Effects of Implementing Cooperative Learning Method (CLM) on Eleventh Graders' Paragraph Writing

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental study probed the effects of implementing cooperative learning method (CLM) on paragraph writing in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. The participants of the study were grade 11 students at Yekatit 12 Preparatory School, Ethiopia. The CLM (experimental) group was taught paragraph writing skills in line with the principles of cooperative learning. The traditional learning method (control) group was not instructed to practice composing paragraphs using CLM. Pre- and post-tests were used on a paragraph writing task. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. In addition, the selected participants from the experimental group were interviewed. Their responses were video recorded and analysed qualitatively to learn their feelings about the effects of implementing CLM in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class. The results of the study after the intervention indicated that the experimental group significantly outscored the control group ($p<0.05$) on a paragraph writing post-test with regard to content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. The focus group interview results also showed that the experimental group participants preferred to use CLM to traditional learning methods. Finally, it was concluded that implementing CLM in an EFL class helped the experimental group participants compose better paragraphs in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. On the basis of these findings and conclusions, a careful employment of CLM during paragraph writing stages was suggested as a pedagogical implication.

Keywords: cooperative learning method, writing skills, traditional learning, Ethiopia

Introduction

Recent studies in the field of language teaching accentuate the importance of the learning process and the central role of students (Leila, 2010). This situation is realized, among other things, when students are provided opportunities to learn cooperatively. In this regard, Richards and Rodgers (2001) contend that traditional learning methods, which do not focus on the learning process and the central role of students, is a teacher-fronted approach that fosters competition rather than cooperation. This is because, 70% of class time is being used by the teacher while the students are sitting and listening passively (Cuban, 1983). Rutherford and Stuart (1978) showed that this kind of teaching can lead to a decrease in students' attention as lectures progress.

When there is a shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach, teacher talk is generally reduced by around 50%, and the extra time can be spent praising and aiding students in their exchange of ideas. Thus, in cooperative classrooms, students remain in charge of their own discoveries and can become truly excited about the learning process (Vermette, 1998).

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Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) argued that cooperative learning method (CLM) is clearly based on theory which has been validated by research and operationalized on the basis of the procedures that educators use. When students are motivated to help one another in the process of learning, a stage for cognitive development is created. In this regard, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that cooperation promotes learning because the process of cooperation during learning enables students to operate within one another's Zones of Proximal Development.

Working with peers has academic benefits because it enables students to comprehend things more easily than solely listening to an explanation given by a person at a different stage of development than the learners themselves. Similarly, Hirst and Sinclair (1989) explained that when students or tutees seek out peer help, they receive individualized instruction and more focused teaching; they may also respond better to their peers than their teachers, and they can build relationships with their tutors. Moreover, Krashen and Terrel (1983) indicated that input from CLM is likely to be comprehensible and contributes to second or first language learning as group members' language levels may be roughly equal. This, according to Krashen and Terrel, facilitates learning which results in higher levels of understanding and reasoning, the development of critical thinking, and a possible increase in the accuracy of long-term retention.

Students sometimes experience stabilization, i.e., incorrect linguistic features which become a permanent part of the way students speak or write a language despite further exposure or instruction. Aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary usage, and grammar may become fixed or stabilized in SL/FL learning. Stabilized features of pronunciation contribute to a student's unique accent that may differ from that of a native speaker of the target language. Some researchers are skeptical of the existence of true fossilization, which implies the impossibility of future change, and prefer the term stabilization (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). As a solution to the problem of fossilization, Santiago (2010) suggested that constant exposure to input, sufficient opportunities to use the target language, and the enhancing role of the teacher to guide and give corrective feedback are necessary; additionally, a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom can prevent or at least minimise fossilization. The solution suggested by Santiago seems to be realized when students are allowed to learn cooperatively. Bruner (1978) also added that if a task is beyond learners' levels of understanding that they should be provided with scaffolding as cognitive support by their teachers to help them solve tasks that they may not be able to solve while working on their own.

