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# Cooperative Learning in EFL Reading Classes at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding School

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**ABSTRACT**
In teaching reading, teachers might place emphasis on Cooperative Learning (CL) as an effective instructional method in which students of the different levels might cooperate with each other in groups to achieve a common goal. This research paper aims at investigating the CL's with respect to Vietnamese learners of English in reading comprehension at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school and investigating students' attitudes towards cooperative learning. A quasi-experiment was conducted over a period of eight weeks. Sixty-one ethnic minority students in Grade 11 at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school took part in this research. The research participants were divided into two groups: control and experimental groups. For the control group, lecture-based teaching was used as usual activities in-class time, while for the experimental group, CL was employed. After analyzing, another standardized post-test was conducted. Later, the authors applied the Independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test to examine whether there existed differences in reading comprehension between inter-and intra-group. The results showed that the students in the experimental group achieved a more remarkable improvement than their counterparts with respect to English reading performance. The findings also revealed that the students with the experimental CL method expressed highly positive attitudes towards the use of CL in reading classes. Further research could be carried out to explore the other CL's effects in language teaching and learning.

***Keywords:*** *cooperative learning, extended reading, attitude, foreign language, ethnic minority*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the economic reform of Doi Moi in 1986, a lot has changed in Vietnam in every aspect of life. As the country developed, an open-door policy created a need for foreign languages, especially English. People of all ages now learn English for a variety of reasons and attempt to use it to bring themselves much further in their careers. In Vietnamese educational programs, English is taught as one of the compulsory subjects for all levels, from primary schools to universities.

Reading is considered one of the most critical and foundational skills for ensuring the learning process. However, reading comprehension is not easy for ethnic minority students with different cultural backgrounds and languages in remote areas in Lam Dong province. These ethnic minority students reported that their English reading test scores were relatively low. However, it is fairly easy to understand why they struggled in learning English. One of the possible explanations of the matter lies in the way that English is traditionally taught [1]. It means that English teachers in Vietnam are far too dependent on traditional teaching methods. In

traditional teaching, teachers merely lecture, and students are passive in their own learning. Additionally, students are not exposed to the English language outside the classroom setting, and English teaching gets faltered and fails.

Cooperative learning (CL) has been proved to be superior to other techniques in accelerating academic achievement. As such, the authors set up an empirical study to apply CL approach in teaching reading comprehension and to determine the EFL students' attitudes towards CL at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school. In this paper, the authors are giving answers to the following questions:

1) To what extent do students of Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school improve their English reading skills through working in cooperative groups?

2) What are their attitudes toward cooperative learning?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Defining Cooperative learning (CL)

Many researchers have defined "cooperative learning" in several ways. In the view of Brown [2], CL or group work is a technical term that covers a multiplicity of techniques for describing the learning process in which students are assigned a functional role for a specific task that they have to be responsible for within their team. [2, p. 177]". Doff [3, p. 138] explains CL as a teaching practice of teachers that requires his/ her students to work in a small group of four or five at the same time to perform collaborative tasks; or simply, Johnson and Johnson [4, p. 2] defines CL as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning". In this research paper, in CL approach, students are understood as active learners to engage in self-directed discovery and learning with one another.

### 2.2. Why STAD model?

There is a variety of cooperative models in the context of EFL. In this study, the Student Team Achievement Division (STAD) model was applied to the experimental group with the purpose of enhancing EFL students' reading comprehension. STAD was developed at John Hopkins University in the late 1970s by Robert Slavin and his colleagues. It is a model in which 4 to 5 learners with different levels of proficiency are arranged into a team that assists one another in understanding the given material in depth. Then, each member will be tested. The result of the second round will be compared to that of the first. The gain score of each individual will be added to the score of the whole group. Slavin [5] adds that there are four steps for implementing STAD in classrooms: (1) The teacher presents the material, (2) Students work in their group to complete the worksheets, (3) Each individual takes quizzes. (4) They recognize their team achievements.

### 2.3. Attitude

In the view of Lambert [6], attitude is defined as responses and reactions to people, groups, social issues, and even evaluations. Such evaluations are often positive or negative, and it is often changeable according to people and time. Similarly, Gardner [7] states that attitude is an evaluative reaction of an individual to a sure thing based on the individual's belief, whereas Wenden [8] views attitude differently by giving a comprehensive definition of attitude consisting of three components, namely affective, cognitive, and behavioral. In this study, the researchers used the definition of Wenden as a working definition, and the questionnaires were also designed based on the three different components of attitude: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral.

