

On the Effect of Interest-Oriented Student Team Achievement Divisions on the Reading Comprehension Achievement of English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract:

This article reports the results of an experimental investigation of the effect of a new type of cooperative learning technique, named Interest-Oriented Student Team Achievement Divisions (IOSTAD) by the researchers of the present study, on the students' reading comprehension achievement of English as a foreign language (EFL). In so doing, two classes (n=25) were assigned to control and experimental conditions. Each class was divided into four groups of three. The control group was instructed via Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) technique, which is a well-known technique of cooperative learning, while the experimental group followed the same technique plus adding students' interest in their grouping and cooperation i.e., IOSTAD technique. It was assumed that considering students' interest in their grouping and working together would lead to better performance in reading. Two different domain-referenced multiple-choice reading comprehension tests were used to assess the reading comprehension ability of the students on a pretest and posttest. The results on an independent T-test showed statistical significance at $P \leq 0.05$ level that can be attributed to the effect of adding students' interest in cooperative learning on their reading comprehension achievement.

Key words: Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD); reading comprehension; cooperative learning; Interest-Oriented Student Team Achievement Divisions (IOSTAD).

1. Introduction:

Language teachers have always been trying to find and apply more appropriate and fruitful approaches to teaching language and many have come up with the cooperative learning (CL) as a way to help to get better results. CL dates from the early 1970s in America (Zuo, 2011) and was developed by De Vries and Edwards (1973), Slavin (1977), Kagan (1989) and others (Ghaith, 2001). It achieved substantial development in the middle of 1970s to 1980s (Zuo, 2011) and it is now established that CL is an effective approach to learning (Ghaith, 2001). CL as a concept is comprised of some instructional methods in which learners study a language in small groups of 4-6 (Slavin, 1988). Slavin (1990) defined CL as "a kind of class technique that encourages students to perform all kinds of learning activities in group or small team, helps study some

materials and rewards students for achievements or performance of the entire group, enhances teacher-student, and student-student interactions, and promotes students to carry out a cooperative learning efficiently. Ormron (2004) argued that, both Vygotsky and Piaget took notice of the importance of social interactions as having positive effects on students learning (cited in Abassi, 2004). The social constructivism perspective advocates that people “work together to make sense of their world” while “helping one another, they may be able to interpret and understand the book in ways that they may not have been able to do on their own” (cited in Ormron, 2004, p. 180) when children interact with adults or more able peers, children’s learning is mediated so that they can mostly do tasks that they would not be able to do on their own (Day, 1983). Piaget (1926) in his theory of cognitive development argued that interaction with others fosters the learning of social-arbitrary knowledge such as language whereby learners acquire higher order skills and concepts. Furthermore, “CL correlates to language acquisition theory in the domains of comprehensible input and output, i+1 discourse, low affective filter, bridging social language and academic language, and combining language and content learning” (Ghaith, 2001. P, 2). Cohen (1994) suggests that CL strategies are conducive to the advancement of higher order thinking, socially acceptable behavior, and interracial acceptance. Johnson, Johnson and Stanne (2000) discuss why cooperative learning is so widely used. They go on to say that the widespread use of cooperative learning is due to multiple factors. Three of the most important are that cooperative learning is clearly:

- 1) Based on theory,
- 2) Validated by research, and
- 3) Operationalized into clear procedures educators can use.

They put it this way: First, cooperative learning is based solidly on a variety of theories in anthropology (Mead, 1936), sociology (Coleman, 1961), economics (Von Mises, 1949), political science (Smith, 1759), psychology, and other social sciences. In psychology, where cooperation has received the most intense study, cooperative learning has its roots in social interdependence (Deutsch, 1949, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989), cognitive-developmental (Johnson & Johnson, 1979; Piaget, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978), and behavioral learning theories (Bandura, 1977; Skinner, 1968). Second, the amount, generalizability, breath, and applicability of the research on cooperative, competitive, and individualistic efforts provides considerable validation of the use of cooperative learning, perhaps more than most other instructional methods (Cohen, 1994a; Johnson, 1970; Johnson & Johnson, 1974, 1978, 1989, 1999a; Kohn, 1992; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1977, 1991). To clarify the third factor which contributes to the widespread use of cooperative learning they mention the variety of cooperative learning methods available for teacher use, ranging from very concrete and prescribed to very conceptual and flexible. Moreover, Johnson et al (2000) mention the following ten techniques of cooperative learning, which they claim that have received the most attention: Complex Instruction (CI) (Cohen, 1994b), Constructive Controversy (CC) (Johnson & Johnson, 1979), Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) (Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987), Cooperative Structures (CS) (Kagan, 1985), Group Investigation (GI) (Sharan & Sharan, 1976, 1992), Jigsaw (Aronson, et al., 1978), Learning Together (LT) (Johnson & Johnson, 1975/1999), Student Teams Achievement

Divisions (STAD) (Slavin, 1978), Teams-Games- Tournaments (TGT) (DeVries & Edwards, 1974), and Team Assisted Individualization (TAI) (Slavin, Leavey, & Madden, 1982).

