) was used. In this technique, the grammar sections were divided into stand-alone segments (pronouns, passive voice, reported speech, articles, punctuation). Each learner in the group was assigned one segment that was different from his or her group mates's sections. Learners were given time to read their sections and to understand their task before they divided to form expert groups. Expert groups consisted of learners from different groups with the same topic. Again, in their expert groups, learners further engaged with their topics, providing each other with more understanding of the topic and more presentation skills on the topic until all members in the expert group were confident about their section and were knowledgeable about the topic and how to present it to other members. Members in the expert groups rehearsed their presentation to each other to reinforce their expert knowledge in the assigned topic. My role was to move around all groups to make sure that the skills transferred to other learners was accurate.

Expert groups, after the allocated time, returned to their original groups (Jigsaw groups) where they presented their expert knowledge to group members. Members of the groups were motivated to ask questions for clarification and to facilitate deeper understanding of the topic.

Learners were in charge of their learning and they discovered knowledge themselves using each other's expert skills and knowledge to learn new skills. Interdependence was fostered during group sharing of knowledge and through supporting each other's learning in groups. Accountability was also achieved by assigning each learner an individual responsibility in the group. Each learner in the group was accountable and entrusted for learning the assigned topic so that he or she could teach group members and facilitate their learning and understanding of the material.

3.5. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is the process of systematically collecting data that represents the opinions and experiences of its participants. Interview, focus groups and observation were the primary data collection tools for this study.

Interviews

Interviews are methods of collecting information through oral questioning and answering of a set of pre-planned core questions (Brown & Parsons, 2002). In qualitative studies, interviews can be a very productive tool since the interviewer and the interviewee can pursue specific issues of concern that may lead to focused and constructive suggestions (Brown et al, 2002). Interviews can also be useful to obtain detailed information.

Interviews can be unstructured, structured, or semi-structured. An unstructured interview is an interview in which questions are not prearranged, allowing for spontaneity and for questioning to develop during the course of the interview (Warrican, 2006). A structured interview, on the other hand, is a fixed format interview in which all questions are prepared beforehand and are put in the same order to each interviewee. A semi-structured interview is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says (Warrican, 2006).

In this study, semi-structured interviews (APPENDIX C) were used to elicit learners' perceptions of using cooperative learning in their EFAL teaching and learning. A list of core questions was pre-planned to guide me as the researcher and interviewer, to ensure that all

participants were asked the same type of questions. Eight learners, consisting of two high achievers, three average learners, and three slow learners were selected to participate in the individual interview. Interview questions consisted of both closed and open ended questions which afforded the participants a chance to elaborate on certain issues they felt needed deep explanation. Semi-structured interviews provided rich data to understand learners' experiences of their learning environment, teaching and learning strategies and group participation. All interview sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed immediately after the session.

Focus group interviews were also used in this study to supplement individual interviews and to explore group perceptions. According to Henning (2012) a focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. The participants are typically a relatively homogeneous group of people who are asked to reflect on questions asked by the interviewer. Henning (2012) argues that the participants of the focus group interview get to hear each other's responses and to make additional responses beyond their own initial responses as they hear what other participants have to say. The primary objective of a focus group interview in this study was to collect high quality data in a natural setting where participants provided their insights, perceptions and opinions in the context of the views of others. Focus group interviews were also used to supplement individual interviews, thus triangulating the data.

Triangulation is an approach that utilises multiple data sources, multiple informants and multiple methods such as participant observation, individual and focus group interviews, as well as member checking in order to gather multiple perspectives on the same issue so as to gain complete understanding of the phenomena (Patton, 2000). Triangulation arose from an ethical need to confirm the validity and reliability of the processes in qualitative studies. Patton (2000) argues that triangulation is used to validate research findings and to compare data to decide if it corroborates. In support of these arguments, O'Leary (2004) contends that triangulation is one of the most important ways to verify the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings

Random sampling was used to select one member from each cooperative learning group. Random sampling is a method in which all members of a group or population have an equal and independent chance of being selected. According to O'Leary (2004) the advantage of random sampling is that the average sample drawn from the larger group accurately

represents the population. Focus group for this study consisted of two high achievers, three average learners and three slow learners. (Patton, 2000) recommends that the focus group should range from six to eight members. The focus group open-ended questions (APPENDIX C) were used to engage the participants in interview discussions to elicit their group perceptions of using cooperative learning strategies for their learning.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a qualitative data collection method in which the researcher collects data in a natural setting of the phenomena being studied. Participant observation connects the researcher to the most basic human experiences, discovering through immersion and participation the hows and whys of human behaviour in a particular context. Participant observers become embedded in the action and context of social setting. They do this by getting into the location of whatever aspect of the human experience they wish to study, by building rapport with the participants and by spending enough time interacting to get the needed data. An observation schedule (APPENDIX D) with categories was used to record observations.

For this study, categories of observation were:

- teacher and learners interactions
- learner and learner interactions
- application of cooperative learning principles
- peer teaching and learning
- use of learning time
- use of cooperative learning strategies

Observing learners in their natural setting was the primary goal of this action research study because it allowed me as the researcher to collect first hand data, contrary to reporting another person's interpretations. Participant observation works best for this small-scale classroom research in terms of affordability, issues of trust between the researcher and participants, and in terms of easy access and easy acceptance by the participants. Because I had been with learners for almost three years (from grade 8 to grade 10) there were strong ties of trust which worked as an advantage for both the learners and me. As researcher, the developed trust enabled me to facilitate the data collection since the participants could reveal

things to me more readily than if I had been an outsider. My trust also ensured that I readily accepted the information provided by the participants as valid.

However, participant observation can be time consuming since the researcher has to plan the activities, facilitate the learning, observe the learning activities, record and analyse data, as well as report findings. Participant observation generated a large amount of data which was relatively challenging to sort out, interpret, and analyse.

3.6. Data Analysis

Long & Robinson (1998) defines qualitative data analysis as 'working with data, organising data, breaking data into manageable units, coding data, synthesising and searching for patterns' (p.4). Hedge (2000) argues that, thus, the aim of qualitative data analysis is to discover discourse patterns, concepts, themes, and meaning. In this process, the qualitative researcher concentrates on the whole data first, then attempts to take it apart and reconstruct it again more meaningfully. According to Hedge (2000) categorising helps the researcher to make comparisons and contrasts between patterns, to reflect deeply on certain patterns and complex threads of the data and make sense of them.

In this research, the process of data analysis began with the categorisation and organisation of data in search of patterns, critical themes and meanings that emerged from the data collected through observation and interviews. The interviews, both individual and focus group, were recorded and transcribed. The useful information gathered from both open and closed questions was analysed, compared and categorised and triangulated with data from observation to draw conclusions.

3.7. Research Reliability and Validity

Assessing the accuracy of qualitative findings is not easy because of the nature of data collected which involves subjective questioning and understanding the meaning and interpretation of the phenomena. This is in contrast to quantitative studies which use objective scientific and experimental means of collecting data. In order to overcome problems of bias and validity, Creswell (2009) argues that triangulation is used in qualitative studies.

Individual and focus group interviews were conducted using the instruments provided in APPENDIX C. Other methods used were participant observation with field notes. This was done as means of mutual validation of the results in an attempt to uncover biases as I was the only researcher investigating my own classroom. Data from the interviews and observation were compared to establish the extent to which they correlated with each other.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

This study, being qualitative in nature, meant that I, as the researcher, had to interact deeply with the participants at a personal level, thus entering their personal domains of values, beliefs, weaknesses and challenges, while collecting the data. Creswell (2009) argues that qualitative researchers are always obliged to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants. Thus, Creswell (2009) suggests that appropriate steps should be taken to observe strict ethical guidelines in order to maintain participants' privacy, dignity, rights, confidentiality and anonymity.

To adhere to research ethical guidelines, as researcher I informed the participants of the purpose, nature, data collection and duration of the study. Parents and guardians of the participants were also informed and their consent sought. In the consent letters, I guaranteed that no participant would be exposed to any harm, either physically or psychologically, during the study. I ensured the parents that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants would be maintained during the study and in the dissemination of the results (Creswell, 2009). It was also made clear that the participation was absolutely voluntary and that participants were free to withdraw from the study whenever they felt like doing so without any fear of being penalised in any way.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter explained the research paradigm, research methodology, and design used in this study including procedures, participants, data collection tools, data collection and analysis methods, and data validity and reliability issues. The research design for this study was action research that was analysed through qualitative methods mainly using descriptive analysis. The chapter also described the action research cycles including the intervention process of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the research process including the planning stage, the tasks, and the reflections in terms of positive aspects of the cooperative learning lessons, challenges and changes for the next lesson.

4.2. The Planning

4.2.1. Preparing the Classroom

Immediately after obtaining the consent from the Department of Education (DoE), the school principal, and the parents, I began to prepare for the implementation of cooperative learning in my EFAL classroom. The classroom, the learners, myself and the lessons were to be prepared for the cooperative learning environment.

For traditional style teaching, the learners sit in pairs facing the teacher in the front. This was a fixed classroom structure for all the subjects and teachers. For a cooperative learning classroom, the first move was to rearrange the decrepit furniture into clusters so that a group of learners of mixed academic ability and gender sat in one group with their desks facing each other to promote face-to-face interaction.

I prepared classroom guidelines to inform learners about the expected cooperative learning behaviour within their learning groups. Cohen (1994, p. 40) suggests the following cooperative learning classroom guidelines:

- To motivate and support other learners,
- To be responsible for their own behaviour and the behaviour of the group,
- To listen to other learners' opinions and to give others a chance to talk,
- To understand that the teacher would always be available for supporting, assisting, and providing knowledge if needed,
- There is no reward for finishing ahead of others, what is important is for the group to complete the task correctly.

4.2.2. Preparing the Learners for Cooperative Learning

Very few individuals come together in a group for the first time and know how to work effectively with each other. Like any other skill, group work needs to be learned. According to Cohen (1994) one of the best methods to teach people how to work together is to first have them work as a team on easy tasks that are not really important but allow for specific lessons on what is successful and not so successful group work. Teambuilding activities like Three-Step-Interview, Team Name game, and Survival game (discussed in the previous chapter) were carefully selected from different cooperative learning websites to teach various group work skills, leadership skills, communication skills, problem- solving among others.

Participants in this study had never used cooperative learning in their learning, therefore it was imperative that they were prepared for the group work teaching and learning atmosphere of cooperative learning. Cohen (1994) argues that learners do not automatically or naturally acquire the knowledge of working effectively in groups, they need to be skilled. Three days before the first cooperative learning lesson, I reinforced cooperative learning skills through the three-Step-Interview activity, Name a Team activity, and Survival game.

4.3. The Three-Step-Interview Group Activity

The aims of the Three-Step-Interview activity were to get members of the groups to:

- know and understand each better,
- practise English communication skills in pairs, and in a group
- promote face-to-face interaction,
- introduce the cooperative learning environment
- listen attentively to one another and to take turns to speak

The Three-Step-Interview began with a pair of learners sharing their favourite social interests by asking one another questions.

