

PAIR WORK VS. GROUP WORK: WHAT'S BETTER FOR THE LEARNER?

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Abstract. *The article deals with pair work and group work as an example of organizing educational process in English language classes. It emphasizes that using a variety of seating arrangements and groupings of students is important as it gives students the opportunity to interact with a variety of people and learn from one another, it encourages cooperation as well.*

Key words: *pair work; group work; useful strategies; teacher-student interaction mode; peer and self-correction.*

Introduction. The theory and practice of teaching foreign languages at non-linguistic faculties of universities today have a unique characteristic: the teacher is not only a source of knowledge but also acts as a leader and organizer of the learning process, which involves assisting students in choosing the desired educational path and actively utilizing new educational technologies.

The aim of this study is to identify and describe the potential for effectively using pair and small group work in foreign language teaching, and to propose several approaches to organizing the learning process tested in teaching English to students with varying levels of foreign language proficiency.

Materials and Methods. The study's materials include research papers on foreign language teaching methods within the context of the problem under discussion, relevant information sources both in Russian and English, and personal experience with pair and group work in academic groups with varying levels of foreign language proficiency. The methods used were pedagogical observation, analysis, comparison, and generalization of practical results.

Results and their discussion. Both pair work and group work have a place in English as a foreign language class. Using a variety of seating arrangements and groupings of students is important as it allows learners to practice different types of things. Working with others gives students the opportunity to interact with a variety of people and learn from one another. It also encourages cooperation which will help students get along in class and could reduce the number of student outbursts too. It is important to keep perfect balance between pair work and group work, which includes: 1) appropriate activities and potential benefits. Pair work is great for practicing model dialogues, playing games such as battleship, conducting vocabulary checks, and completing worksheets. Working in pairs gives individual students a lot of speaking time. If working together, students will often have more confidence than when completing exercises individually. It can also be added that if students are competing with their partners, they will be more motivated.

Students can work in groups or form teams for role plays, races, games such as board games or card games, and discussions. Groups give students the opportunity to create more complex dialogues, explore relationships between characters, pool knowledge together, and have a more social learning environment. Additionally, there is a better chance for self-correction or peer correction and for a discussion on a wider range of thoughts and opinions with larger group sizes.

On the other hand, individual speaking time is limited when working in groups. You can increase the amount of speaking time students have by decreasing the size of groups to three or four people. If you are in a large class and want all the groups to present material at the end of the lesson, larger groups may be necessary but limit group size to about six; 2) monitoring. Pair work is harder to monitor than group work because there are going to be many more pairs of students than groups of students. Teachers must be sure that everyone has a very clear understanding of the material before beginning any activity. The best way to monitor students working in pairs or groups is to walk around the classroom during the activity correcting students who make mistakes and answering questions. You can gauge the effectiveness of the activity by doing comprehension tests afterwards. If students are having difficulty with material after completing an activity, it is likely that they practiced incorrect structures during the exercise. This is unfortunate and highlights why it is so important to ensure that students understand material by completing practice exercises as a class before asking them to work in pairs or groups. If you find that students have practiced incorrect material, you have to review the key points of the target structure again and be sure to explain everything more thoroughly before using the same activity with another class; 3) pairing/grouping students.

If students sit in the same seats for the entire year, they are likely to be paired with the same person throughout the course. For pairs that work well together, this is a good thing but usually not everyone benefits from having the same partner for a long period of time. It is necessary to change the assigned seating regularly so that everyone can maximize the amount they learn in class and have an opportunity to work with different people. Creating different groups of students is easy especially if seating arrangements change throughout the year. If the class size is under thirty, you may be able to group students by row or column for activities.

You can also tell students sitting near each other to form groups or have students count off for example from one to five and then ask students who said the same number to form a group. In order to better facilitate this method of forming groups, direct students who said each number to different areas of the room. Keep in mind that if students count off from one to five, there will be only five groups so you need to determine which number will divide your students into appropriately sized groups.

Besides pair work and group work, students can also complete activities individually and as a class. Mixing up the structure of teacher's activities will keep classes interesting but be sure not to waste a lot of time rearranging the classroom. If you make groups for an activity at the beginning of class, it may be best to stick with that arrangement for the duration of the lesson.

