

# THE EFFECT OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON PRESCHOOLER'S ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES IN THARAKA NITHI COUNTY, KENYA.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the effects effect of interpersonal skills in cooperative learning on preschooler's achievement in English language activities in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. Utilizing a quasi-experimental research design with a non-equivalent control group pre-test and post-test design, the study collected data through questionnaires for teachers and observation of preschool children. The instruments were pre-tested in five preschools that were excluded from the final sample. Research instruments were developed under expert guidance from the University of Nairobi's Department of Early Childhood Education to ensure validity. Reliability was assessed using the test-re-test method and Cronbach's Alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0,72 obtained. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were examined using a thematic approach. Key findings include the positive impact of learning components such as interpersonal and social skills individual. Overall improvements in post-test scores suggest a positive role in enhancing language outcomes. The study concludes that the cooperative learning approach*

*significantly enhances pre-primary school children's achievement in English language activities, emphasizing the importance of incorporating these strategies to improve language skills among preschoolers in Tharaka Nithi County. Actionable recommendations include implementing structured group activities to enhance interpersonal skills. The study's findings offer valuable insights that can be leveraged to improve early childhood education practices.*

**Key Words:** Cooperative learning, interpersonal skills, Language activities, Preschooler achievement.

## INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal skills, the development of language in a child is of great importance. It includes the processes by which a child understands and communicates by using languages acquired in the early years. Children acquire language skills at an early age and at a fast pace. Typically, even before they learn to throw a pebble (Fowler, 2022). Performance is ranked very highly on the education agenda of the nation, with policymakers and educators focused on accountability, testing, teacher quality, curriculum reform, choice of

schools and other concerns (Luong, 2023). The one thing that has been noticeably missing is an investigation into the effect of school conditions on the learning and teaching processes, despite the existence of extensive literature linking the availability of facilities in the school, with the education quality and to teacher productivity and teacher morale.

The conventional method of teaching languages was where the teacher directed the process of learning and learners assumed a passive role in the process of learning. Teachers have been replacing conventional methods of teaching that focus on the way the teacher teaches rather than how learners obtain knowledge (Muliyah & Aminatun, 2020). Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that involves arranging activities in a classroom into social and academic learning experiences (Siddique, Yassimin, Nadeem, & Farooq, 2020). Learners are organized to work and learn in groups, while they accomplish the learning tasks. Everyone succeeds when the group succeeds.

Cooperative learning is composed of four activities, which include interpersonal and social skills, positive interdependence, individual accountability, group processing and face-to-face promotive interaction. Interpersonal social skills refer to a skill like, communicating accurately, reaching a consensus, giving constructive feedback, and giving each of the group members a chance to participate in the process of learning. Learners must be taught these skills before they tackle the problem to ensure the success of the

group in cooperative learning (Tamimy, Rashidi & Koh, 2023; Dzemidzic, 2022; Premo, Cavagnetto & Davis, 2018).

Despite the government's introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and efforts to promote learner-centred teaching, the gap remains significant. Cooperative learning, which has been shown to improve language acquisition in various global contexts (Саленко, 2024; Quisaguano Pumacuro, 2023), could offer a more strategic approach. However, in Kenya, especially in Tharaka Nithi County, the impact of this method on pre-primary learners' English achievement has not been sufficiently explored. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the effects of cooperative learning on pre-primary school children's English language activities, aiming to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing early childhood English pedagogy in the Kenyan context. The choice of preschool learners was justified by the critical nature of early childhood for language development, the need to establish a strong foundation for future learning. Early interventions at this stage can have a profound and lasting impact on learners' language proficiency and overall academic success.

## HYPOTHESIS

The study tested the following null hypothesis at a significance level of 0.05.

**H01:** Interpersonal skills in cooperative learning have no statistically significant effect on preschooler's achievement in English language activities.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Interpersonal and social skills in cooperative learning are important factors for its success. Some of these skills include communication, teamwork, active listening, and problem-solving abilities (Han & Son, 2020). Teachers should carefully teach their learners interpersonal and social skills which include instructorship, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict management skills. These skills make learners more responsible in their work and hence they would not depend on their group members to handle their group tasks. Incorporating social skills in learning helps students blend in well with society as well as benefits them in their interactions while they are in their classrooms. Mind mapping activities related to social skills have a positive effect on students' abilities to learn (Polat et al., 2020).

