Development of Special Assignments for Online Group Learning

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***Abstract*—The research purpose is to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of special vocabulary and grammar tasks for groups learning English online. The sample consisted of 100 students from Middle Eastern University in Jordan. The scholar used an experimental method and methods of observation, description, comparison and testing to investigate the problem. The results showed that online English learning based on special practical assignments and involving lexical and grammar tasks can improve the level of student's language knowledge and their conversational skills. The resulting value confirmed the statistically significant difference between the test results and improvements in the experimental group. The research found that the experimental group showed better speaking skills compared to the control group. It is recommended to integrate similar practical tasks into educational curricula to foster quality education and the development of conversational skills among students studying the English language in an online environment. This approach has proved to be advantageous for instructors of professionally oriented English language courses, equipping them with an effective tool to enhance the quality of instruction and facilitate the linguistic aptitude growth of their students. Such a pedagogical format fosters active participation and collaboration among students, potentially contributing to a more profound and well-rounded language acquisition process.**

***Keywords*—academic achievement, conversational skills, group learning, task-based learning**

I. Introduction

Currently, new approaches are being developed and implemented to ensure effective education, ranging from traditional classroom settings to remote methodologies [1]. The learning strategy for online platforms should involve all components such as methodological, technical, and organisational to be effective for students [2].

For teachers, the first step is to decide on a learning model they will apply to English language learning: asynchronous, synchronous (lectures and group work), or mixed. The research admits that the team of teaching staff that works with students should be directly involved in making such a decision. Teachers should have an understanding of their roles in online teaching, and how often they need to communicate with students, check assignments or answer questions [3, 4].

When the teacher prefers group or project work during class, it is important to consider the best way to divide students into teams, how to guide and control group activities and help students organise effectively information exchange or opinion sharing [5]. A final presentation of projects should meet the needs of the group work, and teachers should inform students about the results. Moreover, the role of a teacher is to ensure that students clearly understand the advantages and benefits of group projects. Educators think about how their students could help each other. Emphasis is placed on the development of teamwork and group collaboration skills. Students should work in different teams with or without the support of a teacher [6]. Many students need help working in groups, especially when learning via online platforms. The main problems are a lack of communication and the inability to interact online successfully with peers. A teacher should decide whether or not students have to communicate inside the group to complete the task. Teachers can lead projects, assign roles, and initiate collaboration and communication. In some cases, students can cope with difficult assignments themselves and need only advice from a teacher to organise the teamwork [7].

Online group work ensures effective interaction among students, and the teacher's control is less visible. The teacher's role is to manage the beginning and end of the interaction in teams: a teacher formulates tasks, gives instructions for project implementation, and takes part in the analysis of the results with students [8]. The joint assessments help teachers build students' self-esteem and self-control. It is essential that the work of the whole group not only individual students, will be assessed, and the students will be informed about the results. Students' mistakes are discussed within the group. It is suggested that student work is transformed from individual student activity to collaborative interaction [9]. Students are forced to learn negotiation skills quickly, paying less attention to personal interests. Working in a team, the student has the opportunity to take the initiative (choose tasks, advise how to manage work, etc.). Moreover, students learn to plan their actions, acquire communication skills and the ability to persuade peers, and be responsible for their actions and team activities [10].

Distance education is based on two important components: the schedule (it should meet the needs of all participants in the educational process) and communication (students can come up with and do a lot of interesting and useful things, but if they do not talk about the final result, they will not be able to achieve it) [6, 11]. Online group learning can be an alternative to the streamlined learning system, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The application of cooperative learning to teaching practices places more emphasis on collaboration between learners in groups [1]. The scholars admit that it is easier for students to understand the fact sheets if they discuss the problem with peers. In cooperative learning, students are motivated to learn [12]. Such learning can make it easier for students to learn concepts and improve learning outcomes through positive collaboration practices [13].

As part of the research process, the scholars develop special tasks for English language learners. The choice of the English language was not accidental. English is the leading international language, learnt in many countries and

specialities. Language learning requires well-organized group work and feedback from teachers, which is difficult to manage during the coronavirus pandemic. The solution to effective teaching practices can be online group learning and the development of special tasks. The effectiveness of the task-based language learning approach has been insufficiently explored in previous research, creating certain gaps in the existing body of scientific knowledge. The research identified the gaps in the literature, which was carried out using pilot research. The research is described in detail below. Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT) focuses on using a native language to perform learning tasks in the language learnt by students. Such assignments may include visiting a healthcare professional, conducting an interview, or contacting a support team for help. The analysis considers the outcomes (proper task performance) rather than the accuracy of the language forms. TBLT has become popular for developing language fluency in languages except for native ones and promoting student confidence [14]. This study may fill certain gaps in the literature related to the effectiveness of specific lexical-grammatical tasks for groups studying English online. The findings could facilitate a better understanding of how online learning influences the enhancement of students' lexical and grammatical proficiency. This could provide insights into the process of English language acquisition in an online context and whether targeted tasks can lead to enhancements in speaking skills. The conclusions drawn from this study have the potential to refine pedagogical approaches within online educational settings, thereby offering advantages to both educators and educational institutions.

