

Group Work in Crowded Classes: Ambition or Utopia?**Dr. TURQUI. Barkat* ⁽¹⁾****University Mohamed Kheider of Biskra, Algeria**barkat.turqui@univ-biskra.dz

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Abstract

The present research work analyses the challenges that might face the foreign language teacher in the utilization of group work activities in crowded classes within a TEFL context. Hence, it is hypothesized that the teaching process would be hindered by a number of difficulties namely, students' low motivation, allocation of time, suitable material, and class management. Contrarily, the principal objective of the investigation is to propose some solutions through the careful and proficient application of successful cooperative learning with group work activities. The attainment of this objective is expected to realize multiple benefits such as, to higher students' motivation in the pedagogical material, develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity, and possibly reflecting on the learning experiences in group work and relate them to issues and defiance in the out-of-class world. A descriptive research methodology has been adopted, and an online interview has been addressed to a number of English Studies teachers at tertiary level as a research tool. The preliminary outcomes demonstrate the tangible possibility of the successful application of group work in large classes and the multiple and various advantages that can be grasped out of such activities.

Key Words: cooperative learning- group work- crowded classes- TEFL- tertiary level.

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يحلل هذا البحث التحديات التي قد يواجهها مدرس اللغة الأجنبية عند استخدام أنشطة العمل الجماعي في الفصول المزدحمة في سياق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ومن ثم، فإن الفرضية هي أن عملية التدريس ستواجه عدداً من الصعوبات، وهي انخفاض دافع الطلاب، وتخصيص الوقت، والمواد المناسبة، وإدارة الفصل. وعلى العكس من ذلك، فإن الهدف الرئيسي من البحث هو اقتراح بعض الحلول من خلال التطبيق الدقيق والكفء للتعليم التعاوني الناجح مع أنشطة العمل الجماعي. ومن المتوقع أن يحقق هذا الهدف فوائد متعددة، مثل زيادة تحفيز الطلاب على المواد التربوية، وتنمية حس المسؤولية والتضامن، وربما التفكير في تجارب التعلم في العمل الجماعي وربطها بالقضايا والتحديات في العالم خارج الفصل الدراسي. تم اعتماد منهجية بحث وصفية، وتم إجراء مقابلة عبر الإنترنت مع عدد من مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الجامعية كأداة بحثية. تظهر النتائج الأولية إمكانية ملموسة لتطبيق العمل الجماعي بنجاح في الفصول الدراسية الكبيرة والمزايا المتعددة والمتنوعة التي يمكن جنيها من مثل هذه الأنشطة.

المفتاحية :

تعليم اللغة – الأقسام المكتظة – العمل الجماعي – التعلم التعاوني – المستوى الجامعي – الكلمات (TEFL) الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

1. Introduction

Classroom organization represents an essential component of the language teaching operation. The realization of educational objectives, especially at the level of the class, depends to a great extent on the arrangements that are adopted by the foreign language instructor in relationship to the different classroom activities which are employed in the teaching process. In general, three basic classroom organizations that language teachers have at their disposal include whole class teaching, individual work, as well as pair and small group work. Although the value of the first two of these and their suitability for certain types of activities can hardly be denied, there is a general agreement among teachers and researchers that pair or small group work has a particular significant role to play in instructed language acquisition (Harmer, 2015).

The adoption of one classroom organization instead of another is determined by the contextual and circumstantial conditions that exist in different instructional settings. For instance, teacher fronted instruction appears to be a good choice for giving explanation or directives, whereas individual work enables particular students to work at their own pace. Nevertheless, a number of studies have now convincingly demonstrated a relationship between various types of interaction that can be generated by group work activities and effective foreign language learning (Gass et al, 2011). The concept of group work teaching is principally based upon the principle of individualisation. This notion is founded on the conviction that the success of the student is largely dependent on the learning-situation in which s/he can express her/his personality and abilities. The individualisation in learning presupposes a method of working that assumes to each student the possibility to discover (and may be control) the different stages of student's learning through a process of gradual improvement, with the help of the teacher.

However, the foreign language teacher should take into consideration certain factors that play an important role in the constitution of the students' different characters and also their environment; these influential elements are usually categorized into three major types. First, the sociocultural handicaps because students tacitly or overtly (the question depends on the ethics that exist in a speech community) belong to dissimilar social classes. Second, this factor is closely linked to the different aptitudes of the students. These individual capabilities can take various aspects and, probably, one of the most significant is the degree of intelligence discrepancies which exists between one student and another. Third, learners individually display very different interests. Foreign language teachers are often confronted with this kind of problems because the interests and also aims of the students do not always coincide.

