The Effect of Using the Cooperative Learning Group Strategy (Learning Circles) A Study of Fifth Primary Pupils' Vocabulary Acquisition in English

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of the Learning Circles strategy on vocabulary acquisition of the English language as a second language. In addition, it examined the level of vocabulary knowledge required to communicate effectively in a foreign language. Based on the researcher's personal experience in the classroom, the researcher found that pupils had weak linguistic expressions, which inspired him to employ the Learning Circles strategy, which involves exposure to the foreign language as well as ample opportunities for using it.

An experimental design divided into two groups was used by the researcher. A random group was selected by the researcher. A total of (60) male 5th graders are divided into two groups for a period of 12 weeks. In order to control the experiment, the researcher taught both groups directly. As a result of the statistical analysis and data analysis (SPSS), it was determined that there were statistically significant differences between vocabulary acquisition tests in the post-test for both groups, and the experimental group scored higher on the post-test.
1. Introduction
1.1 The problem statement

It is widely considered that vocabulary is the most important element and pillar of any language, so teaching vocabulary in primary schools can be challenging; since it affected a lot of teachers; because teaching was often tedious and lacks luster, and because children in primary schools had to be motivated by implementing a variety of teaching strategies (Richards et al, 2009: 2). Educators and supervisors in Iraqi primary schools have expressed concern about the teaching of English in Iraqi schools. There are a variety of conventional methods used by English teachers, and it depends on the teacher. This situation results in pupils facing difficulties learning the English language either by acquiring vocabulary or mastering the four English skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening because of the centered approach, combined with weak participation of pupils in classroom learning.

Furthermore, some studies, such as those by Abdul-Ghanee (2018) and Bader (2017), suggest that pupils' inability to acquire vocabulary may be the result of inadequate learning environments and teachers' teaching methods, which restrict pupils' ability to learn efficiently.

In light of this, the researcher formulated the problem of the present research as follows: "Do LCs have an impact on fifth-class pupils' vocabulary acquisition in English?".
1.2 Study significance
In learning English as a foreign language (EFL), vocabulary plays an important role in children's thinking, and a higher vocabulary has been associated with better academic achievements (Smith, 1941).

Vocabulary knowledge involves understanding the definition and application of a word. In order to live a fulfilling life, we need words to express ourselves. With words, we can acquire an enormous amount of knowledge that is crucial to effective communication: words for speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words for listening (receptive vocabulary) (Newman & Dwyer, 2009: 385). Vocabulary development has been recognized by educators for a long time (John Dewey, 1910). In order for students to develop their ability to understand words and express themselves correctly, vocabulary acquisition provides ammunition to develop their understanding of words (Milton, 2009:1).

1.3 The purpose of the study
A study designed to investigate the effect of the Learning Circles strategy (LC) on vocabulary acquisition by pupils in fifth-class primary grade is being conducted in the present study.

1.4 Study Hypothesis
The following null hypothesis has been formulated based on the research objective. Learning Circles strategy (LCs) was used by the experimental group EG to teach English vocabulary acquisition. By comparison, the conventional method is used by the control group CG.

1.5 Study Limitations
There are several limitations to the research:
1. During the first term of the academic year (2020-2021), a sample of fifth-year primary boys in Mosul's left side.
2. In Iraq, the Ministry of Education is implementing the first four units of Book 5 in English.

1.6. Terminology Definitions:
1.6.1 Circles of learning:
Following is a definition of "Learning Circles strategy":
- Açıkgüz (2003: 177): D.W. developed this technique. Johnson & Johnson Ltd. Group goals, the sharing of opinions and materials, labor divisions, and group rewards are prominent most important characteristics of this technique. Working in groups, sharing ideas and materials, and asking each
other questions before the teacher has provided rewards, put out a single product during the first application.

- **Glanz (2004: 151):** Through sharing ideas and materials, this program focuses on getting pupils working together as a team to achieve a group goal and then a personal goal. Cooperation means working together to achieve a common goal in a heterogeneous group.