Recognizing the value of cooperative learning, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education issued the National Education Policy (1994), which require teachers to practice group work and student-centred teaching. Specifically, teachers are asked to implement the Learning Together Method (LTM) or One-to-Five Learning Method (OFLM). This is a type of cooperative learning or peer-collaboration method which engages students in working two to five heterogeneous member groups on a given task to accomplish mutual learning goals. Teammates work on academic and social tasks that involve them preparing a single team product to which all contribute and receive praise or rewards based on the group product. This method emphasizes team-building activities before students begin working together. As such, LTM/ OFLM includes the elements of Cooperative Learning. However, the appropriate implementation of LTM/ OFLM in classrooms in Ethiopia have encountered several problems, due mostly to teachers' lack of training. Ambaye (1999) found that many teachers in Ethiopia lack the critical determination of effective teaching; that is, they lack the pedagogical content knowledge and motivation although they are in the front line of education reform programmes. Ambaye further explained that teachers in the current training institutes of Ethiopia predominantly use conventional/traditional types of teaching methods that they are familiar to them perhaps even the ones that they themselves experienced when they were students at schools. Some studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of CLM in Ethiopia. For example, Seid (2012) investigated the effects of CLM on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading comprehension achievement and the social skills of tenth graders. Seifu (2005) assessed group activities in grade nine English textbooks whether or not they promoted cooperative learning focusing on speaking skills. To the best of my knowledge, no studies have been carried out to identify the effects of implementing CLM on eleventh graders' paragraph writing in line with content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. This

paper aims to fill this gap. Its results may be relevant to practical classroom application. Probing the issue may help students to fill a gap in paragraph writing skills and to help them skilfully juxtapose appropriate content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics in their compositions.

Specifically, the present study attempts to examine whether or not CLM could help the experimental group compose appropriate paragraphs in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. To this end, the researcher used pre- and post-tests on a paragraph writing task to measure learners' improvements in writing paragraphs before and after the interventions.

CLM versus Traditional Learning Methods

Though some English language teachers believe that they use CLM in their classes, they may not find its implementation as simple as what the literature suggests. The secret lies in the differentiating features between CLM and traditional learning methods. Some distinguishing features adapted from Kessler (1992), Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991), and McDonnell (1992) are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Differences between CLM and Traditional Learning Methods

CLM	Traditional learning methods
Teamwork skills are emphasized.	Focus on practicing drills without team work.
Members are taught collaborative skills and expected to use them.	Few are appointed or put in charge of the group.
Leadership is shared by all members.	
Structuring of the procedures and time for processing.	Rare structuring of procedures and time for processing.
Teachers are facilitators, observers, change agents, advisers and supporters.	Teachers are controllers and authorities.
Group as well as individual accomplishments are rewarded.	Group members compete with each other and withhold information "If you succeed, I will lose". So, only individual accomplishments are rewarded.
Students analyse how well their groups are functioning; how well they are using the appropriate social skills, and how to improve the quality of their work together.	No processing of how well the groups is functioning or how to improve the quality of the work together.

Effects of CLM on Writing Skills

Several studies have looked into the effects of CLM on students' writing skills (Chatupote, Nudee, & Teo, 2010; Kitchakarn, 2012; Najar, 2012). These studies indicate that students who learned writing through CLM achieved a higher level of writing ability than those who studied through traditional learning methods. Ismail and Maasum's (2009) research findings also showed that CLM could enhance writing performance in terms of form. The present study bears a resemblance to Ismail and Maasum's (2009) study, but differs significantly in context, methodology, and variables considered. These researchers studied low proficiency students in Malaysia while the participants of this study are preparatory students (grade 11) with diverse proficiency levels at Yekatit 12 in Ethiopia.

According to Li and Lam (2005), CLM may have the following effects: teachers can gain insights on the purposes of employing it in EFL classes; students who come from different English language backgrounds can learn to cooperate with one another, not only in EFL classrooms, but also in their daily lives; students can learn to understand the issues related to CLM that can have an impact on their writing achievements; policy and other

educational decision making authorities can create feasible policies that promote its implementation; and interested researchers can gain inspiration in studying the same or related topics further.