This study aims to achieve two main objectives. The first objective involves the development of specialized practical lexico-grammatical tasks tailored for group-based online English language instruction. The second objective encompasses the assessment of the impact of this form of instruction on the academic performance levels and conversational proficiencies of the participants.

The pursuit of this goal was motivated by several underlying factors. Firstly, the escalating utilization of online education within the contemporary educational milieu necessitates the development of novel methodologies and tools to facilitate effective and purposeful instructional endeavours. Online education mandates distinctive approaches to the organization of the learning process, particularly within group formats, which may exert an influence on the efficacy of learning and the outcomes achieved by participants. Secondly, the assimilation of lexical and grammatical rules and skills constitutes pivotal components of language acquisition. The development of specialized practical tasks enables a focused exploration of specific linguistic facets that might pose challenges for learners, allowing them to practice these skills within authentic communicative contexts. Thirdly, the evaluation of the impact of group-based online instruction on levels of academic achievement and conversational proficiencies stands as a significant aspect in discerning the effectiveness of such an approach. This information holds potential utility for educators refining their pedagogical methodologies and for students seeking an optimal approach to English language learning.

Research Inquiry: Does group-based online instruction, facilitated through the utilization of specifically crafted lexico-grammatical tasks, yield an enhancement in participants' academic performance levels and conversational competencies?

II. Literature Review

A researcher affiliated with the University of Hawai'i at Manoa delineates the primary considerations that necessitate careful attention when formulating and executing collaborative assignments within online language learning contexts [15]. The first problem is that the technological challenges faced by students and teachers are not considered. Some online learning activities require a stable and reliable Internet connection (e.g., video conferencing and screen sharing). Teachers should ensure each student has a good Internet connection before planning the learning programmes for the entire semester using online learning tools. Teachers should analyse the technical capabilities of the participants, their level of digital literacy and institutional support [16]. Educators should pay special attention to the workload that online courses create for educators, the technical possibilities to connect remote participants synchronously, the feedback that students will receive, and the type and amount of assessment that can be done using the technology. Synchronous and asynchronous participation in online learning can help to maintain a balance and keep students cognitively involved in task completion [17]. The research underlines that it is important not to rely heavily on technological determinism. Online language learning can provide access to group work and learning materials and may be the only way to learn under the COVID-19 lockdowns. Technology supports and facilitates the teaching process, but a well-designed and methodologically sound curriculum based on research findings in language acquisition should be the core base of any language course [18].

The advantages and disadvantages faced by students when they learnt online in groups were analysed by Van Lang University. The research sample consisted of 60 participants, including freshmen and high school students who learned foreign languages and had already been involved in online programmes. They responded to the questionnaire and rated their experience working in groups over the Internet. The results show that while some students find collaborative virtual learning methods beneficial in terms of distance, time savings and financial constraints, other students have problems with personal interaction and attention. Some technical issues such as Internet connection and poor computer skills are still major obstacles, leading to disputes between students in a group. Moreover, some challenges, including media, noisy environments, and chatty participants also affect learning [19].

In their research, scientists from the USA paid attention to the technological components of online group learning [20]. For example, multiplayer online games can encourage experiential learning and collaboration. However, these tools require teachers to be more competent in online platforms and have the technological capabilities and literacy skills for new educational environments [21].

The delineation and substantiation of criteria for the formulation of specialized tasks hold pivotal significance within the realm of research dedicated to minimizing

potential errors, augmenting result validity, and enhancing the efficiency of the educational process. Special assignments for group learning must meet the following criteria:

Be oriented towards the meaning aspect of the language. Even if the task has a pre-planned language learning goal, some of the learning practices must be unknown to students before the completion, and the focus should not be clear to the learners at once.

Be goal-oriented. A learning programme should have a communicative goal and a result based on the task. This outcome can be communicative (e.g., an email message) or non-communicative (e.g., ordering food online).