Cooperative learning, characterized by structured group activities, has been recognized for its potential to enhance both interpersonal and social skills, thereby positively influencing English language achievement among pre-primary learners. In the African context, several studies have explored this dynamic.

A study conducted in Lagos, Nigeria, explored the impact of interpersonal and social skills developed through cooperative learning on pre-primary learners' performance in English language. The study revealed that learners who engaged in cooperative learning groups, where social interaction was emphasized, showed enhanced listening and speaking skills. Teachers noted improved peer-to-peer communication and collective problem-solving in language activities. However, challenges in managing interpersonal conflicts among children occasionally impeded learning (Adetunji & Adepoju, 2023). While the study underscores the benefits of cooperative play, it does not explicitly connect these social skills to English language achievement, suggesting a need for further research to explore this linkage.

In South Africa, research focused on multigrade teachers' implementation of cooperative learning strategies. Findings indicated that, despite challenges such as varying learner ages and abilities, cooperative learning fostered positive interpersonal relationships and enhanced social skills among students (Dlamini & Zulu, 2021). The study primarily addressed the implementation challenges and social skill development but did not directly measure the impact on English language proficiency, highlighting an area for future investigation. The current study addressed this lacuna by investigating the effect of cooperative learning on learners' proficiency in English in pre-schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

A study in Ghana explored the influence of pre-primary school experiences on pupils' social skills development. The research revealed that early exposure to cooperative learning environments positively affected children's social abilities, which are foundational for effective communication and language (Boateng & Agyemang, 2022). While the study establishes a connection between early cooperative experiences and social skills, it stops short of examining the direct impact on English language achievement, indicating a pathway for further research.

A study in Zimbabwe assessed the impact of cooperative learning on the social skills of grade two learners. The findings demonstrated that cooperative learning strategies significantly enhanced learners' social competencies, which are essential for collaborative learning and communication (Khan, Noreen & Hussaini, 2024). While the study highlights the enhancement of social skills through cooperative learning, it does not directly correlate these skills with English language achievement, indicating a need for further exploration into this relationship. A study in Rwanda explored how interpersonal skills developed through cooperative learning impacted pre-primary learners' performance in English language activities. The study found that learners who worked in teams were more proficient in conversational English and demonstrated improved social cohesion within their groups.

However, the study noted that learners from low-income families had less exposure to social skill development outside the classroom, which affected their performance in cooperative learning environments (Nkurunziza & Uwayezu, 2022). More research is needed on how socio-economic factors influence the development of interpersonal skills in cooperative learning contexts and how these factors affect English language achievement.

A study carried out in Uganda by Nabirye and Okello (2023) examined the use of cooperative learning strategies to develop rural primary students' English oral performance. The research indicated that cooperative learning groups provided a supportive environment for practicing English, leading to improved oral skills. This study focused on oral performance outcomes but does not explicitly address the development of interpersonal and social skills within these cooperative settings, pointing to an avenue for future research. In Nairobi, Kenya, a study examined how cooperative learning that fostered social skills such as collaboration, empathy, and peer support influenced English language proficiency among pre-primary learners. The research indicated that learners in cooperative groups exhibited stronger oral communication skills and were more confident in using English. However, teachers reported difficulties in facilitating group activities, especially in large classes where some learners tended to dominate (Mwangi & Karanja, 2022).

The study highlighted the need for additional research on strategies to ensure equitable participation in cooperative learning environments, particularly in overcrowded classrooms.

Collectively, these studies suggest that cooperative learning can positively influence the development of interpersonal and social skills among pre-primary learners in African contexts. However, several research gaps emerge. These studies have focused on social skills development or English language achievement but have not explicitly examine the direct correlation between the two within cooperative learning frameworks. Implementation challenges such as resource constraints, teacher training, and cultural factors are recurrent themes. Addressing these contextual issues is crucial for the effective adoption of cooperative learning strategies. There is a scarcity of longitudinal studies tracking the sustained impact of cooperative learning on social skills and language achievement over time. Addressing these gaps through targeted research can provide deeper insights into optimizing cooperative learning strategies to enhance both social competencies and English language proficiency among pre-primary learners in Africa.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a quasi-experimental Research design with a non-equivalent control group pre-test and post-test design. This design was appropriate since the objective of the study is to do a comparison between the learners' acquisition of English skills on the pre-test and that of the post-test.

