



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GROUP WORK IN
ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN
SEMI-URBAN SECONDARY ESL CLASSROOMS**

NIK ISMAIL HJ. HARUN

FPP 1998 33

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GROUP WORK IN
ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN
SEMI-URBAN SECONDARY ESL CLASSROOMS**

NIK ISMAIL HJ. HARUN

**Master of Science
Universiti Putra Malaysia
1998**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to my supervisor , Encik Ghazali bin Kamarudin for his invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout the process of writing this project paper.

I am also indebted and grateful to my dearest wife Zaitun Hj. Shamsudin and my loving son Nik Mohamad Yusuf Izz for their constant forbearance, support and understanding.

Lastly, a note of thanks too to all the teachers for their undivided co-operation in the survey.

Nik Ismail Hj. Harun



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	v
ABSTRACT	vi
ABSTRAK	vii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	
Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Objective of Study	4
Limitations of the Study	4
Definition of Terms	5
Groupwork	5
English as a Second Language (ESL)	7
II REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	
Group Work in Language Teaching	8
Advantages of Group Work	9
Increases Quantity of Language Involvement	9
Enhances Quality of Language Involvement	10
Provides Individualization of Learner Pace	11
The Affective Climate and Exploratory Talk	11



	Increases Motivation Among Learners	12
	A Psycholinguistic Rationale	13
	Community Language Learning	17
	Group Work and the KBSM English Language Programme	19
	Criteria for The Implementation of Group Work	22
	The Social Relations and Environment	23
	Communication	23
	Selection of Members and Tasks	24
	Group Leadership and Autonomy	25
	Group Development	26
III	METHODOLOGY	
	Sample	28
	Instrument	28
	Research Procedure	29
	Method of Data Analysis	29
	Developing Lesson Plans	29
	The Lesson Plan Format	30
	Organization of the Lesson Plan	31
IV	ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND SAMPLE LESSON PLANS	
	Analysis of Findings: Items in Questionnaire	34
	Discussion	47



**V SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS,
CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTED
LESSON PLANS**

Summary	49
Recommendations	50
Conclusion	54
Suggested Lesson Plans	55

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES



LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table		
1	Overall Teaching Experience	34
2	English Teaching Experience	35
3	Academic Qualification	36
4	Teacher Training	36
5	Familiarity With Group Work Techniques, Principles or Strategies	37
6	Exposure on the Knowledge of Group Work	38
7	Courses/Seminar Attended Related to Group Work	39
8	Effectiveness of Group Work	39
9	Possibility of Group Work Adding Variety to Teaching Techniques	40
10	Weaknesses/Problems the use of Group Work	41
11	Opinion of Group Work as Teaching Device	42
12	Opinion on Whether Students Find Group Work Interesting	42
13	Opinion on Whether Group Work Will Enhance Students' Language Abilities	43
14	Frequency of Using Group Work	44
15	Types of Group Work Use	45
16	Advantages of Group Work	46



**Abstract of project presented to the Faculty
of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Master of
Science**

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GROUP WORK IN ENHANCING
COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN SEMI-URBAN
SECONDARY ESL CLASSROOMS**

By

NIK ISMAIL HJ. HARUN

Supervisor : Encik Ghazali bin Kamarudin

Faculty : Faculty of Educational Studies

This project paper is an investigation on the use of group work in the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL). It is selected in view of the many advantages of group work and if fully exploited it can be an innovative strategy that can be effectively used in the ESL classrooms.

A short survey has been included in this project paper. It attempts to find out the use of group work in the ESL classrooms through the administration of a questionnaire. An analysis of the data showed that the majority of the respondents were receptive towards the use of group work. Hence, group work can be further exploited as an innovative strategy for the teaching of English.

In addition, it proposes five sample lesson plans that include several types of group work which can be used for teachings English for the KBSM Form Two classes. These sample lesson plans attempt to highlight the various types of group work and to give an insight to language teachers using group work in ESL classrooms.

Some suggestions and recommendations have also been included with the hope that teachers will give group work its due consideration in the teaching of English.