The assignments must meet the needs and motivations of the students. The program should be based on their language usage, non-linguistic and digital resources, that is, the assignments must be student-centred.

Assignments must be authentic and reflect the student's inner world.

Tasks should have a reflective component as part of the experiential learning system that underpins task-based language learning.

Assignments should encourage genuine collaboration and interaction between students. Moreover, both tasks and technology must be fully integrated into the curriculum to benefit students. Multiple tasks should be integrated into a communicative language programme and be interpreted as a strategic way to introduce technology-based tasks into a language learning course [15].

Well-designed small group assignments can be helpful if they ensure equal participation by all group members, provide more time for interaction, and the provision and acceptance of feedback [22]. Among the learning tools that can facilitate interaction in small groups/pairs are tools of synchronous work, such as video conferencing, and tools for asynchronous interaction, where students can collaborate without having to be connected at the same time [23]. The Internet allows students to complete unique tasks using different multi-modal sources of information, including purchases (books, clothes, gadgets, food, etc.), bank operations, choice of take-out restaurants, booking a hotel, excursion or flight reservation, search for a tutor, yoga classes, reviewing the weather forecast from any place around the world [24]. Such online assignments may be more representative and perhaps more relevant to learners than those found in traditional foreign language textbooks. In addition, they can be easily completed online [10].

III. Methods and Materials

A. Research Design

The study utilized the experimental approach to meet the research objectives and investigate the research inquiry [25]. This approach proved suitable due to several significant advantages it offers and its relevance within the context of the research topic. Firstly, the method enables the exploration of causal relationships between dependent and independent variables. In this study, it was essential to establish a correlation between group-based online instruction utilizing specialized lexico-grammatical tasks and the enhancement of participants' levels of academic achievement and conversational proficiencies. This method facilitated a systematic manipulation of the independent variable (in this case, the type of instruction) while observing the resultant effects on dependent variables (levels of achievement and proficiency). Secondly, experiments are particularly advantageous within controlled conditions as researchers can actively intervene and regulate experiment parameters. In this instance, the process of instruction could be precisely controlled, ensuring uniform conditions for all participants and establishing a standardized teaching approach. The experiment included a control group that did not engage in group tasks. This facilitated the creation of control conditions reflecting the traditional teaching approach widely employed in educational institutions. It allowed for the determination of the specific impact of the new method on academic performance and speaking skills enhancement, by assessing the differences between the groups. Comparisons with the control group helped elucidate whether there was a positive influence of the new method compared to the traditional one. Such an approach is crucial for a rigorous scientific analysis of the results.

Methods of observation, comparison, testing and literature analysis were used to analyse the research problem. Observational Method: For this methodology, a cohort of participants was assembled, engaging in group-based online sessions incorporating specialized lexico-grammatical tasks. Researchers meticulously monitored their instructional process, responses, and engagement levels throughout the sessions. Additionally, supplementary data encompassing task completion time, participation level, and other pertinent aspects reflective of the efficacy of group-based online instruction were systematically recorded. Comparison Method: To assess the efficacy of group-based online instruction, a control group was incorporated, engaging in learning through traditional methodology. This facilitated an evaluation of the impact of introducing specialized lexico-grammatical tasks on the enhancement of participants' levels of academic achievement and conversational proficiencies. Testing Approach: Before and following the implementation of group-based online instruction, participants underwent evaluations, involving exercises that covered lexico-grammatical aspects of the English language, along with tasks aimed at identifying enhancements in conversational skills. The test results were compared to determine changes in the participants' levels of knowledge and skills. The Approach of Literary Examination: To substantiate the appropriateness and justification of the chosen methods and approaches, an investigation into the existing literature was undertaken. This encompassed an exploration of similar research outcomes, a critical examination of theoretical viewpoints regarding group-based online instruction, and an evaluation of the effects of innovative strategies on augmenting academic attainment and communicative competencies.

Special assignments for online group learning of English were developed based on the recommendations of educators teaching foreign languages [14, 18, 24]. The tasks were developed independently, and only the general principles for task development were considered.

B. Participants

The sample consisted of 100 students from Middle Eastern University in Jordan. They were first-year and second-year

students learning English. The English language course was chosen for group online learning because this course was studied in many world universities and various specialities. The research proposes to develop special tasks for this particular training course based on group work. The age of the participants was 17–19 years. The sex distribution was equal. The participants had the same level of English proficiency: Intermediate Level (B1). The level was assessed using the free online General English test. The participants took the test in the computer lab at the university, and the course teacher controlled the testing. The test contained standard questions on the grammar and vocabulary of the English language [26].