As education is a means of development and eradicating poverty in developing countries like Ethiopia, the needs of a society should be reflected in the educational objectives of a particular country (Ministry of Education, 2002). To this end, the New Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia has given due emphasis to active learning (Ministry of Education, 1994). Active learning is a learning strategy that provides students with opportunities for meaningful talking, listening, writing, reading, and reflection on the content, ideas, issues, and concerns of an academic subject (Meyers & Jones, 1993). CLM, according to Johnson and Johnson (1990), focuses on active interactions among students while working together on a given task. Furthermore, Peter and Daniel (2002) argued that cooperative and collaborative learning are two approaches to active learning using groups or teams. So, it is possible to say that CLM is a subset of active learning.

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to look into the effects of implementing CLM in English writing class on grade 11 students at Yekatit 12 Preparatory School. The main focus is to look into whether CLM can help students to write better paragraphs. Quasi-experimental research was conducted to achieve this goal. As mentioned above, this study examined intra- and inter-group comparisons between the control and experimental groups overall results in content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. Thus, the study endeavors to address to the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on paragraph writing post-test in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics?
2. What are the students' perceptions about the effects of implementing CLM while writing assorted paragraphs in the EFL class?

Methodology

Participants

In Yekatit 12 Preparatory School, in the 2014 academic year, there were six EFL teachers teaching eleventh graders in 18 different sections. Of these EFL teachers, one was selected randomly and invited to participate in the research. The teacher taught two sections of eleventh graders and the participants in the two sections were given a paragraph writing pre-test. Out of these 96 students in these sections, only 86 students responded appropriately to the pre-test and thus only these were put into the experimental group and the control groups (43 in each group). Almost all the participants were between 17 and 19 years old. All had studied English for eleven years, beginning from the first year of schooling. They use English primarily for academic studies (particularly from grade seven) and learn it as a subject. The experiment was carried out with the agreement of the classroom teacher, students, and the school directors.

Tasks and Materials

For the Teacher

The teacher that taught the selected sections was offered training on CLM as their awareness of the method might have an influence on the results of the quasi-experimental study. For a week prior to the intervention the teacher was provided training with the definition of cooperative learning (CL), elements of CLM, the necessity of teaching social skills, the formation of CL groups, types of CL groups, teachers' and students' roles in this type of EFL class, kinds of CLM, and the benefits and drawbacks of CLM. The researcher gave the training on the basis of their own knowledge of CLM from the literature and experiences teaching EFL classes. For the training, the researcher referred to the following books: *Cooperation and Competition: Theory and Research* by Johnson

& Johnson (1989); *What is Cooperative Learning?* by Johnson & Johnson (1990); *CL: Integrating Theory and Practices* by Gillies (2007); *A practical Guide to CL* by Slavin (1994); *Research on CL and Achievement: What we Know, What we Need to Know* by Slavin (1996); *Enhancing Teaching and Learning through CL* by Kirk (2005); *An Experimental Study to Evaluate the Effectiveness of CL versus Traditional Learning Methods* by Khan (2008); *Applying CL to English Teaching for EFL Students* by Xiaoshuang (2011); and *Ability Grouping* by Bainbridge (2014).

For the Students

Tests which take many forms provide a way to assess participants' knowledge and capacity to apply this knowledge to new situations. They may require respondents to choose among alternatives, produce short answers, or write extended responses (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Considering Guba and Lincoln's (1981) ideas, the researcher administered pre- and post-tests for the experimental and control groups to gauge their paragraph writing skills. The paragraph writing tests were adapted from Brenda (1997). The tests were comprised of four different types of topics and the participants were asked to choose and write on any two topics. The paragraphs were marked based on content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. The reliability of the paragraph writing tests was calculated using the split-half method. The reliability coefficient was 0.81 for the pre-test and 0.77 for the post-test.