Learners took turns to interview each other and to respond to each other's questions before they joined another pair of learners. In a group of four, the pairs introduced each other to the other pair and mentioned all the details they had shared during their pair interview. One learner from Pair A introduced her partner to the Pair B.

Learner from Pair A introduced her partner to the members of Pair B like this:

“This is my partner Zola. She likes to play netball. Her favourite subject is English and her favourite soccer team is Kaizer Chiefs, and her role model is Nelson Mandela. Zola likes to go to New York one day and she likes Generations.”

This activity provided learners with a non-threatening environment in which they interacted, modelled English skills to each other, learned new vocabulary, learned to express themselves, had fun while learning and got to know each other better. I had an opportunity to get to learn more about learners by listening to the group interviews. After the four member introductions were completed, the group joined another pair and continued to introduce each other. In a group of six, learners introduced a partner from another pair, for example, a Pair A member would introduce a Pair B member, and so on. All learners took turns to ask questions and to respond to their partner's questions, thus providing even the weak and shy learners with an opportunity to speak and interact in the target language which the traditional teaching environment never provided.

4.3.1. Positive aspects of the activity

Learners said that the activity encouraged them to think about what questions to ask their partners, to share their thinking as pairs and in a larger group, to ask questions and to listen to each other attentively so that they could remember the information shared. Learners said that speaking to a person next to them provided them with an opportunity to practise the language skills before they could speak to a larger group

Learners took turns to speak which was a skill necessary for group work learning. The ability to think and articulate thoughts to someone else was also important for cooperative learning group discussions in which each member of the group was required to think individually and share the information with the group. The Three-Step-Interview fostered learner-learner interaction and group interaction. When I moved around to facilitate the activity, learners had the opportunity to ask clarification questions in a non-threatening environment because I was closer to the pair or the group, thus promoting teacher-learner interactions.

4.3.2. Challenges of the activity

Learners took time to grasp the activity and to engage meaningfully. Group work discussions generated much noise as each pair competed to make their presentations before the other pairs. Some learners took the activity as more of a game than a learning task, thus creating

more noise as they chatted with their friends instead of concentrating on the task. Some groups completed their task earlier than other groups and their chatting generated more noise.

4.3.3. Possible solutions and changes for the next activity

Learners felt that, to improve on the next team work activity, it would be more structured and systematic if I started by explaining the task to the whole class and discussing with the class the objectives and responsibilities of each group member so that everyone would engage meaningfully with the task. Learners also said that strict rules should be formulated by the groups and the class for group members who do not participate in the group activities and chat while other members put all their efforts into the tasks.

To ensure that there was self-control, democracy, discipline, respect and responsibility in the classroom and in the cooperative learning groups, a set of rules and guidelines had to be formulated and followed by all individual learners and by all teams for the entire cooperative learning intervention tasks. The rules and guidelines were to outline what behaviours were acceptable (Do's) and what behaviours were not acceptable (Do not's) in the cooperative learning environment. Each group had to formulate five Dos and five Don'ts which they believe were important for the smooth and effective learning in the cooperative classroom. After team discussions and sharing of the lists, the whole class joined to formulate one list of Do's and Don'ts that governed all individual learners and groups.

All group members agreed and accepted that they would always:

- respect the teacher and classmates
- respect differences between classmates and themselves
- keep the noise level very low during group discussions
- listen attentively to classmates during presentations
- help classmates when needed
- appreciate anyone who helped them in the class
- motivate and encourage classmates during learning and presentations
- contribute positively and responsibly to the group discussions
- be responsible for their own learning and for the learning of their team

Groups also agreed that all members of the groups were not allowed to:

- laugh at teammates and classmates when they made mistakes
- shout or scream at their teammates instead of speaking to them
- chat with group members or speak while someone else was speaking or presenting
- move around unnecessarily during teaching and learning
- submit work late
- move the classroom furniture unless asked to do so by the teacher

The rules and guidelines were displayed on the front wall of the classroom so that all learners could see them and practise them every day.

I decided to improve the next tasks by assigning roles to learners to maximise individual responsibility, and foster individual accountability and more group participation. Member roles would also minimise free riding during group learning whereby some learners loaf around while others exert effort in group activities (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). The roles were explained to members and were expected to be rotated for each cooperative learning task to provide all group members with the opportunity to learn the skills attached to the role. Each group was assigned a group leader who led all the group discussions and made certain that each member did his or her task and that all members of the group participated equally and actively during the learning. The group leader also made certain that the group did not disturb other groups by being noisy.

A recorder was attached to each group to take notes during group discussions and to produce written reports for the reporter to present the group ideas. Each group had a time keeper who controlled time and was responsible for ensuring that the group completed and accomplished the tasks on time. The checker in each group was responsible for checking that all members completed their tasks.

4.4. Team Naming Game

The aims of the activity were to:

- develop positive interdependence
- teach decision-making skills
- promote learner-learner interactions
- enhance teacher-learner communication
- improve thinking and creativity skills

I explained the activity to the whole class and when I was satisfied that all groups understood the task and that all members of the groups understood their individual responsibilities and their group responsibilities I asked the groups to start discussions. Learners were asked to be creative in thinking for their group name. It was left up to the groups to structure their discussion and how they would reach consensus. When the groups had challenges in processing discussions, I would assist to channel the conversations like asking each member to give their favourite names, and then when all the names had been listed, the group would either vote for the most popular name or they would eliminate their least favourite name, one by one by show of hands, until they were left with one name. Problem-solving skills were necessary for cooperative learning. Instead of using numbers for different teams, names were going to be used when referring to the teams. Time was allocated for this activity to foster time management skills, keep learners on the task and to prepare learners for cooperative learning lessons in which all the activities were to be completed in the allocated time. Learners could name their team after their favourite sport team, music group, animal, movie star, or anything they liked.

For the Team Naming game learners reflected on the skills they used to reach consensus about the name of their team and how they solved problems and conflicts. They also reflected on other skills they learned from the activity, what worked for their groups and what did not work. All views were shared by the whole class and were used to prepare for the next cooperative learning task.

4.5. Intervention

4.5.1. Vocabulary Skills

My thesis supervisor, suggested that it helps, when the learners and the teacher have no experience of cooperative learning, to start the implementation with easier lessons and gradually progress to more complicated lessons when the learners get used to the learning style. Hedge (2000) argues that the acquisition of vocabulary is the most critical component of successful language learning. Hedge (2000) also claims that teachers give vocabulary teaching most attention because they understand its inevitable role. These arguments are supported by Chaudron (1999) who also maintains that units of words of the language can only be used successfully if learners know how to combine them appropriately. For this reason Hedge (2000) believes that vocabulary development is important for second language acquisition.

Nation (2001) argues that because there are so many things to teach about each piece of vocabulary (meaning, spoken/written forms, collocations, grammatical behaviours) it is important that teachers introduce a little at a time, starting with the most frequent and useful.

Instead of listening passively to the teacher's explanation of the new words, as in the traditional classroom, learners in cooperative learning groups learned the vocabulary in a learner-centred style, which entailed their active involvement, participation and responsibility. As opposed to the teacher-centred method, learners in cooperative learning classrooms share the teaching and learning responsibility.

Since vocabulary was the first cooperative learning lesson for learners and as well as for me as the researcher and teacher, it was important that it was structured into a simple vocabulary lesson, but it needed to be interesting as well. The teambuilding activities had increased learners' interest in cooperative learning, therefore it was also important that I did not bring the morale down. The first lesson was going to set the standard for the rest of the cooperative learning lessons, hence, the success or failure of the class organisation and implementation was more or less dependent on that first lesson. It was extremely crucial for me to capture the attention, the participation, the discipline and the interest of learners in that first lesson.

I decided to move slowly from the conventional method into cooperative learning until I was confident that learners were independent enough to work alone in their teams with as little support from me as possible. Therefore, for this first lesson, I guided learners slowly but fostered their independent learning and group learning as much as possible.

Second language learners sometimes need a little push so I was available to provide assistance in the form of providing the first sentence to set the scene for the storyline but also cautious to promote independent learning as well. To start interactions in groups I wrote the first line on the board using one of the new words on the board in the sentence and I asked provocative questions based on the first sentence, to prompt the learners to think in a more focused way about the vocabulary. For instance, if the new word was *'quickly'* the first sentence could be *'Thabani saw the man move quickly'*. I used provocative follow up questions like:

"Where was the man?"

"Why did the mysterious man move quickly?"

"Did anyone else see the man?"

Providing support helped set the discussions in motion as quickly as possible. Using new vocabulary to formulate a storyline was used to teach learners that lists of words do not function in isolation but they become more meaningful when they are used in different contexts like conversations, formal and informal writing. Using the new words in a narrative helped learners to learn how they are used in real-life contexts.

Learners were then asked to finish the storyline I had started. Groups were encouraged to add other minor characters to the story if they wanted to. I moved around to monitor group discussions and group participation. I also wanted to monitor story development which was a learning goal for each group. I stopped occasionally to listen to the ideas as the sentences formed. Sometimes learners would code switch between isiZulu and English to explain concepts to one another. I supervised and kept the code switching at a minimum because, in English classes, the main purpose is to acquire and learn the target language. Therefore, it was important that learners spoke the target language as much as possible. Some learners were not creative at all, and I had to encourage them, while others went overboard and I had then to keep the wonderful ideas for later lessons on storytelling.

To develop positive interdependence, accountability and interaction in groups, each member of the group had to come up with one line or sentence of the story. In a group of six, a storyline had six lines. As much as each learner developed his or her line, members had to assist each other to create a cohesive storyline. To develop a complete storyline the group needed the full participation of all members; without interactive discussions and support from all members, the group could not achieve the task. Each line and idea had to link to the previous one. This required learners to discuss and correct each other's sentences to achieve one learning goal: a narrative storyline using the words on the board. As I moved around the groups I had to ascertain that each learner kept his or her role, and that all learners participated fully in the discussions. I stopped now and then to encourage interaction from individual shy learners when I noticed that they were not taking their turns to speak. Without putting them under the spotlight, I would ask for their opinions on what the group was saying. I wanted them to feel part of the learning process and to value their contribution in the group as well as to provide them an opportunity to speak the language in a small group setting with only group mates listening and willing to help.

For presentations, each group was given an opportunity to have one member narrate the story to the whole class who listened attentively to check if the words on the board were used

correctly in context. If there were grammatical errors in the presentations, I avoided correcting during the presentation, but left it for later when the groups submitted their work.

One group used all the words on the board and presented a story that read:

Menzi ran quickly and vanished around the corner. Immediately, the police car siren was heard from the distance. Surprisingly the siren followed Menzi's direction. All residents in our street were eager to see what had happened because Menzi is an obedient boy and he plays sports magnificently. Before we could all guess our versions of the story, the police came handling a man we had never seen before in our neighbourhood. Menzi was striding along the two police men looking weary, and outraged. The mysterious man had a small bundle in his handcuffed hands. It was an old ladies' money bag! It was stolen by the man from the ladies house. Menzi was a hero!

To conclude the lesson and to provide feedback and extended learning, I opted for some creativity. I decided to end the story I started in the introductory part of the lesson by using as many words from the board as possible. This way, learners observed and learned alternative uses of the words in real life, especially the new vocabulary. Alternatively, if there was more time available, learners could be allowed to finish the story as a class, bringing them together to end the lesson, providing more learning opportunities for slow learners to learn from their peers.