Exclusion Criteria:

1) Age: Participants not within the specified age range (17–19 years).
2) English Proficiency Level: Participants possessing a proficiency level in English below or above Intermediate Level (B1).
3) Health Condition: Participants with health limitations or other medical issues that might impede their capacity to engage in group-based online instruction.
4) Lack of Computer and Internet Access: Participants lack the means to participate in online learning due to inadequate equipment and connectivity resources.

Students were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. Randomization occurred in multiple stages. All participants meeting the inclusion criteria were entered into a database with unique identification numbers. Utilizing a random number generator, identification numbers were randomly assigned to participants within the control and experimental groups. Participants were informed of their assignment to one of the groups. This randomization approach facilitated a random and unbiased distribution of participants across groups, thereby enhancing the internal validity of the study and enabling more precise and reliable conclusions to be drawn.

C. Research Tools

To assess the academic performance of students in English, a special test based on two parts was developed (Appendix B). In the initial section, there were five essay-type questions, and participants were required to select one of them to answer. The second part included 15 multiple-choice questions. The maximum score for the test was 50 points. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the test, which was 0.78. The result was acceptable, and the test could be used in the research. The Speaking Skills Rating Scale (CSRS) developed by Spitzberg and Adams [27] was also used. It consisted of two main parts. The first part has 25 communicative behaviour patterns that each student must demonstrate in a conversation. The second part involves the assessment of the overall performance of the participant in terms of how good a conversationalist he is. The total score for both parts was 160 points. In Appendix C, the grading scale for the initial segment of the CSRS can be located.

D. Procedure

To determine the homogeneity of the sample, a preliminary testing procedure was performed. For pre-testing, a Google form was developed. Study participants were invited to a Google Form containing questions related to English language grammar and vocabulary. The testing was conducted online and took approximately 1 h to complete. Participants responded to questions by selecting correct options, filling in blanks, translating sentences, and similar tasks. The assessment of the preliminary testing results was carried out by the course instructor, who possessed experience with Google Forms and determining English language proficiency levels. The procedure for assessing conversational proficiencies encompassed the following steps. Before the commencement of the evaluation, the instructors familiarized themselves with the CSRS and received pertinent instructions concerning the assessment process. Detailed explanations were provided regarding each of the 25 communicative behaviour models, which were to be considered during the assessment. Participants engaged in a conversational situation where they discussed a designated topic. The instructor observed the conversation and documented the extent to which participants demonstrated communicative behaviour models from the first section of the CSRS. Upon the conclusion of the conversation, the instructor assigned a rating to each participant based on their overall communicative proficiency. For each participant, the scores for each communicative behaviour model from the first section of the CSRS were aggregated. Additionally, the scores for overall effectiveness were added to the accumulated model scores. The comprehensive assessment of conversational skills was calculated as the sum of scores across all communicative behaviour models and the scores for overall effectiveness.

Then, the participants were trained for five weeks. For the experimental group, special tasks for online group learning were developed. It can be found in Appendix A. The participants in the experimental group were divided into small groups of 10 individuals. There was no such division in the control group. Google Meet and Zoom platforms were used to organise online training, as they were easy to use.

Participants attended three online lessons per week for 50 minutes each, taught by one teacher in both groups. The training programme included the following topics:

Topic 1. Meeting. Business card. Establishing contacts/relationships.

Topic 2. Business communication. General working environment and daily work. Discussions on professional topics and leisure. Exchange of information on various issues.

Topic 3. Phone conversation. Establishing contacts/relationships. Planning for follow-up and tasks. Answering phone calls. Presentation and transfer of information. Providing and receiving feedback.

Topic 4. Business meetings. Appointments at business meetings. Differences. Appointing another date. Preparing measures. Organisation and introduction of changes in the organisation of the meeting.

Topic 5. Business correspondence. Understanding and compiling business documentation (reports, letters, memos, etc.). Correspondence (letters, emails, etc.)

Topic 6. Contracts. Transactions. Understanding the clauses of the contract. Discussion of contracts.

Topic 7. Office. Workplace. Equipment.

Topic 8. Employment. Understanding and writing resumes, cover letters, and recommendations. Participation in

interviews. Filling out forms, and questionnaires.