In the pre-test (see Appendix A), students were asked to compose a text on the following topics: narrating a joyful or painful event, describing their favourite relative, explaining their favourite TV show, and arguing against or for the implementation of capital punishment. The topics were assumed to be familiar with all the participants as they are related to the participants' day to day lives. Their papers were marked by the researcher. Learners who achieved similar results were randomly assigned into experimental and control groups in their intact classes.

After the pre-test, eight writing tasks meant for practice, in addition to the pre- and post-writing tests, were given to each group at different times. The participants in the experimental group were taught paragraph writing activities with the lesson plans prepared by the researcher based on the following:

- It involves the explicit teaching of social skills necessary for group functioning.
- It emphasises team-building activities before students begin working together.
- It should be continuous with the curriculum rather than an isolated add-on and engage students in exploring and applying the content currently being taught.
- Each group works on the same task simultaneously and pools its resources. Only one completed activity sheet is submitted from the group. Each student within the group makes his/her own verbal/written contribution to the given activity.
- Students are assigned specific roles (tasks) in order to facilitate the smooth running of the group work.
- Students are given the opportunity to reflect on and self-evaluate their own helpful and unhelpful behaviours during cooperative group work. (as cited in Kirk, 2005, p. 18)

Participants in the control group, on the other hand, were given the same writing activities via a traditional learning method, which was non-CL. The lesson plans were prepared by the subject teacher based on the course textbook and teacher guide. The time given for discussions and composing a paragraph to each group was equal, i.e., 25 minutes for discussions and 15 minutes for composing a paragraph.

The experiment was conducted over two months. After the treatment, a paragraph writing post-test (see Appendix B) was administered. The post-test also consisted of four items whose contents were similar to the issues raised in the pre-test and the participants were again asked to write on any two topics. The aim of the paragraph writing post-test was to weigh the possible effects on the experimental group's writing after the intervention.

Two teachers with MA degrees in English corrected each of the groups' compositions. They were asked to rate the students' paragraphs for content, vocabulary, layout, grammar and mechanics on a scale of 0–4 for each

category, making it a total of 20 points for each paragraph. After the two teachers had finished marking the students' papers, the researcher then compared the ratings given by the teachers to each student. When the ratings were similar, they were recorded as the final rating. When there were differences, the researcher took the average of the two ratings. The two teachers' ratings had a correlation of 0.81 for the pre-test. Since this indicated that their ratings had an acceptable degree of agreement, the same teachers were asked to rate the post-test paragraphs in the same procedure.

Focus Group Interview

Six randomly selected participants (two high, two average, and two lower achievers) from the experimental group were interviewed by the researcher (see Appendix C). They were interviewed whether or not the effects of implementing CLM helped them improve their paragraph writing in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics; they were asked why they could say 'yes' or 'no' to the question posed. The final question that the researcher raised was if they encountered any problems while writing paragraphs through CLM and if their answer was 'yes', they were asked to suggest some solutions in connection with the problems. The focus group interviews were conducted for twenty minutes after the paragraph writing post-test had been administered and responses were video recorded to analyse the content validity.

Analytical Procedure

The participants' paragraph writing pre- and post-test results were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for Windows, i.e., their inter- and intra-group comparisons were analysed through independent and paired samples t-tests respectively.

Findings

To measure the participants' skills in paragraph writing in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics, the results from the pre-test and post-tests were compared. The effect size was measured using Cohen's d index of effect size formula to see how strong the relationship between the variables was (Cohen, 1988). Coe (2002) and Elis (2010) showed that the difference between two groups is calculated by subtracting the mean of one group from the other (M1-M2) and dividing the result by the standard deviation of the population from which the groups were sampled. In this study, Cohen (1988) showed the degrees of effect sizes as 0 - 0.20 = weak, 0.21 - 0.50 = modest, 0.51 - 1.00= moderate and > 1.00 = strong. The results and analyses of the tests are provided in the next section.