According to Gardner and Lambert [9], an attitude has long been considered as one of many influential variables in the field of language learning. Oxford and Shearin [10] also highlight the importance of that attitude in language learning. Farzaneh & Nejadansari [11] stress the importance of attitude in the educational process. They state that when formed, attitudes will decide the way learners think, feel, and behave. It means that attitudes impact many aspects of learners in the learning process, starting from learning behavior to their quality of learning. In the view of psychologists, learners' attitudes may be positive, negative, or neutral. In language learning, both positive and negative partly determine success or failure.

With the above views, it can be concluded that attitude is one of the significant elements impacting directly on learners' achievement in language

learning. Positive or negative attitudes can set the tone for the learning process itself. People who maintain positive attitudes will benefit more than those who do not.

### 2.4. Previous studies on cooperative learning

Many studies on cooperative learning have been done in different countries all over the world [12, 13, 14, 15, 16], and the list of related studies is still going on. These studies were spread on a variety of topics such as *using CL to promote problem-solving* [17, 18], *teaching strategies* [13], *teaching language and social skills* [19, 20, 21, 22], and *recent studies related to online learning* [23]. Especially, there were two plausible studies on CL and its educational applications for *learning effectiveness* and *student attitudes to group work* in the Vietnamese context. One evaluated the effects of jigsaw cooperative learning on knowledge retention and the achievement of 80 final-year Vietnamese mathematics students and reported their attitudes toward this form of learning by using empirical design [24]. The other focused on implementing CL in teaching Speaking skills for Vietnamese Learners of English [25]. The findings from two studies show that teachers were reluctant to implement CL activities in teaching despite their students' better performance.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research design

In this study, quantitative, descriptive, and qualitative methods were implemented. First, this study examined the effect of cooperative learning with respect to EFL learners in reading comprehension at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school. It dealt with empirical and statistical data analyses. Hence, quantitative and descriptive methods were used. Second, this study focused on determining the attitudes towards group work of EFL students. As such, a qualitative method was also engaged in this study.

### 3.2. Participants

Students of grade 11 at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school took part in the study. For research question 1, the participants were 61 11-grade students of two classes: control and experiment classes. One of the research played the role of the teacher in these two classes. Students aged from 16 to 18 were of mixed proficiency levels and had a similar total average score of English last semester. For research question 2, there were 31 students in the experimental group.

### 3.3. Instruments

Regarding Research question 1, tests (pre-test and post-test) and observations were used as instruments. Students in two groups were both asked to do a pre-test before setting up the study, and a post-test was given to them after the experimental group received the treatment. To ensure validity and reliability, the tests were derived from Test 1 and Test 2 in Preliminary English Test (PET) for school 1 of Cambridge Book for Cambridge Exams, published in 2010. Each test consisted of 5 reading parts with different task types, including thirty-five questions in the form of multiple choices. The allotted time was 50 minutes. There were also four observations in this study: two observations during the first week, another two observations during the last week of the application treatment to discover the frequency of students' participation in EFL reading classes.

Regarding research question 2, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed to collect data. The questionnaire, which was adopted and adapted from previous studies [25, 24], consisted of 15 five-point-scale items and was designed into three parts: p*articipants' desire*, p*articipants' awareness, and behaviour when working in a group.*

**Table 1. A summary of factor analysis of students attitude towards CL**

| Factors | Variables to apply | Cronbach's Alpha Index |
|---|---|---|
| **Factor 1:** Participants' desire to work in a group | **5** variables: E1, E2, E3, E4, E5 | .963 |
| **Factor 2:** Participants' awareness of group work' benefits | **5** variables: C6, C7, C8, C9, C10 | .902 |
| **Factor3:** Participants' behaviour when working in a group. | **5** variables: B11, B12, B13, B14, B15 | .823 |
| KMO = .724 | | |
| The value for Bartlett's testSig = .000 | | |
| % of variance explained = 77.638 | | |

There was also a semi-structured interview with five questions to check some of the irregularities in the results.