**Abstrak projek yang dikemukakan kepada
Fakulti Pengajian Pendidikan Universiti
Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi
sebahagian syarat bagi mendapatkan Ijazah
Master Sains**

**IMPLEMENTASI KERJA KUMPULAN DI DALAM
AKTIVITI KOMUNIKATIF KELAS BAHASA INGGERIS
DI SEKOLAH LUAR BANDAR**

Oleh

NIK ISMAIL HJ. HARUN

Penyelia : Encik Ghazali bin Kamarudin

Fakulti : Fakulti Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian ini mengenai penyelidikan tentang penggunaan kerja kumpulan di dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Ianya dipilih berdasarkan kebaikan kerja kumpulan serta strategi yang inovatif dan efektif yang dapat dijalankan di dalam bilik darjah.

Satu kajian ringkas telah dijalankan melalui borang soal selidik. Tujuannya untuk mengetahui pelaksanaan kerja kumpulan di dalam bilik darjah. Analisa data menunjukkan majoriti responden menerima aktiviti kerja kumpulan.

Lima cadangan rancangan pelajaran disertakan dengan beberapa aktiviti kerja kumpulan yang sesuai untuk digunakan bagi kelas Tingkatan Dua.

Cadangan dan pandangan disediakan dengan harapan guru-guru dapat menjalankan aktiviti ini dengan jayanya.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the KBSM curriculum has brought changes to the roles of teachers and students. These fundamental changes in the teaching-learning processes focus on the main goals of education as expressed in the National Education Philosophy. It stresses that education is a life-long effort towards the all round development of the individual.

The KBSM advocates a level of competence and accuracy in all aspects and levels of language. In the KBSM English Language Programme, the integration of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing is emphasized. The KBSM aims to produce competent and confident language users in the students. To realise this aim, the programme encourages teachers to adopt a wide variety of teaching strategies that will generate interest, motivation and stimulation in the students. If carefully selected and implemented, group work can prove to be a powerful and effective tool for teachers in the language classrooms. It is able to provide practice for developing the learner's mastery of the four language skills in an enjoyable and creative way. This will provide learners with the ability to communicate in a meaningful and effective way.



Teachers will play a significant role in contributing towards the success or failure of group work. Implementation of small group work is very challenging for the teacher. Kirwan and Swales (1981:69) of the Ministry of Education in Qatar, share this view in stating that "the establishment of group-work requires very careful development over a considerable time." Nystrand, Gamoran and Hick (1993:22) reiterate that "for group work to succeed, teachers must carefully design collaborative tasks that are interesting to students." Its implementation would require teachers to change their teaching styles and roles. Teachers who have so far been comfortable with teacher-dominated methods of teaching would have to make a drastic shift to teaching which is more student-focused if they were to adopt group work in their language classrooms. The teacher is thus a crucial factor in the successful implementation of group work in the ESL classroom. He has the responsibility of planning and teaching the lessons, taking into consideration his learners' needs and proficiencies, while maintaining to uphold the spirit of the KBSM programme.

Statement of the Problem

There is an abundance of benefits for the teaching of ESL to be found in group work. Group work, apart from being an invaluable pedagogical arrangement for language teaching, is also useful for developing the emotional, social and cognitive awareness of learners. Group work can help in the problem of reticence among learners in the ESL classrooms. Close (1992:68) claims that "groups were a place where students gain confidence in their ideas, where they could work out confusions and share puzzlements."

However, some teachers do not seem to realise all the benefits of group work and regrettably, group work is not skilfully carried out in many language classrooms. They seem to feel that group work is difficult to carry out and not appropriate for use in the large Malaysian ESL classrooms. In their ignorance, they may assume that the learners would not benefit and understand, let alone enjoy group work.

Another reason why group work has not been fully exploited as an innovative strategy for language teaching may be the many beliefs that teachers have continued to assume. Group work has been thought to create a noisy environment where discipline is poor. It has also been thought that its success lies only with the good students, and the weaker students will inevitably use the native language during their discussion sessions. Many pictured it as a noisy, chaotic and purposeless activity (Kirwan and Swales, 1981:66).

Still another reason for the lack of emphasis in using group work in the language classrooms could be the teachers' lack of knowledge and training in this area. Teachers who have not been exposed to the different types of group work and the techniques of teaching English using group work may not be able to see the true potential of group work. Only when they are given the proper training will they be able to experience the many benefits of group work.

With the present importance placed on developing communicative skills, there is a need not only to expose teachers to the advantages of using group work in language teaching, but also the activities they can create for language learning using group work.