On the other hand, it has been already proven that the process of learning can actually breakdown or partially fail if the foreign language teacher keeps on applying certain 'traditional' methods of teaching that are particularly prejudicial to the students. One of these classical methods, which is still practised in some educational settings like some primary schools, is the one that consists of dividing the class into 'weak and strong' learners or even classes. The risk with this kind of division can be an essential cause in the creation of casts and discriminations among the students.

In sum, the social, affective, and cognitive factors largely impact the personality and traits of character of individual learners and, consequently, their attitudes, aims, and expectations in connection with the process of learning, would be quite disparate.

2. Literary Review

Among the various teaching methodologies, Cooperative Learning has been judged to be one of the most successful methods. This kind of approach requires small teams working towards a group task in which each member is individually accountable for the part of the outcome that cannot be completed unless the members work together. Recently, cooperative learning has been proposed as a framework for organizing and maximizing authentic and purposeful classroom interaction among learners in a supportive and stress-reduced environment, thereby increasing their achievement in the cognitive, affective, and social domain of schooling (Shaaban et al, 2005).

Cooperative learning tasks take even a step further by encouraging students to work together and by promoting an equal opportunity for every student to participate in the activity. Likewise, improving self-esteem, enjoyment of the class, and interethnic relations, are key in the approach. One of the most significant activity which is particularly advocated in cooperative learning is group work, especially in foreign language classes. Group work is widely

recognized as a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning. Rooted in social independence theory, it highlights the importance of positive independence, individual accountability, promoting interaction, social skills, and group processing as conditions for successful cooperative learning (Johnson et al, 2009).

Besides, research carried out on the effectiveness of the use of cooperative learning in EFL content has shown that this approach is very useful in developing positive attitudes towards learning and in relationships to other learners. This theoretical foundation has guided decades of research demonstrating that when group work is carefully structured, it fosters not only academic achievement but also interpersonal and socio-emotional skills. In consequence, cooperative learning enhances intrinsic motivation and creates solidarity among team members through their working together to achieve group goals. Researchers have also indicated that cooperative learning decreases levels of anxiety and augments the degree of expectancy of completing academic tasks successfully.

It is necessary to point out that cooperative learning gives great consideration to the personal learning factors such as, motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. These elements are usually referred to as the learner's affective filter (Krashen, 1982), and such factors are considered to play a significant part in language acquisition. Thus, it is mostly expected that learners would display respectively a high level of motivation, be very confident, and would be under little stress. In fact, group work has been proven by researchers and practitioners alike to be an effective classroom activity that promotes students' interest in FL learning, enhances performance, and lessens learners' language learning insecurity. In reality, cooperative learning constitutes an efficient alternative environment which is essential to communicative language learning (Yang et al, 2003).

Cooperative learning is viewed as a general term for an instructional approach that emphasizes conceptual learning and development of social skills. Nowadays, there is a pervasive demand of the information age in which we live. It requires that everyone should be able to do complex thinking particularly the ability to develop problem-solving operations. Complex thinking always takes place best in groups, which means that people need to be able to share ideas and collaborate with one another. Moreover, the theoretical background of cooperative learning has been originally inspired by D. Hymes' Communicative Competence Approach which aims to develop learner's capacity to use the language effectively in a sociocultural context. Accordingly, the essence of communicative language teaching is a shift from the language system as an end in itself to the successful use of that system in social environment.

In sum, the literature can be interpreted in three basic principles, namely, cooperative learning is a natural step in a process towards the effective implementation of the contemporary communicative language learning theory. In addition, cooperative learning is due to positively emphasize and promote the cognitive, affective, and social domains in schooling. Lastly, cooperative learning encompasses much greater scope of theory and practices, but a special focus is put on the implementation of one salient aspect which is group work as a major classroom activity.

2.1 Advantages of Group Work

A practical analysis of the advantages of group work can be organized under three essential constituents which constitute key elements in the language teaching/learning operation. Namely, the theoretical background in terms of approach, method, and curriculum, the FL learner who is impacted by essential factors such as, learning strategies, motivation, psychological traits, personality, etc. The last element is closely linked to the sociocultural factors that influence the speech community, and higher education settings in particular.