### 3.4. Data analysis

In this research paper, the authors use SPSS software to analyze the data obtained from pre-test and post-test for giving affirmative answers to research question 1 and content analysis for processing the data obtained from the interview. The mean score is used as a key to interpreting the students' performance. The pre-test significant value (0.524) reveals that there was no statistical difference between the two groups.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. The CL influence on students' reading comprehension performance

Table 2 presented the descriptive statistics of the student's performance in the pre-test. After running the Independent T-Test through SPSS, data displayed in Table 2 revealed that the control group's mean score was 19.8667, compared to 19.0968 in the experimental group. The significant level was .524, which is greater than .05. Therefore, it was inferred that no difference between the pre-test results in both groups was statistically significant. (*see* Table 2).

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the pre-test results**

| | GROUP | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PRETEST | Control | 30 | 19.8667 | 3.43143 | 0.524 |
| | Experimental | 31 | 19.0968 | 5.70003 | |

Table 3 presented students' performance in the control group. As can be seen, students' performance gained a lot of improvement. The difference between the two tests was 0.64316, with a higher mean score in post-test.

The reading comprehension results were confirmed with the sig of .001 < .005 in a Pair samples check.

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics for both pre-test and post-test results**

| | | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 1 | Pretest | 19.8667 | 30 | 3.43143 | 0.001 |
| | Posttest | 21.5333 | 30 | 4.07459 | |

Therefore, there was statistical significance between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores in the control group. In other words, the learners in the control group had improvement in the post-test scores.

Table 4 presented pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group. From the data in table 4, the mean score of the pre-test was 19.0968 and 24.1290 in the post-test. After running the Paired samples Test through SPSS, the results in the reading comprehension indicated that the significant level was .000 < .05.

**Table 4. The experimental group performance**

| | | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 2 | Pretest | 19.0968 | 31 | 5.70003 | .000 |
| | Posttest | 24.1290 | 31 | 5.14290 | |

Therefore, there was a statistical significance between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores in the experimental group. In other words, the learners in the experimental group got progress in the post-test scores.

Regarding the post-test, after running the Independent T-Test through SPSS, the results in the reading comprehension showed that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group, with the mean score of 24.1290 against 21.5333 of the control group as shown in Table 5. As can be seen from table 5, the significant level was .033 < .05. Therefore, the mean difference was statistically significant found between the post-test scores in both groups (*see* Table 5).

**Table 5: The control group performance**

| | GROUP | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| POSTTEST | Control | 30 | 21.5333 | 4.07459 | 0.033 |
| | Experimental | 31 | 24.1290 | 5.14290 | |

In summary, the results revealed that at first, the control group and experimental group had similar pre-test scores (the mean score of the control group was 19.8667 and 19.0968 in the experimental group). After eight weeks under different treatments, both learners in the control group and the experimental group got progress in reading performance. However, there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of post-test scores. The mean score of the control group was 21.5333 and 24.1290 in the experimental group. Specifically, the experimental group gained 2.5957 of reading score more than the control group on the post-test of reading performance, which means that the students in the experimental group gained more progress than those in the control group. As such, it can be concluded that it is the implementation of cooperative learning that helped students in the experimental group outperform in reading comprehension tests than their counterparts in the control group.

Apart from the scores of reading performance, the improvement of the students in the experimental group could also be described through their involvement during EFL reading classes. Below is the table that shows the participation of students in both groups during EFL reading classes.

**Table 6: The involvement of control and experimental group during 8 weeks of EFL reading classes**

| Week | Class | Student involvement level | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st | Control group (30 students) | 12 | 40 % |
| | Experimental group (31 students) | 9 | 29 % |
| 8th | Control group | 15 | 50 % |
| | Experimental group | 27 | 87 % |

As shown in Table 6, the number of students in the control group engaged in the tasks at the first week was higher than their counterparts, 40 % against 29 %. However, there was a big difference between the two groups in terms of students' involvement in the eighth week. Surprisingly, the students in the experimental group who participated in the tasks increased dramatically, while the involvement of students in the control group did not change much.