The last minutes of the lesson were dedicated to reflection time from learners. Each learner was asked to think about cooperative learning and point out what he or she liked about the learning and what he or she did not like. I encouraged learners to be honest with their reflections because the extent of improvement in the following lessons lay in what they raised as obstacles and successes of the lessons we had. Learners were then requested to share their individual thoughts with their group mates and compile one list of positive feedback and challenges experienced by the learners.

4.5.1. Reflections on the vocabulary lesson

4.5.1.1. Positive aspects of the vocabulary lesson

Learners' reflections of their cooperative learning experiences provided me with a general insight into how they felt about cooperative learning in their EFAL classroom. Their reflections indicated that, in general, they were happy about the new approach. Learners implied that, for the first time, they realised that they were capable of learning without the direct supervision of the teacher. Learners also revealed that they had begun to trust

themselves with their own learning, which never happened before within the traditional classroom. They expressed satisfaction about their ability to provide support to other learners and that they enjoyed seeing their struggling classmates participating actively in the learning and hence achieving within the group.

Slow learners indicated that cooperative learning was never boring for them as they were actively involved in their learning and that they preferred asking other learners if they had some difficulties than asking the teacher. These learners said that they enjoyed the cooperative learning approach because they could speak more freely and without fear of being ridiculed in small groups, than when in the large group. As teacher-researcher, I also had the opportunity of improving my teaching practice through the enhanced cooperative learning approach. Instead of standing the whole class time speaking to learners, I took the role of introducing the lesson and utilised the help of peer tutoring to help other learners acquire knowledge in the best way they could. Implementing cooperative learning was also a learning experience for me and it developed me as teacher and a researcher to be a better teacher than I was in the traditional classroom. I was equipped with alternative methods of teaching and learning and I understood my abilities and learners' talents and skills much better.

All in all, learners and I were positive about cooperative learning and, although some difficulties were experienced, we were confident about the new approach.

4.5.1.2. Challenges of the vocabulary lesson

The major challenge I experienced in the first cycle of the implementation was that learners used a lot of their home language in their group interactions and that posed a huge obstacle to their opportunities of acquiring a second language. Time was also a challenge in the first phase. Cooperative learning activities needed a lot more time than I had actually expected. Some learners took time to adjust and they needed more attention, motivation, and encouragement to adapt to the group learning which consumed other learners' teaching and learning time.

Reflection on the first cycle highlighted the challenge of excessive noise during group discussions. Learners were too relaxed within their groups and spent time chatting to their group mates instead of focusing on the task. Excessive noise disturbed other groups and often

teachers from other classes would complain about the high level of noise. Groups which spent more time chatting with each other finished their tasks later than other groups. Absenteeism also crippled the performance of the groups. When one or two members of the group were absent, the whole group had to perform additional tasks which learners felt was unfair, especially if the absent individual would obtain the group score as well. Learners stated that they did not trust their peers to completely teach their expert topics, hence, they preferred the teacher did other sections of the teaching process.

Another challenge was that learners in some groups lacked individual accountability. It was a challenge for me to accurately assess individual accountability due to time limits during cooperative learning discussions.

After acknowledging both positive and negative aspects of the first phase of cooperative learning, I asked groups to discuss the solutions to the challenges. All suggestions and solutions were written on the board for all learners to agree upon and implement in the following phase.

4.5.1.3. Possible solutions

To improve the following cycle of cooperative learning and teaching, it was necessary for the class to discuss and find solutions to the challenges raised by the groups and for the suggested solutions to be implemented. The following suggestions were raised, discussed, and recommended for implementation in the following cooperative learning task.

Because of time constraints, I decided that, in the following tasks, learners' group discussions would not be compromised for any reasons because it is through these interactions that learners shared knowledge and skills and provided academic support to other learners. Instead, I decided that instead of whole group presentation, the groups would summarise their ideas and appoint one member to present the summary of ideas on behalf of the group. All in all, I hoped that when learners grasped the concept of cooperative learning they would learn to work faster and more efficiently.

To address the issue of learners' concern about learners completely teaching their assigned topic, I decided that my role was not going to be limited to introducing the topic, as before, but I would guide learners to independent learning through leading questions until I was confident that the learners could learn on their own. I also decided that for future lessons, I

would provide a summary of the topic discussed to supplement presentations by expert learners and to ascertain that all learners had acquired the correct information.

To encourage individual accountability, I decided to prepare follow-up questions for each lesson to be posed to individual members in the groups to ensure that the learners understood the topic. The random questioning of individual learners in the groups would keep the learners alert and actively participating in the tasks in preparation for the questioning session.

Throughout the reflection session, I listened to learners' discussion and recorded all the discussions to help me plan for the next cooperative learning sessions.

4.5.1.4. Changes for the next lesson

Among the changes that were implemented in the next lesson of the study was that expert groups would prepare in advance of lessons so that less time would be used for discussions before each lesson. In other words, expert groups would be given their topics some time before presentations so that they could thoroughly prepare for their teaching and learning process and organise their teaching material in advance of the day of presentation. In terms of quality and correct information provided by the peer tutors, I decided to check all lessons thoroughly before presentations to make certain that all the knowledge was correct and that all worksheets provided by the expert groups contained the correct information.

In respect of the excessive noise by certain groups, I concluded that I would make certain that all members in the group were assigned roles to perform in their groups and were all accountable for the bad behaviour in the group so that all members could advise self-control in the learning groups.

To reinforce individual accountability, I would prepare follow up questions during learning and would pose them randomly to group members. By doing that, I aimed to keep all group members alert, active, and participating in their group tasks in preparation of the random questioning session.

4.6. Poetry Lesson

Poetry was probably the first genre to develop in every culture when literary traditions were still oral. In other words, poems form a common background for almost all cultures. Furthermore, poetry provides for authentic language use and stimulates language acquisition

(Evans et al, 2012). If a poem is carefully selected, it will contain vocabulary and structures used in real life. Poems also give learners the opportunity to practise reading skills. However, in my school many teachers fear poetry. Prior to studying alternative methods to teaching and learning, I also thought that poetry was too difficult and my negative attitude towards poetry teaching was communicated to my students.

As opposed to traditional methods of teaching and learning poetry in which learners chorus the different verses of the poem, and are expected to answer questions about the poem individually in the isolation of their desks, cooperative learning uses interactive group discussions in which learners share ideas, learn from each other and from the teacher. Cooperative learning integrates different strategies of reading a poem to help learners understand the author's meaning, language and stylistic choices. Through cooperative learning activities, learners are provided with an opportunity to recognise that poetry requires a careful, deliberate use of language. Through careful guidance and facilitation by the teacher, learners are able to recognise that poetry can express universal truths in powerful or playful ways and that it often leads the reader to see the world in a different way.

To generate learner-learner interaction I began the lesson by asking learners to discuss what they think a poem means. Each group was motivated to use as many words as they could to explain the word. Groups were given time to share their responses and to see what their definitions had in common. The exercise was to lead learners into realising that poetry was difficult to define because it is all-embracing, extensive and personal.

After distributing the copy of the prescribed poem, *An abandoned bundle* by Oswald Mtshali, all learners were asked to look at the poem for a minute, and read it quickly in silence. I then modelled the reading of the poem aloud twice. The whole class was then asked to read the poem aloud twice, first time slowly, and then increase the reading pace. That way, slow readers were provided with opportunities to learn pronunciation, and reading pace from peers, before reading the poem in small groups.

Groups were provided with similar questions in their teams to facilitate discussions. The questions elicited different responses from the groups in terms of where and when the poem took place, what happened in the poem, who the poem was talking about in the first stanza, why the poet was writing about those people, and whether the poet was happy or sad, and why. All groups were requested to present a report back to the class and to submit to the

teacher later on for more feedback. This provided a motivation for cooperation and individual responsibility. To ensure that all learners in the group read the poem for understanding and that each learner participated meaningfully in the discussions, I emphasised that each learner had to respond to one of the questions from the list and explain to group mates his or her particular reasoning behind the response. This was my way of enforcing interdependence and the accountability principles of cooperative learning which promote group support as well as individual learning.

After group presentations and a brief discussion on how the responses of different teams were similar or different, it was time for learners to focus on the content of the poem and to discuss how they felt about the poem. I asked learners to share, in their groups, words the poet used in the poem to evoke their emotions and what images were painted in their minds by the words. Moving around the groups to ensure relevant discussions kept the groups independently on the task. To facilitate deep discussions, I led the discussions with questions like "How does the word's sound help emphasise the meaning of the poem?" and "Why does the poet use certain words repeatedly in certain stanzas?"

Each group had to write down their responses and present their ideas to the whole class for open discussions. I wrapped up the session by highlighting to the learners the rich imagery used in the poem and also the language the author used. The next poetry lesson was going to focus on the devices used in the poem.

The following day I asked learners to read the poem we discussed the day before, aloud, twice. That exercise was done to reinforce poetry reading skills to slow learners and to jog the learners' memory of the lesson we had the day before. After the reading task I asked individual learners simple questions on what was learned the day before and discussed in the class. Although the questions were directed to the individual learners, the learner had a choice to pause and discuss the answer with fellow group mates before providing the final answer. Questions were mostly directed to the weak learners in the group to bring them into the same level in terms of content with their peers before we moved to the next discussions of the poem. It was intended to motivate them into asking for help when they struggled with the content, as well as to allow them to learn from their group mates. After all the learners had provided their responses and I was happy with the responses, it was time to continue to the next section of poetry discussion.

Three sound devices were the focus of the discussion: assonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia. At grade 10 level, the EFAL curriculum (CAPS, 2011) specifies that learners must learn literary text, rhetorical devices in a poem, imagery in a poem, and develop poetry skills. According to the curriculum it is important that learners achieve these skills at grade 10 level before they continue to the more demanding poetry tasks of the following grade.

I introduced the three sound devices mentioned above to the learners and provided their meaning. I felt it was important for me to provide the new and critical basic knowledge instead of entrusting it to the group work discussion. Once I was certain that all learners understood the three terms clearly, it was time to move into the cooperative learning groups.

Learners were asked to sit in pairs facing each other and work together to find additional examples of the learned sound devices in the poem. If learners could remember examples of the same devices from the poems they had learned in the previous classes, they were welcome to share such knowledge with their partners. Face-to-face interaction was the focus point of this activity, and I encouraged this by moving around the class, stopping here and there to listen to the partners and motivate more interaction by asking questions that would promote further discussions. I would often ask learners to remember a certain poem they learned in a previous grade and relate it to what they were discussing. When I was certain that all learners had acquired a strong understanding of the poetic sound devices, I asked the pairs to join other pairs and share their ideas to verify their own responses in terms of what they got right or what they did not achieve to learn as a pair. Each pair had to add to the ideas of the other pair by pointing to the information they missed on the task.