The development of online lessons encompassed several stages to ensure effectiveness and targeted direction of instruction. At the outset of each development stage, an analysis of participants' needs was conducted, identifying key aspects and learning objectives to be incorporated into each topic. Subsequently, specific questions and subjects to be included in each lesson were determined, considering their relevance, practicality, and focus on enhancing participants' conversational skills. Educational materials were devised for each topic, encompassing texts, tasks, exercises, audio, and video materials. The materials were crafted with consideration for interactivity and the potential for active student engagement. Each lesson followed a clear structure, encompassing an introduction to the topic, a main section with various tasks and exercises, practical situations for conversation and communication, as well as a summary with conclusions. During the lesson development process, opportunities for active interaction between participants and the instructor were considered. Tools for discussion, exchange of thoughts, and communication were employed. After the development of each lesson, a small group of participants underwent testing to evaluate its effectiveness and pinpoint any potential weaknesses. Modifications were implemented in accordance with the test results. The testing results facilitated the integration of essential adjustments and improvements into the lesson materials, ensuring an optimal learning experience and the attainment of the specified objectives.

According to the assessment rubrics and the academic achievements, the student should be able to perform the following tasks:

- use of the subjunctive mood in English;
- modal verbs in English, their primary and secondary functions;
- know about 1200 lexical units based on textbook texts, conversational topics and home reading;
- apply the theoretical knowledge in practice and the research activities;
- understand the language as a social phenomenon, the patterns of its development and functioning.

After training, post-testing was performed following a procedure similar to pre-testing. Participants were required to have a device or personal computer to participate in the research. Data collection and analysis adhered to established scientific principles. To ensure data validity and reliability, validated instruments were utilized (Google Form for testing), and consistent procedures were maintained for both assessments. Oversight of the testing process and evaluation of results were conducted by the course instructor, thereby ensuring the objectivity and reliability of the obtained data. This approach to data collection facilitated systematicity, consistency, and objectivity in assessing the impact of group-based online instruction on the levels of academic achievement and conversational proficiency among research participants.

E. Data Analysis

For data analysis, ANOVA analysis of variance and T-test were used for two independent but equal samples. SPSS software version 22 was used. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to compare the mean values of two or more groups. In the study, there were two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The purpose of applying ANOVA was to identify potential statistically significant differences between the mean outcomes of pre-test and post-test assessments for both groups. The assumptions of ANOVA encompass normal distribution of data and homogeneity of variances among groups. These assumptions were assessed through preliminary analysis and other statistical methods as needed. The independent samples *t*-test was employed to compare the means between the control and experimental groups. The test facilitated the identification of statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test outcomes for the groups. The assumptions of the *t*-test involve the normal distribution of data and homogeneity of variances among groups. Verification of these assumptions was also conducted before applying the test.

F. Ethical Issues

Throughout the experimental research, the following ethical principles were observed: minimizing the risk of ethical discrepancies, obtaining informed consent, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, avoiding deception, and the right to withdraw. Before the commencement of the study, all participants were thoroughly informed about the objectives, methods, duration, and requirements of the research. A comprehensive description of procedures, risks, and benefits associated with participation was provided. Only those participants who willingly provided written consent were included in the study. All data collected during the research were processed and maintained in an anonymized format. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier, which was utilized for data analysis and processing. Under no circumstances was personal information disclosed to others. Measures were implemented to minimize potential risks and discomfort for participants. The study was structured in a manner that mitigated adverse effects on participants. Additionally, participants had the option to withdraw from participation at any point without repercussions. Participants were adequately informed about all aspects of the research, receiving accurate and reliable information. No deception or information concealment took place.

IV. Results

A. Sample Homogeneity Test

Experimental learning was preceded by a preliminary assessment of students. Its purpose was to determine the prior knowledge of students. For the experiment, equal knowledge sharing among the participants was important for the research. For pre-assessment, both the Academic Achievement Test and the Speaking Skills Test were used. The data obtained for the two tests were subjected to ANOVA analysis of variance. Sample homogeneity test results are available in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Differences in the average scores of students on the academic achievement test

	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean of Square	F-value	Significance
Multiple group comparison	0.648	1	0.701	0.188	0.541
Intergroup comparison	177.358	43	3.544		

Table 2. Differences in the average scores of students for the conversational skills

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean of Square	F-value	Significance
Multiple group comparison	0.407	1	0.509	0.249	0.511
Intergroup comparison	83.444	43	1.303		

As can be seen in Table 1, the F-value (0.188) was negligible ($\alpha = 0.05$). This indicated no statistically confirmed difference in the initial knowledge of the two groups learning English. The first stage of data analysis indicated the homogeneity of the sample, then it was necessary to confirm the equal level of speaking skills among students.