## 4.2. Students' attitude towards cooperative learning in reading classes

### *4.2.1. Desire to work in a group*

Table 7 presented the desire of students when working in a group. Data displayed in Table 7 above revealed that the mean scores of the items ranged from 4.00 to 4.32 and the average mean score of 5 items was 4.094, which means the students were interested in working in group work mode.

**Table 7: Descriptive statistics for the desire to work in a group**

| No | 5 items with M = 4.094<br>Desire to work in group | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| E1 | I like participating in group work activities when learning reading. | 4.00 | 1.033 |
| E2 | It is interesting and fun when learning English in group | 4.32 | 1.107 |
| E3 | I feel more confident when working in group | 4.12 | 1.118 |
| E4 | I feel motivated when working in group | 4.00 | 1.125 |
| E5 | I like learning from my friends in group | 4.03 | 1.080 |

As regards Table 7, the participants strongly agreed that learning English in a group was interesting and fun (item 2: M= 4.32). Besides, group work made them feel more confident when dealing with reading texts (item 3: M= 4.12). They reported that they liked learning from their friends (item 5: M= 4.03). They said that the implementation of group work in English classes made them feel motivated (item 4: M= 4.00). They also expressed that they really liked taking part in group work activities in learning English. (Item 1: M= 4.00).

### *4.2.2. Awareness of the benefits of working in a group*

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics for the advantages of learning English in group work. Data displayed in Table 8 showed that the mean scores of the items ranged from 3.52 to 3.81 and the average mean score of 5 items was 3.654, which means the students agreed with the benefits created by learning in group work mode.

**Table 8. Descriptive statistics for advantages of learning English in group work**

| No | 5 items with M = 3.654<br>Awareness of benefits of working in group | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| C6 | Learning reading in group is beneficial | 3.58 | 1.232 |
| C7 | Group work creates positive learning atmosphere | 3.68 | 1.045 |
| C8 | Group work creates more chances to learn from each other | 3.52 | 1.288 |
| C9 | Group work helps me understand and do reading texts more efficiently | 3.81 | 1.078 |
| C10 | Group work encourages me to learn better | 3.68 | 1.137 |

Expressly, as regards Table 8, students strongly agreed that group work helped them understand and do their assignment more efficiently (item 9: M= 3.81). They thought that learning in group work fostered a positive learning environment among them (item 7: M= 3.68) because it encouraged them to learn better (item 10: M= 3.68); Moreover, they believed that group work not only brought back lots of benefits (item 6: M= 3.58) but also provided them with more opportunities to learn from each other (item 8; M= 3.52). This illustrates that the participants, generally speaking, had positive attitudes towards using group work in learning English due to the huge benefits brought to them.

In addition, the finding of the questionnaire is supported by interviewees' comments. 6/8 students stated that they preferred group work to individual work. Most of them expressed their positive attitude towards learning in group work mode. They mentioned the necessity, usefulness, and important role of group work in EFL. Some statements by students are presented as follows.

"…I love working in a group. I find group work is helpful in learning. Thanks to this activity, we can learn from each other. Besides, our assignments are always done effectively…"(S1)

"…For me, working in a group is better than working individually. Group work enables me to share my opinion freely…" (S2)
"… working in a group can free the lesson from boredom" (S4)
"…I feel more confident and comfortable when I learn with my friends." (S5)
"…We can help each other in learning English…" (S7)
"… feel more confident when I work in a group"(S8)
Nevertheless, many disadvantages of group work mode were also noted. Some interviewees shared their thought presented as follows:
"… Group work causes lots of noises" (S2)
"…Some students are more dependent on the other members in group..." (S3) "…Learning in group work can create chances for some students to exchange personal matters..." (S4)
"…Some often hitchhike on the other works..." (S6)
It can be concluded that the findings of the questionnaire and interviews are in alignment with each other. Most of the students liked working in group work, and they thought that the use of group work in EFL classes embraced a variety of advantages.

### 4.2.3. Behaviour when working in a group

Table 9 presents the descriptive statistics for students' behavior when working in a group. Data displayed in Table 9 above revealed that the mean scores of the items ranged from 3.19 to 4.10 and the average mean score of 5 items was 3.608, which means the students moderately cooperate in reading classes.