Açıkgöz (1992) noted that for a group work to be considered a cooperative learning process, following components and conditions should be taken into consideration:

1. *Group reward*: In order for members of a group to succeed, it is necessary for the group itself to succeed.
2. *Positive interdependence*: It creates a condition in which individuals make a common endeavor for the reward and their common goal which can in fact be possible via positive dependence, positive product dependence, and positive process dependence.
3. *Individual accountability*: It is individual learning that results in success or failure. Every learner has the responsibility to learn the subject and do whatever must be done.
4. *Face-to-face promotive interaction*: group members motivate each other.
5. *Social skills*: It is about teaching learners how to build relations among individuals and encouraging them to use this.
6. *Group processing*: It refers to identifying those behaviors of the members which benefit to the success of the group.
7. *The opportunity for equal success*: It is about contributing to the success of the group by developing their own behaviors and this can be achieved through a specific grading method. (cited in Bolukbas, keskin, and Polat, 2001)

Of particular interest to this study is STAD which was developed by Slavin at late 1970s (Zuo, 2011). Ghaith (2004) mentioned four stages for carrying out STAD in the classroom: teaching, team study, individual quizzes, and team recognition. So that: first, learners listen to the teacher's explanation of material, second, they work in mixed groups based on their ability to complete activities or worksheets, third, they take individual quizzes, and finally recognize their team achievements. "STAD operates on the principle that students work together to learn and are responsible for their teammates' learning as well as their own, and emphasizes having team goals that are dependent on the learning of all group members" (Zuo, 2011. P, 987). In their review of the research evidence validating the CL methods, Johnson et al (2000) in a Meta-analysis of CL tried to examine the empirical support validating the effectiveness of the different methods of CL. When the impact of cooperative learning was compared with competitive learning, Learning Together (LT) promoted the greatest effect, followed by Academic Controversy (AC), Student-Team-Achievement-Divisions (STAD), Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), Group Investigation (GI), Jigsaw, Teams-Assisted-Individualization (TAI), and finally Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC). When the impact of cooperative lessons was compared with individualistic learning, LT promotes the greatest effect, followed by AC, GI, TGT, TAI, STAD, Jigsaw, and CIRC. So we can conclude that research provides strong validation for the effectiveness of different types of CL techniques, but what if we considered adding students' interest in grouping and working together of students while working on reading comprehension. Does it lead to better results? The researcher in this paper is to find out if considering students interest in their grouping and also their working together contributes to improvement in their performance on reading comprehension while working in groups. In individualistic instruction,

the teacher is the only person who teaches and conveys the information, however, in cooperative learning; students help each other in learning. A lot of teachers feel that they do not have enough time in class to work individually with every student; cooperative learning is a way for all students to get individual help and enough time to practice and learn. Due to the intimacy and friendship among students they can talk to each other without inhibition, and understand each other better, they can ask questions when they are confused, without fear of being embarrassed in front of the whole class. This study is to examine the difference between two cooperative learning techniques (i.e. STAD and IOSTAD) and their effects on students' achievement in reading comprehension.

1.3. Research Question:

Is there any difference in terms of reading comprehension achievement between EFL learners who are instructed via STAD and those who are instructed via IOSTAD?