- **Defining operations:** Fifth graders are taught English vocabulary through Learning Circles, which involves small groups of four or five children, where they can extend their own learning and share knowledge.

### 1.6.2. The vocabulary:

According to this definition, vocabulary refers to:

- **Oxford (2008: 495):** In a foreign language book, vocabulary is a list of words and their meanings.

- **Wincel (2014: 27):** Words are connected to their uses in real life through Vocabulary Acquisition.

- **Defining operations:** Communicating ideas and expressing the meaning of the speaker requires a collection of words. In the English language, pupils in fifth grade gain these skills. The researcher prepares a vocabulary acquisition test for pupils to measure their vocabulary acquisition.

### 2. Background theory

#### 2.1. Strategy for Learning Circles:

Earners are more likely to be effective when the learner takes center stage. As a result, he is more likely to participate actively in class. A positive attitude toward school and subjects can be developed among learners. The environment of learning has led to the development of this strategy. Through their participation in planning, executing, and evaluating lectures, students may also acquire cooperative working skills both inside and outside of the classroom (Trodd & Chivers, 2011:159).

It is evident that Learning Circles' strategy is effective in providing the necessary changes necessary for acquisition and skill development, and it transforms the role of the learner from that of a receiver into that of an active participant. It is necessary for this position to involve working in teams in order to accomplish tasks by cooperating in a way that involves developing the skills of collective leadership and conversation, accepting others, gaining self-satisfaction, as well as improving performance working in teams. In addition, the program provides opportunities for the pupils to improve their academic and educational skills. Active learning is thought to be more effective than passive
learning, according to scholars. A concept of active learning is also supported by cognitive theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky. From their experiences, they assume that children construct knowledge. Thus, Vygotsky is regarded as an early proponent of constructivism and constructivist thinking. Through interaction with the environment and exposure to situations that allow a person to consider solutions, these concepts are based on knowledge development. Original edges are born as a result of this process. The learning process needs to be restructured to meet the needs of the present. Furthermore, Johnson & Johnson (1999: 187) maintain that cooperative learning is correlated with second language acquisition.

Subsequently, the Learning Circles strategy increases the ambiance: fun, opportunity to help others, opportunity to gain a sense of achievement from doing something useful, improving communication skills, gaining an insight into teaching, an enhanced CV, improved academic knowledge, a challenge, social contact (Falchikov, 2001: 49) Communication is by far the broadest of the terms we have attempted to define. One author describes it as "The process participants use to exchange information and ideas, needs and desires" (Kuder, 2018: 5). There are four elements that must be present in order for communication to be successful: a. a sender of the message. b. A receiver of the massage. c. A shared intent to communicate. d. The ability to communicate with each other. Kuder (2018: 5) suggests that communication may occur when all of these elements are in place.

Additionally, it is an effective cooperative learning strategy that divides learners into non-harmonious groups based on their academic level. A cooperative learning group consists of three to six learners who assist each other in executing the cooperative learning process. As part of achieving a common goal, they also exchange ideas. As well as helping each other to solve problems, they submit reports on the results reached at the end of the learning process. Results will be evaluated by using assessment tools appropriate for the nature of the learning activities as well as by reviewing the final product (the reports submitted) of the group. A teacher presents some material and moral rewards to the top-performing groups, and team building and class building are essential features of creating a brain-friendly learning environment. The idea of creating a classroom community of learner’s veers away from "it's all about me" to the idea of "it's all about us." (Wincel, 2017: 8).

Zepeda (2009) states that pupils take on different roles during a single Learning Circle, but must switch roles for the next Learning Circle. This way, everyone will have responsibilities for different cities.
2.1.1. Learning circles could provide pupils with the following advantages:

- realize that they will win or lose together
- Feel that they are responsible for the subject
- help each other
- Make each other successful by doing more and more
- Encourage one another to learn
- Be pertinent, accepted, and cared for at work
- Get to know each other better,
- Help present lessons by providing support and assistance
- Come up with a plan
- Become responsible for learning the material
- Rather than criticizing people, learn how to criticize ideas
- Possessing the ability to ask questions
- Emotional expression
- Being able to listen to what the teacher is saying in class
- The lesson should be engaging for all pupils. (Cited in Donaldson, 2009: 19-20)

2.1.2. Learning Circles: Difficulties
Implementing the Learning Circles strategy has some difficulties, including:

- Classes are overcrowded.
- Treatment and evaluation of works are difficult.
- Interaction within a group can be challenging.
- Active elements are difficult to encourage.
- Discipline in the classroom is difficult.
- Students' dependency on their teachers.
- Some students may rely on their classmates to answer questions and respond (Mukhtar, 2017: 78-79).