Table 2 shows that the F-value (0.249) was negligible ($\alpha = 0.05$). This indicated no statistically confirmed difference in the level of English-speaking skills of the two groups. The statistical analysis shows that the homogeneity of the sample was fully confirmed. It was possible to proceed to the next stage of the experimental research.

B. Analysis of Academic Performance

After the training courses, which lasted for five weeks, participants were reassessed for academic knowledge and conversational skills. The data obtained were analysed using the *t*-test since this test allowed the scholars to reveal the difference in two independent but equal samples. The results of the statistical analysis of the post-test data can be found in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Results of the *t*-test for the post-test of academic achievement

Group	Number of students	Average value	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	T-value	Significance
Experimental group	50	30.3308	4.00873	8.1408	5.444	0.027
Control group	50	22.1900	5.61234			

Table 4. T-test for the post-test of speaking skills

Group	Number of participants	Average value	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	T-value	Significance
Experimental group	50	17.1306	1.3309	5.1308	5.467	0.029
Control group	50	11.9998	2.4120			

According to Table 3, the T-value for the difference between the average post-test academic performance of students in the control (M = 22.19) and experimental (M = 30.33) groups was 5.444. The value confirmed a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the test results. The experimental group, which completed special assignments for online group learning, showed better results after the completion of the English language course. The research found that the method of teaching, based on special tasks, allowed to achieve better academic outcomes than the traditional teaching of the English language.

C. Analysis of Speaking Skills

A T-test was used to test the differences between the average scores of students in the post-assessment of speaking skills (Table 4).

According to Table 4, the T-value for the difference between the average post-test speaking skills of students in the control (M = 17.13) and experimental (M = 11.99) groups was 5.467. The value confirmed a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the test results. The experimental group, which received special tasks for online group learning, developed better speaking skills. The research confirmed that students who learnt the specially designed programme in the experimental group achieved better development of conversational skills in English than the participants in the control group.

V. Discussion

The current research based on the experimental design shows that online group learning of the English language using special tasks improved students' knowledge and speaking skills. The proposed approach was more effective than classical online learning, aimed at independent work and skills development. The research proved an increasing motivation and participation of students in group work. In a study conducted by Swedish researchers, a sample comprising 60 students participated in a six-week research program focused on collaborative English language learning within small groups. The experiment showed that group work had benefits and advantages aimed at increasing their learning motivation and confidence [28].

In Indonesia, the scholars found that a collaborative learning approach reduced language anxiety, and increased student engagement and self-confidence [9]. The research proved the importance and the significant role of collaborative learning in language learning. The research conducted in Saudi Arabia supported the findings of the current work. Collaborative learning has improved students' language skills and satisfied their need to share their ideas with peers [29]. The research results are similar to the findings of Iranian scientists. By conducting pre-test and post-test comparisons, researchers observed a notable improvement in students' conversational skills following the implementation of cooperative learning techniques. Additionally, there was an enhancement in intrinsic motivation, further affirming the influence of motivation on student learning outcomes [12].

During group work, students supported each other in the English language learning process, which could have a positive effect on learning outcomes. Recent Chinese research analysed the effect of English performance measures on students. The research found that the group that received metacognitive support and the highest average scores on all measures [8]. This supports the research idea that special assignments for online group learning should be developed and introduced under the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The results of Turkish scientists stated that group learning had a positive impact on vocabulary, grammar, listening and reading skills development compared to the traditional method of teaching English. The experiment involved non-equivalent groups that did not allow the scientists to ensure the validity of the results [30].

According to the results of Ukrainian scholars, teachers

consider interactive methods and technologies of language teaching to be effective for students. These technologies have a positive impact on the involvement of students in learning and help teachers consider the individual preferences of students as part of the collaborative process. Moreover, the new teaching methods proposed better cooperative activities between all participants as the main driving force of the learning process [31]. The scholars prove that online learning in groups based on special assignments and tasks is an effective method under the COVID-19 restrictions.