Objectives of the Study

This study attempts to:

- a) Find out teachers' responses towards the use of group work in the English language classrooms.
- b) Reveal their knowledge of group work in language teaching.
- c) Advocate the use of group work in the teaching of ESL by proposing the many benefits of group work.
- d) Discuss how group work can be used in various approaches to language teaching to develop the four language skills and how group work can be integrated in the KBSM English programme.
- e) Instil a greater awareness of the importance of group work among teachers as well as expose them to guidelines on the various types and techniques of effective group work and to give five sample lessons which incorporate group work.

Limitations of the Study

This project paper involves a library research and a survey. The library research aims to find out how group work can be used in the ESL classrooms and to offer suggestions for its use. The survey is conducted

in order to get some insights into the teachers' responses towards the extent of their use of group work in language teaching. It also aims to examine their knowledge about group work and the types of training that they have undergone in relation to group work.

Twenty teachers from four schools in Jerantut, Pahang have been selected. This sampling is too small for the results to be generalised for all teachers. Moreover, only a set of twelve questions have been drawn for the survey. This is a small number and it therefore limits the findings to this number. Also, this study only examines teachers' responses at a particular point in time. It is only as good as their conscientiousness in responding to the questionnaire. Non-committal statements will affect findings.

Definition of Terms

Groupwork

Gibb (1969) in Sharan and Sharan (1976) states that group work is:

an activity performed by a group of interdependent individuals with mutual relatedness and a common goal.

(1976:6)

The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics defines group work as:

a learning activity which involves a small group of learners working together. The group may work on a single task, or as different parts

of a large task. Tasks for group members are often selected by the members of the group.

(1987:127)

Brumfit (1988:72) believes group work to be:

a task performed by a number of people who interact with one another, who are psychologically aware of one another, and who perceive themselves to be a group.

(Spratt, 1958:9; Schein, 1965:81;
(Handy, 1976:145-6)

Other definitions of group work are from Jacques (1991), Nation (1989), Byrne (1987) and Savova and Donato (1991). Jacques (1991:13) maintains that group work involves a task by a collection of people who possess the following qualities: shared aims, needs, interdependence, cohesiveness and interaction.

Byrne (1987:76) is of the school of thought that believe that group work involves a group of several students coordinating together to perform the activities. It is largely an autonomous unit.

Likewise, Nation (1989:20) feels that group work must include the learning goals, the task, the way information is distributed, the physical arrangement of the group and a positive social relationship between the members of the group.

An almost similar definition of group work is given by Savova and Donato (1991:13) who feel that group work implies face to face communication in performing a task. Learners "work towards a common goal" and establish "positive interdependence."

The definitions of group work given above are a mere sample of the numerous definitions that have been made about group work. From the various definitions given, certain aspects of group work may be gleaned. Generally, group work can be said to be a learning activity that involves a small group of learners having a common goal and shared interest. They interact, exchange views and display interdependence among themselves. A positive social climate further promotes and facilitates the advancement of the group towards accomplishing their task.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

The position of the English language in Malaysia is that of a second language. This implies that it has an "official status or a recognised function" (Stern, 1983:16) within the country, that it is a "non-native language learnt and used within" the country (Stern 1983:16) and that it is "for full participation in the political and economic life of the nation" (Paulston, 1974:12-13) or for education.



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Group Work in Language Teaching

The idea of using group work in language teaching is not a new phenomenon. In fact, Long and Porter (1985:207) state that the "use of group work in classroom second language learning has long been recommended by methodologists." To them, group work "has been supported by sound pedagogical arguments" and has also taken on a recent "psycholinguistic significance" in the second language classroom (Long and Porter, 1985:207). Due to these implicit values of group work in language teaching and learning, Long and Porter advocate the greater use of group work in language teaching.

Similarly, Paul Nation (1989:20), a lecturer and teacher trainer in ESL at Victoria University in New Zealand, also contends that group work provides opportunities for learners to obtain maximum exposure to "language that they can understand (negotiate comprehensible input) and which contains unknown items for them to learn."

Besides this psycholinguistic value of group work, he also outlines various other contributions that group work has made in second language learning. In fact, much research has been done on the effectiveness of using group work in the teaching of language. Many researchers and teachers alike support the inclusion of group work in language teaching citing several advantages.