2.1.3. Exercising the (LCs) in stages:
2.1.3.1. Stage 1 (Planning):
1. To specify the topic of the lesson, analyze its content together with the formulating of objectives in a procedural manner.
2. To prepare and provide the learning resources necessary to carry out the learning tasks and activities.
3. To select the materials, tools and supporting means to accomplish the educational tasks.
4. To determine the size of groups in the learning environment and distribute the learning activity tasks in a uniformed manner to all groups together with the arrangement of the workplace as groups in the learning environment.
5. With the participation of learners in the learning environment, defining the roles of groups and individuals within those groups through the setting of work rules, which will be represented by:
A- It is common practice for one group to cooperate and exchange expertise with another group in an orderly manner while adhering to the schedule for each task separately.
B – The achieving of the learning objectives is the responsibility of the learner. A person responsible for group registration records notes and results simultaneously during the activities.
C- Focusing on the nature of the task inside the learning cycle avoiding the addressing of other topics outside it.
D- The following up of the work inside its circle is the responsibility of the chief of the group.
e- When there is a need to discussion and dialogue, this should be done with the appropriate etiquette.
6. Assisting the teacher with the process of determining the methods of reinforcement that can be used during the work of the group.
7. Assessing the extent to which objectives have been accomplished by determining the necessary means and tools for evaluation.

The more the learner participates with the teacher, especially when setting the rules of work, the more it encourages achieving the objectives of the learning subject by ensuring the performance of the tasks of the learning activities associated with it, this is according to the time-table approved upon in a way that suits the nature of each task separately.

A learning circle strategy's first stage consists of the following steps in planning by setting up a chart that simplifies these steps as follows:
Figure (1): The First Stage of Learning Circles’ Strategy (Planning)

First stage: planning

- Determining lesson subject, analyzing its content and formulating its objectives
- Preparing learning sources and designing activity tasks
- Determining materials, tools and means
- Forming groups, distributing activity tasks and determining roles
- Organizing work environment, setting work rules and timetable
- Determining consolidation and reinforcement means

Roles

- Learner
  - Participates in
  - Committed with
  - Expresses his opinion when

- Teacher
  - Participates in
  - Co-operates with
  - Initiates
  - Ensures

Learner/Teacher: Teacher cares about, Learner performs.
2.1.3.2. Second stage (Initiating Cooperative Activity Tasks):

1- Guiding learners into groups according to the agreement made with them at the planning stage and to ensure that the groups sit in circles in a way those accords with the nature of the suggested strategy.

2- Reminding of the work rules that participate in achieving the objectives of the lesson by presenting them by one of the means.

3- Providing guidance to groups in the learning environment so they can perform the tasks they have been assigned.

4- In cooperation with the other groups, each group carries out the same task simultaneously.

5- Instructing the learners in the group that finishes the implementation of its tasks to help the groups that have not finished yet and to ensure that ideas, information and experience are exchanged.

6- Reinforcing the work of the groups and encouraging them to continue the cooperative work.

Organization mechanisms inside the groups and between them perform a vital role in implementing activity tasks in its cooperative nature. When learners feel that they are in charge of their learning, they would exert their utmost efforts to finish all the tasks they are asked to perform. That the helping of learners to each other is a kind of commitment that should be fulfilled, for it is, at the end, added to the balance of the group. This ought to be recommended by the teacher and repeated over and over and reinforced by him procedurally.