Table 2

Differences between the Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups on Paragraph Writing Pre-Test and Independent Samples T-Test for Equality of Means

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Max	Min	Range	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	9.54	2.11	.322	16	5	11	-.389	84	.698
Experimental	9.70	1.75	.267	16	7	9			

Notes. alpha > 0.05 ; N = 86

Table 2 presents a comparison between the mean gain scores of the experimental and control groups on the paragraph writing pre-test. The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that the mean score of the control group on the paragraph writing pre-test was 9.54 and that of the experimental group was 9.70. The table also

shows that the standard deviation of paragraph writing scores for the control and experimental groups were 2.11 and 1.75 respectively. The maximum and minimum ranges for both groups were 11 and 9 respectively. The independent samples t-test reveals that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean gain scores of the control and experimental groups on the paragraph writing pre-test at 0.05 alpha level. The effect size for this comparison was 0.08 which indicates that the difference that existed between the two groups paragraph writing pre-test scores was insignificant. This indicates that the participants in both groups were at the same level in paragraph writing skills at the onset of this research.

Table 3
Differences between the Mean Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups on Paragraph Writing Post-Test and Independent Samples T-Test for Equality of Means

Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Max	Min	Range	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	9.72	2.44	.373	17	5	12			
Experimental	11.63	2.13	.324	17	9	8	-3.860	84	.000

Notes. Alpha < 0.05; N= 86

As can be seen in Table 3, the mean score of the control group is 9.72 (std. 2.44) whereas the mean score of the experimental group is greater, at 11.63 (std. 2.13). Their maximum and minimum ranges are also different. The independent samples t-test shows that the p value was .000 which was lower than the alpha value (0.05). Hence, the t-test for equality of means shows that there was a significant difference between the participants of the control and experimental groups on the paragraph writing post-test. The effect size, i.e., 1.03, shows that the extent of the difference between the two groups in achievement on the paragraph writing post-test was strong. Thus, it could be understood that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test. The difference may be a result of the treatment offered to the experimental group.

Next, I show the comparison between the control and experimental groups' paragraph writing pre- and post-tests in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics.

As demonstrated in Table 4, the mean scores of the students in the control group on composite paragraph writing pre-post tests were slightly different. Table 4 shows that the mean score for the composite pre-test was 9.54 whereas that of the composite post-test was 9.72. The standard deviation (SD) of the composite post-test for the participants in the control group was slightly higher than their own scores in the composite pre-test. This indicates that there were gaps in the participants' scores on the post-test. Table 4 also depicts a comparison of the means scored by the participants in the control group in terms of the content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics of the paragraph writing pre-and post-tests. The figures in the composite pre-post-test, i.e., t=.928, df=42, p=.358 reveal that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean gain scores of the control group on paragraph writing pre-post-tests in terms of the said components. The effect size between the composite pre- and post-tests of the control group was 0.07 which shows that the difference was trivial.

Table 5 reveals the mean scores of the paragraph writing pre-post-tests in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics of the experimental group. The experimental group mean scores on composite pre- and post-tests were 9.70 and 11.63. All components in the table reflect higher scores in the post-test than in the pre-test. The SD also indicates that the participants' post-test scores were mostly greater than that of the pre-test. Hence, the experimental group's paragraph writing pre-post mean scores were different. The table also shows a comparison of the means scored by the participants in the experimental group in line with the composite pre-post-tests and other components of paragraph writing pre-post-tests. The figures in the table, i.e., t=-2.439, df=42, p=.009; t=-3.597, df= 42, p=.001; t=-2.630, df=42, p= .012; t=-2.986, df=42, p=.005; t=-3.532, df=42, p=.001; and t=-10.521, df=42, p=.000 reveal that there were statistically significant differences among the mean scores of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, mechanics, and composite pre-post-tests of the experimental

group respectively. The effect size of the composite paragraph writing pre-post-test was 1, which shows that the difference between the pre-post-tests was strong.