The comparison of the research results with the world data related to education shows that the present research findings are valid and do not contradict the previously published results. Moreover, the results are similar to the world data on English language learning. The present research has several limitations and drawbacks that have to be investigated in future. The scholars suggested conducting an additional comparison of students' motivation before and after online learning in groups. The individual differences between students, their psycho-emotional characteristics and their physical health could directly or indirectly affect academic outcomes. Future research will endeavour to comprehensively consider various potential factors while examining the role and impact of group-based online learning under the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is imperative to delineate and discuss certain potential limitations that could impact the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. One such limitation pertains to the constrained temporal and resource budget allocated to this investigation. The finite duration of the study may impede the tracking of enduring changes and effects on participants' learning and conversational skills post-course completion. Furthermore, the limited pool of resources could potentially affect the scale and representativeness of the sample. Another potential constraint resides in the susceptibility to bias or results in distortion due to participants' awareness of their involvement in the study. Participants might consciously or unconsciously attempt to respond to queries or execute tasks in a manner they perceive as more favourable or amenable. Such behaviour could exert an influence on the internal validity of the study. External validity constitutes an additional concern. The research was executed within the confines of a specific student group from a particular university and course; hence, the results may be confined in applicability solely to this cohort. It is incumbent to account for the university's context, nuances of the educational curriculum, and plausible cultural or social disparities, which could impede the transference of outcomes to alternative contexts or student cohorts.

VI. Conclusion

The research showed that online English learning based on special practical assignments and involving lexical and grammar tasks can improve the level of student's language knowledge and their conversational skills. The T-value for the difference between the average post-test scores of academic performances of students in the control (M = 22.19) and experimental (M = 30.33) groups was 5.444. This value confirmed a statistically significant difference between the test results and the positive changes in the experimental group. The experimental group showed better development of conversational skills (M = 11.99) in comparison with the control group (M = 17.13), which was confirmed statistically.

The obtained findings yield several significant implications for educational practice, teaching methodology, and further research endeavours: The study has demonstrated that the integration of specialized tasks within group-based online learning can significantly enhance the acquisition of linguistic skills among students. This underscores the importance of innovative pedagogical methods and bolsters the incorporation of analogous approaches into educational curricula. The marked improvement observed in conversational proficiencies among participants in the experimental group underscores the potential of group-based online instruction in facilitating active language utilization and communication. The deployment of specialized tasks has fostered heightened student engagement through collaborative group work and collective task resolution within the learning process. The results underscore the imperative to incorporate innovative approaches and methods into educational curricula, thereby potentially ameliorating the quality of education and rendering learning more engaging and efficacious.

The scholars suppose that the experiment results affect many factors that should be investigated in future. This scientific work provides recommendations for the world scientific community and supports the development of special tasks for online group learning. Moreover, it should be considered more widely and will go beyond the English language learning environment. The research admits that it is important to introduce other research areas and involve teachers in the development of new group tasks. Educators should delve into understanding student motivation, engagement, and the diverse academic burdens they bear to determine the most effective methods for teaching English. The present research is a source of empirical knowledge that can be used as practical application by educational institutions for the development of new online learning programs. This study may serve as an initial point of departure for future investigations in the realm of group-based online learning and the development of language proficiencies. Subsequent research endeavours could explore diverse facets of such pedagogy, encompassing its impact on other linguistic dimensions, the efficacy of various methods and strategies, and beyond. The gleaned outcomes hold potential utility across disparate educational contexts and subject domains, wherein group-based online learning might find pertinent application.

Appendix

A. Appendix A: Special Tasks for Online Activities Learning English in Groups

1) Task 1: Purchases

Level: Intermediate

Skills: reading, speaking, and listening, writing a short letter

Technologies: *Zoom and Amazon site*

In pairs or small groups, students are asked to find four books on the Amazon site for individuals specified by the teacher (for example, one book is for a teenager who loves science fiction, another book is for an elderly adult who loves

gardening, the third one is for a teacher and the fourth one is for himself). Students should use the breakout rooms in Zoom. Students can use the Amazon site, talking to each other in the language they learn to decide on the choice of books. They can read reviews, find familiar or single-rooted words, and take into account the reviews' ratings. Then, they should use the chat function to write a short message to the teacher with their solutions and write a simple explanation of the choice of each book (if the writing skills among students are high). To ensure feedback, the teacher can visit sectional rooms and/or ask each group to complete the group work and share it with the teacher to receive feedback. Feedback can also be provided in written form.

2) Task 2: Prepare for a party

Level: Intermediate

Skills: reading, speaking, and listening, writing tasks

Technologies: Zoom and the website of electronic appliances

In small groups, students read and discuss reviews of *electronic appliances* to help the teacher buy what he/she needs (laptop, tablet, headphones, TV, ...), taking into account the budget and product characteristics. After that, they write their recommendations in a Google document and share it with the teacher. This activity develops reading, discussion, and consensus skills. In addition, more complex grammar structures may be required to write recommendations.