2. Review of literature:

In a meta-analysis of 66 studies on cooperative, small-group learning, Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulseon, Chambers, and d'apollonia (1996) found that children achieve more when they work together in small groups than they do in whole class groups(cited in Gillies, 2003). Jalilfar (2010) investigated the impact of student team achievement divisions (STAD) and group investigation (GI) on students' reading comprehension of English as a foreign language (EFL). The results of his study suggest that STAD technique is more effective than conventional instruction (CI) and GI technique in improving EFL reading achievement of college students at the pre-intermediate level of English. At his thesis, Zuo (2011) attempted to provide background information about some L2 research into motivation, illustrating the causes of the lack of learning motivation among Non-English major learners. In so doing, a survey and an empirical research was carried out in an ordinary class of non-English major for 15 weeks by applying CL in college English teaching. After collecting data and analyzing it, he concluded that application of CL is effective because it can raise the level of variables that contribute to motivation, raise achievement, and produce positive social outcomes. Sporer and Bronstein (2009) attempted to examine the effects of peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) program on reading comprehension of 7th grade students. Eight classes of 186 students were assigned either to a PALS condition or traditional instruction condition (IT) and the results of post-test showed that PALS students, 1) scored higher on experiment constructed and standardized comprehension tests, 2) achieved higher scores on declarative and procedural measures of summarizing strategies, and 3) improved to a greater extent in their understanding of self-regulated reading activities than traditional instruction students. Gaith and Yaghi (1998) attempted to investigate the effect of CL on the acquisition of English as a Second language (ESL) rules and mechanics. There were experimental groups which received instruction according to cooperative learning methods of STAD, whereas the control groups followed an individualistic instructional approach, the students were pre-tested and post-tested. Finally, the results proved that there was

no significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the post-tests. The results showed that the overall effect of cooperative learning was more or less equal to that of individualistic instruction in helping learners acquire the rules and mechanics of the target language. Gaith (2001) attempted to figure out the perceptions of a group of middle school learners who studied the rules and mechanics of English as a foreign language (EFL) in accordance with dynamics of STAD cooperative strategy. In so doing, after a 12 week period of cooperative study, sixty one EFL learners expressed their conceptions of the enjoyableness and effectiveness of STAD by responding to a semantic differential scale. The results indicated that learners held positive attitudes about their experience and were willing to recommend the use of STAD in other classes. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that male learners were clearer than females about the procedure and that they perceived that they had learned more than females. The results also showed that the high achievers felt that they had contributed to the learning of others more than low-achievers. In a study by Gillies (2004), the effect of cooperative learning on junior high school students who worked in structured and unstructured cooperative groups was investigated. The results showed that the children in the structured groups were more willing to work with others on the assigned tasks and they provided more elaborate help and assistance to each other than their peer in the unstructured groups.

3. Method:

3.1. Participants:

The participants of this study were all high school students in Islam Abad Gharb, a city in the west of Iran. Prior to the beginning of the study the researcher obtained the permission from the head of the Ofogh Language institute, which is located in the same city, for conducting the study. The Oxford Placement Test was administered to 37 students, who were studying at intermediate level, in order to make sure if they were really at intermediate level. 25 students scored 26 to 35 which showed that they were at intermediate level and appropriate for the present study. Then the Two classes (n=25) were randomly assigned to control (n=12) and experimental (13) conditions and a domain referenced test of reading comprehension, that covered the content domains targeted prior to the study, was administered to check for any initial differences among groups on reading comprehension. The participation was voluntary and the students had already enrolled in English Language institute. All the participants were males, with age ranged from 15 to 18 and all came from somehow similar socioeconomic backgrounds and the same teacher handled both the control and the experimental group. The first language of the participants was Kurdish and their second language was Persian. The control group was instructed via STAD technique and the experimental group via IOSTAD technique. The teacher used modified version of STAD model either for the control (STAD) or the experimental group (IOSTAD). The modification was that instead of considering their improvement scores in comparison to their base scores, the mean of their individual scores obtained in every quiz were considered for their team scores and final evaluation.

3.2. Instrumentation:

For the purpose of the study and to investigate the hypothesis, several instruments were utilized. Including:

3.2.1. Ten validated mid-intermediate informational reading comprehension tests, retrieved from www.Englishforeveryone.org, were used for both groups. Each reading comprehension test comprised of fewer than 400 hundred words and also comprised of 10 multiple-choice questions. All the multiple choice questions had the same format; one correct answer and three distracters. Every item was graded dichotomously: one point for a correct answer, zero for an incorrect one. The readings were all informational. The topics of the ten reading comprehensions included: (1) "why do birds sing?" (2) "Cacti" (3) "Counting" (4) "Easter Island" (5) "Empress of the blues" (6) "Hibernation" (7) "Marco Polo" (8) "Movie Ratings" (9) "Television" (10) "Voyagers 1 and 2"

3.2.2. Four big pictures of four well known football teams that were installed on the wall. The teams included:

1. Barcelona(a football team in Spain)
2. Real Madrid (a football team in Spain)
3. Manchester United(a football team in England)
4. Inter Milan(a football team in Italy)

3.2.3. A picture of each group in the experimental group that were attached under their favorite team.

3.2.4. The Oxford placement test.

3.3. Procedure:

Both groups were instructed by the same teacher (the first researcher of the present study). Before the start of the present study both classes had studied the first four lessons of interchange 3 book plus reading comprehensions taken from the same source(i.e., www.Englishforeveryone.org), by following the individualistic instructional approach. By the start of the new course, when the teacher started his investigation, the procedure on reading comprehension part changed and the randomly assigned control group (n=12) started working in four groups of three. The instruction for the control group followed the STAD technique. It was started according to components such as, teaching, team study, individual quizzes, and team recognition. Each lesson began with a teacher presentation to introduce and discuss the material. Then the students worked in their teams to understand reading comprehensions provided by teacher (see [Appendix A](#) for a sample reading comprehension). Following this cooperative practice, the students took individual quizzes on the same material and were not allowed to help each other (see [Appendix B](#) for sample test materials). As Ghaith (2001) puts it, learners in CL take individual quizzes to show individual accountability and personal achievement and to

control for any potential free ride effect on the efforts of other learners. Although each group took quizzes individually, their score contributed to the group mean significantly. Afterwards, at the end of the tenth session the instructor administered a domain -referenced post test to both groups. Finally, the teams were recognized as super, great, and good teams, according to teams' means, from the highest to the lowest. On the other hand, the experimental group followed all the steps of SATD plus adding student's interest in grouping and working cooperatively i.e. IOSTAD, and also using "Plus sign" to arrange teams from the highest to the lowest mean. In so doing, the teacher interviewed all the students and asked them about their most favorite game, 13 out of 25 students highlighted playing and watching football as their favorite game, and accordingly, they were assigned to experimental group and the rest (n=12) to control group. Then the students in the experimental group were asked to write the name of their most favorite team on a piece of paper and to give it to their teacher. After analyzing their verdicts the teacher chose four football teams that had been most voted by the students (i.e. Barcelona, Real Madrid, Manchester United and Inter Milan) and wrote them on the board. Afterwards, through negotiation, the teacher and the students chose four captains. Of course, the teacher considered students talents, leadership qualities, and enthusiasm for being captain of their teams. Then the teacher and students again negotiated and chose team (group) members and finally three groups of three and one group of four were formed. When the captains and their team members were identified, the teacher took a photo of each group and attached it to the pictures of their favorite teams (i.e. Barcelona, Real Madrid, Manchester United, and Inter Milan) and then installed them on the wall. At the beginning of the second session, the teacher told the students what they were going to learn and that by trying to learn more and scoring well on each quiz each individual could help his team to become the champion. They were told that each session they are supposed to work in groups on the reading comprehensions provided by the teacher and to take a quiz individually. Then they were told that the mean of each group on each quiz will be calculated and the team gaining the highest mean on each quiz obtains four pluses for his team, the second high mean three pluses, the third high mean 2 pluses and the last one 1 plus. They were told that this continues until the end of the tenth session, and then all the pluses were added to identify the champion i.e. the team who had gained more pluses on all sessions was identified as the champion. And the champion team was given a cup bought by the head of the language institute. In order to keep Control and experimental groups unaware of what was done in the other group, experimental group students attended their class on even days and the control group attended their class on odd days. The researcher assumed that IOSTAD would cause a better condition, to see the group as a whole entity in which all the members were responsible for the success or the failure of the group. As the students started working in their groups, the teacher tried not to interfere by talking too much, because he assumed his role to be less that of information giver or text explainer, and more that of coach, classroom organizer, trouble shooter, consultant, personnel manager, and catalyst (Williams, 1986).

4. Results and analysis:

After collecting the data, statistical analysis was performed using SPSS19 software. Independent sample T-test was run to analyze the data. As seen in Table 1, the mean score on the pre test for the control group is lower than the experimental group but, because $.05 \leq .484$ the difference between the control and experimental group on the pretest is not significant, and this indicates the homogeneity of students on reading comprehension at the beginning of this study.

Table 1 INDEPENDENT T-TEST BASED ON PRE-TEST FOR EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

Pre- Test	Group	N	Mean	S.D	Levene's Test for Equivalence of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means		
	Control	12	14.17	3.271	F	Sig	T	df	Sig(2-tail)
	Experimental	13	14.92	1.935	.690	.415	-.711	23	.484

As seen in table 2, the Independent Sample T-test results indicate that there is meaningful distinction between the means of two groups at 0.05 level of significance, that's to say that, the mean score for the control group, on the post test, is lower than the experimental group and the difference between them, after the experiment, is significant ($.05 > .048$). The mean score for experimental group ($M=16.85$) is higher than the mean score for the control group ($M = 15.00$).