The target population for this study will be all 411 public preschool headteachers, 508 teachers and 24000 preschoolers aged 5 years in early childhood in PP2 Classes in the County. From the sampled schools the 24 headteachers were sampled by use of purposive sampling, and 110 teachers of the PP2 class will also be sampled using purposive sampling. The researcher also sampled 462 PP2 learners from all the sampled preschools, by use of purposive sampling technique. Of the sampled preschools, half (12) of them were classified as the experimental group, while the other random half was classified as the control group. The instruments for data collection included questionnaires for teachers, document analysis and observation for preschool children.

Before embarking on data collection an introductory letter was obtained from the University of Nairobi. A research permit and authorization from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) was sought. Permission from the County Commissioner, Tharaka Nithi County, and the Director of Education were sought. After the authorisation was received, the process of data collection commenced.

The administration of data collection instruments was done by the researcher both at the pilot and main study. One intact class was selected as the control group and another as the experimental group. The dependent variable was measured by comparing the learners' acquisition of English skills in the pre-test with the learners' English skills

based on Cooperative learning. The learners of the control group were not exposed to treatment but to regular ways of teaching followed in pre-schools. Both groups were given equal opportunities in sharing the same learning materials, schedule and tests. The study interviewed the head teachers on face-to-face basis. Interviews enabled the study to understand the feelings of the interviewee. The study used a questionnaire with pre-school teachers. The investigator sat in a class and observed the participation of the pre-scholars during an English lesson. Documents on the learner’s performance were obtained from the head teachers’ office. This study generated both qualitative and quantitative data.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 provides a result of interpersonal skills and Social skills in cooperative learning between the Treatment and Control groups.

**Table 1: Group Statistics for Interpersonal Skills and Social Skills**

	Control and Treatment Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interpersonal and Social Skills in Cooperative Learning	Treatment	24	18.5000	1.58800	.32415
	Control	24	14.5000	1.58800	.32415

The Treatment group, consisting of 24 participants, had a mean score of 18.50 (SD = 1.59), indicating a higher level of interpersonal and social skills because of the cooperative learning intervention.

In contrast, the Control group, also with 24 participants, had a mean score of 14.50 (SD = 1.59). The identical standard deviations in both groups suggest consistent variability within each group. The standard error of the mean for both groups was 0.32415, reflecting the precision of the mean estimates. These results demonstrate that the participants exposed to the cooperative learning approach (Treatment group) exhibited significantly enhanced interpersonal and social skills compared to those who were not (Control group). The difference in mean scores between the two groups underscores the positive impact of cooperative learning on fostering these skills among pre-primary school children. The uniformity in standard deviation and standard error between the groups adds robustness to these findings, indicating that the observed differences are likely attributable to the intervention rather than random variation.

Table 2 presents the results of the independent samples t-test used to determine whether the observed differences between the two groups are statistically significant. Levene’s test for equality of variances, which assesses whether the variances of the two groups are equal, yielded an F-value of 0.000 with a significance value of 1.000.



**Table 2: Independent Samples Test for Interpersonal Skills and Social Skills**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Interpersonal and Social Skills in Cooperative Learning	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	8.726	46	.000	4.000	.45842	3.07726	4.92274
	Equal variances not assumed			8.726	46.00	.000	4.000	.45842	3.07726	4.92274

This result indicates that the assumption of equal variances is not violated. The t-test results show a t-value of 8.726 with 46 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, the difference between the mean scores of the treatment and control groups is statistically significant. The mean difference between the two groups is 4.00, with a standard error difference of 0.458. The 95% confidence interval for the difference ranges from 3.08 to 4.92. This confidence interval does not include zero, reinforcing the significance of the observed mean difference.