**Table 9: Descriptive statistics for behavior when working in a group**

| No | 5 items with M = 3.608<br>Behavior when working in group | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| B11 | I take part in all group work activities. | 3.55 | 0.601 |
| B12 | I discuss and contribute my ideas. | 3.39 | 0.978 |
| B13 | I help other members when working in a group. | 3.19 | 1.195 |
| B14 | I finish my reading texts all the time. | 4.10 | 0.568 |
| B15 | I learn things from my group members. | 3.81 | 0.882 |

As regards Table 9, the students strongly agreed that group work helped them finish their reading text all the time (item 14: M= 4.10). Through group work, they learned things from their group members (item 15: M= 3.81). Additionally, they showed their eagerness to participate in group work activities in reading classes (item 11: M= 3.55). However, they were undecided about discussing and contributing their opinions (item 12: M= 3.39) and helping other members working in a group.
The information was backed up by the respondents' comments when the participants were asked about the best things about working in a group. They stated as follows:
"…Group work helps me to finish my reading assignment, and I never put off anyone." (S1)
"… I always finish my reading texts thanks to group work" (S2, S7)
"…We can accomplish the reading assignment quickly" (S6)
"…After working in groups, I understand my reading texts, and I always complete them." (S8)
"…I can learn from my friends the way to deal with reading tasks" (S4)
"…I can exchange ideas with my group members and learn from each other" (S5)
Regarding discussing and contributing ideas, some reported sometimes they could not:
"…I try to give my opinions. However, some challenging topics stop me from doing this" (S7) (S1)
or another one
"…I know I should contribute something, but I am afraid of being ridiculed". (S2)
"… Sometimes, there are several topics that I know nothing so that I could not give any ideas" (S5)
For obstacles that hinder them from working in a group, 2 out of 8 agreed that they did not always
"...because of my limited proficiency level" (S2, S8)
Besides, others said:
"… I feel unpleasant with group members" (S3)
"… It is time pressure that hinders me from working in-group" (S4)

"… It is disagreement among group members" (S5)
"…Unequal workload distribution. One or two often do most of the work, and the others hitchhike on it."
From the data analysis, it can be concluded that data collected from both the questionnaire and interviews reflected that most students moderately cooperated when working in a group.
Overall, the questionnaire and the interview findings showed that the participants had a favorable outlook on cooperative learning in reading classes. They expressed their preference and awareness of the benefits of learning English in the group, and those were expressed through their actions.

### 4.3. Discussion

In Vietnam, there are 54 ethnic groups. When learning English, ethnic minority students seem to be equated with Kinh ethnic majority students. However, they, in fact, have to learn English as an extra foreign language (the third language) via Vietnamese (most dominant) as the language of instruction. Consequently, these ethnic minority students not only confronted with the same problems as their Kinh counterparts but also tackled multiple obstacles in learning English, especially in reading skill. The results in section 4.3 showed that CL learning had a significant effect on ethnic minority students' reading comprehension achievement. After eight weeks under cooperative treatment, students in the experimental group were proved to have a better performance than their counterparts in the control group. The findings were consistent with previous studies such as Pan and Wu [22], Azizinezhad, Hashemi, and Darvishi [16] and Yavuz and Arelan [26].
The significant gains of the experimental group in this study were also in alignment with Slavin [5, 12], who asserted that cooperative learning is an alternative to the traditional teaching strategy. The higher mean gains indicated that students in the experimental group understood the reading comprehension passages better. Furthermore, these findings were confirmed by Hoa and Tran's study [25], which demonstrated that CL could improve Vietnamese learners' understanding, especially for ethnic minority students. Several studies have been carried out with a wide variety of learners around the world, and many of them have found similar results – an increase in reading comprehension in their studies [8, 20, 26]. However, the study conducted by Ishtiaq, Ali, and Salem [27] proved that there was no significant difference between the two groups when using STAD. STAD, like any other model of CL, cannot be said to guarantee a positive outcome, but the study conducted by Ishtiaq, Ali, and Salem [27] covered a short period, only two weeks. Their treatment was administered for only two weeks which might not be sufficient to investigate the effect of a teaching strategy. A more extended period would have been better. The improvement of reading comprehension of learners in the experimental group could be best explained from Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and constructivism [28]. According to Vygotsky and Code [28], all good learning was that which is in advance of development and involves the acquisition of skills just beyond the student's grasp. Such learning occurred within the student's zone of proximal development through interaction. In this study, it was CL-that offered more classroom interaction to the participants in the experimental group than those in the control group. It encouraged them to be more participative and much involved during learning sessions. From the frequent interaction with their peers, the high and low achievers in the experimental group were able to develop their potential fully and thus move beyond their current level. To sum up, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development could hardly be achieved without the help of peer interaction and cooperation.
The gains of the experimental group could also be explained partially by the constructivism theory. According to constructivism theory, learning was an active process in which learners constructed new ideas or concepts based on their current knowledge. Learners selected and formed information, constructed hypotheses, and made decisions, relying on a cognitive structure to do so. In the experimental group, each individual was allowed to construct learning based on his/ her current knowledge. Not only the peer correction but also the self-correction and occurred. As a result, they could reduce their misconceptions and increase their comprehension in reading. That way, both the high and low achievers in the experimental group were able to progress at their own pace, and at the