Table 4
Differences between the Mean Scores of the Control Group Pre- and Post Tests and Paired Samples T-Test for Equality of Means

Variables	Tests	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Content	Pre-test	1.84	.58	.088	-.725	42	.472
	Post-test	1.96	.98	.149			
Vocabulary	Pre-test	2.02	.831	.127	.206	42	.838
	Post-test	2.00	.817	.125			
Layout	Pre-test	1.93	.55	.084	-.206	42	.838
	Post-test	1.95	.69	.105			
Grammar	Pre-test	1.98	.51	.093	.172	42	.864
	Post-test	1.95	.79	.120			
Mechanics	Pre-test	1.77	.61	.093	-.892	42	.377
	Post-test	1.86	.74	.113			
Composite	Pre-test	1.86	.74	.113	-.928	42	.358
	Post-test	9.54	2.11	.322			

Notes. alpha > 0.05; N=43

Table 5
Differences between the Mean Scores of the Experimental Group on Content, Vocabulary, Layout, Grammar and Mechanics Pre- and Post Tests and Paired Samples T-Test for Equality of Means

Variables	Tests	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Content	Pre-test	1.88	.70	.106	-2.439	42	.019
	Post-test	2.26	.88	.134			
Vocabulary	Pre-test	1.81	.66	.101	-3.597	42	.001
	Post-test	2.23	.68	.104			
Layout	Pre-test	2.07	.67	.102	-2.630	42	.012
	Post-test	2.42	.73	.111			
Grammar	Pre-test	1.98	.51	.078	-2.986	42	.005
	Post-test	2.35	.65	.099			
Mechanics	Pre-test	2.00	.62	.094	-3.532	42	.001
	Post-test	2.37	.58	.088			
Composite	Pre-test	9.70	1.75	.267	-10.521	42	.000
	Post-test	11.63	2.13	.324			

Notes. alpha < 0.05; N = 43

Participants' Views about the Effects of Implementing CL during Paragraph Writing Activities

Six randomly selected participants (2 high, 2 average, and 2 lower achievers based on their post-test results from the experimental group) were asked whether or not the effects of implementing CLM helped them compose better paragraphs with a focus on content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. They were also asked to justify why they said 'yes' or 'no' to the question posed. In addition, they were asked if they encountered any problems while writing paragraphs through CLM and if their answer was 'yes', they were asked to suggest solutions to the problems.

All the interviewees unanimously agreed on the usefulness of CLM to practice writing assorted paragraphs because the method helped them exercise social skills and generate ideas better than the traditional learning method, which was non-CL. The respondents mentioned that they sometimes encountered problems while writing paragraphs cooperatively. The main problems that they raised were some students' dependency on more competent students, disagreements among members of the group and unfamiliarity with the method. As solutions to these problems, they suggested that elements of CL and a mixed ability grouping system had to be practiced appropriately. Moreover, the teacher intervened and offered support to the students who were writing paragraphs in their respective teams. This helped them to develop confidence that might, in turn, help them not to be dependent.

Discussion

This study shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of both groups on the paragraph writing post-test in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics at 0.05 alpha level. This difference occurred possibly because the method used by the experimental group during the intervention was more effective than that of the control group in developing these skills. Students also seemed to have positive reaction to CLM, although they also pointed out some important issues that teachers can take into consideration when implementing CLM.

The study was limited to one preparatory school in which one grade level and only two sections of this grade were used for the study; so, generalizing the findings of this research to other settings may be difficult. In addition, during the data collection, the teacher and the students in the experimental and control groups were observed by the researcher, which may have affected the results. Finally, as the study was a quasi-experimental research design, it was challenging for the researcher to control all of the extraneous variables that potentially threatened the study's internal validity during the intervention.

Nonetheless, the findings show that CLM resulted in significantly positive outcomes after it had been implemented to teach paragraph writing skills. The participants in this study gained the benefits of the method and improved their paragraph writing skills. These findings are consistent with the previous research conducted by Adeyemi (2008), which revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in writing skills with the experimental group after implementing CLM in a writing class. Furthermore, the findings seem to be in agreement with Sirikhun (2000) and Ismail and Maasum (2009). Their studies show improvements in student achievement after learning writing skills through CLM. They indicate that the students performed better in the post-test as compared to the pre-test after the inclusion of CLM in the writing class.