The findings from this analysis align with theoretical perspectives on cooperative learning and its impact on social skills. According to Tadesse, Ware, Asmare, and Gillies (2024), Nsor-Ambala (2022) and Siddique et al. (2020), cooperative learning strategies, which involve

structured group activities and peer interactions, significantly enhance students' social skills. The results of this study corroborate this theory by demonstrating that students who engaged in cooperative learning showed a substantial improvement in these skills compared to those who did not. Cooperative learning emphasizes collaboration, communication, and mutual support among students. As highlighted by Muliya and Aminatun (2020), this learner-centered approach fosters an environment where students are actively involved in the learning process, which enhances their social interactions and interpersonal skills.

The significant mean difference observed in this study suggests that students in the treatment group benefited from the cooperative learning approach, which likely facilitated improved communication and collaboration skills.

The significance of the findings is also supported by the theoretical framework of cooperative learning, which posits that structured group work promotes positive interdependence and individual accountability (Ngwenya & Arek-Bawa, 2022). When analyzing the impact of cooperative learning on student performance, certain elements of cooperative learning can be associated with variations in scores. Elements associated with higher scores include positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, collaborative skills development and group processing. When students perceive that their success is linked to the success of their group members, they are more likely to engage actively in the learning process. This shared responsibility fosters collaboration, motivation, and a sense of belonging, leading to better academic outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Ensuring that each student is responsible for their contribution can enhance performance.

This element encourages students to prepare and participate meaningfully, which may lead to improved scores as each member is accountable for their learning (Slavin, 1995). Encouraging direct interaction among students promotes effective communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. This element helps clarify concepts and solidify understanding, which can result in higher post-activity scores (Gillies, 2006). Teaching learners how to work together effectively including skills like communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making can enhance group performance and lead to improved individual scores (Smith et

al., 2005). Johnson and Johnson (2014) posit that allowing learners to reflect on their group interactions and evaluate their effectiveness can help them identify strengths and areas for improvement. This reflective practice can enhance collaboration and contribute to better performance

These elements of cooperative learning are essential for developing effective interpersonal skills. In this study, the treatment group's higher scores indicate that the cooperative learning activities were successful in fostering these skills, which aligns with the theories proposed by researchers like Tamimy, Rashidi, and Koh (2023) who emphasize the role of social skills in cooperative learning. Moreover, the results reflect practical implications for educational practice. As the study demonstrates the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing interpersonal and social skills, educators might consider incorporating such strategies into their teaching methods to improve students' overall communication abilities. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of preschool education, where developing social skills is crucial for young learners' holistic development.

Elements associated with lower scores include lack of structure. Poorly designed cooperative learning activities without clear roles or goals can lead to confusion and disengagement, resulting in lower performance. Without clear expectations, some students may dominate discussions while others may remain passive (Sharan & Shachar, 1988).



Further, inequitable participation contributes to lower scores. If a few learners dominate the conversation or decision-making, others may disengage, leading to unequal learning opportunities. This can negatively impact on the overall group performance and individual scores (Gillies, 2006). Johnson and Johnson (2014) argued that negative interdependence, for example, when competition is introduced among group members, or if group members feel that one person's success is at the expense of another's, it can create a hostile learning environment. This may lead to anxiety and lower scores (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). Poor group dynamics also contribute to low scores. Groups that do not function well together due to conflicts, lack of trust, or poor communication can hinder learning. Negative dynamics can lead to frustration and disengagement, which may lower overall performance (Vygotsky, 1978). When teachers do not actively facilitate cooperative learning experiences or provide necessary support, students may struggle to engage effectively. A lack of guidance can result in missed learning opportunities and lower scores (Slavin, 1995). The effectiveness of cooperative learning is heavily influenced by how well its elements are implemented. Positive interdependence, individual accountability, and effective communication can lead to higher scores, while a lack of structure, inequitable participation, and negative group dynamics can result in lower scores. Understanding these elements allows educators to design cooperative learning activities that maximize student engagement and achievement.

The analysis of social skills in cooperative learning reveals a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups. The treatment group, which participated in cooperative learning, showed a higher mean score in social skills compared to the control group. This result supports the theoretical and practical benefits of cooperative learning, highlighting its effectiveness in improving learners' social interactions and communication skills. The study's findings align with existing literature on cooperative learning and provide valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance students' interpersonal and social abilities through effective instructional strategies.