Advantages of Group Work

Long and Porter (1985) provide the framework to show the possible advantages of using group work in second language learning. They state six advantages, namely:

Increases Quantity of Language Involvement

Among the many main reasons for the low achievement of many learners in the Malaysian English language classrooms is that they do not have enough time and opportunity to practice the new language. This is made worse in "large ESL classes in which students need to develop the aural-oral skills" (Long and Porter, 1985:208). Group work, if skilfully organized, is able to display significant increase in language practice opportunities. Observational studies of classrooms carried out by Long and Porter testify that "individual practice time" for each student, while group work is being administered, shows an "increase of over 500 percent" (Long and Porter, 1985:208). Group work may not be able to solve problems entirely but it can certainly help with its "greater intensity of language involvement" (Long and Porter, 1985:208).

Brumfit shares this view that group work in language teaching can "massively increase the likelihood of students both producing and receiving language" (Brumfit, 1988:75). This will contribute considerably to both the cognitive and affective development of the learner as group cooperativeness could "increase commitment to learning" (Brumfit, 1988:75).

Along a similar vein, Smagorinsky and Fly (1994:54) reiterate this by stating that small interaction among students will enable them to teach and learn from each other besides promoting a pedagogically sound environment for language production.

Enhances Quality of Language Involvement

Language skills, once learned, can be developed and improved with practice. Teachers who gradually introduce opportunities into their lessons for language practice will find their efforts well rewarded. Group work, if well administered, not only increases the quantity of talk but its quality too. Group work promotes conversational skills needed outside the classroom where "accuracy is often important but communicative ability is always at a premium" (Long and Porter, 1985:209).

Brumfit (1988:77) provides further evidence to this value of group work by stating that "group work provides greater intensity of involvement, so that the quality of language practice is increased, and the opportunities for feedback and monitoring also."

Provides Individualization of Learner Pace

Unlike the traditional teacher-fronted classrooms, the inclusion of group work is able to accommodate the different working pace of individuals. Having considered individual differences, a group therefore is "able to develop greater autonomy and independence in the learning process" (Ruth Wajnryb, 1987:22). This implicit value of group work



will find a stronghold in the ESL classrooms. The KBSM, in particular, has tried to provide a range of teaching and learning styles to suit differing abilities and levels of proficiencies (Compendium, 1989:v).

Brumfit, who has done extensive researches on the issue, summarises this argument:

... placing students in groups assists individualisation, for each group, being limited by its own capacities, determines its appropriate level of working more precisely than can a class working in lock-step, with its large numbers.

(Brumfit, 1988:77)

The Affective Climate and Exploratory Talk

A positive affective climate, made possible through group work, reduces the stress on the learner by moving interaction away from the "public arena of the lock-step classroom" (Long and Porter, 1985:211). The students in ESL classrooms, especially the shy and insecure, experience considerable stress when called upon to express themselves. In contrast to this public atmosphere of lock-step instruction, a "small group of peers provides a relatively intimate setting and usually a more supportive environment in which to try out embryonic SL skills" (Long and Porter, 1985:211).

Barnes (1973:19) offers further support for this argument when he writes this of small-group setting:

an intimate group allows us to be relatively inexplicit and incoherent to change direction in the middle of a sentence, to be uncertain and self contradictory... our confidence in our friends allows us to take the first groping steps towards sorting out our thoughts and feelings.

(Barnes, 1973:19)

The improved group dynamics allows for the phenomenon of "exploratory talk" (Barnes, 1973:19) among peers, something which is impossible in the large Malaysian ESL classrooms. In exploratory talk, the learner is allowed to focus on the meaning rather than the form of his spoken message. With this inhibition of being monitored removed, the learner is allowed greater freedom to use language. Hence, group work promotes a positive affective climate which allows the development of communicative strategies for which the Malaysian aural-oral classes are trying to prepare their learners.

Increases Motivation Among Learners

Motivating students remains as one of the main challenges that teachers constantly face in the ESL classrooms. Group work has much to offer in the wake of this problem. Long and Porter (1985:212) affirm this fact when they write that "group work motivates the classroom learner" with the "variety" group work introduces into the lesson.