same time, contribute to their peers' learning. However, as a sharp contrast to the improvements made by learners in the experimental group, the performance of learners in the control group was not satisfactory. Such results could be explained partially by reference to Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development. According to Vygotsky and Code [28], a necessary feature of learning was that it awakened a variety of internal development processes that was able to operate only when learners were in the action of interacting with people in his or her environment and cooperating with his or her peers. Unfortunately, these elements rarely exist in traditional classrooms. While the students in the control group, without much opportunity to interact with their peers, tended to be limited in their language development, especially the low achievers who were easily neglected in a traditional classroom. Without such an interactive environment, the zone of proximal development in both the high and low achievers in the control group was not fully developed. The scores of high and low achievers in the control group confirmed many educational reports that pointed out the solitary models of the traditional teaching method tended to make students overly passive and indifferent to what was being taught [29].

The study also indicated that participants rated cooperative learning moderately high. They expressed enjoyment with group work mode. They held the point of view that learning English in group work mode was necessary and useful. In other words, they had a positive attitude towards using group work in EFL because of its numerous benefits. These findings are in alignment with the findings of the studies conducted by Gardner and Lambert [9] and Bushido [30] with the acknowledgment of using group work in learning English. Therefore, the students were willing to participate in group work activities in EFL classes. It is important to maintain the learner's ongoing motivation to learn because only with ongoing motivation, language achievements could be sustained.

However, it was found that there existed some obstacles in the process of group work. The main obstacles that the participants faced in participating in group work activities were lack of language knowledge, disagreement among group members, unequal workload distribution, time pressure, boring topics. These findings of the study are also consistent with those of the study by Walker [31] and Basta [32]. On the one hand, these obstacles might have resulted from the poor background knowledge, large topics, lousy management of group leaders and teachers, monotonous activities. On the other hand, the majority of ethnic minority students had difficulty accessing information technology. Hence, their vocabulary and knowledge were limited. Moreover, their shyness and lack of communication skills contributed to their barriers in language learning.

Taken as a whole, these findings of the present study revealed that learning in English in group work mode implies enormous benefits such as enhancing reading comprehension, improving the attitude of learners towards learning English,… Taken that cooperative learning could achieve a positive effect in language acquisition as well as enhancing motivation towards learning English in such a short period (over two months), more powerful effects could be thus expected with long term implementation as one semester or the whole academic year at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school. However, the findings may also inform teachers of some potential constraints in applying group work activity in the context of Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research paper has made an attempt to examine CL effectiveness in improving student's reading comprehension and to determine the attitudes towards CL of EFL ethnic minority students in EFL classes at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to analyze the data set in the survey and interview. The results showed that the students in the experimental group performed better than their counterparts after two months of the experiment. They scored significantly higher than those in the control group in the form of Cambridge tests. Besides, the majority of the students in the experimental group had a positive outlook towards CL strategies. Remarkably, they showed an agreement among their desire, their awareness, and their behaviour to cooperative learning.