Table 3 presents the effect sizes for interpersonal and social skills in cooperative learning, calculated using three different methods: Cohen's, Hedges', and Glass's delta. These effect sizes provide insights into the magnitude of the differences observed between the treatment and control groups. The point estimate for Cohen's  $d$  is 1.588, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.747 to 3.275. Cohen's  $d$  is a commonly used measure of effect size that quantifies the difference between two means in standard deviation units. An effect size of 1.588 indicates a large effect, suggesting that the cooperative learning approach has a substantial impact on enhancing interpersonal and social skills compared to traditional methods.

**Table 3: Independent Samples Effect Sizes for Interpersonal and Social Skills**

		Standardize r	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Interpersonal and Social Skills in Cooperative Learning	Cohen's d	1.58800	2.519	1.747	3.275
	Hedges' correction	1.61449	2.478	1.719	3.221
	Glass's delta	1.58800	2.519	1.590	3.427

Hedges' g, which corrects for small sample sizes, yields a point estimate of 1.614 with a 95% confidence interval from 1.719 to 3.221. Hedges' g is particularly useful in studies with small samples as it provides a more accurate estimate of effect size by adjusting for bias. The large effect size indicated by Hedges' further supports the conclusion that cooperative learning significantly improves interpersonal and social skills.

Glass' delta, another measure of effect size, reports a point estimate of 1.588 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.590 to 3.427. Glass's delta is calculated using the standard deviation of the control group and is often used when comparing the effects of an intervention against a control condition. The result indicates a substantial effect of cooperative learning on the treatment group's interpersonal and social skills, reinforcing the findings from Cohen's d and Hedges'. The effect sizes reported in Table 4.4 underscore the robust impact of cooperative learning on enhancing social skills.

Cohen's, Hedges' and Glass's delta all indicate large effect sizes, with their point estimates converging around 1.588 to 1.614. This consistency across different measures of effect size provides strong evidence that the cooperative learning approach is highly effective in improving interpersonal and social skills among preschool children.

The large effect sizes observed are consistent with existing literature that highlights the efficacy of cooperative learning strategies in developing social competencies. Siddique et al. (2020) and Ngwenya and Arek-Bawa (2022) emphasize that cooperative learning fosters an environment conducive to positive social interactions, collaboration, and communication, which aligns with the substantial effect sizes observed in this study. Furthermore, the confidence intervals for the effect sizes, which do not include zero, reinforce the statistical significance and practical importance of the findings. The intervals suggest that the observed effects are unlikely to be due to random chance and that cooperative learning has a meaningful impact on students' interpersonal and social development.

The mean score for interpersonal and social skills in cooperative learning is 16.50 with a standard deviation of 2.56. This indicates a moderate level of interpersonal skills among the preschoolers. Given the positive skewness and moderate kurtosis, it suggests a slight leaning toward higher skill levels.

Thus, there appears to be a beneficial effect of interpersonal skills in cooperative learning on the children's achievement in English language activities. One of the most striking findings of this study is the significant improvement in interpersonal skills among students in the cooperative learning group. This suggests that cooperative learning not only enhances academic outcomes but also fosters essential social competencies that are critical for students' overall development. The importance of these findings is further emphasized by the significant differences observed in individual accountability, indicating that cooperative learning promotes a balance between collaborative effort and personal responsibility. These results align with theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's social development theory and constructivist perspectives, which highlight the role of social interaction and active engagement in learning.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the data generated, the study concludes that the cooperative learning approach, encompassing interpersonal and social skills, accountability, interdependence, promotive interaction, and group processing, positively affects pre-primary school children's achievement in English language activities. This suggests that implementing cooperative learning strategies can be beneficial in enhancing language skills among preschoolers in Tharaka Nithi County.

Educators should implement structured group activities that emphasize turn-taking, active listening, and respectful communication. Teachers should model and reinforce these skills during language activities. This can be done by incorporating role-playing exercises and peer feedback sessions where children practice and reflect on their interpersonal interactions during English language activities.

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