The experimental group participants outperformed the control group participants on the paragraph writing post-test perhaps because they practiced composing different paragraphs via CLM. Furthermore, the method created more frequent interactive and supportive learning environments within which learners had the chance to ask questions, organize ideas, and decide the best concepts to help them produce better compositions. The interviewees in the experimental group witnessed that employing CLM was a great help for them in composing better paragraphs in terms of the investigated components. Their responses also support the statistical findings reported earlier.

Sociocultural theorists have suggested that when students perform a given task cooperatively, they can operate within one another's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The social interdependent theorist

Lewin (1948) also argued that the CLM encourages students to help their classmates succeed, contrary to competitive and individualistic learning methods. To this end, group members encourage other group members to exert a maximum amount of effort in their learning. This kind of learning among the participants in the experimental group enabled them to augment their paragraph writing skills in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, the policy to implement group work in Ethiopia has encountered some important problems. To alleviate or possibly circumvent these problems, CLM should be used because it provides the students with: (a) the opportunity for reviewing what they have written as peer criticism aids them sharpening their knowledge about paragraph structures and grammatical rules, (b) awareness of group formation systems and the elements of CL, and (c) the chance of evaluating their own work. This can help them to demonstrate more confidence in writing assorted paragraphs and help to decrease their apprehension towards learning writing skills. Thus, making traditional learning methods cooperative in EFL classes will be of great benefit to them to boost paragraph writing skills in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics.

This study showed that implementing CLM in an EFL class had positive effects on eleventh graders' paragraph writing skills in terms of content, vocabulary, layout, grammar, and mechanics. This finding is also in agreement with other similar research in different countries (e.g., Ismail & Maasum, 2009). Recent approaches in the field of language teaching acknowledge the relevance of this method, however, it should be used cautiously as it may lead low achievers to become dependent on higher achievers and hamper the participation of students who have a lower level of understanding. The current findings suggest that the one-to-five group learning method, which is being practiced in Ethiopia, can be effectively implemented in line with the principles of CLM. Since the National Education Policy (1994) emphasizes students' cooperation to acquire knowledge, this type of approach can decrease competitiveness and individualism and increases opportunities to actively construct knowledge among students through cooperation. EFL teachers should know that making students get together and study does not automatically mean that CLM is being used, and does not necessarily lead to effective learning. Cooperation is much more than being physically near other students. Therefore, EFL teachers should be trained in CLM so that they are able to incorporate its principles into group work. This could also enable them to structure cooperativeness among members in each group and intervene to improve the effectiveness of any group that is not able to do the activities well in EFL classes.

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Appendix A
Paragraph Writing Pre-test for Eleventh Graders

Name _____Section _____

Time Allotted: 40 Minutes

Total Mark: 20 points per paragraph

Directions
This is a paragraph writing test which is intended to examine your skills in writing paragraphs. Of the given questions, choose any two and write appropriate paragraphs with legible handwriting.

1. Write a narrative paragraph on one of your painful events.

2. Describe your favourite relative.

3. Write an expository paragraph about your favourite TV show.

4. Abortion must be legal. Write an argumentative paragraph either supporting or opposing the motion.

Appendix B
Paragraph Writing Post-test for Eleventh Graders

Name _____ Section_____
Time Allotted: 50 Minutes

Total Mark: 20 points per paragraph

Directions
This is a paragraph writing test which is intended to examine your skills in writing narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative paragraphs. Hence, of the give four options, choose any two and write them with legible hand writing.

1. Think about your high school life, and write a narrative paragraph about the things you used to do.

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2. Describe your home.

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3. Write a contrast paragraph on the topic "city life and countryside life".

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4. Capital punishment has to be banned. Write an argumentative paragraph either supporting or opposing the notion.

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview for the Research Participants in the Experimental Group

1. Do you feel that CLM helps you improve your paragraph writing skills? Why?
2. Have you come across any problem when you learned paragraph writing lessons through CLM? If your answer is *'yes'*, how did you solve the problem(s).
3. What do you comment to make the implementation of CLM

Thank you in advance!

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