Sharan and Sharan (1976:11), a highly experienced specialist in teaching and a social psychologist respectively, offer further support by stating that "the personal contact made possible by the small group, and the range of different abilities, motivate group members to work together and enable them to solve problems they could not have solved alone" (Sharan and Sharan, 1976:11). Groups have distinct advantages over individuals in solving problems. Through discussions and brain storming, learners can deal with them from more points of view and in a shorter period of time.

Colin Retter (1980:11), an experienced EFL teacher, agrees that learners are motivated by group work because they enjoy it. Group work offers them a refreshing change from the traditional teacher-fronted classrooms.

A Psycholinguistic Rationale

Recent evidence from second language acquisition research on group work in second language teaching (Long and Porter, 1985) has added to the methodological value of group work. In their findings, it was revealed that small groups of second language learners who are engaged in a two-way communicative task, that is, a task requiring information exchange by all parties in the group, are able to generate a significant increase in the quality of negotiation and repair in interlanguage talk as compared to teacher-fronted, whole class settings (Long and Porter, 1985:213). In their research, it was concluded that group work provides more "individual language practice" opportunities

and the range of functions practised is wider. They argue that the small group provides opportunities for students to engage in more negotiation for meaning.

A similar view is taken by Nation (1989) who claims that group work provides an avenue for learners to be exposed to language which they can understand, which he termed "comprehensible input". According to Paul Nation, group work allows the learners the "opportunity to negotiate comprehensible input" through the use of plausible communication strategies used to check and control the input (Nation, 1989:20).

Besides these pedagogical arguments for group work, other advantages cited include the social and emotional effects generated through it. Aronson and Lucker cited in Nation (1989) purport that working in groups improve the "social relationships" of learners. A similar view is taken by Slavin cited in Nation (1989:22) when he states that learners improve their "social relationships" in group work, including learners from different ethnic backgrounds.

Group work also enables the participants to learn more about themselves as individuals, group members and members of the society (Rogers, 1979:viii). Group work allows individuals to learn something vital that they would probably not encounter otherwise. Richardson cited in Rogers (1979:vi) points out that group work provides students with the opportunity to gain some self knowledge rather than just language knowledge. Group work encourages students' involvement in learning within a social context (Rogers, 1979:vi).

In light of the wide range of advantages that group work offers, it is therefore strongly advocated by methodologists and researchers. Group work holds much promise if used thoughtfully and appropriately. It promises to serve as a major alternative, in the ESL classrooms, to the traditional receptive learning which continues to bore many learners and teachers today.

Group Work and the Various Approaches to Language Learning

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has communicative competence as its desired goal. It is based on the idea that language is basically for communication. It aims at developing the communicative competence in learners which "involves being able to use the language appropriate to a given social context" (Freeman, 1986:131). This view is further clarified by Widdowson (1978:2) where he states that when we acquire a language, we do not only learn how to "compose and comprehend correct sentences as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence", we also learn how to use sentences appropriately to achieve a communicative purpose.

Brown (1987:213), a lecturer of language teaching, summarises the main characteristics of this approach which include having communicative competence as the classroom goal and not merely linguistic competence. As a result, function and not form serves as the framework through which forms are taught. In the event of a successful communication, "fluency"

is stressed over "accuracy" as the ultimate aim is receiving intended meaning. To achieve these aims, students are to use the language in the communicative classroom productively and receptively.

As a result, group work has been strongly advocated as fluency work will be maximised with its careful implementation. Brumfit (1988:78) adds, "because small groups stimulate natural conversational settings more closely than any other mode of classroom organisation, it will combine most effectively all aspects of communication, learning and human interaction." A language user who is fluent and accurate would be facilitated by the use of communicative activities (Brumfit, 1988:78).

Communicative activities performed in groups allow natural learning to take place, for many aspects of language learning can take place through natural processes while the learner is involved in using the language for communication. Communicative group work serves as an integral part of the total learning process. It creates a context which supports learning. Littlewood (1981:43) shares this view by stating that communicative activities performed in groups allow opportunities for positive personal relationships to grow among learners and between learners and teachers. These relationships can help to "humanise" the classroom and to create "an environment" that supports the individual in his effort to learn. As a result, methodologists advocating this approach have suggested group work as the alternative classroom arrangement and activities include role play, simulation, communicative games, drama, problem solving tasks, discussions and brain storming sessions.