(Implementation of cooperative activity tasks) represents the second stage of the learning circle strategy, can be illustrated for purposes of simplification in the form of a sketch as follows:
2.1.3.3. Stage 3 (Discussion and Feedback):
1. Keeping learning groups sitting in circles as they are.
2. Each group presents, by its leader, a report of the reached findings.
3. The teacher discusses with the learners in an organized manner the findings of each group with adherence to the schedule when holding the discussion between the teacher and the learners.
4. Each group receives feedback from the teacher on the results of their work, and the teacher corrects any incorrect assumptions the learners had made during the educational task.
5. Summarizing and record information, ideas, and results of experiences reached at by learners.

The teacher should remember to thank participants and the cooperative individuals of the groups. His feedback should be directed in a general context, so as not to be taken individually by some learners; therefore, he should make them feel that the results of cooperative learning are distinguished from individual learning results that are not related to one another. The main goal of which is to correct errors regardless of the doer, and this assures that everyone is responsible for their learning in the end and that cooperation achieves the sought for results.

In order to simplify the steps of the third stage of the learning circle strategy, the following sketches are intended to help illustrate the steps (discussion and feedback):
Third stage: Feedback and discussion

Continually sitting in circles

Organizing the presentation and discussion of work results by the head

During the discussion, the schedule should be adhered to

Feedback is provided

Information and ideas that are incorrect are corrected

Information, ideas, and results are summarized and recorded

Figure (3): Stage Three of Learning Circles' Strategy
Feedback and discussion
2.1.3.4. Stage 4 (Follow-up and Evaluation):

1- The teacher compares with the learners the results of the learning activity tasks with the procedural objectives of the study subject.

2- Evaluating the type of the submitted reports of each group after finishing the cooperative tasks by applying the measurement tool connected with the tasks of the learning activities on all the individuals of the group.

3- Providing adequate reinforcement for the advanced group circle.

4- Identifying their strengths in order to strengthen them, and identifying their weaknesses in order to avoid them in the next lesson.

5- The teacher and the learners set forth in the future, here are some suggestions for improving the learning process with the teacher suggesting some tasks and extra activities that support learning.

The aim of evaluation and follow-up in this stage is to develop the performance of the groups so that the learner is sure of the deepness of the learning and that its positive effect is transferred to the employment stage and the learner practices what he learnt of behaviour and this is considered a procedural employment of what he learnt. And this is the sought for change we are after via the learning process.

The fourth stage of the learning circle strategy consists of the following procedural steps: by (follow-up and evaluation) to set a sketch that participates in their simplification can be illustrated as follows:
Fourth Stage, learning circle strategy (follow-up and evaluation)
2.2. The vocabulary:

2.2.1. Vocabulary Concept:

Through the researcher’s review of the theoretical literature related to linguistic vocabulary, she found that those interested in linguistics and discovering the nature of vocabulary were not satisfied with the interpretation of vocabulary with words, but considered that the term “words” is considered a general one that must be detailed, and that the discussion about “vocabularies” is long and branching. For this reason, the definitions that define the precise meaning of the linguistic vocabulary differed, and despite this difference, Uliman (Uliman, 1987, p 49) pointed out the difficulty of defining an all-encompassing definition of this kind of abstract terms, as they are terms that are difficult to define, although it is easy to identify them, so he defined it as meaning “the word that is the smallest linguistic unit and has meaning for speech and language.” The importance of acquiring English vocabulary. Foreign language teaching involves teaching vocabulary, in contrast to the attention of most language teaching branches on the skills that fall under listening, writing, speaking, and reading comes the interest of teaching vocabulary and linguistic structures, and enables the teaching of vocabulary of speech (Lin 2002 :47).

It is extremely important to learn English vocabulary, which is one of the most important facets of teaching foreign languages. Teaching vocabulary depends on the relationships between words of antonyms and synonyms, endings and beginnings that affect the meaning of words, and vocabulary is one of the factors affecting the growth of each of the four language skills. Reading, writing, listening and speaking and their poor learning contribute to the emergence of many obstacles and challenges that stand in the way of acquiring these skills. Developing linguistic vocabulary is essential to effective language communication. To solve communication problems caused by new words, learners must master the language using effective strategies to develop their linguistic outcomes and continue learning vocabulary words. (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005: 7).