The next task was a writing task. Individual learners were requested to write a poem of one stanza about anything they liked. The poem did not have to make sense, but it had to use the sound devices learners had learned. Learners were encouraged to be creative in choosing the words and to keep their poem lines short as in the poem they had just read. In their groups, learners shared their poems by reading it to group mates while they listened attentively and taking turns to read. Each member read his or her poem to the group once and passed it to the member sitting next to him or her who underlined the assonance devices used in the poem, and again the member had to pass the poem to the following member who underlined the alliteration sounds in the poem, and moved the poem to the next member to do the same with the onomatopoeia sounds. The poem finally came back to the author who checked it for any accuracy or disagreements and discussed it with the group mates. All group members had

their poems read and underlined and had discussions and feedback given to them by group mates in terms of any additional information the group mates felt was missing in the poem.

Learners were then asked to voluntarily read their poems to the whole class and the teacher discussed the use of sound devices in each poem. At the end of the lesson, learners had utilised cooperative learning groups, pairs, and individual skills to explore poetic language, emotions and mood of the poem and how these had been used to support the meaning of the poem. Learners had also learned to identify sound devices, for example, assonance, alliteration, and onomatopoeia and incorporated these devices into their own writing. Through the writing of their own poems, learners and I realised that learners could also produce meaningful and creative poems. In the whole learning journey, learners were not alone and isolated, but they were interdependently provided academic support by their group mates, as well as by me. I did not do the work for them, but engineered them towards the learning by allowing them to be independent and responsible for their own learning and for the learning of each other.

4.7. Grammar Lesson

CAPS EFAL grade 10-12 (2011) states the language structures and conventions should be taught in the context of reading and writing and as also part of the systematic grammar programme (p.46). The curriculum specifies pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, passive voice, reported speech, determiners, modals, spelling, and punctuation as critical sections of grammar that learners should be exposed to in the three-year Further Education and Training (FET) phase. For this reason, this study implemented grammar lessons to investigate whether the use of cooperative learning in the teaching and learning of grammar in the EFAL classroom would enhance learning in this area of language.

The Learning Together (LT) (Slavin, 1996) technique was used to learn and teach grammar topics in this study. LT technique requires that learners form two groups; home groups (original groups) and expert group (temporal groups). Within the LT structure I assigned each learner within each group a grammar topic, ranging from pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, passive voice, reported speech, and articles. Each learner would then leave his or her home group and look for learners with a similar topic. Once all learners with a similar topic found each other, they formed one group of six learners. Learners in the new temporal groups had to read and understand the instructions in their topic worksheets. Topic worksheets of each

group provided the assigned topic, the objectives of learning that topic, and the teaching and learning material that would assist in teaching, the topic. Groups were allowed to provide additional material they thought might add value to their teaching of the topic.

Groups of learners with the same topic were to take charge of teaching the topic and they were responsible for making sure that their classmates would learn and understand the grammar structure they were tasked to teach. Groups were required to become experts in their topic and were required to design and develop the teaching process of their topic, guided by the learning objectives and material suggested by me. If learners had difficulty in understanding some concepts of their topic, they were allowed to ask for my help. This would consist of pointing learners in a direction to solve the problem, but not solving the problem for learners. It was extremely important for the learners in the expert groups to have correct information as they would be teaching their topic to the rest of the class. I had to ascertain that there was no transference of incorrect information to other learners. I helped with photocopying of the teaching worksheets, and provided the charts, and flash cards.

In the LT teaching and learning environment, I was no longer the primary source of knowledge for learners. Instead learners turned out to be sources of learning and support in their expert section of language learning. From lesson 4 onwards, the class time was dedicated to group presentation and feedback from the teacher. Expert learners took charge of the learning activities and consulted the teacher when they needed help and they had to make certain that peers participate actively in the learning process.

4.7.1. Positive aspects of the grammar lesson

Most learners still preferred cooperative learning to traditional learning. They enjoyed the active learning and open-discussion classroom environment provided by cooperative learning. Learners understood each other a lot better within cooperative learning groups than before in individualistic learning. Weak learners were happy that they were no longer left alone with their problem, they had abundant academic support from their peers, and no longer felt shy to ask for help. Weak learners, though, still preferred to ask their groups mates if they did not understand than asking me. They said they could ask their teammates to repeat three or four times but could not do that with me. Learners were also happy that I knew them better with cooperative learning, and I referred to them individually by names. This made them feel positive and part of the class

There was more teacher-learner interaction during the learning. Shy learners began to ask me more questions directly than they did in the previous lesson. Learner concentration and participation were reported to have increased in other subjects as well. Other teachers stated learners were more disciplined after starting cooperative learning and that they were motivated to learn and to speak out their ideas.

Learners' English skills improved to a larger extent as they engaged deeply in group interactions during the learning. More language use during group discussions and during presentation was observed. Learners were no longer shy to express themselves in English. Though their expressions were not grammatically perfect, they were eager to learn. Respect for each other and for each other's ideas and opinions also developed. Learners learned patience as they waited for their turn to share ideas and would listen and wait until the speaker finished before they commented. Learners could work more independently with less direct supervision from me.

4.7.2. Challenges of the grammar lesson

Time was still a problem with cooperative learning lessons. Some group tasks were too long to accomplish within a specific time. Individual accountability was also a challenge to assess with group learning. Some learners still preferred teacher-led learning with group learning activities to reinforce what had been taught instead of other learners leading the entire teaching and learning as experts.

4.7.3. Possible Solution

I decided not to minimise discussion and interaction time, as I hoped that, with time, learners would eventually become used to cooperative learning techniques. Individual scoring would increase individual scoring, hence, for the future, I would consider methods of group learning with individual scoring to reinforce accountability.

I would need more experience in cooperative learning to be able to effectively balance the traditional method and cooperative learning without compromising the positive academic benefits of cooperative learning.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter presented the implementation process of this action research study in a grade 10 EFAL classroom. All stages of the interaction process which involved preparation, implementation, reflections, and possible solutions for the following lessons were discussed in detail.

The learners and I experienced the transition from the individualistic teacher-centred traditional method to the learner-centred cooperative learning method. The experience, with expected and unexpected challenges, proved to be worthwhile. Moving from one cooperative learning task to the next improved my knowledge and use of cooperative learning, lesson preparation, classroom management, and interaction with learners. With the exception of limited time for effective completion of cooperative learning tasks within one EFAL period, I am proud to be an agent of change in my EFAL classroom and to bring forward knowledge and experience of cooperative learning to my learners and to the school.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION

This study investigated the implementation of cooperative learning in an English First Additional Language (EFAL) classroom context.

Throughout the implementation of cooperative learning learners were observed mainly on five classroom behaviours:

- helping group members to learn,
- contributing ideas during group or pair discussions,
- active participation in the group tasks,
- asking for help, and on
- interactions and behaviours.

Learners were also interviewed to gather their perceptions on using cooperative learning in their EFAL classroom.

Major findings from both the observations and interviews were summarised and will be presented in this chapter.

5.1. Strategies used to implement cooperative learning

In a traditional classroom the teacher and learners' communication scope is restricted to a particular pattern of the teacher asking a question, the learners responding and the teacher summarising. My learners' communication skills in English were very limited prior to the implementation of cooperative learning. Most learners were very shy to speak me or other learners.

Introducing cooperative learning proved to be a challenging task for me and for the learners as well. I was tasked with implementing, facilitating and observing the intervention. Given the fact that I had never been trained to use cooperative learning, and the fact that learners had never used cooperative learning before, the task was very challenging.

I noted that after participating in the teambuilding activities of Three-Step-Interview, Team Naming game, and Survival Game described in Chapter Three learners were eager to share

their opinions in their groups. Learners' self-esteem developed through continuous motivation and encouragement from me and team mates. High achievers were willing to help their weak group mates understand the learning tasks. After my explanation of the task for the whole class, peer tutors would break down the task and explain it in detail to their group mates, sometimes using their mother tongue to further explain the concepts. High achievers displayed their in-depth knowledge of the topic to facilitate deeper understanding of their group mates.

I observed that the introduction of cooperative learning in the EFAL classroom provided learners with the opportunity to have conversations and to help each other to acquire English skills at their own pace. When the weak learners did not know how to phrase their ideas in English, the high achievers would ask them to say it in their mother tongue and help them translate their sentences to English before they read their sentences to the group. The support the learners received from their expert group mates increased their confidence to share their ideas in groups and to learn.

I noted that the Jigsaw technique fostered interdependence in cooperative learning groups. Learners seemed to feel that their group mates depended on them for their learning and hence they made maximum efforts not to let their groups down. Learners seemed to feel that they needed each other and that each member was important and had equal responsibility in the groups. The acknowledgements from group members developed a sense of worth for learners and motivated them to do their best.

These observations of mine were validated by the responses from the learners' interview (see Appendix C) results. Learners indicated they generally felt positive and pleased about using cooperative learning in their EFAL learning and they felt more confident about sharing their thoughts when seated in smaller groups than in one large group. They all expressed happiness about how cooperative learning provided them opportunities to speak more in the classroom which improved their English skills. Learners also revealed that they felt good about cooperative group learning when compared to the whole class learning because they learned more about each other and about the subject.

Two learners responded as follows:

“I feel good about learning in groups because we get to know each other better and we help one another to know the work. When another person in the group knows the stuff he help all of us and you feel good about yourself that is what I like about cooperative learning”

“In the other activity the teacher gave us topics to learn and then to teach our group mates and I was scared that but my group mates from expert team helped a lot and I was happy when my group mates learned from me. I like cooperative learning.”

As learners got to understand each other better, I noted that more learners came out of their shells and began to display more talents and skills in their groups. They began to communicate more frequently with me and with other learners in their groups and in the classroom.

The general impression obtained from using the Three-Step-Interview and the Jigsaw techniques was that in both techniques learners shared information, participated in their learning, listened attentively to each other, took turns to speak and supported each other's learning. The Jigsaw technique could be very useful for teaching a lot of material quickly. Grammar skills topics were divided into sections and allocated to expert groups. Each individual member had to perform well in order for the whole group to do well, thus Jigsaw maximised interactions in the groups, and created an atmosphere of cooperation, interdependence, accountability and respect for other learners.

5.2. Factors that promoted the implementation of cooperative learning

When learners understood clearly the aims of implementing cooperative learning in their classroom and how the pedagogy would help them acquire skills in their EFAL learning they were motivated to try the learning method. I found I needed to continuously reiterate the advantages of cooperative learning with learners to keep them motivated to use cooperative learning. Johnson & Johnson (2003) argue that, for success in using cooperative learning, the teacher must know the aims or purposes of the lesson and also specify the social skills and cooperative learning methods that would be emphasised during the lesson. I noted learners' increased willingness to learn and to put effort into solving their problems when I implemented cooperative learning in my EFAL classroom.

I observed that learners benefited when teambuilding activities were taught to them prior to the cooperative learning EFAL tasks. The interaction skills, mutual assistance, supportive

atmosphere, and cooperation skills that were learned and created during teambuilding activities helped learners engage effectively in their cooperative learning groups during the learning tasks. Training in social skills and teacher modelling provided learners with improved communication skills, questioning skills, listening skills, decisions-making skills and conflict resolution skills they needed for effective cooperative learning.

I found that heterogeneous groups promoted cooperative learning in the classroom. Expert knowledge of some learners in the subject promoted cooperative learning in my EFAL classroom because they were quick to understand the task and explain it to their group mates. The willingness of expert learners to support weak learners motivated the weak learners to try their best and increased their self-esteem. Learners felt mixed ability groups helped weak learners to understand the tasks within the supportive and friendly environment of peers instead of one-on-one consultation with the teacher. High achievers and weak learners reported that they preferred being grouped with people who would help them in their learning rather than being grouped with friends because friends could be disruptive. I noticed that, however, at the beginning some learners were not happy about the way they were grouped which created some minor barriers to effective participation in the groups. After the first group activity I explained, motivated, and convinced them that they were needed in the group and that their skills and talents would benefit other members of the group. I noticed that after I had made learners feel more responsible for their group member learning, they were motivated to learn in their groups.

I found that it was important to assign roles and responsibilities to different group members and to provide clear explanations about the assigned roles during the preparation stage. Assigning roles was effective for cooperative learning and explaining the roles to learners enabled them to perform their duties effectively in their groups. Learners had never been assigned to serve as a group leader, writer, checker, and reader, before in their learning, therefore they did not know what to do within those roles and how important it was, for the effectiveness of the team, to perform those roles to their maximum abilities. I found out that it was important to motivate and support learners when they experienced problems with their roles or when they forgot their roles.

Tags for each role were rotated among group members after every cooperative learning task. With diverse abilities and talents in the classroom, it was a bit challenging to assign learners responsibilities within their groups because learners had their preferences that were

somewhat different from mine. Alternating the roles after each cooperative learning task proved to work for almost all the teams. The learners and I noted that assigning roles to everyone in the group kept everyone engaged and participating in group work activities and provided learners with lifelong leadership skills.

I found that the type of EFAL tasks given to learners during the implementation had a profound impact on the quality of cooperative learning in the classroom. The tasks required a lot of preparation time to ensure that all teams would be at work for the duration of the class. I needed to prepare the lessons very well in order to keep the groups engaged and interested in the learning tasks. It was important that the tasks were relevant to all learners and would stimulate their cognitive abilities otherwise learners would not be interested in the activities and would not develop skills.

Kagan (1995) contends that if teachers do not organise enough time for learners to work in their groups, learners do not take these tasks seriously. It is, therefore, important that teachers factor in enough time for group work. I experienced this challenge raised by Kagan (1995) during the first EFAL cooperative learning task. I prepared too many group activities and ran out of time before learners could finish their tasks. Learners indicated that they were not given enough time to understand and then complete the activities.

I found that that positive face-to-face interaction promoted cooperative learning in the EFAL classroom. The learning groups were not so big that learners could not speak easily and without shouting at each other. Each group had six learners of mixed abilities. At most, each group had two high achievers and two average and two weak learners. However I observed that if there was one weak learner in each group it was more effective as it allowed for maximum and undistributed support.

As noted earlier, for effective cooperative learning the teacher should prepare lessons that require cooperation, utilisation of different learning talents in the groups and that are realistically achievable within the time allocated for the learning. The tasks should not be too complicated to complete within the given time but at the same time should challenge learners. Sharan (2010) advises on how teachers should organise their cooperative learning tasks and materials. He says that giving the groups a simple worksheet to fill out is not usually a sufficient cooperative learning task but that asking the groups to complete a very complex task within a class period is also possibly inappropriate. Sharan (2010) points out that

organising difficult tasks can overwhelm the group and cause the group to give up immediately.

The tasks I organised were prescribed by the CAPS EFAL Grade 10 (2011) and facilitated positive cooperative group learning. The vocabulary, grammar and poetry tasks were simple but, I felt, would stimulate the thinking skills of all learners and keep them actively involved in their learning. I observed that there were few instances of discipline issues as a result, I deduce, of pitching the tasks at the right level.

Learners mentioned that the cooperative learning tasks were interesting and helped them to understand their learning EFAL learning tasks better because they were actively involved and were able to ask for more explanation from their group mates if they did not understand the concept. Group work tasks gave them a chance to learn at their different paces because group members shared their knowledge and expertise in different areas. Expert learners indicated that explaining material to their group mates gave them an opportunity to learn more about the topic as well. Weak learners reported that they used to have a problem with asking for more explanation from me because there was no time after the lesson and/or they felt embarrassed to ask questions.

Cooperative learning tasks should allow for learners to accumulate knowledge and learn from each other. The learners should clearly know what they would learn, how they would learn the tasks, what learning aids they would need for the tasks prior to the lesson and they should be able to help each other to understand the tasks.

An advanced learner said:

õI enjoyed helping my group mates in poetry skills. I love poetry and I enjoy it better than other tasks. Cooperative learning is better - we discuss in groups and come up with one correct answer."

When interviewed, one weak learner said:

õIt is better when the teacher let the group mates help me, I feel safe when I ask my friends question they don't think bad or laugh at me they help and now I get my answers right and I know most stuff. I like it when we learn like this."

Learners reported that they understood their work better in small group cooperative learning because they were no longer passive but active during the learning. In cooperative learning they were allowed to ask each other questions and to ask me for more explanation if all the

group members were challenged by the task. They indicated that explaining work to each other made them understand better and that increased their confidence in the subject.

Learners also indicated that the sense of individual responsibility fostered by cooperative learning motivated and encouraged them to focus on their learning task. Learners stressed having expert learners in their groups helped them not to depend entirely on the teacher for knowledge as they also had other people to support them in their learning and increase their understanding of the work.

5.3. Factors that hindered the implementation of cooperative learning

Although cooperative learning had many benefits for EFAL learners, I met with challenges during its implementation in the classroom. Learners were not familiar with group learning and I observed that when they were grouped heterogeneously, although this method of grouping is the most beneficial, problems would arise. Conflicts between group members hindered cooperative learning, especially when the group members had not fully practised conflict resolution skills. Problems in communication were found to be more common in groups. In mixed ability groups some learners had advanced communication skills and others had barely any which hindered interaction and group participation. Conflicting personalities were also observed to hamper cooperative learning. Dominant personalities wanted to move into leadership roles whether or not they were best suited to lead the learning tasks. Constant monitoring of group roles was needed to keep group members to their assigned roles.

The first implementation of cooperative learning proved to be challenging for me too. Managing the class of 40 learners divided into eight groups who were encouraged to speak to each other could be noisy. I continuously observed that when learners enjoyed their tasks they increased their interactions and increasingly spoke louder which became a distraction from the learning process and for the other classrooms. Lack of discipline was found to be a crippling factor in the cooperative classroom. Learners would often leave their desks and move around the class to take their learning resources from other learners in other groups. Without strict discipline cooperative learning can reduce an organised classroom to chaos. I sometimes found it difficult to both observe and facilitate the learning process. Constant monitoring of discipline, participation and cooperative learning was a demanding task.

Lack of motivation, passive participation and negative group atmosphere minimised cooperative learning. I found that some weak learners were not open-minded about

cooperative learning. They were not eager to participate in their group activities unless I was around to constantly motivate them and encourage them to try their best. When the tasks were too demanding for them they were eager to give up and withdrew from group discussions. The low esteem, minimum participation and lack of cooperation hindered cooperative learning and resulted in a negative group atmosphere. In some groups, I observed, advanced learners took over the majority of the learning for the sake of finishing the tasks and for the sake of completing the tasks earlier at the cost of helping their struggling peers learn. Similarly, weak learners relied too much on advanced learners to complete the tasks, hence placing too much work on their shoulders. Such situations hampered the success of the implementation.

As noted earlier in the literature review and therefore expected, cooperative learning is more time consuming than whole class learning. Participatory learning engaged learners in lengthy discussions about learning material, supporting each other, reporting back, my feedback and reflections. Often, the learners did not complete their tasks during the EFAL period and had to use their spare time to finish them. Other teachers were not happy about the extra minutes that were taken off their time while the learners finished their tasks. Cooperative learning required more planning in terms of time allocation for the cooperative learning implementation.

5.4. Learners' perceptions and experiences of using cooperative learning strategies

Learners indicated that cooperative learning offered them an opportunity to get to know each other better. Working together in small groups every day, learners reported, brought them closer to each other and fostered friendship. Learners reported the working together helped them to learn more about each other's strengths and weaknesses and enabled them to provide more support to one another. Working with peers that they had not engaged with in the whole class learning method helped learners to form new positive relationships that had not existed before.

In the beginning, learners often reported that they were not happy about group learning and about the way they were grouped because it separated them from their friends but as they progressed with cooperative learning activities and began to know each other better learners indicated that the relationships among group members were based on respect for each other,

and for each other's views and opinions. They motivated each other to try their best and encouraged each other when one of them struggled to understand the learning material. Learners indicated that the relationships promoted by cooperative learning enabled them to control each other's behaviours during learning. For the benefit of the group and of the individual, learners reported that as group mates and friends it was easy to warn each other against bad behaviours in the group because they were like friends. Learners indicated that they depended on each other as a group and without each individual's maximum efforts the group would not achieve.

When asked to elaborate on how they felt about the teacher's role in cooperative learning, learners indicated that with cooperative learning the teacher's role was changed from teaching all the content and speaking only to ask the questions, to a new role of guiding and supporting them while they discovered the knowledge by themselves. The teacher trusted them and had more confidence in them and that developed more trust for the teacher as well as for themselves. I moved around the groups to generate more discussions and to make certain that all learners were active and participated in their group discussions. In monitoring the progress and the learning in the groups I would join the group discussions and, to encourage more discussion, I would ask questions to steer the conversations towards the point of discussions. Learners asked me questions as they tried to understand the task better and, in that way, interactions between my learners and me improved. Communication between us increased in cooperative learning because I understood learners better and was always available to assist when needed.

One learner said:

"The teacher would come to our group to check if we understand our work and she would ask for each member's opinions on the discussion to make sure that we all speak. We always compare our answers with her answers at the end of the lesson and that we become so happy if our answers match hers and that build more confidence in group members."

Learners reported improved teacher-learner communication in the cooperative learning classroom. Learners indicated that when they provided answers in their groups the teacher would ask them to elaborate on their explanations and that provided them with more chances to speak the language to the teacher and to the classmates. Interactions were more frequent in the cooperative learning both between learners and between the teacher and learners.

In sharing their experiences of cooperative learning learners indicated that the opportunity to share learning challenges with group mates was most helpful in cooperative learning. They

reported that in traditional learning they had struggled in silence until they failed their examinations. With cooperative learning they did not wait for the teacher to explain the concepts and to learn because they had expert learners in their groups who could teach them at their own pace and with whom they felt at ease when asking to repeat when they did not understand, and they felt more prepared for the test and examination. In cooperative learning they were more active in their learning and they participated in group discussions and that helped them accumulate more vocabulary and improved communication skills.

Learners reported that when they were tasked with the responsibility of explaining the tasks to their classmates they developed leadership skills and presentation skills and their self-esteem increased. Cooperative learning was more helpful in keeping all learners engaged in their work. Concentration in the classroom also increased with interactive group activities which kept learners interested in their learning. Learners indicated that they felt more responsible for their own learning and also for helping their classmates learn and that developed interdependence among learners.

Learners found that in a traditional method the teacher was the only expert in the classroom which left all the explanation to her knowledge of the subject. The pace at which learners learned was also determined by the teacher without taking consideration of different learning abilities in the class and, as a result, weak learners were always left behind of the curriculum with no hope of them ever catching up. Learners articulated that with cooperative learning learners got the opportunity to learn in mixed ability groups consisting of expert learners and weak learners and that smart learners, through group discussion of the material, provided support to their group mates at a slower pace until they understood the task.

Learners indicated that in the traditional classroom the teacher would only use English language to teach and explain the concepts and that alone was the problem for many learners. In a cooperative learning classroom, learners code-switched to help their peers understand more and to further explain the learning tasks that, according to the learners, made them feel very comfortable with cooperative learning methods.

In cooperative learning my role was that of the facilitator of learning and progression within learning groups which provided me with time to provide individual support to weak learners. Learners reported that in the traditional method the teacher had no time for questions and deeper explanations because she always had a lot to teach and by the time she finished the teaching she was tired. They indicated that with the cooperative method the teacher moved

around the groups during learning and, when she noticed that some learners required more time to teach the task, would remain behind with them to provide extra teaching. Learners felt that cooperative learning should be used for all subjects in the school.

During the group discussions I would sit with groups and listen to their interactions and engagements with the learning material and I would ask members of the group to elaborate and ask them provocative questions to help them think more about the questions asked. Learners indicated that the sessions improved their relationship with me and it enhanced the interactions between us. In group learning, learners reported that they were not scared to interact with me when compared to the traditional method.

When I asked learners to talk about the things they did not like about cooperative learning, learners indicated that some members in the group did not cooperate until I came around to check on the group progression and they felt that placed an unfair and unequal workload on the other group members. Learners reported that shy learners did not like to interact in the groups and that it was a great effort to get them to speak and that, since cooperative learning depends more on group interactions and group collaborations to solve problems, their non-cooperative nature did not help the groups to learn.

Learners felt that some group members were more mischievous during group discussions and they did not cooperate leaving other members to work hard on the task. Learners indicated that it would be helpful if they decided their own groups because they would eliminate playful learners from their groups. The problem of absenteeism was raised by learners as another challenge with cooperative learning. When one or two members in the group were absent they had to divide the responsibilities among the available members and that created problems since members had to handle more than they could realistically manage.

“One member of our group is often absent from school and when we have to do our task you find that there is more to do because one or two members are missing and this make our task difficult. We do not finish on time like the other groups and everyone has his role to play in the group and so when he is absent less work is done this so bad. Oh, again, some members do not stop talking to let others talk too, I do not like with group work”

When asked to elaborate on what they viewed as the shortcomings of cooperative learning, the learners reported that it would be better for everyone if the teacher provided more explanations and teaching of the new concept and then asked expert learners to teach again in small groups. Learners indicated the teacher would always be the specialist in the subject and the expert learners would be guided by the teacher towards helping other learners. They felt that some learners were not ready to

impart knowledge to the group on their own, especially in the technique where learners had to read a section and come back to teach others. Learners indicated that group members would sometimes dominate the discussions and did not share the learning with others.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed the findings from the participant observations and from learners' individual and focused group interviews. For coherent presentation, the results were organised by using the four research questions stated in chapter one.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. Introduction

A review of the results led to the identification of common patterns and themes that constantly emerged. These patterns are categorised into three themes for discussion in this chapter. They are: benefits of using cooperative learning and factors that hinder cooperative learning.

6.2. Benefits of using cooperative learning

The first research question of this study was on strategies that could be used to implement cooperative learning in an EFAL classroom. Although cooperative learning was only implemented for five days in my EFAL class, the results indicated that the implementation of cooperative learning yielded positive results in four areas: improved motivation for learning, better understanding of the EFAL tasks, improved learner-learner interactions and enhanced teacher-learner relationships. Each area of improvement will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

6.2.1. Improved motivation for learning

Before the study took place the traditional teaching and learning methods that I used in my EFAL classroom did not encourage active participation of learners in their learning. Unlike the traditional method, cooperative learning strategies provided EFAL learners with opportunities to learn in mixed ability groups which afforded them ample chances to combine their efforts and skills, share their ideas, interact with each other, support each other and develop skills as they engaged in EFAL tasks. In a cooperative environment learners supported and encouraged each other's efforts which provoked learners' willingness to try. Shared responsibilities and common goals of cooperative learning techniques motivated learners to try and contribute to the learning of their peers (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

The exchanges between learners encouraged independent thinking which implies that the tasks given to learners in cooperative learning stimulated learners' thinking skills, encouraged collaboration and common goals so that learners realise the importance of cooperation.

The results from observations indicated that approaching EFAL tasks using cooperative learning strategies maintained learners' interest in their learning tasks and also stimulated their motivation in the learning of EFAL tasks. In a vocabulary task, learners helped each other understand the list of new words and they shared their dictionary meanings of the words in their groups. All learners contributed in the formulation of sentences using the newly acquired words so that all learners in the groups, with the help of peers, formulated at least one sentence. Sharing their sentences with peers from other groups boosted learners' self-esteem and developed their second language skills. I praised my learners for individual and group effort and compliments from peers increased their intrinsic motivation to learn and to better their skills (Sharan, 2010).

The findings from this study that cooperative learning strategies promote motivation for learning, learner-learner interactions and better understanding of the EFAL tasks corroborate Slavin's (2010) research into the use of cooperative learning. Slavin (2010) found that after implementing a Jigsaw technique to his English Foreign Language (EFL) students' reading comprehension understanding increased when compared to students who used the traditional method in their learning of the reading comprehension. These findings are parallel with the findings of this study which indicated a positive language improvement in EFAL grade 10 learners after using the Jigsaw technique in their learning.

Likewise, Mengdou & Xiaoling (2010) investigated whether the use of the Jigsaw technique could successfully be used to integrate listening, reading, speaking and writing skills in the college English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The aim of the study was to find out whether the Jigsaw technique could be used successfully to fulfil the intended task of integrating these four skills. A conclusion was drawn that the Jigsaw technique is an effective way to promote student participation and enthusiasm as well as a useful technique for language learners to accomplish learning tasks in the EFL classroom. The findings from this study verify the results from my study which indicates that the use of Jigsaw in the EFAL curriculum improved participation of learners in their tasks, motivated them to complete their work, promoted interaction amongst each other and with me and developed learners' self-confidence in the use of the second language.

Moreover, the results of this study are consistent with other cooperative learning studies across the world (Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Liang, 2002; Pillay, 2000; Pillay, 2008; Slavin, 1996; Van Wyk, 2012). The results from learners' interviews indicated that their motivation

to learn increased during and after the study. I found that teambuilding activities such as the Three-Step-Interview, Team Naming, and Survival Game created a relaxing and pleasant learning atmosphere in which learners developed better understanding and relationships with me and with each other which increased their self-esteem and confidence.

Interviews with learners revealed that interesting EFAL activities that learners were engaged in and the support they received from me and peers motivated them to work at their learning tasks. The immediate feedback from me and their peers motivated learners to do their best to meet their group challenges and earn respect from classmates. Van Wyk (2012) argues that all learners need three sources of motivation to work at their learning tasks: opportunities for success, relevance of school work, and a caring and supportive human environment. This study provided learners with a positive cooperative learning environment in which all learners had opportunities to succeed and their advanced peers and I were always available to support and help them solve their learning problems.

The results from both my observations and learners' interviews indicated that the use of cooperative learning strategies in the EFAL class enhanced learners' motivation to learn English. Cooperative learning strategies of Jigsaw and Three-Step-Interview helped motivate learners to achieve mastery of their EFAL concepts as they collaboratively negotiated meaning in order to solve authentic problems and achieve common goals. Furthermore, I discovered that using the cooperative learning technique of the Three-Step-Interview cultivated friendship among learners and improved learners' understanding of each other.

6.2.2. Better understanding of EFAL tasks

The mixed ability cooperative learning groups into which learners were divided and worked for the entire implementation process meant that high achievers spent a substantial amount of time with low achievers in the same groups. Advanced learners explained ideas and concepts to their peers to enhance their understanding and learning. In interviews advanced learners indicated that they were happy to provide support to their peers because they also benefited. Supporting their weak group members helped advanced learners to explore more learning materials and to read beyond their EFAL learners' book to teach their group mates. Reading more sources provided high achievers with more skills to explain their concepts and led to fruitful discussions.

Both high achievers and low achievers articulated their enthusiasm for cooperative learning because it allowed them to learn at their own pace, simultaneously with group mates, and contribute to each other's learning which improved their learning. The use of mixed ability grouping in this study where advanced learners help their weak group members is supported by the Zone of Proximal Development theory (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978) all meaningful and developmental learning is that which is in advance of development and involves the acquisition of skills beyond the learner's understanding. He defines the ZPD as the difference between the learner's actual development level (independent achievement) and his or her potential level (achievement with help from a more competent peer). In this study, through engagements in participative and interactive activities with group members, all learners were able to develop each other's potential and move beyond their level of development in the EFAL tasks. Learner-learner interactional activities that learners were exposed to are in line with what Krashen (1985) found in his input output concept explained in Chapter 2. Krashen (1985) argues that language acquisition and learning takes place during classroom interaction in the target language whereby the learner receives language input that is one step beyond his or her current linguistic competence. Through group interactions, presentations and feedbacks, and modelling learners were provided with ample opportunity to learn the target language in the EFAL classroom.

This study provided a cooperative learning environment in which all learners contributed their ideas and opinions based on their existing knowledge of the learned concept. Both high and low achievers were encouraged and motivated to articulate their thoughts and contribute to their group mates' learning. Observations indicate all learners learned at the same time but at their own pace using each other's current knowledge to build their own understanding of the material. Such findings are parallel with Bruner's (1966) constructivist ideas which say that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on their previous and current knowledge. Learners used their previous experiences and present knowledge to debate concepts and problems and made decisions that established new meanings which allowed the individual learners to move beyond the learning provided to them.

The findings of this study show that the use of cooperative learning strategies improved learners' understanding of EFAL tasks and these findings are consistent with those of Chen (1999) who found that the use of the Jigsaw technique in EFL major students improved students' grammar and competence, social language function and communicative output.

However, in interviews, high achievers indicated that they were not always willing to support slow learners. At some points they were so eager to complete the learning tasks ahead of other groups and that they neglected to help weak learners. In justification, high achievers indicated that some of the slow learners in the groups were not putting in their maximum efforts and they lazed around during group discussions and did not concentrate. Nevertheless, learners' reports were mostly positive about cooperative learning.

However, some learners did not favour all of the techniques used in their learning. During the focused group interviews learners pointed out that they had preferred it when I, as teacher, carried half of the teaching task and peer tutors did the rest during the Jigsaw learning because, they said, some of the peer tutors were not confident with their topic and were not at the expert level in their assigned topics. I acknowledged the learners' perceptions and felt that with more practice in the technique and more exposure to cooperative learning learners would develop more confidence and skills. The issue of time was also indicated to be a major setback in terms of enough preparation in the expert groups. This implies that cooperative learning, when compared to traditional learning, requires more learning time for learners to complete their activities. In planning for cooperative learning tasks, teachers should take into consideration that cooperative learning involves more group discussions, debates, decision-making, peer facilitation, and group presentations, hence, for effective development of cooperative learning skills learners should be provided with enough time to work in their groups.

6.2.3. Improved Learner-Learner interactions

The results from the observation indicated that learners enjoyed classroom activities that provided them with opportunities to speak to each other on a variety of topics. It was within the vocabulary, poetry, and grammar activities carried out in this study that learners had the opportunity to explain, paraphrase, describe, ask for clarification and talk about the content in their cooperative learning groups. I observed that the cooperative learning environment provided learners with extended opportunities to develop different skills of second language through discussions and arguments.

Heterogeneous grouping provided learners, with different personalities, talents, skills, weaknesses, and strengths, opportunities to work together in cooperative learning activities in an attempt to achieve the common learning goals. The exchange of ideas and opinions during

the learning gave learners many opportunities to reflect upon and reply to the diverse responses fellow learners brought to the questions raised. Small groups allowed learners to add their perspective to the issues under discussions and, thus, promoted learner-learner interactions and language learning. Learners began to understand each other better and learned to listen and respect other people's points of view and contribution to the learning. Structured interactions helped learners to relate better to their peers and to develop friendship among group members. Learners indicated that working together in their groups helped their shy fellow learners to develop social skills (Liang, 2002; Sharan, 2010).

The use of the Jigsaw technique in this study fostered positive interdependence among group members as they all felt that their individual contribution was important for the success of the group. Learners felt that other group members trusted them and relied on them to complete the portion of the task assigned to them. Learners indicated that they did not want to let their group members down by not fulfilling their tasks, hence they participated responsibly to gain the respect and trust of their group members. When members were complimented by their group mates and me, their self-confidence increased and they felt needed and important in the groups and that promoted cooperative learning (Johnson et al, 1994).

Sharan (2010) argues that the role of interaction in additional language is especially important. He says that it is in their interaction with each other that teachers and learners work together to create the intellectual and practical activities that shape both the form and the content of the target language as well as the processes and outcomes of the individual development.

All the learning tasks in this study were developed with the primary aim of developing and promoting learner-learner interactions and teacher-learner interaction. During the vocabulary activity learners had to use all the words to create the short narrative story. In the process, it was observed that the learners started by explaining all the words to each other to make sure that all the members understood the meaning of each word. Learners used their dictionaries to find the meaning of the word. Learners had to ask for some help from me when they did not agree with a word meaning or how to use the word in context.

Dictionary skills were transferred between learners in the groups. To achieve a common goal, learners had to share their individual sentences and arrange them into a short narrative story. Various skills were shared and transferred among learners. Listening, communication, decision-making, peer teaching, questioning and language skills were all developed during

the learning. Learners indicated that they were happy about learning in cooperative learning groups because they learned from each other and only asked for my help when they reached deadlock in the groups. Learners reported that group learning afforded individual learners a chance to articulate their thoughts in a supportive environment and that promoted their self-confidence in their language skills.

6.2.4. Enhanced teacher-learner relationships

In traditional teaching, the teacher's role was to teach the entire content and only interact with learners to ask questions which solicited what had been taught. Only the learners who knew the correct answers communicated with the teacher during the learning. Quiet and weak learners did not get the opportunity to interact with the teacher, and thus, their relationship with the teacher remained very limited. During the focused group interviews quiet and weak learners indicated that before cooperative learning they were scared to ask me questions or to respond to questions because they were not confident that their answers were correct.

Cooperative learning strengthened the teacher-learner relationship in many ways. Firstly, through Three-Step-Interview activity, I got a chance to listen to learners' interactions and had an opportunity to learn more about individual learners in the classroom. It was interesting to move around the groups and listen to the debates and to learn more about the learners' characters without asking each learner to explain her or himself to me. I observed that learners were more eager to share their experiences with me when they were in their cooperative learning groups than at other times (Sharan, 2010).

Secondly, because my role in cooperative learning was to plan the learning activities, explain the activities to the learners, and to facilitate and monitor the learning progress, I had more time to attend to each group and help them with their learning problems. When attending to one group at a time, I had more opportunities to listen to learners' problems and to provide guided learning and more feedback.

Thirdly, to motivate and to foster individual accountability in the groups, at the end of the learning task I would pose the questions to any group members to ascertain that they participated in the group discussions. It was interesting to observe that group members participated more when I told them that they should ask questions at the end of the learning task. Asking questions randomly of any group member gave me an opportunity to speak to learners in a less threatening environment and learners were willing to participate in the

question and answer session because it gave them the opportunity of showcasing their learned skills and expertise to me and to other groups.

Fourthly, during the feedback and reflection time, I had more opportunity to listen to the learners' ideas, opinions and problems about the learning task and how they felt the class could improve on the following task. Learners were eager to comment on their group activities and to improve on their cooperative learning activities. Such discussions opened two-way interactions between us and increased mutual trust (Johnson et al, 1995).

6.2.5. Positive interdependence

Creating a sense of positive interdependence by designing tasks which would make learners feel mutually connected to each other promoted the use of cooperative learning strategies. Structuring tasks in which learners strive towards a common learning goal, like a single short narrative story, motivated learners to work together because they knew that the completed task would represent the group's effort.

Assigning group roles was also found to foster positive interdependence in cooperative learning groups. During the preparation stage of this study, I assigned group roles that specified responsibilities each member of the group needed to carry in order to accomplish the task successfully. Allocating group roles fostered the feeling of "swimming or sinking together" among group members as they felt that they depended upon each other for the success of the group (Liang, 2002).

6.2.6. Individual Accountability

To prevent group members from not doing their share of the work, I would randomly select any group member for group presentations, to summarise the group discussions, or to answer the questions on the material covered by the group. Johnson & Johnson (1994) also suggest that teachers can foster individual accountability in their cooperative learning groups by randomly selecting one worksheet from the group for evaluation with the score achieved representing the group.

6.2.7. Group identity

Developing a group name or logo was used in this study to create a sense of belonging, connectedness, and friendship among group members. During the preparation stage, I

engaged learners in the teambuilding activity of Naming Team in which group members brainstormed a name for their group (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).

6.2.8. Design of the Classroom environment

According to Vygotsky (1978) every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and then, later, on the individual level; first between people, then inside the child. A particular physical arrangement of the classroom furniture is essential to promote the ZPD concept of peer guided learning and to the success of cooperative learning in this study. In my classroom I rearranged the desks so that they formed a circle in which learners faced each other to enable them to work together and to interact easily and learners were heterogeneously arranged in their groups. Similar findings were found in a case study by Mengdou & Xiaoling (2010) in which learners from a middle school in the United Kingdom were heterogeneously grouped to investigate its effects on interactions between learners of different academic abilities. Likewise this study, through observations and students' interviews, revealed that heterogeneous grouping held potential to increase motivation and social confidence of low achieving learners and helped all members of the group, high achievers and low achievers, overcome their own challenges.

6.3. Factors that hinder Cooperative Learning

Implementing cooperative learning in this study was not easy for me or the learners. I discovered that facilitating cooperative learning required experience, time and perseverance from my side. The major aspects which, in some ways, hampered the successful use of cooperative learning in an EFAL class can be summarised as follows:

6.3.1. Time factor

Using cooperative learning required a lot of class time. I found that cooperative learning group activities needed much more classroom time than traditional learning. Learners needed more time to discuss the activities among group members, explain and support each and to complete the task. I observed that weak learners needed more time to grasp the concept from their peers and some were slower in writing their share of the task, hence, the groups were held back and did not finish their tasks on time. Time did not allow for much explanation of the task to the groups, assigning of new roles for the tasks, and feedback and reflection in one period. The solution could be to spread the lesson to over two periods or two days, depending

on the school time table. If a Jigsaw technique is used, one period could be allocated to assigning topics, regrouping of the expert groups and discussions of the assigned topics within the expert groups. The teacher could then ask expert group peers to do more research on their assigned topic, compare their notes and practise for the home group tutoring in the next period. The other period, which could be the following day, could be used for peer tutoring in the home group and presentations (Kagan, 1992).

6.3.2. Noise Level

The sharing of ideas, opinions and discussions, and debates over issues generated high levels of noise in the classroom which at some stages was uncomfortable for other teachers in the adjacent classrooms. I tried my best to control and to monitor the group activities but, I observed, learners' excitement over the new learning style and opportunity to speak and discuss provided by cooperative learning brought them joy, hence, they raised their voices. Some groups finished ahead of others and would chat while waiting for the other groups to finish and that also increased the level of noise. Debates over topics in discussions would often cause learners to raise their voices in attempt to get their points across or to get the group's attention.

Strict guidelines and rules of group discussion and individual accountability are important to reinforce at the beginning of the learning task to keep all members engaged in the group activities. Imposing group accountability for individual member's ill behaviour will force group leaders to exercise some form of discipline in the groups (Kagan, 1992)

6.3.3. Lack of group processing

I observed that some learners did not like to work in groups and preferred to work alone. Some did not want to do their share of work. These and other learners were not always cooperative in their groups which often led to group conflicts and groups not completing their task on time. If individual accountability was not in place other group members would do all the work. To accommodate all learners in the classroom, those who do not like cooperative learning and those who prefer it, teachers should vary the teaching styles in the classroom. The teacher may introduce the lesson in a traditional method where all learners listen to the teacher and the teacher may then assign sections of the lesson to the groups for peer teaching and report back.

6.4. Conclusion

The results from the study led me as researcher to conclude that the cooperative learning strategies used in this study yielded positive results in terms of learners' motivation to learn, better understanding of EFAL tasks, improved learner-learner interactions, and enhanced teacher-learner relationships in the given context. I also conclude that cooperative learning was not the easiest way to teach but, when used effectively, proved to help learners support each other's learning and develop necessary social and collaborative skills for use in problem solving situation in the classroom as well in their lifelong situations. Teaching learners to work cooperatively fostered the cooperative learning skills that learners will need all their lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the major findings of the study will be summarised and implications for teachers will be discussed. The limitations and challenges of the study will be discussed in addition to the suggestions for improvements and future research.

My aim in planning this action research was to provide my English First Additional Language (EFAL) grade 10 learners with a learner-centred environment which supported participation and promoted interaction in an EFAL classroom. In this study I wanted to find out if cooperative learning activities increased learner-learner interactions and teacher-learner interactions in an EFAL classroom.

My study consisted of one class of 40 EFAL grade 10 learners. Cooperative learning structures of Three-Step-Interview and Jigsaw were implemented in the EFAL grade 10 curriculum. I observed throughout the study how learners used cooperative learning principles of positive interdependence and accountability to: contribute their ideas in their cooperative learning groups; support peers; ask for help; interact with peers and with the teacher; and complete tasks. In order to reinforce and develop interactions and peer support, the implementation introduced the Three-Step-Interview technique and Jigsaw strategy in the learning of vocabulary, poetry, and grammar skills during the five day study. Additionally, I interviewed learners individually and in a focused group to determine their perceptions of using the cooperative learning structures in their learning.

7.2. Summary of Findings

Overall, the results from the observations made me conclude that learner-learner and teacher-learner interactions increased when learners were engaged in cooperative learning activities. I observed that the cooperative learning activities provided learners with more opportunities to share their opinions and ideas and to listen and produce the second language in a non-threatening environment. A noticeable change occurred in my classroom when I began to speak less and allowed my learners to speak more during learning. My EFAL classroom was less teacher-centred and more focus was on learners.

Results from the individual and focused group interviews revealed that learners developed positive friendship connections and related more to each other through cooperative learning group discussions. This was validated when two learners said that before working together in a group they did not know each other well. The two learners said working together throughout the study had brought them very close and that they interacted even more outside the EFAL classroom.

The results from observations indicated that learners' attitudes towards their learning improved. Learners were interested, motivated and excited about the EFAL class and activities. This was evident as the study progressed when learners were eager to share their ideas and to provide feedback after the tasks without my immediate supervision.

Engaging learners of different academic levels in a group supported their EFAL skills and strengthened their second language skills. When placed in one group with high achievers, two weak learners indicated that they had learned how to read a poem fluently after their peers modelled the reading. These learners articulated that with the support they received from peers they felt more confident to read aloud among peers and they were excited about the learning support they received.

Finally, cooperative learning promoted leadership skills and teamwork in my EFAL classroom. Learners were learning from their peers and this provided comprehensible second language input and output. More advanced learners used academic language to explain concepts to group members and this guided learning at learners' pace fostered deeper understanding of the concepts to peers.

7.3. Pedagogical Implications

CAPS (2011) emphasises a need for teachers to promote cooperation, teamwork, friendship, leadership skills, communication skills, decision-making skills, and problem-solving skills. The cooperative learning method offers educators many strategies to facilitate the growth of these skills in learners. During classroom activities teachers can present opportunities for learners to work with their peers and develop skills that would be impossible to promote if learners were learning as individuals in a traditional classroom. My study suggests that a small group setting is an ideal environment to foster communication skills, leadership skills, teamwork and friendship as it may decrease anxiety for learners who are withdrawn and passive in whole class learning situations.

Educators need a variety of teaching strategies to meet the needs of their learners. This is particularly apparent when working with learners of diverse learning abilities and personalities. Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy which provides a learning environment that can raise the levels of participation, interaction and motivation to learn for learners of all academic abilities in the classroom (Slavin, 2010).

For teachers thinking of using cooperative learning strategies, it is strongly recommended that learners are thoroughly prepared for cooperative work situations before attempting to use the strategies in the classroom. It was found in this study and also suggested by Cohen (1994) that a suitable training programme be instituted to teach learners the group skills that are essential for the cooperative learning. Inadequate preparation with regard to group skills was found to result in problems with the learners' behaviour and groups being disorganised.

Thorough teacher preparation was also found to be central to successful implementation of cooperative strategies. Teachers need to prepare for the different new roles as a researcher, observer, facilitator and motivator within the cooperative learning classroom. As a researcher, the teacher observes the cooperative learning process, taking into consideration what works for learners and what does not work, and collecting data accordingly. This role, however, does not mean that learners are left on their own, and that the teacher is no longer responsible for the learning process. Cohen (1994) points out that as a facilitator the teacher gives learners a chance to take charge of their own learning.

7.4. Recommendation for future research

My study investigated cooperative learning and relationships between the teacher and learners and amongst learners. One way to expand this research would be to identify the effects of cooperative learning on academic achievement in EFAL classrooms. During cooperative learning small groups of learners work together to accomplish individual and shared goals and Johnson & Johnson (1994) recommend giving individual scores and group scores to promote positive interdependence and individual accountability. Another way to expand the research could be to do a longitudinal study following these learners into grade 11 and 12. The study could ascertain if cooperative learning, understood in grade 10, were built on and developed by learners in higher grades. In addition, it could prove interesting to do the study in two different types of schools-an under-resourced township school and well-resourced suburban school.

7.5. Limitations of the study

The length of EFAL classes and the duration of my study influenced the results. My class periods were only 55 minutes, which made it difficult to start and complete a cooperative learning activity. I would recommend that cooperative learning activities be implemented for a longer time period. In my study I used two cooperative learning strategies. Learners were not able to adequately master both of them because of the length of time. I think it would be better to use one cooperative structure and provide learners more time to learn how to use it before introducing the second strategy.

My results were limited because of the small sample of learners I used. It would strengthen my results to use more grade 10 classes or different grades. After conducting this study I realised that five days is a very short period of time to teach and implement cooperative learning activities.

If I were to embark on another similar study, I would attend cooperative learning training before attempting to implement the activities in the classroom. It was difficult to learn about cooperative learning and try to implement the new ideas at the same time. During my study I learned that creating and gathering teaching and learning material for cooperative learning tasks involved a huge amount of preparation. Therefore, I would recommend that small groups of teachers work together to produce a unit on one strategy. This not only reduces the workload for an individual, but also results in a better product.

7.6. Conclusion

Enhancing learners' interaction skills and promoting positive relationships between the teacher and learners and amongst learners contribute to the learners' success in the EFAL classroom, and to life-long learning. In this study, I implemented a teaching strategy that was new to me, and in the process, I obtained more knowledge about the language teaching theories, research skills and methods, and about cooperative learning strategies and how to implement them successfully in my teaching and my classroom context. Importantly, I learned how to use the knowledge I have acquired to promote learner-learner interactions and teacher-learner interactions in my EFAL classroom and in developing the EFAL skills.

The study informs how cooperative learning can be used to improve teaching and learning in EFAL secondary school classrooms, and how teachers can engage in action research to improve their own practice and the learning of their learners.

The ultimate goal in education is to prepare learners for their future. Providing learners with a variety of instructional strategies helps learners to be successful in many of life's settings. This idea is supported by Kagan (1995) who states that if we provide learners a wide range of experiences, learners will be more prepared to adjust or adapt to their physical and social environments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PERMISSION FOR PARENT CONSENT

Dear Mr and Mrsí í í í í í í í í í í í ..

I Mrs N.I. Ngubane herewith seek your permission to conduct action research study which will involve your childí í í í í í í í í .during the English First Additional Language lessons. I am currently studying towards a Masters Degree at the UKZN, Edgewood campus and I am required to do a research project. My research study is titled òThe Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in an English First Additional Language classö and entails investigating an alternative teaching strategy, namely, cooperative learning.

Because the study involves your child, I need you to sign the permission slip below and return it to me as soon as possible. I appreciate your willingness to help. If there are any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact me on at school 031 509 6329 or you can contact my research supervisor Mr Mthembu (UKZN, Department of Language and Media) 031 260 3478 or send a note with your child.

I am looking forward to working with your child.

Yours in education

Mrs N.I. Ngubane (class educator)

í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ..cut hereí í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í ...

I í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í agree to allow my childí í í í í í í í í í í to participate in the action research study being conducted by Mrs Ngubane. I fully understand that no emotional or physical harm will be done to my child and that the research ethics will be adhered to throughout the process.

APPENDIX B

INCWADI YEMVUME YOMZALI

MZALI

Mina Mrs Ngubane ngicela imvume yakho ukusebenzisa umntwana wakho uí í í í í í í í . kucwaningo engizolwenza nabantwana bebanga leshumi esifundweni sesiNgisi. Ngiphothula iziqu zemfundo ephakeme enyuvesi yakwa Zulu-Natal ophikweni i Edgewood. Ukuphothula iziqu zami kudingeka ngenze ucwaningo. Uma unemibuzo mayelana nocwaningo uvumelekile ukuthintana nami kulenombolo yasesikoleni 031 5796329 noma uthinte uMnumzane Mthembu kulenombolo 031 2603478.

Ngesikhathi socwaningo kuzoqikelelwa ukuthi abantwana ngeke bathole ukuhlukumezeka kwanoma yiphi uhlobo. Ukuqinisekisa imvume yakho, uyacelwa ukuba usayine lefomu engezansi uyibuyisele kumina ngokushesha.

Ngibonga ukubambisana emfundweni.

Yimi ozithobayo

Nkk N.I. Ngubane

í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í .sika laphaí í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í .

Incwadi yokuzibophezela yomzali

Mina í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í í . Mzali womfundi uí í í í

ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi ngiyavuma ukuthi umntwana wami abe yingxenywe yocwaningo oluzokwenziwa u Mrs Ngubane. Nginolwazi oluphelele lokuthi akukho kuhlukumezeka kwanoma yiluphi uhlobo oluzokwenzeka kumntwana wami ngesikhathi socwaningo noma seluphelile.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual and Focused Group

1. How do you feel about using cooperative learning in your EFAL learning?
2. How do cooperative learning group discussions help your understanding of the EFAL concepts?
3. What changes have you noticed in terms of the relationship between you and your group mates since you started using cooperative learning?
4. What changes have you noticed in terms of the relationship between you and your teacher?
5. What part of working in cooperative learning groups is most helpful? And Why?
6. What part of working in groups is the least helpful? Explain.

APPENDIX D

TEACHER OBSERVATION SHEET

Name of the group: í í í í í í í í í í

Date: í í .

Cooperative learning task: í í í í í í í

Cooperative Learning Groupsø behaviour	Highly achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved	Area of improvement	Comments (member)	Comments (teacher)
Positive Interdependence among group members						
Individual Accountability						
Peer support						
Staying on Task						
Face-to-face interactions						
Asking for help						
Participation in group activities						

APPENDIX E

LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

9 HAKE PLACE
NEWLANDS EAST
4037
15 MARCH 2013

Dear Sir

I, **Nomalungelo Isabel Ngubane**, am an English First Additional Language grade 10-12 teacher at your school, but I am also studying part-time towards a Master in Education degree at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Edgewood Campus). To complete my degree I am required to conduct a research on my thesis titled “**The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in an English First Additional Language Classroom**”. The study will investigate the impact of cooperative learning approach on the interaction behavior of grade 10 EFAL learners that I teach. The study will be conducted within the school hours in my EFAL class. No school teaching and learning time will be interrupted during the study since all data will be collected during my EFAL class teaching and learning time.

I would like to ensure you that the data collected from your school will be treated with confidentiality. I will be the only one to keep the data gathered. Participants from your school will be allowed to view data before it is presented to the public. Nowhere in the research study will your school or participants be mentioned by name.

I am therefore, writing this letter to ask for permission to use English Department learners as participants for my study. I will appreciate your in my effort to seek the best teaching methods for our learners and to help me finish my degree.

Should you need more information on the study please feel free to contact me on 0794710483 or my Supervisor, Mr Mthembu (UKZN-Language & Media Department) on 0312603478 or 0796284969

Yours sincerely

Nomalungelo Isabel Ngubane

APPENDIX F

LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



26 April 2013

Mrs Nomakungelo Isabel Ngubane 203513326
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0246/013M

Project title: The effectiveness of cooperative learning in an English first additional language classroom

Dear Mrs Ngubane

Expedited approval

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steven Collings (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: AB Mthombu
cc Academic Leader Researcher Dr MN Davids
cc School Administrator Ms B Bhengu

Humanities & Social Sc Research Ethics Committee
Professor S Collings (Chair)

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Funding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

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