3) Task 3: Netflix mini-series

Level: Intermediate

Skills: Letter writing, speaking, and listening

Technologies: Google Documents, Google, Google Meet and Google forms

In groups, students prepare a proposal for Netflix about a new film or mini-series. The topic can be identified by the teacher based on the curriculum or use a free topic. Students jointly discuss (using the chat or video in Google) and record their ideas in the Google document (i.e., format, synopsis, characters, episodes, etc.); develop a presentation using Google slides (or any other tool) to present the idea to the group. Students should write their dialogue for the series and record a video. When all sentences are completed and students read the feedback, they should identify the best ideas and language means. Students provide presentations to peers (in the common Google folder). Then, they vote for the best idea using Google Forms.

4) Task 4: Art and artists

Skills: Reading, speaking, and listening

Technologies: At the initial level, each student receives by e-mail a well-known image to describe. In the next stage, the teacher assigns a painting, a sculpture and an artist, and students are to find and read information about the artist and work of art (origin, background, historical period, and describe it). After that, each student presents his piece of art to the group, and other students may ask questions. In the end, students write a short essay, describing what three paintings they would like to have at home and why. At a more advanced level, each student can virtually visit the museum and choose his favourite work of art, research the artist and work, and then present it to his group mates, explaining why this work is of special interest to him.

5) Task 5: Planning a city tour

Skills: speaking, reading, and writing

Technologies: Google Earth, Google Drive and Google Forms

This task requires students to work with Google Earth (or Google Maps in the streets view mode). Working in small groups at the initial level, students are looking for one monument or sightseeing in the city (one city for the group) and describe it to their peers, who must guess what kind of monument it is. In the next stage, each group of students jointly selects four or five important places of interest in the city (different cities for each group) and describes them to the groups. At an advanced level, each group of students jointly prepares a tour around the city for half a day (monuments, places of interest, their historical and cultural significance, a place where to eat, etc.). Students complete it in the form of a three-dimensional virtual visit using the *Tour* button on *Google Earth to record a tour*. All tours are saved in the Google Drive folder so that students can review them and vote for the best one using Google Forms.

B. Appendix B: Test for Academic Performance Assessment

1. *Write a short essay* (10–12 sentences) on one of the topics:
   - If you had the opportunity to eradicate crime or environmental pollution, what would you choose and why?
   - If you had the chance to travel with any explorer in the world, who would it be and why?
   - Do you think scientists should test drugs on animals to fight human diseases like cancer?
   - An old saying goes that money is the root of evil. Do you agree? Explain. What else could be the root of evil?
   - You have a choice: lose all old memories or not be able to get new ones. What would you choose and why?
2. Choose the correct answer from the given options.

1. I _____ very hard at the moment.
work
am working
will work
2. Water _____ at 100 ℃.
boils
is boiling
boiled
3. I _____ at 6 o'clock in the morning.
gets up
getting up
get up
4. Their mother _____ the party yesterday.
did not enjoy
is not enjoying
were not enjoying
5. She has _____ big black cat.
a
the
-
6. Rice _____ in Britain.
does not grow
is not grow
has not growing

7. There was _____ puddle on _____ floor.
a, -
the, the
a, the
8. Mozart _____ more than 100 pieces of music.
wrote
has written
had written
9. Please don't make so much noise! I _____ to sleep.
try
am trying
have tried
10. Are you going _____ home now?
to
-
at
11. I want _____ a new car.
buying
buy
to buy
12. I go _____ work _____ bus.
to, on
to, by
on, on
13. You can go out now. It _____ anymore.
does not rain
is not raining
is not rain
14. _____ Wednesdays, I don't work.
On
At
In
15. I can say anything _____ English.
in the
in
by

C. Appendix C: Grading Scale for the First Part of CSRS

Competency elements are typically evaluated on a 5-point scale as follows:

1 = INADEQUATE (usage is cumbersome, detrimental, or leaves a negative impression of communicative skills)

2 = SATISFACTORY (occasionally awkward or detrimental, at times adequate)

3 = ADEQUATE (usage is sufficient, yet unremarkable and inconspicuous, yielding neither notably positive nor negative impression)

4 = GOOD (usage surpasses adequacy but remains unremarkable)

5 = EXCELLENT (usage is seamless, controlled, and leaves a positive impression of communicative skills)

Administration: The most prevalent application for competency assessment involves instructors evaluating students engaged in conversation, typically in an introductory or prompted dialogue.

Pragmatics: CSRS entails a duration of approximately five to six minutes. It does not necessitate preparation; however, training is advisable to ensure inter-rater concordance, if requisite.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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