Commenting on the current study agrees with the previous two studies in that it applies the strategy (learning circles) one of the cooperative learning strategies in teaching English vocabulary, in addition, the cooperative learning
model has been found to be effective in teaching English vocabulary as well, and it differs with them in the study stage and sample the study.

2.3.2. A review of previous studies on vocabulary acquisition is provided below:

1- Bader (2017):
Palestine / Gaza was the site of this study. An experimental design was used to investigate the effectiveness of a PAVE strategy in learning and retaining EL vocabulary. The sample was for an eleventh-grade student at a secondary school. EG was studied by the PAVE strategy and CG by the conventional method where 72 female students participated, divided equally into two groups (EG & CG). We used the vocabulary achievement test as a measure of vocabulary achievement, as well as pre-and post-tests; after conducting the study in the first semester, we used a t-test for statistical analysis. EG was the most effective at teaching vocabulary and retaining information from CG, according to the statistical results.

2- Abdul – Ghanee (2018):
In this study, humor was used as a method for teaching English as a foreign language in Iraq / Mosul city. Students from the first year of intermediate were sampled. An experimental design was used to select the sample. EG and CG consist of thirty female students each, divided into two groups. A humor technique was used in the study of EG, while a conventional approach was used in the study of CG. Five weeks after the start of the program, pre-and post-tests were conducted. An experiment element's requirements were determined using the T-test, a statistical tool. Based on the results, humor technique in EG can affect words' comprehension and retention relatively.

3. Search procedures:
Research methodology due to the nature of this study, Using the experimental method with a quasi-experimental design (Pre-Test, Post-Test, Control Group Design), the researcher used the experimental method with pre-and post-testing. In order to measure the effectiveness of the independent variable (the learning circles strategy of cooperative learning strategies) on the dependent variable (English vocabulary), for the fifth grade pupils, where the research sample was divided into two groups: one of them is experimental, which studied English vocabulary using the (learning circles) strategy of the cooperative learning, and the other control, who studied the same vocabulary in the usual way.
3.1.1. Research Community:

The original study community included a group of fifth-grade pupils in Al-Qadisiyah School and Al-Sanadid School, affiliated to In 2020/2021, the left side of Mosul will be taken and their number was (19880), according to the statistics of the education department, for the academic year 2020/2021 A.D.

3.1.2. The research sample:

In light of the research's nature and sample size, the researcher relied in her selection on the random method, and two primary schools were chosen to apply the research experiment. Choosing one school to be experimental, and the other to be control. Adopting a class of the fifth grade in the experimental school, which will study English vocabulary using the (Cooperative learning strategy), the number of which has reached (34) pupils. Adopting a class from the fifth grade in the control school, which will teach English vocabulary in the usual way, and their number has reached (34) pupils.

3.1.3. Search Variables:

3.2. Search Tools:

Research variables, the current research includes the following variables: the independent variable: It represents the chosen method of teaching, which is: teaching using the strategy (learning circles)/ cooperative learning for the experimental group. Students in fifth grade acquire English vocabulary as the dependent variable.

3.2.1. Material and tools for conducting research:

First: Materials for research:

For the academic year 2020, the first and second units of the English language course will be taught in the fifth grade of primary school. The teacher's guide for teaching English vocabulary related to the first and second units according to the learning model in the learning circles. Daily worksheets for pupils measuring vocabulary acquisition during the lesson. In addition to daily motor activities, English vocabulary was also measured proportionally to the sample's age. Quizzes.
Second: The Research Tools:

3.2.2. Validation of internal consistency:

As part of the exploratory sample, which numbered 35 pupils, the internal consistency of the achievement test was verified. A Pearson's linear correlation coefficient was calculated between the scores of each subtest and the total score of the achievement test, along with the total score.

3.2.3. Achievement Test Stability:

The stability of the achievement test was determined using the midterm segmentation method and Cronbach's alpha, which were administered to 35 students and corrected. To calculate the correlation coefficient, the two halves of the test were compared based on their scores on the individual and pair questions of the test, and their correlation coefficients. The following table shows the results of calculating the test reliability coefficient.