Researchers have extensively evaluated the merits of group work and, a quasi-unanimous judgement stipulates that cooperative learning and groups work tasks are superior to teacher fronted activities. It has been regularly observed that group work tasks provide students with more opportunity for language production and enable them to express a much greater range of language function. In fact, the difficulties of communication practice in a traditional classroom seating is that students are listening or speaking to ‘backs of heads’ of fellow learners sitting in front of them. Contrariwise, in a group work situation, target language is used in a meaningful context. As a result, a student working in a small group tends to learn more of what is taught and retain it larger than when the same context is resented in another instructional format (Fujita-Starck et al, 1994).

Furthermore, group work constitutes an effective solution and is regularly recommended as a strategy and common practice in the language learning context where the class is over-sized and students’ learning motivation is low. The issue in large classes is that it is easy for the student to feel alienated. Indeed, many learners are affected when they undeniably establish -or sometimes wrongly assume- that their teacher does not really know them, and does not ‘care’ whether they actually learn or not. As a consequence, learners usually put little effort into practising actively in the learning process. However, there are ‘attenuating circumstances’ in favour of the foreign language teacher, because in crowded

classes instructors have a very limited time to interact with individual students. Fortunately, group work can to a great extent solve such problem, since the teacher can divide the large class into small groups and, therefore, he would be able to better interact with each group and pay close attention to individual needs (Renaud et al, 2007).

In a cooperative learning perspective of FL teaching, students have ample opportunity to be actively engaged in the target language, rather than passively receiving information from the instructor. Access to the foreign language in a TEFL context is much more difficult and less frequent if one would compare it to an ESL situation. In fact, in FL classes the most common input and environment of the target language originate only from the classroom, and usually from the educator alone. Consequently, the major aim of group work is to constitute an effective framework in view of accommodating students with multiple occasions to use the FL within contextual circumstances nearly similar to those that exist in the foreign speech community. In this manner, abundant opportunities are offered to learners in order to interact in the FL with peers, and the possible creation of real-life situations of the communicative acts (Duppenhaler, 2000).

On the other hand, group work can be particularly useful in an ESP/EMI context at a tertiary level. A substantial body of research confirms that cooperative learning yields significant improvement in academic outcomes. As a matter of fact, Freeman et al (2014), in a landmark meta-analysis of 225 studies, found that students engaged in active learning- including structured group work- achieved higher exam scores and had lower failure rates compared to those in traditional lectures. Similarly, Theobald et al (2020) reported that active learning significantly narrowed achievement gaps for historically underrepresented students in undergraduate STEM, demonstrating the equity-promoting potential of group-based instruction.

Recent meta-analyses provide further support. Ridwan et al (2022) found consistent positive effects of cooperative learning on student achievement across educational settings. Likewise, Zach et al (2023) demonstrated that group work in physical education enhanced not only performance but also motivation and enjoyment. Furthermore, Tondok et al (2024) confirmed that cooperative learning can strengthen intergroup relations, reducing bias and improving peer attitudes in diverse classrooms.

Taken together, these studies confirm that well-designed group work enhances learning, engagement, and equity. For contexts such as ESP/EMI or more

particularly English for Academic Computing Purposes (EACP), group work provides authentic opportunities for both subject matter and language practice, provided it is structured with accountability, scaffolding, and fair assessment mechanisms.

As far as individual students of small groups are concerned, there are many factors that should be taken into account due to their importance in shaping and determining to a great level the success or failure of one learner or another. Within this context, the question of intelligence represents a crucial parameter in the efficiency of group work tasks in terms of students' proficiency in the foreign language. A pioneer study has been undertaken as early as the 1980's by Gardner (1983) who proposed different and autonomous intelligence capacities that result in many ways of knowing, understanding, and learning about the world. He identified seven types of intelligences and ultimately added two other intelligences and in view of the objectives of the present study and due to the limited scope of the article requirements, it is not possible to discuss Gardner intelligences at length. However, it is worth mentioning that generally most people are capable of developing a medium rate of intelligences with few intelligences highly developed, most modestly developed, and one or two underdeveloped. One of the positive aspects that can be grasped from such classification within FL teaching/learning settings, is that in a group work environment learners are offered a good opportunity to exhibit their highly developed intelligence, evaluate their modestly developed and enhance their underdeveloped intelligences (Christian, 1998).

Finally, on the sociocultural level, students may cultivate greater friendship across gender and social lines. Additionally, they may improve their psychosocial adjustment and they can better their self-concept as learners. It is equally important to indicate that group work promotes a positive affective climate by providing less threatening environment in which students are more willing to try out their deficient FL skills as well as motivating them to actively participate in the multiple classroom activities.

2.2 Disadvantages of Group Work

Despite the numerous merits that have been enumerated, group work activities are not always equally effective. It has been argued that their indiscriminate

application may even turn to be detrimental to the process of foreign language acquisition. For instance, the findings of some research projects indicate that the students' use of language in such contexts is unavoidably less grammatical than teacher talk and, thus, extensive exposure to peer input may result in fossilizing the learners' errors. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the errors and inaccuracies students hear will reinforce their own misanalysis of the target language, creating a circle out of which it is difficult to escape (Xiaochun, 1992).

Moreover, other researchers state that in many cases group interaction can be monopolized by some assertive or more proficient students, who will take the role of the teacher and, in this manner, prevent other learners from making relevant contribution. One probable drawback in such situations- which is quite disquieting- might be the learners' unwillingness to participate in group work tasks, typically reflecting the diverse expectations and learning styles they bring to the classroom.

Another potential disadvantage of too many group activities, and that is quite conspicuous, concerns the foreign language material/content where the learners have the option of using their mother tongue (in some higher education ESP/EMI classes) to overcome their communication problems. It is strongly advised not to heavily lean on such approach because the abusive use of this kind of activities may induce students into routinely performing their tasks in the native language and, therefore, lessen their motivation, decreases their positive curiosity of discovering the foreign language, and probably discourage other students who would like to use the English language while performing their different activities. In addition, the extension of the group work programme and the allocation of time to the tasks are also significant in the determination of the failure or success of the programme along with students' attitudes and motivation. The reason is that no matter how effective a given activity may have initially turned out to be, using it over an extended period of time may not be the most reasonable option because variety should be at premium in the FL teaching process.

On the whole, despite the numerous benefits of group work, it has been clearly demonstrated that it also faces many challenges. A common issue is social loafing, where some students contribute less to group tasks. McKay et al (2024) found that perceptions of unfair grading and unequal participation remain prevalent in student feedback. To address these concerns, Francis (2024) recommends a combination of team-based deliverables with formative assessment to enhance fairness and accountability. Similarly, Fleckney et al (2025) emphasized that peer assessment is most effective when it is formative, transparent, and aligned with

clear rubrics. The quality of interaction within groups is also critical. Bach and Thiel (2024) demonstrated that in online collaborative learning environments, the quality of digital interaction- such as mutual trust, elaboration, and constructive feedback- had a stronger impact on outcomes than the technology platform itself. Complementing this, Oyarzun et al (2023), in a systematic review, argued that successful online group work requires scaffolding of both cognitive elaboration and relational trust.

2.3 Strategies to Planning Group Work

It is generally admitted that the successful group work planning rests on four important exponents: number, time, gender, proficiency and task complexity. The smaller the group, the more likely is that participants will get involved in a given activity, and a greater amount of negotiation will occur. Essentially, experience shows that groups of three or four students and no more than five to six students maximum work best. In fact, groups that are larger than the above cited numbers decrease each member opportunity to participate actively, and increase their chance to hide in the group. Moreover, the less skilful the group members are, the smaller the group should be (Jacobs et al, 1996).

The question of the allotted time to the various tasks is equally important. In order to limit the time necessary for students to form small groups, the foreign language teacher should have the students work with those next to them or immediately behind them even if the issues of students' affinities and friendships can cause some problems. Nevertheless, the principal goal is to constitute new groups of different learners (numbers and members), thus, seats can be changed weekly or monthly in order to allow students to work with new classmates. Depending on the time available and the type of activities, instructors can also use games, competition, or any other procedures that produce groups and make grouping fun. The FL teacher should set up groups in advance and have students stay together for several class periods, which will avoid the time-consuming daily organization of groups. In addition, instructors should assign roles to group members so that everyone in the group feels involved in some way. It is equally necessary that for each activity roles should rotate among group members, with different students acting as the facilitator, secretary, recorder, time keeper, etc.

The issue of gender represents regularly some problems in certain countries throughout the world. The influence of the sociocultural parameters in gender relationships and behaviour is extremely important and delicate. The higher

education settings do not constitute an exception, especially in this environment the FL teacher deals with grown learners who possess their own traits of character, personality, opinions and social background. For example, female students are more likely to stress cooperation and to deal sensitively with relationships, whereas male students tend to emphasize the establishment and maintenance of hierarchical relations and the assertion of their identity. Yet, the majority of research findings indicate that the best policy is to form groups which are heterogynous in terms of the learners' proficiency level, and less importance is assigned to gender discrepancies.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of group work is largely enhanced when students are requested to work 'two ways or required information exchange task', in which participants hold portion of information that is indispensable for the successful completion of an assigned task. When the teacher introduces pair and/or group work for the first time, he should plan simple activities for very short periods of time. The procedure that should be followed is that at first students should ask the person next to them (probably in pairs), for instance a pre-set question (for each pair of students) could be prepared prior the task and would be sufficient. It should be observed that the time spent on an activity and complexities of tasks can gradually be increased as students become more familiar with the proceedings and accustomed to the routine.

2.4 Role of the Teacher

Based on Gardner's (1983) classification of the multiple types of intelligence, the role of the foreign language teacher is to help learners use their combination of intelligence to be successful. Even if the theory is still open to debate, the procedure can be useful for the language teacher's method of class management. In fact, the role of the instructor is multifaceted and should not be limited to specific concepts despite their utility and effectiveness. Additionally, the FL teacher should constantly monitor student-student interaction, adopting the role of facilitator and resource-provider. Guiding the students in the elaboration of group work tasks is essential, especially in the unambiguous provision of instructions even if it entails- at primary stages- the use of the mother tongue with particularly ESP/EMI students.

The question of the allocation of time is also primordial in classroom management, and if the group work is to be effective, it is necessary not only to set a reasonable time limit within which a given task should be completed, but equally the fair distribution of time to all the groups of students at the delivery of

the activities. Needless to mention that the success, in terms of efficiency and motivation, of any activity requires careful planning, preparation, and application on the part of the teacher.

In summary, the complexity of teacher's role necessitates, in addition, to heighten students' motivation and to keep them eager to cooperate with one another. In fact, students' cooperation is continuously enhanced by the teacher through the maintenance of a high degree of stimulation and enjoyment. Such positive and enthusiastic expectations depend on the experience and competence of the teacher in setting well-designed activities that would probably preserve learners' interest and involvement in the group work. Lastly, the foreign language class can stand apart in relationship to Teacher Talk, because it seems evident that students should be permanently encouraged to use the target language during group work interaction. Therefore, the binary but not necessarily contradictory responsibility of the teacher in this situation is to serve as a guiding model in English speech delivery, yet he should talk as little as possible and incite learners to speak as much as possible.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The nature of the research work and the demands of the situation determine the format the researcher uses and the way s/he documents her/his sources. Accordingly, the researcher has opted for a descriptive research methodology along with a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach. The purpose is to describe systematically the facts and characteristics of the researcher's area of interest, thus, the framework of the present research investigation is what is generally referred to as a survey study.

3.2 Research Tool and Sampling

In accordance with the type of research methodology, the researcher has used the interview as a research instrument for data collection. The researcher's expectations were met to a great extent because interviewing an informed person (university teachers in our case) provided us with first hand answers to our queries, let us ask follow-up questions, and gave us an access to the most up-to-date thinking. The interview consisted of 12 open-ended questions that inquire about teachers' opinions in relationship to cooperative learning and group work activities. Besides, the researcher has integrated some scale grids in order to obtain more detailed and precise answers, percentages, and frequency ratios. The sampling was constituted of 12 university teachers of English Studies and

ESP/EMI, 8 teachers have a long experience- 10 to 27 years- career, and 4 instructors have been teaching English/ESP/EMI for 4 to 10 years at tertiary level. As far as the question of qualification is concerned, 10 teachers hold a PhD degree and 2 educators post-graduated within the former higher education framework and were rewarded a 'Magistère' degree.

4. Results and Discussion

4.4.1 Teachers' Interview

Section 1: Background Information.

Question One: Where are you teaching currently?

The selected 12 teachers have informed the researcher that all of them actually teach English Studies and ESP/EMI at university level. The choice of teachers' rank is logically justified because the research investigation concerned a sample study of university students. Those instructors have been randomly chosen due to the fact that in nearly all the workshop sessions of the majority of courses, it is possible to organize group work.

Question Two: What is your highest degree achieved?

The professional qualifications in nearly all the national universities- 98 per cent- of teachers hold a doctorate degree, solely 2 per cent of them post-graduated with a 'Magistère' degree (former university organigram); which is the exact situation of the research sample study.

Table 1. Teachers' Qualifications.

Number of Teachers	Degree
10	PhD
2	'Magistère'

Question Three: How long have you been teaching English?

On the whole, the 12 participants are sufficiently experienced in their profession. Indeed, 8 teachers- 70 percent- have an experience that oscillates (different from one case to another) between 10 to 27 years of tertiary teaching. Besides, 4 teachers- 30 per cent- indicated an experience which varies between 4 to 10 years.

This long experience is quite impressive and, in consequence, one would expect that all instructors are perfectly aware and probably have already practised group work as a classroom activity.

Table 2. Teachers' Experience

Number of Teachers	Experience
8	10-27 years
4	4-10 years

Teachers' Interview.

Section 2: Collaborative Learning and Group Work Activities.

Question Four: Do you have any theoretical knowledge about group work?

The study indicates that only 6- 50 per cent- teachers gave a positive answer, 4 of them- 30 per cent- answered with "somehow", and 2 teachers -20 per cent- answered negatively. These results may seem very alarming, yet thorough discussion with teachers resulted with a satisfactory impression because most of the teachers 'intuitively' or 'proficiently' demonstrated that they knew a lot about group work. One may conclude that their skill or knowledge is more practical than theoretical.

Table 3. Teachers' Theoretical Knowledge

Number of Teachers	Theoretical Background
6	Positive (yes)
4	Relative (somehow)
2	Negative (no)

Question Five: How often do you use group work?

The first striking fact is that all the participants came to a general agreement that group work usage is a must. The other noticeable outcome is that the overwhelming majority of teachers- 8 teachers- 70 per cent- uses group work 'sometimes'. This rate represents an acceptable frequency which may be at first regarded as negative, contrarily, it is an indicator of healthy reasoning. The cause

is that teachers understand that one of the main principle of group work is not to use it over an extended period of time- in any kind of instruction- routine, boredom and demotivation should be avoided or even fought; and that variety should be at premium. One can also notice that only 4 teachers- 30 per cent- have indicated that they 'always' use group work.

Table 4. Frequency of Using Group Work

Number of Teachers	Frequency	Percentage
8	Sometimes	70%
4	Always	30%
0	Never	0%

Question Six: How effective do you think group work is?

When asked about the effectiveness of group work, only $\frac{1}{4}$ of teachers consider that group work activities are ineffective, and their judgement stem probably from their negative experience, local circumstances, or preferred methodology. The other $\frac{3}{4}$ mentions the effectiveness of group work in the economy of time in crowded classes, arouse confidence, and most important of all the exhibition of the different intelligences.

Table 5. Effectiveness of Group Work

Number of Teachers	Effectiveness	Percentage
10	Effective	80%
2	Not effective	20%

Question Seven: How do you organize small groups of students?

Group management is another area where interviewees show a great command of the three (3) principles of group work formation: number of the group members (each group should comprise 4-6 students), the degree of competence of learners, and the fact that small groups should be homogeneous. Additionally, some teachers have arisen the question of giving clear and easily comprehensible instructions of the students' tasks, and even a small number of instructors recognized that the mother tongue can be useful in some situations. Certainly, the issue is open to debate, especially at the level of ESP/EMI education, and the proponents and opponents of respectively, the use or ban of students' native

language present extensive argumentation in favour or against the use of L1 in giving directives.

The advocates of the use of the mother tongue assert that it is simply a ‘myth’ that the native language hinders the FL teaching operation, particularly in the instructional phase of group work management in ESP/EMI classes. They also claim that only a small number of teachers seems to be fully aware of the importance of directives clarity and Arabic can better do the job than the English language in other specialities. On the other hand, the supporters of the use of the foreign language during all the session assert that such a choice lessens or even sometimes eliminates problems like mother tongue interference, the incitation of students to use their native language in group discussion, and the tendency (as it has been observed in many ESP/EMI classes) of some students to systematically translate (very often without due success) every single word uttered in English into Arabic. Lastly, only 3 teachers proposed the application of ‘All’ parameters, one can deduce that such a small number of teachers indicates that the majority of instructors does not think that it is impossible or extremely difficult to integrate all parameters at the same time.

Table 6. Parameters of Group Management

Number of Teachers	Parameters of Group Management
12/12	Instructions
11/12	Number of students
10/12	Level of students
8/12	Homogeneity of the group
3/12	All of them

Question Eight: What types of language skills do you think are suitable for group work? You may choose more than one skill, please justify your choice.

Teachers were asked about the language skills that could be mostly suitable in group work, they selected (unanimously) ‘writing and speaking’ which took the lion’s share, whereas ‘listening and reading’ appeared the least attractive skills. The classification that has been obtained is as follows: all teachers selected ‘writing and speaking’, 10 teachers opted for ‘writing’, 9 teachers chose ‘speaking’, 5 teachers preferred ‘reading’, 2 teachers favoured ‘listening’, and no one proposed ‘all the skills’.

Table 7. Suitability of Language Skills.

Number of Teachers	Language Skills	Percentage
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12/12	Writing and speaking	100%
10/12	Writing	90%
9/12	Speaking	80%
5/12	Reading	45%
2/12	Listening	10%
0/12	All of them	0%

Question Nine: Do you designate group leaders during the organization phase of groups?

The issue of the designation of students-leaders in group work is still open to discussion. Teachers' opinions are generally (with some nuances) divided into two major groups: those in favour of teacher's choice and the instructors who prefer to leave the matter to the students themselves. The theory is that the two options both display many advantages. The FL teacher can allow the group members themselves to select a leader based on who demonstrate qualities like strong communication, organization, and productivity; or the instructor can use a random method such as, random name selector or by assigning roles based on the seating chart of the class.

As far as the research case study is concerned, a majority of teachers 10/12- 80%- has opted for students' self-selection of the group leader due to the numerous advantages which have been discussed above- that can be grasped from such choice. Nevertheless, a minority of teachers 2/12- 20%- has preferred the teacher's designation of the group leader which they have strongly supported with some receivable arguments such as, to establish clear communication channel with students, encourage students' participation and responsibility, and set shared goals and expectations.

Table 8. Designation of Group Leaders

Number of Teachers	Type of Designation	Percentage
10/12	Students' Self-Nomination	80%
2/12	Teacher's Choice	20%

Question Ten: Any argumentation in favour or against teacher's selection or students' self-nomination?

The argumentation that has been developed by nearly all teachers 10/12 in favour of students' self-nomination is that in such situation those leaders are usually highly appreciated by their peers. The main reason is that group leaders are

characterized by personal qualities like ease of communication, proactivity, organization, flexibility, solidarity, and humble leadership. Additionally, the process of small group constitution generally goes through a specific development that has been already described by many researchers. This mechanism is quite simple and it is displayed as follows: forming- dependency on the leader, the nature of situation, anxiety; storming- conflicts between sub-groups, rebellion against the leader, opinions are extreme, resistance to group control; norming- groups develop cohesion, conflicts are sorted out, members begin to support each other; performing- individual's problems are resolved, interpersonal activity more functional (Basturkmen, 2010).

On the other hand, the teachers who opted for the instructor's choice of group leaders have indicated that the teacher in person should in her/his turn exhibit certain qualities such as to develop a clear and shared vision with students, foster and empower inclusive and organizational culture, and to maintain a strong ethical and moral standard (Gretchen, 2024).

Question Eleven: Can you please list any results achieved with group work activities? Whether your answer is positive or negative or both, please elaborate upon your response.

As a general answer to the question about the results achieved, nearly all teacher 10/12 who participated in the study emphasized the positive outcomes mainly, participation, interest, cooperation, peer-teaching and self-teaching. These results obviously show the realization of two basic gains: teachers' tasks are greatly simplified and the increase of learners' autonomy and, most importantly, the improvement of students' critical thinking, the creation of sane competition, and the enthusiasm of nearly all of the students. However, some negative aspects have also been mentioned such as, some students' noisy interactions which could undermine other classmates, and the use of the mother tongue in small groups discussions. Within this perspective, it is worth signalling that such problems can be easily solved by a competent teacher who is sufficiently trained and experienced in classroom management as long as students are happy, feel independent, motivated, and eager to enthusiastically participate in group work tasks.

Table 9. Students' Feedback.

Number of Teachers	Feedback	Percentage
10/12	Positive	80%
2/12	Negative	20%

Question Twelve: Could you please add any further comments or suggestions?

One becomes amazed and satisfied at the same time in view of the ability of the Algerian university teacher- whether English Studies or ESP/EMI- by her/ his flexibility and her/ his skills in finding efficient and rapid solutions to educational problems. For example, teachers of ESP/EMI, despite the relatively short period of time, many teachers are visibly able to master the most important principles of group work and effectively implement it in classrooms. Although group work as a kind of classroom organization is newly introduced in the Algerian ESP/EMI classes, teachers who agreed to participate in this study have shown very high awareness of this procedure of classroom management as an alternative to the traditional model of the whole class teaching, of course needless to mention the competence, skills and experience of the English studies teachers who kindly accepted to collaborate with us.

However, there are still some interrogations that have not been answered by the participants. For instance, most of teachers seem to agree that the number of learners in small groups should be between 4-6, and that the small groups should be homogenous at the level of language competency and gender equality, but none of the interviewees mentioned the reasons behind these choices. Moreover, some teachers recognized the difficulties they still face in class management and the organization of group work because of crowded classes and time constraints, such as giving the opportunity to all groups to participate in classroom interaction. They sincerely declared that they do understand the frustration of some students who work very hard in the group but they are unable to present their work to the class because of the shortage of time.

Besides, most of the teachers, state that their students favour the writing skill as an activity suited for group work, and they justify their preference by the fact that students feel stressed and in need of help when they are required to perform writing tasks. Accordingly, special attention and interest should be assigned to the writing skill as long as students face numerous difficulties in elaborating a FL writing product. Lastly, some teachers suggested the creation of a resource bank in English at the level of each department whatever the specialisms, because resources and references that are particularly devoted to teaching ESP/EMI are rare and are urgently needed by both teachers and students.

5. Recommendations

In line with the outcomes of the present research work and the sensitive suggestions of the teachers who have accepted to collaborate with the researcher, some recommendations are hereby concisely summarized in the following.

1. The foreign language teacher should elaborate and present group work activities and tasks which take into consideration the fact that language learners often have different backgrounds, problems, priorities and learning styles, so materials must be wide-ranging and flexible.

2. Group work activities should determine specific aims that should be attained through the achievement of various tasks, in addition, students should learn or revise ways of doing certain functions and develop targeted skills in the foreign language.

3. Group work should sustain conversational exchanges between group members, reading for main ideas, and also using lexical and syntactic devices to improve a written draft.

4. The instructor should be aware that students need interesting short-term goals to maintain motivation, because learners prefer activities where progress or performance is easily measurable.

5. It has been demonstrated that people generally learn languages best when their experience, knowledge of the world, interests and feelings are involved and, therefore, group work activities must allow students to 'be themselves' as fully as possible.

6. Creative activities are very important both pedagogically and psychologically. Students probably do not assimilate new material very effectively until they are given a chance to use it themselves to express their own ideas.

7. Group work practice in some ESP/EMI classes is seized as an opportunity by certain students to waste time or lapse into the native language (Arabic). In such a situation, the teacher (content and language) should maintain a balance between totally controlled exercises and real-life communication.

8. In an ESP/EMI context, some novice teachers may not be familiar or lack experience in group work practice and classroom management, consequently,

teachers' supplementation is primordial through pre-service and in-service training programmes.

6. Conclusion

The implementation of cooperative learning in educational settings requires the careful preparation, expertise, and experience of the language teacher. The reason is that intrinsic and intermingled factors should be taken into consideration. One essential issue is the difficulty to describe, or above all manage, the talks of small groups of students in ways which would distinguish motivated engagement with the learning tasks they had been set. In addition, it is a very complex task for the teacher to identify aspects of the social context and of the setting of the tasks which relate to successful learning.

In view of such difficulties, some essential parameters constitute the organized framework which can facilitate the process for the language teacher. It is primordial that a precise analysis of group work activities should be undertaken. Within this context, the teacher should study respectively the form, the discourse, and the strategy that are required in the elaboration of such activities. Another series of crucial factors that necessitates teacher's due expertise is referred to as the characteristics of group work tasks which can be summarized in three major questions which should be definitely answered: What is said? What is done? What is to be accomplished?

On the other hand, the nature of group work talks or interaction that occurs between the students in small groups is also extremely significant in the maintenance of group dynamism and comprehensible exchanges without the risk of breakdowns of communication. These elements can be concisely grouped into three important factors: the structural level which represents the grammatical, semantic and phonological components of 'understandable' speech delivery. The second element is related to the discursive strategies of students' talks in terms of illocutionary force. The last feature which is as well crucial, or even the most important, is embedded in the social and cognitive strategies that are employed by small groups students in the accomplishment of the different tasks, essentially urged by the 'pressure to participate' as an effective and valuable collaborator in the group work activities. Indeed, many research investigations demonstrate that the cognitive and social meanings of group members require in-depth analysis at the level of the strategies that should be put into practice in the establishment of

group work in not only the foreign language classes, but also in the ESP/EMI settings.

In conclusion, a simple description of an educational process indicates the necessary combinatory process of elements that constitute the usual trilogy: teacher, students and curriculum. Besides, to the knowledge of the researcher, the most important component of the trilogy is the students whose physical and psychological non-participation in group work activities would inevitably cause the failure the procedure because students constitute the 'core or essence' of cooperative learning. Consequently, the diversity of students' social experience, degree of competence, and the psychological traits of character and personality, represent the essential ingredients in the organization, enhancement and success of cooperative learning and group work classroom activities in the foreign language and/or content teaching and learning operation.

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