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**APPENDIX 1**

## SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey is designed to collect information for the study "Cooperative learning in EFL reading classes at Lam Dong Ethnic Minority Boarding school: A focus in grade 11". Please choose the statement that fits your opinion.

| | | **Totally disagree** | **Disagree** | **Undecided** | **Agree** | **Totally disagree** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| **My desire to work in group** | | | | | | |
| 1 | I like participating in group work activities when learning reading. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 2 | I feel interesting and funny whenever I work in group. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 3 | I feel more confident whenever I work in group. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 4 | I feel motivated whenever I work in group. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 5 | I like learning from my friends whenever I work in a group. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| **My awareness of working in a group** | | | | | | |
| 6 | Learning reading in a group is beneficial. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 7 | Group work creates a active learning atmosphere. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 8 | Group work provides chances for students to learn from each other. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 9 | Group work helps me understand the lesson well. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 10 | Group work encourages me to learn better. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| **My behavior when working in a group** | | | | | | |
| 11 | I eagerly take part in all group-work activities. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 12 | I discuss and give my opinions whenever I work in a group. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 13 | I help my friends whenever I work in group. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 14 | I complete my assignment all the time | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 15 | I learn a lot of things when I work in a group. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

## APPENDIX 2

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Students are asked the following questions:

Question 1. Do you prefer working in a group or individually when learning English? Why? Or Why not?

Question 2. Besides lots of advantages, does group work embrace any disadvantages? If yes, what are they?

Question 3. According to you, what is the best thing about working in a group?

Question 4. Do you often discuss and contribute your ideas when working group? If no, why?

Question 5. Are there any obstacles that hinder you from working in a group? If yes, tell me what they are.

## APPENDIX 3

## STUDENTS' ANSWERS FROM SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

| Question 1: Do you prefer working in a group or individually when learning reading? Why or why not? | |
|---|---|
| Student #1 | I love working in a group. I find group-working is helpful. Thanks to this approach, we can learn from each other. Besides, our assignments are always done effectively. |
| Student #2 | For me, working in a group is better than working individually, it enables me to share my opinions freely. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Student #3 | I like individual work. Group work wastes a lot of time. |
| Student #4 | I think I choose group work because group work frees the lesson from boredom. |
| Student #5 | I often feel relaxed when I learn with my friends. So, I like group work. |
| Student #6 | I don't like group work. I learn nothing from my group members. |
| Student #7 | It's group work that I really like. We can help each other in learning English. |
| Student #8 | I think I like group work better than individual work. It makes me more confident. |
| Question 2: Besides lots of advantages, does group work embrace any disadvantages? If yes, what are they? | |
| Student #2 | It causes a lot of noise. |
| Student #3 | Some students are more dependent on the other members of the group. |
| Student #4 | Learning in a group can create chances for some students to exchange personal matters. |
| Student #6 | Some often hitchhike on the other works. |
| Question 3: According to you, what is the best thing of working in group? | |
| Student #1 | Group work helps me finish my reading assignments and I never put anyone. |
| Student #2 | I always finish my reading texts thanks to group work. |
| Student #3 | It can foster the relationship among group member |
| Student #4 | I can learn from my friends the way to deal with reading tasks. |
| Student #5 | I can exchange ideas with my group members and learn from each other. |
| Student #6 | We can do the assignment quickly |
| Student #7 | I always finish my reading texts thanks to group work. |
| Student #8 | After working in groups, I understand my reading texts and I always complete them. |
| Question 4: Do you often discuss and contribute your ideas when working in a group? If no, why? | |
| Student #1 | I try to give my opinions. However, some challenging topics stop me from doing this. |
| Student #2 | I know I should contribute something but I'm afraid of being ridiculed |
| Student #3 | Yes, I always. |
| Student #4 | Although my contribution is not always the best, I always do |
| Student #5 | Sometimes, there are several topics that I know nothing about, so I couldn't give any ideas. |
| Student #6 | Yes. I love giving opinions when discussing it. |
| Student #7 | I try to give my opinions. However, some challenging topics stop me from doing this. |
| **Question 5: Are there some obstacles that hinder you from working in a group? If yes, tell me what they are.** | |
| Student #1 | I believed that it was a challenging and boring topic. |
| Student #2 | May be it was my limited proficiency level. |
| Student #3 | I feel unpleasant with my group members. |
| Student #4 | Sometimes it's time pressure that hinders me from working in group work |
| Student #5 | Disagreement among group members |
| Student #6 | Unequal workload distribution. One or two do most of the work, the other hitchhike on it. |
| Student #8 | My limited proficiency level. |