Table (3): Explant the values of the reliability coefficient using split-half method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N.</th>
<th>The dimension</th>
<th>N. of sentences</th>
<th>Correlation coefficient before conformation</th>
<th>reliability coefficient after conformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.511</td>
<td>0.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.426</td>
<td>0.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Application</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.478</td>
<td>0.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Test</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.430</td>
<td>0.601</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the previous table that the stability coefficient of the dimensions of the test by the split-half method ranged between (0.598 - 0.676), which are acceptable stability values, As a result, the test is valid for use in this study, and its results are reliable and reproducible.

Table (2): calculation results the reliability of Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the achievement test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N.</th>
<th>The dimension</th>
<th>Number of sentences</th>
<th>Cronbach's alpha coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Application</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Test</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of calculating the stability of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient achievement test Dimension number of phrases Cronbach’s alpha coefficient
Remembering Understanding Application the test as a whole It is clear from the previous table that the stability coefficient of the test as a whole is (0.733), and the stability coefficient at the level of remembrance was (0.641), and the stability coefficient at the level of understanding amounted to 12.4 " 32.0.641 0.7334.

3.3. Statistical Methods Used in the Research:

A Pearson's linear correlation coefficient was used to verify the internal consistency of the achievement test in the current study. The data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. To verify the stability of the achievement test, we used the split-half method and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

In order to experimental variables between the experimental and control groups before conducting the research experiment, a T-test for two independent samples was used, and to verify the significance of the differences between the scores of the pupils of the experimental and control groups after each of the memory level, college level, and understanding level tests were administered. As a result of the application, the following mathematical relationship can be used to determine the size of the effect of the independent variable (learning circles strategy) on the level of understanding of dependent variables (at the level of remembering the test score) for the pupils in the experimental group:

\[
(\eta)^2 = \frac{T^2}{T^2 + df}
\]

\((\eta)^2\) : Square Eta
\(T^2\) : T test
\(Df\) : Degree of freedom

3.4. Discussing and Interpreting the Results of the Research:

Through the previous presentation of the research results, it was clear that the pupils of the experimental group were superior to their counterparts in the control group acquired English vocabulary in the first and second units of the fifth-grade English course. A total of 25.3 was the average score of the experimental group pupils on the English grammar test, while 16.8 was the average score of the control group pupils.

The previous results can be explained that the model of cooperative learning strategy can be used in other educational contexts to achieve many
educational outcomes compared to teaching based on the traditional method that relies on recitation, because the researcher noticed a change in the pupils’ behaviors, and their ability to expression of knowledge; where they participate by asking questions and looking for answers to them, the language of dialogue has also developed for them, as they have come to respect each other's opinions, and during the teaching process the organization of work has evolved. In light of the above, it can be said: that the strategy of (learning circles)/cooperative learning can be applied to primary pupils, which is consistent with the study (Bader, 2017), which showed the ability of young children to retain concepts related to vocabulary education and that the application of the model contributes to an increase in their English vocabulary. The results of the study agreed with the study (Abdul – Ghanee, 2018), which emphasized the model that helped the application of the strategy of (circles of learning)/cooperative learning to traditional learning and the study of vocabulary chosen by the pupil.

3. Recommendations:

The researcher recommends the following in light of the study's findings:
Teaching English vocabulary in general and using the learning circles strategy, in particular, is a cooperative learning strategy. Using the Learning Circles model, one of the cooperative learning strategies, in teaching English to different grades in general education stages in general, and primary grades in particular. Including (learning circles)/cooperative learning in the English language courses and the teacher’s manual and clarifying the model’s steps and objectives in a sequential and clear manner, with the addition of educational applications that facilitate the application of the model by the teacher and pupils. By providing pupils with the opportunity to search, think, and access information on their own without teacher assistance, we can engage them in the learning process. The teacher serves as a guide and mentor when necessary, and pupils conduct research and experiments in (learning circles) or cooperative learning.
References: