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The Advantageous and Disadvantageous Aspects of Utilizing Cooperative Learning in an ESL Classroom

Fördelarna och nackdelarna med att implementera kooperativt lärande i ett klassrum med elever som lär sig engelska som andraspråk

Jens Hultberg
Filip Söderberg

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Examiner: Damon Tutunjian
Supervisor: Shaun Nolan
Abstract

This evaluation of research investigates the advantageous and disadvantageous aspects of utilizing cooperative learning into the ESL (English as a second language) classroom for pupils at an elementary education level. Teachers need to be contemporary with their pedagogy and lesson design and implement methods that can enable that the national criteria regarding knowledge requirements in the syllabus for English are met. The methods within cooperative learning corresponds with sociocultural theories of Vygotsky as it is based on the zone of proximal development where high achievers can develop accordingly to their own qualifications, as well as low achievers. In the current study, we examine a selection of empirical studies on cooperative learning. The results of this analysis reveal that Cooperative learning is an advantageous way of reaching every individual to make sure that their English language acquisition is nurtured, but that the aspects of group grading make it difficult when grading each individual pupil. The findings also revealed that the implementation of cooperative learning into the ESL classroom had advantageous outcomes when it comes to vocabulary learning, writing skills, speaking skills and a lot of the pupils gained a better confidence and had a high achievement level in comparison to more traditional teacher focused pedagogy. Pupils also showed that their motivation and attitudes changed over time, when exposed of the cooperative learning methods in the ESL classroom. It is advised that teachers utilize cooperative learning in the ESL classroom hence it is beneficial for both pupils and teachers.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, English as a second language, English as a foreign language, elementary school, group grading, ESL classroom and EFL classroom.
Individual contributions

We hereby certify that all parts of this essay reflect the equal participation of both signatories below:

The parts we refer to are as follows:

• Planning
• Research question selection
• Article searches and decisions pertaining to the outline of the essay
• Presentation of findings, discussion, and conclusion

Authenticated by:

Jens Hultberg

Filip Söderberg
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1. Introduction

According to Westlund (2015), cooperative learning, hereafter CL, is a method where pupils get to discuss and interact in smaller groups and these groups serve as a platform where high achievers can aide those who are struggling and everyone is challenged based on their individual qualifications. CL can be seen to have strong links to sociocultural theory. Vygotskij (1978) believes that learning is a social process that stems from interaction with others and that language plays a central role. One's own perception of the world can be challenged through linguistic formulations and different ways of interpreting specific contents. In addition to this, Vygotskij presents the concept of the zone of proximal development. He argues that for learning to take place, a pupil must interact with someone else who can guide them further from what they already know into the field where they can solve a task but with the help of others. Thus, the process requires dialogue between two or more parts in order for someone’s current knowledge to be challenged and developed, which is implicit in CL. Kagan (1995) points out that in order for a pupil to learn a second language it is not enough that the input is understood, it also has to be in the ZPD. If it is not in the ZPD, the next level in pupils’ language learning is not achieved. The developmental level is where you find acquirements that the pupils already master. The proximal level is what pupils can do when supported by others and the difference between these levels are labelled as the zone of proximal development. An important thing in the cooperative nature is that input must be focused within the zone of proximal development, encouraging pupils to take the next step in their language learning process.

The teacher’s role in a CL-classroom is different from traditional teaching methods. Teachers play a central role, since they are the ones who initiate and guide the pupils throughout the structures within the activities, but at the same time they act in the background when the work has started. The leadership of implementing the structures only means that the teacher makes sure that the rules are followed, so that the learning processes for each pupil can develop in the best way possible. The structures within CL are formed so that pupils interact with each other, with the teacher and at the same time also get close to the subject content in different ways that get positive results. CL thus also has the power to increase each pupil's motivation to learn (Kagan & Stenlev 2017). As McCombs and Pope (as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) argue, every single
pupil is motivated to learn if they are provided with appropriate and adjusted conditions that teachers have elaborated in their classrooms.

A number of researchers have demonstrated the advantages of implementation of CL in the English classroom, showing that CL attends several of the different components that are essential to language learning. For example, it has been shown to provide a complex synergy between elements of input and output in different contexts (Khan & Akhtar, 2017). It has been demonstrated to lead to greater, more efficient gains for vocabulary acquisition compared to traditional methods (Bilen & Tavil, 2015). Finally, it has been shown to enhance to what extent pupils stayed on task, listened to teammates’ thoughts, participated in discussions and became good role models for their classmates by demonstrating a good attitude that fostered a positive classroom environment (Shahamat & Mede, 2016).

However, CL methods and group work has also been shown to have its drawbacks and disadvantages. According to Kagan (1995), CL can make it more difficult for teachers to assess the pupils work and assure the individual contributions. Hence, it inhibits their motivation among both low and high achievers and some pupils hide behind the group and simply do not put in that amount of work that the assignment requires. Ghufron and Ermawati (2018) propose that even though CL as a teaching method can be useful and beneficial for both teachers and pupils, it can also be viewed as problematic. Their findings showed problems such as CL needing a lot of time to be properly carried out and teachers and students both need to actively participate. Furthermore, they highlight that it needs considerable amounts of preparation and can be difficult to manage. Groups that are created by the teacher can become imbalanced if the group creating process is done by a method such as lottery; as a result, some groups can consist of predominantly high-achievers while others consist mostly of low-achievers.

Kagan (1995) identifies a number of factors that may feed into the success or failure of the CL approach. First, he argues that when pupils in an elementary ESL classroom learn English, learning is determined by different parameters regarding input, output and context. When looking at these parameters, it can be seen that the input pupils get has to be comprehended and since they are working in small groups they adjust the input so that they can be understood by the
group, i.e., the one who speaks can look for understanding when speaking to others and beneficially adjust the level of speech so that it becomes easier to understand, something that is hard to do if you work in a large group. He also claims that inputs must also be redundant and repetitive. Language acquisition is not assured if it is not repeated from different sources and the group setting in the CL is a good source when retrieving repetitive and communicative language acquisition. When students in small groups discuss a topic, they use words and phrases that provide for everyone to zone in on the meaning as well as gaining abundance and repetitive inputs, so that the language acquisition can go from short-term to long-term. For the language learning to become long-term the output must be practical and communicative as well as repetitive and often practised. The pupils must feel that the language output is identifiable with their own way of speaking, otherwise the communicative competence will be almost unaltered. For example, if pupils get to memorize words in a vocabulary list or other grammatical aspects, the fluency will not evolve significantly. Therefore, it is important to know that learning about a language is not the same as learning a language. To a great extent, pupils acquire spoken language best when speaking. “The single greatest advantage of cooperative learning over traditional classroom organization for the acquisition of language is the amount of language output allowed per student.” (p. 3). Finally, Kagan claims that when learning a language, it is helped if pupils encounter the learning processes and their activities within contexts that are helpful and inspiring, together with that it is communicative, at a decent level and provide a lot of feedback.

In the Swedish context, CL is clearly promoted. In the National Curriculum, it is stated that “language, learning, and the development of a personal identity are all closely related. By providing a wealth of opportunities for discussion, reading and writing, all pupils should be able to develop their ability to communicate and thus enhance confidence in their own language abilities.” (Skolverket, 2019, p. 11). Skolverket (2019) further requires that teachers ensure that the education is coherent and creates situations where pupils can explore their creativity, curiosity and self-confidence and go deeper within their own ideas and solve different problems. They must have chances to take responsibility and evolve when working both alone and in groups. It is also mentioned that the school must provide varied and reasonable working methods and content in order to develop amiable pupils. In the syllabus for English it is explained that pupils should develop a variety of communicative skills and get to practice these skills in different situations.
They shall be evaluated and assessed based on their individual needs. From the Skolverket policy documentation, we can thus determine that Swedish schools thus must stay contemporary and strive for a qualitative development so that they meet the Swedish national goals. It is continuously required to review, analyse, follow up and evaluate results that pupils provide and at the same time stay contemporary by assessing and establishing new methods. This must be done by an ongoing cooperation between school employees and pupils and also together with a close contact with the home and the local community.

Fohlin, Moerkerken, Westman and Wilson (2017) supports the use of CL in relation to the Swedish curriculum. According to Fohlin et al., CL structures are independent of content, which means that the structures are applicable to more than one subject. Teachers can revise them and fill them with content in a way that fit their pupils learning needs so that the criteria from the curriculum is met. The structures also contribute to a sociocultural learning process where genuine learning takes place in conversations and interactions among pupils.

Given the potential benefits of CL as a teaching/learning approach, and its support for CL in the Swedish curriculum it is imperative to determine the drawbacks and disadvantages of implementation in the Swedish context. In the current study we will explore associations between CL methods and the communicative English classroom to gain better insight as to its drawbacks and disadvantages. Teachers must have a variety of methods that they use, as no method could be generally applicable to all pupils, no matter how strong the arguments are. The drawback of CL is that it is focused on group work and there are situations where pupils do not reach their true potential. Even though the method itself has strategies for reaching every individual, there will be pupils that do not feel that CL is the perfect fit for them and then teachers need to have other methods within their competence. The difficulties with group grading are a strong argument that enlighten the disadvantageous of CL implementation.

**Key terms:** Cooperative learning, ESL classroom, English language acquisition, group grading, Situationism (in the Bowers, 1973 sense), Sociocultural theory.
2. Aims and research question

In the following investigation, we will explore what effects that appears when implementing CL methods in the ESL classroom. Our aim is to find studies that lean on empirical results that give us more comprehension regarding how CL effects ESL pupils’ language acquisition. We are going to address this by researching ourselves and comparing, contrasting and discovering both advantageous and disadvantageous aspects of studies that have been conducted on it.

Thus, our research question is as follows:

What are the advantageous and disadvantageous aspects of utilizing cooperative learning in an ESL classroom?
3. Method

We have in our research tried to use a variety of methods, when collecting literature and sources that we felt were pertinent regarding our focus on how cooperative learning can have advantageous and disadvantageous effects in the ESL-classroom. The method that we used most frequently was searching through educational databases and when needed following up the references that we found in articles that most suited our needs.

3.1 Search delimitations

When we started our process, we searched about general aspects of being a teacher in an English classroom and the bridge to the Swedish educational system. Gradually, as we advanced in our research, we primarily focused on CL and how it benefits language acquisition in an ESL classroom. With the knowledge that the core content in the syllabus for English aims towards a communicative classroom quite generally, we wanted to focus on the effects that CL could have regarding advantageous and disadvantageous aspects when pupils learn English as a secondary language and connect it to the Swedish school system. ERIC became the database we used exclusively in the beginning, but we started to search in both Libsearch and Google Scholar shortly after but discovered that ERIC was the search engine that e.g. Libsearch forwarded the searches to. Something that we emphasized was that all our searched articles were peer reviewed. The hits were many in the beginning, but when we looked through different keywords in sources that we found interesting, we learned how we should narrow our searches and thus we became more focused in regard to our research question.

With the method of using search limiters, a search with the terms “cooperative learning” and “EFL or English as a foreign language or ESL or English as a second language classroom” generated totally 230 hits. This became our main cluster of sources that hopefully could be beneficial and pertinent for us with regards to our aim and research question. There were results that we deemed relevant and kept throughout this investigation, however as we reformulated our research question, we felt it was necessary to limit the search further to get some more pertinent results. We narrowed our previous search by adding the term “teaching methods” and then we
got 124 hits. When also putting in the search term “elementary school” we got 12 hits and we were satisfied with the sources we had at our disposal.

Search words used: Cooperative learning, ESL or English as a second language, EFL or English as a foreign language, classroom, teaching methods and elementary school.

3.2 Inclusion criteria

In order to find empirical studies, we did an advanced search in ERIC, putting in some limiters and therefore we always included the search limiters: peer-reviewed, in English, both journals and documents, numerical/quantitative data, evaluative reports and research reports.

We have limited our searches to articles published between the years 2000 and 2019 in order to get contemporary and more relevant results. As we are studying to become teachers for the grades 4-6, we wanted to find sources that focused on this age group. That means that the study could aim at either students or teachers, as long as they are engaged in our age group. Different countries have different school systems and sometimes we were forced to be flexible, whilst trying to stay within the appropriate age group, no matter what level the pupils were labelled in.

3.3 Exclusion criteria

As part of our exclusion criteria, we have avoided usage of what we deemed as biased research, such as one article we found called “Student-Produced Videos Can Enhance Engagement and Learning in the Online Environment”. The use of the word “can” in the title indicates a biased conclusion. In other titles, phrases such as “impact of…”, “effects of utilizing…” and “the strengths and weaknesses of…” point to more unbiased articles, at least judging by the title.
Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

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<td>Motivation and attitude</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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4. Results

In the following section, we show a variety of viewpoints that are relevant to our specific area of interest. Firstly, different aspects of studies that we have deemed relevant to our research question will be systematically presented. Second, these studies will be compared and contrasted with each other. Lastly, our findings will be related back to e.g. theoretical aspects, the curriculum and the communicative English classroom in Sweden.

The presentation of the studies will be structured according to what the focuses implicit in the studies are. These are e.g. attitudes towards CL, a digital approach, writing skills and a teacher aspect.

A study by Bilen and Tavil (2015) examined if there was a compelling difference between vocabulary skills and recollection of Turkish pupils who were exposed to cooperative learning strategies, as well as their attainment on vocabulary learning, versus pupils who learned through traditional method activities. The study also explored what the pupils’ attitudes towards cooperative learning strategies were. The method used was an administered pre-test before the study commenced, and the creation of two groups, one experimental group and one control group. In the experimental group, cooperative learning strategies were implemented by one teacher whereas in the control group, a traditional method to teach was used by another teacher. When the study was completed, a post-test was administered and the impact of cooperative learning strategies were examined, thereof differences between the two groups. The participants of this study were 48 fourth grade pupils from two different classes in a private school. The experimental group consisted of 13 female and 11 male pupils. The participants had never been exposed to cooperative learning instructions prior to this study. The discoveries of this study were that there was a telling difference between the results of the two different groups with regard to the post-tests, where the experimental group scored higher than the control group; thus it was concluded that cooperative learning strategies benefits pupils’ vocabulary skills. An analysis of the lesson journals also suggested that the pupils’ notion of the cooperative learning strategies developed during the study and became more positive as time went on.
Similarly, Shahamat and Mede (2016) have done research regarding attitudes towards CL. They targeted 23 Turkish EFL (English as a foreign language) pupils in the fifth grade and their two EFL teachers. They investigated the attitude that teachers and pupils had about the utilization of CL, to what degree CL is effective regarding how pupils stay on task, listen to others ideas, participate in discussions, inspire team members and demonstrate good attitudes and also in what way CL can be beneficial for pupils language competence. There were 12 girls and 11 boys between 10-12 years old. The two teachers both came from Turkey and had been teaching for approximately six years. The data was retrieved from pre-tests and post-tests, pupils’ own words through diaries and observations. The qualitative bearing was represented by pre-tests and post-test and the quantitative part came from the diaries and all the observations. The teachers kept a diary where they wrote about ideas that connected the integration of CL to the EFL classrooms.

Pupils thought that it was vital to cooperate in relation to learning from one another, being able to clarify things, collaborate with various ideas and it was obvious that their English improved. They preferred the shared responsibility and got things done quicker. Both teachers and pupils agreed on some negative aspects about the way the groups were arranged. Pupils wanted to choose their own groups and teachers thought that selecting groups needed more time, to make sure that the best learning outcome was assured. However, the overall thoughts revealed that both pupils and teachers liked integrating CL in the EFL classroom. The pupils thought that it was a fun way of learning English. The ratings made from observations gave proof that learning with CL had good effects on pupils when it comes to those presented aspects mentioned earlier. When looking at the scores from post-tests, it became clear that the proficiency level had developed significantly after being active in CL classrooms (Shahamat & Mede, 2015).

Another perspective on CL is a digital one. Hung, Young and Lin (2015) conducted a study that examined if cooperative game-based education, that is competitive, is advantageous for pupils’ learning and how this acquisition is favourable for the pupils’ perspective regarding their perseverance, involvement and expectancies. Furthermore, they searched for an answer to the question that covers what kind of approach teachers could use to shut the knowledge gap and expand low-achieving pupils’ exploit. For the study, the participating pupils were divided into two groups, one experimental group and one control group. The pupils of the experimental
group used a tablet PC whilst the pupils of the control group used a traditional approach of markers and paper during the inquiries of the study, thus the groups used different methods but ran the same activities. Qualitative as well as quantitative data was collected in the form of surveys, observations, interviews and video-tapings. The participants were 30 sixth grade EFL (English as a foreign language) pupils from an elementary school in Taiwan who were randomly assigned into the two different groups that were mentioned. The results implied that the cooperative and competitive game-based learning setting substantially could improve the pupils’ learning and that it had helped enhance pupils’ learning motivation and involvement. Regarding shutting the knowledge gap, six different classroom strategies were advocated for by the findings of the study. These were equal opportunity, heterogeneous groups, inter-group collaboration, intra-group competition, learning by playing and one-on-one technology.

Likewise, Lan, Sung, Cheng and Chang (2015) explored a digital approach to CL and investigated how computer-assisted cooperative pre-writing strategies influenced the writing skills of EFL (English as a foreign language) learners by studying two different aspects of writing with the first one being writing performance, such as the understanding of grammar and quality of writing, and the second one being the EFL learners’ motivation for English writing. A quasi-experimental design including pre- and post-tests was used for the study. The participants were three classes of fifth-grade pupils with 27 pupils in each class. The classes were randomly assigned into three different groups that all received the exact same instructions for the CSCL (Computer Supported Cooperative Learning) English writing, however they were taught different pre-writing strategies. The findings of the study were such that two of the groups, one that had received strategies related to mind mapping and one that had received strategies related to drawing, had developed their writing skills and English grammar knowledge more compared to the third group that had received strategies related to brainstorming. Further, it was concluded that CSCL helped young EFL writers in different elements of produced English.

Nair and Sanai (2018) have presented further research concerning writing skills. They explored the effectiveness with implementing STAD (Student Team Achievement Division) in the ESL classroom in Malaysia and the study’s participants included 20 sixth grade pupils. They explored if there were some different results regarding pupils descriptive writing and used pre-tests and post-
tests as means for that. Further, they also wanted to dig into what pupils thought about the STAD-method when being taught writing skills. Within teaching about writing skills, the study also wanted to bring answers to aspects about what the teachers’ reflections were on the implementation of the STAD-method.

Nair and Sanai collected their data from the pre-tests and post-tests, pupil interviews, teachers’ thoughts and an observation checklist. The study lasted for six weeks and showed that the pupils had improved their writing skills and the level of activity in the ESL classroom as a result of applying STAD. From this, there also came the conclusion that the pupils felt more secure when speaking. Both high achievers and low achievers said that they enjoyed the STAD method, hence it brings joy to the learning. The teachers acknowledged that many pupils had better scores on their post-test in relation to the pre-tests. The study has its limitations as it only aimed at 20 pupils and that it was located in a small suburban place.

Ishtiaq et. al (as cited in Nair & Sanai, 2018) explain that the STAD method can be described as cooperative learning strategy where pupils work in groups to achieve the same goals. Wyk (2012, in Nair & Sanai, 2018) states that STAD methods are within the CL structure and have been beneficial for pupils in several aspects.

Suárez Ramírez and Rodríguez (2018) also included a teacher aspect in their study. They wanted to know more about how pupils and teachers in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context communicated based on carrying out tasks that were collaborative in nature. It was an action research and conversational analysis where they collected data from video recordings and pupils produced work. The participants were 22 boys and 17 girls between 8-12 years old and they came from a private school in Bogota. The action research provided proof that collaborative tasks enhanced the classroom climate. The pupils developed their self-belief in terms of their language usage and how they cooperated with the group members. The pupils became more and more active throughout the study and they became more confident and had more appropriate language acquisition. The tasks that the pupils were given were close to the their own social reality and that meant that they were more engaged in the process of learning English. An interesting point was that collaborative tasks revealed that the pupils often used their native language and body language to give meaning to the content.
Lastly, Gagné and Parks (2016) conducted a study and investigated how pupils working in teams would take turns while carrying out CL tasks and if the turns were equally assigned between the pupils. Further, they studied if the pupils would use the target language, in this case English, while speaking. The methodologies used for the study were observations, interviews and different CL-based tasks that were videotaped. Participating in this study were two heterogeneous groups of sixth graders who had French as their mother tongue whom all volunteered to partake. Four groups were created, of which one consisted of high achievers in English, two of average achievers and one of low achievers. Out of these groups, two were randomly chosen. Results showed that all tasks were comprised of a considerable amount of turns and in every case, contributions were made by all pupils, i.e. low, average and high achievers. They also showed that the target language was used almost exclusively, with 90% to 98% of the turns produced by individual pupils being solely in English, and that there were not any telling differences in the turn-taking of individual pupils in any of the groups.

The study concluded that CL-tasks that are constructed in a way so that pupils actively interact with others at the same time as they are individually liable promote cooperation by ensuring that all members of a group are involved in an equal fashion. Further, it concluded that factors that play a significant role in the pupils use of the target language, which in this case naturally is English, are clear regulations regarding restriction of the use of pupils’ mother tongue, the teaching of procedures that include understandable language so that pupils are encouraged to use given resources and feel confident when asking for help and tasks that were within the pupils’ ZPD (Gagné & Parks, 2016).

Numerous of the studies that we have presented have shown CL to have an advantageous outcome when practiced in ESL classrooms, e.g. as shown with the method of analysing pre-tests and post-tests where the post-test proves that as a result of integrating CL into the classroom, the English language acquisition was significantly improved (Bilen & Tavil, 2015, Shahamat & Mede, 2015, Nair & Sanai, 2018). Lan, Sung, Cheng and Chang (2015) also had pre- and post-tests but there were some differences regarding the outcome. Two out of three groups that were given pre-writing instructions such as mind-mapping and drawing produced better results when it comes to knowledge about English grammar, than the third group that had the pre-writing instruction brainstorming.
Something that was recurrent when researching the consequences of CL utilization in a ESL classroom was the enhancement regarding pupils’ skills to write coherently, lucidly and with correct grammar, depending on how the tasks were orchestrated. Nair and Sanai (2018) and Lan, Sung, Cheng and Chang (2015) showed in their studies how pupils had developed their ability to write at the end of the studies. This was achieved among pupils in general and it was the researchers’ overall view on this aspect. Nair and Sanai (2018) designed their study towards knowing more about the effectiveness that collaborative group work had on pupils ability to write descriptively. From what they could find, they are convinced and strongly recommend that teachers change their way of teaching, leaving the stale teacher focused pedagogy. Teachers should start to utilize more contemporary, cooperative group work and make lessons more pupil oriented since it is indisputable that pupils’ English acquisition is improved significantly when interacting together with their classmates.

Both the findings of Hung, Young and Lin (2015) and Lan, Sung, Cheng and Chang (2015) suggest that a digital approach to cooperative learning can be beneficial for ESL pupils’ English acquisition. Hung et al. (2015) concluded in their research that pupils’ English learning attainment increased after a conducted experiment that included cooperative game-based activities using tablet PCs while Lan et al. (2015) similarly showed that working in a CSCL environment improved pupils’ motivation and different areas of pupils’ English skills including their grammar. However, it should be taken into account that Hung et al. (2015) used two groups for their study, one experimental group and one control group and that the control group practiced a traditional approach in the form of using markers and papers, i.e. both groups executed the same activities but using different methods. Both the experimental and control group increased their scores in the post-tests of the study; thus, one cannot conclude that the use of digital resources were the sole cause of the positive results that were demonstrated.

Hung et al. (2015) also made a comparison of low- and high-achieving pupils in their study. Results showed that there was a compelling enhancement between the test scores of the pre- and post-tests of the low-achievement pupils regarding their English vocabulary achievement in both the experimental group and the control group. Their findings regarding their third research question showed that six different classroom strategies were desired in order to narrow the achievement gap and enhance the learning achievement of low-achieving pupils, of which one
were heterogeneous groups. This is in line with the research of Gagné and Parks (2016) which also showed how CL tasks can create equal involvement between pupils of different achievement levels. In order to cohere to literature concerning cooperative learning, they used heterogeneous groups in their study (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, Kagan & Kagan, as cited in Gagné and Parks, 2016) which as mentioned was found to be of essence in order to stimulate learning achievement for pupils of low achievement (Hung et al., 2015). Their results showed that pupils took turns in conversations while exercising CL tasks and that the turns were equally allocated; hence, they concluded that with regards to turn-taking, the CL tasks inspired pupils of different achievement levels to contribute. Furthermore, Devi and Dahiya (as cited in Nair & Sanai, 2018) state that the STAD method is beneficial for both high- and low-achieving pupils. Nair and Sanai (2018) demonstrated that the STAD method was appreciated by both low- and high-achieving pupils, that it helped create a fun learning atmosphere in the classroom and that the majority of pupils performed significantly better on their post-tests compared to their pre-tests in the study; which naturally includes both low- and high-achieving pupils.

Aside from CL having been shown to improve a variety of areas within ESL pupils’ English acquisition, evidence also suggests that the pupils’ attitudes toward CL methods are positive, i.e. pupils appreciate and think CL methods are fun. In the study by Bilen and Tavil (2015), diaries were written by the participating experimental group. They would write about their feelings, attitudes toward working in groups and the lessons. The diaries showed that their notion of CL strategies became increasingly positive as the study progressed. Similarly, the findings of Shahamat and Mede (2016) showed that pupils deemed it necessary to cooperate with regard to learning from each other, being given the opportunity to express oneself in an understandable way and letting different pupils with different ideas present them.

The findings of numerous studies show that pupils of different achievement levels had a positive attitude regarding the exposure of CL in the ESL classrooms. According to the pupils, CL helped to create a more joyful and motivational learning environment and they stated that the learning process itself became funnier (Bilen and Tavil, 2015, Nair and Sanai, 2018, Shahamat and Mede, 2016).
5. Discussion

In the syllabus for English, in the core content, it is formulated that Swedish pupils shall engage in activities that reflect their interests and subjects that are known. It is important that the content of lessons is structured so that the learning outcome will be applicable in the pupils' future everyday life where they are exposed to English. When it comes to the receptive part of the core content, it is stated that pupils must be exposed to a variety of oral and written English from various media and develop strategies for how they best can make things understandable. Regarding the output speaking and writing and communication, it says that content shall include ways to understand others and make themselves understood when their skills are absent, e.g. with the ability to rephrase. Strategies to involve themselves and participate in discussions are also brought up here (Skolverket, 2019). Therefore, based on our findings, we think that CL is a really good method and structure for ESL teachers to implement into their pedagogy. It fosters many opportunities for pupils to engage in group activities, where pupils get to listen to a lot of spoken language, get to speak a lot of English themselves and are exposed abundantly of receptive tasks and instructions. The variety of tasks within the CL method are something that we want to emphasize since that creates an exquisite collection for teachers, thus they have all the possibilities in the world to find something that suits everyone. E.g. Fohlin and Wilson (2018) show in their book that there are tasks for every individual need and there is a wide range of teacher guidances that teachers can search for and directly implement in their own CL classroom.

It has become clear that the relation between pupils and between pupils and their teacher is central in order to get CL to play an important role in the ESL classroom. Vygotsky, Blake and Pope (as cited in Ansari, Ansari & Panhwar, 2016) demonstrate that language acquisition is dependent on pupil to pupil and teacher to pupil synergy. The model of teaching that Vygotsky highlights shows that it helps CL and dismisses traditional teaching where the teacher is the focus, hence it gives both teachers and pupils socio cultural values.

One aspect of CL is the assessment of pupils that carry out tasks in a cooperative manner. Kagan (1995) proposes that group grading, assessing pupils as a group rather than individually and giving all the members of the group the same grade, can never be justified and should therefore never be
used by teachers. He provides several reasons for this, one being that it is simply unfair with the hypothetical example of two students that both are lingering between the grades A and B in a course and have comparable levels of motivation, and have learned and done about the same amount during the course. During the course’s final team project that is significant to these students’ final individual grades in the course, they are placed in separate groups. They both contribute with about the same amount of work to their respective groups, but one of the students has a team member that is particularly skilled in creating fancy banners and graphs for that group’s presentation. The other student’s team members are low-achievers and one is in fact a slacker. This student’s group gets the grade C+ on the presentation while the other student’s group gets an A+. Because of this, despite the two students being on a similar level, they get different final grades in the course. Furthermore, he argues that group grading impairs motivation for both low- and high-achievers. Slackers are rewarded by group grades in the sense that they are not motivated to contribute if it is the case that they have high-achieving teammates whereas high-achievers may deem it useless to put in a lot of work if his/her teammates are not doing their part.

Kagan also asserts that group grades violate individual responsibility. Pupils are more likely to perform better if they are aware that they are individually responsible for their work performance or learning (Slavin, as cited in Kagan, 1995), thus group grades create a gap in the line between what a pupil achieves and what grade that pupil gets.

However, Kagan also describes arguments that have been made by teachers in favour of group grading. One of these is the so-called real-world argument in which it is argued that one of the purposes of schools is to prepare pupils for the real world and that in the real world, working teams are usually rewarded for their shared input rather than being evaluated on an individual level. However, Kagan (1995) proposes a counter-argument to this which is the fact that there are many unjust practices in the real world such as discrimination based on e.g. age and race and different salaries for the same amount of work and that this does not justify unfairness in the classroom.
Kroll, Masingila, and Mau (as cited in King & Behnke, 2005) write that one way to be more fair to pupils when working in groups is to use group work for academic preparation and later on grading the individual contribution itself. King and Behnke (2005) claim that grades are just one way to reward CL and still avoid less motivated members to hide behind the groups’ final representation. When pupils give oral presentations in regard to something group specific or certain topics there lies a social pressure that often is used as motivation for CL and prohibits hiding behind the group. If teachers announce that pupils must put their own names on written papers, this can have comparable effects.

Much of the research that we have presented has shown that pupils’ attitudes toward CL and motivation for learning English as a second language increased. It was continuously so that pupils thought that CL methods were a fun way to learn English. This corresponds well with the Swedish national curriculum under the syllabus for English where it is stated that “In order to deal with spoken language and texts, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop their skills in relating content to their own experiences, living conditions and interests [emphasis added]” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 32).

Language learners can appear as complicated individuals that are possessing combinations of cognitive, emotional, social and motivational aspects, that always merge with one another (Dörnyei, 2009, as cited in Ushioda, 2016). According to Ushioda (2016), research regarding pedagogical aspects of motivation primarily focus on general ideas and assumptions about language acquisition. Even though you can see a change from a social-psychological view to a more classroom centred and intellectual analysis of second language learning motivation, the focus still seems to continue to address general aspects about motivational methods and less on what happens in specific classrooms regarding specific teachers and pupils. Still, it is within the local level of pupils’ learning background and the local classroom environment the true capability for retaining or losing their motivation exists. Holliday (as cited in Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011) elaborate further regarding the same aspect and state “any pedagogical recommendations deriving from empirical research are not directly generalisable to all classroom situations and, as with other aspects of instructional methodology, need to be adapted in ways that are appropriate to the local learning context” (p. 104).
In the same topic, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) further focused on the connections between motivation research and classroom usage and they investigated how the findings could be beneficial for language teachers when working in the classrooms. The whole idea with motivational procedures is to deliberately increase pupils’ motivation. When adapting well balanced methodology to local learning contexts, Dörnyei and Ushioda do not only mean the sociocultural context, but also the micro-culture, history and behaviour of a specific classroom. It is rarely the case that teachers say that they have a motivational strategy, that is applicable to all their pupils. Therefore, it is vital to understand that educational researchers can only present findings to raise motivational awareness among teachers by contributing with possibly useful examples from which they can choose what they believe best fit their pupils’ needs.
6. Conclusion

We wanted to know more about what effects CL could have in a classroom where English is being taught as a second language. We always made the connections towards the Swedish ESL classroom in our minds. Based on our findings, we strongly believe that the utilization of CL can be beneficial for ESL pupils, if carried out appropriately. Nair and Sanai (2018) and Lan, Sung, Cheng and Chang (2015) both found out that when implementing CL, pupils writing skills developed. The research of Nair and Sanai (2018) showed more specifically how pupils descriptive writing expanded when implementing collaborative teamplay, since it kindles their motivation and curiosity for writing and therefore aids the language acquisition. They also noticed that the pupils’ confidence when speaking English during lessons was improved. When it comes to the benefits for low achievers as well as high achievers Hung, Young and Lin (2015) showed that regarding vocabulary learning, low achievers developed more than high achievers, but all of the pupils language learning benefited from CL. Nair and Sanai (2018) brings up that both low- and high achievers liked the STAD method as it built a more fun learning environment and when the pupils engaged in group activities, the cooperative conversations enhanced their motivation and learning dedication. Bilen and Tavil (2015) and Shahamat and Medc (2016) also write about how their targeted pupils experienced CL as a method that made it more enjoyable to learn English. Ghufron and Ermawati (2018) highlight possible disadvantageous aspects of CL. These are the time and effort it takes for CL to be executed well, teachers and pupils both needing to actively participate in order for the learning to be optimal, and the risk of unequal groups being generated. Kagan (1995) elaborates further on these disadvantageous arguments and mentions group grading, giving several reasons to why it never should be used; one being that group grading can fail to illustrate individual performances if not carried out with these disadvantageous aspects in mind.

The limitations of the research are that the studies are carried out with small groups, a lot of them placed in small places around the world. We would have preferred to find more articles and studies that address the outcome from CL in a culture which is more applicable and closer to our own Swedish educational system. Not until then can we be certain of what impact CL has in the Swedish ESL classrooms. Together with the thoughts of Ushioda (2016), that educational
researchers mainly focus on general aspects of motivation regarding ESL learners and rarely on how motivational strategy issues are conducted on a regional level, future research regarding CL and how it affects teachers’ own learning environment is an educational field that has big opportunities. Therefore, a feasible future research project that we could conduct when writing our degree paper could be about to what extent CL is beneficial for ESL pupils in Sweden? What are Swedish ESL teachers’ views on working with CL? Are there any other subjects that could be used to work with CL together with English in an interdisciplinary manner?
References


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