Table 2 INDEPENDENT T-TEST BASED ON THE MEAN OF (or post-test) EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS ON QUIZZES

The Mean on Quizzes (i.e. Post-test)	Group	N	Mean	S.D	Levene's Test for Equivalence of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means		
	Control	12	15.00	2.629	F	Sig	t	df	Sig(2-tail)
	Experimental	13	16.85	1.725	.852	.366	-2.093	23	.048

Conclusion:

The research question of the present study intended to determine the efficacy and contribution of considering students' interest in their grouping and also their working together, while implementing the STAD technique of cooperative learning, on their reading comprehension. Before applying the treatment there was not a significant difference in the performance of the students on the pretest, but after applying the treatment there was a significant difference between the performance of experimental and control group. The results obtained provide evidence that pinpointing students' interest and utilizing it, while grouping them for cooperative learning through using the SATD technique, is more fruitful than the mere use of the STAD technique. The researchers of the present study coined the term IOSTAD (i.e. interest-oriented student team achievement divisions) to refer to this new derivation of STAD technique. As Chomsky (cited in Jane Arnold, 2000. P, 13) even pointed out: "The truth of matter is that about 99 percent of teaching is making the students feel interested in the material" (cited in Zhou, 2012). Taking heed of student's interest, while teaching, would be conducive to their willingness to spend more energy on the task and also feel more responsible. It would also lead to their motivation, and motivation paves the way more for more fruitful results. As Zhou (2012. P, 1318) puts it "motivation is one of the key influences on language learning success. Motivation influences learners' autonomy, attention, effort, persistence, the frequency of using learning strategies, and their learning achievement, etc." Many studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning and many have affirmed and validated its usefulness (e.g. Johnson et al's (2000), meta-analysis of CL techniques), but as reflective teachers we can always find new ways for more effective teaching. The results of this study suggest that the teachers shouldn't feel bound by the technique which they are implementing. They can always add variety to their teaching.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted at Ofogh language institute, Islam Abad Gharb, Kermanshah. The authors wish to thank Mr. Afshin Doobash, the manager of affiliated institute, for his wholehearted support during this work.

Appendix A:

englishforeveryone.org



Name _____

Date _____

“Counting”

Reading Comprehension – Informational Passages (6)

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer questions about the passage below.

Archaeologists believe that counting large quantities began about 10,000 years ago. Early farmers had to account for communally stored crops. Early counting systems involved small **tokens** which represented farmers’ stores. In the area which is now Southern Iraq, little figures shaped like discs, balls, and pyramids were used in about 7500 B.C. to represent various holdings. Later, marks which represented the figures were **inscribed** on clay tablets by use of a blunt reed to cut into the wet clay. Still, the symbols were always connected with specific merchandise. Around 3000 B.C., people began using clay tablets and a new **accounting** system which they perfected over the next 4,000 years. A writing system called cuneiform, which consisted of wedge-shaped symbols, was also invented. At the same time, other cultures were independently developing numbering and writing systems. Soon philosophers began to discover that nature was **subject to** laws which could be expressed with numbers.

Appendix B

<p>1) When did counting large quantities start? A. 10,000 B.C. B. 10,000 years ago C. 7,500 B.C. D. 7,500 years ago</p>	<p>1) Archaeologists study</p> <p>A. ancient history. B. mathematics. C. pottery. D. Both A and C are correct</p>
<p>2) People wrote on tablets. A. paper B. wooden C. clay D. stone</p>	<p>2) Tokens are</p> <p>A. symbols B. crops C. numbers D. stores</p> 
<p>3) Tokens represented</p> <p>A. crops B. merchandise C. people D. Both A and B are correct.</p>	<p>3) Marks that were inscribed were</p> <p>A. painted B. carved C. counted D. represented</p>
<p>4) consisted of wedge shaped symbols .</p> <p>A. Counting B. Cuneiform C. Clay tablets D. None of the above</p>	<p>4) An accounting system is a system of</p> <p>A. raising crops B. writing C. keeping records D. None of the above</p>
<p>5) What shape tokens were found in Iraq? A. discs B. balls C. pyramids D. All of the above</p>	<p>5) Something which is subject to laws is</p> <p>A. free from laws B. ruled by laws C. above the laws D. None of the above</p>

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