When I first started working about twenty years ago, I absolutely loved one of the exercises. The idea was to propose some unusual, even extraordinary activity, something like: "Walk around the class and ask your classmates who has the same ideas as yours. Then build up a dialogue with that person." I enthusiastically offered it to my students, to complete silence and perplexed faces. After a longish pause, my brightest pupil asked timidly. "Do you want us to move around and speak to each other? But this is never done at a lesson!" Actually, regardless the students' age, the initial reaction to such a task was the same!

I realized I was up against a cultural obstacle. Let us step aside, mentally, and take an unbiased look at any lesson. Are students ever supposed to actually walk around the classroom and talk, asking their peers' opinions on anything? Are they expected to produce various answers which may be in direct opposition to those of the teacher and their friends? Can they fantasize, invent stories, and talk on any subject which they like, provided they do it in a foreign language? It seems that at the English Language lessons, they not only can but must do it. I would even say that this is what the communicative approach to English language teaching is all about. People are to communicate in English, not only in the familiar teacher-student modus, but also in the less conventional student-student, students-students, student 1-teacher-student 2 and so on. Let us look at various aspects of pair and group work in speaking, and work out some useful strategies.

How to organize pair/group work in speaking activities? First of all, a teacher must be aware of the age and level differences. If you have Beginner or Pre-Intermediate level, age 7-13, you probably will not have any problems because everything is new for the pupils. Any activity you suggest is accepted as part and parcel of the wonderful new subject. When dealing with higher levels and ages, we should proceed with caution.

Any teacher knows that there exists vast difference between teaching the familiar classes and the new ones. When you are faced with children you have known since primary or middle school, you continue doing what you have always done, at a more advanced level. They know what to expect from you and you know what to expect from them. The situation is more complicated once you get a new middle school or senior class or even university students with different English language background. You may discover that their teacher never spoke English with them, or that their former teacher never allowed them to speak unless they raised their hands and waited their turn. Many teachers still mostly use the old teacher-students interaction mode, or make their students learn everything by heart and recite it rather than speak spontaneously.

In such a case first step is a short explanation of what is expected. Have students read aloud example dialogues from a textbook, demonstrate a short conversation with your best pupil as a partner, allow children a few minutes to absorb the formulation of the task. Only then suggest composing their own dialogues in pairs, and walk around the class yourself, listening to their productions in turn. Prior to asking the group to perform that outlandish exercise "walk around the class", separate them into two groups. Group A may argue for something while group B may argue versus the same topic. Choose a theme which is close to the students' hearts. "Higher education is vital nowadays" vs.

“higher education is a waste of time” is one example. First year students start a hot debate at once, offering arguments for and against necessity of getting higher education.

What should a teacher do when there is a problem in arranging pair work? Many times I encountered a situation when nobody would agree to work with one particular student. Naturally it is easy to follow the forceful solution and simply “order” someone to work in a pair. However, this may evoke a negative reaction from both unwilling or unhappy participants, and an outburst of feelings from the whole class, especially if we are dealing with young adults. The one safe way here is to act as if nothing happened, and to work with the outcast, designating them to be the teacher's helper. This usually works, resulting in the grudging acceptance of the fact that everybody needs to communicate. Young tempers, likes and dislikes flare up easily. It is much harder to quell the unrest. We do not need to know all the reasons; we certainly must resolve the conflicts to the best of our abilities, because we are obliged by law to teach all children. One more difficulty arises: how to notice and correct mistakes when we are listening to the whole group? There can be one possible solution. Once we are sure that our students can make up and perform dialogues and conversations, we can arrange a round table group discussion or performance. I have done these many times in regular classes. I confess it is always easier to have children do it than to persuade young adults to communicate and role-play.

Here is one of the ways to follow. I would bring in a stack of cards with each role neatly printed on them. For instance, a family discussion involves grandparents, parents, children, friends and maybe a family counselor. You may add on aunts and uncles to occupy every child. We re-arranged the desks so that we really had a round table. While the students were doing this, I wrote a few discussion topics on the board. For instance, the teen son went joyriding in the family car without permission, or the teen daughter went to a party in secret. Then I placed the cards in the middle of our large table and explained one rule: cards could not be changed. In other words, if a boy got a card which said “grandmother”, he was to play her. Usually this evoked laughter and helped see the exercise as a fun activity. Students might have a few minutes to think out their role, and to prepare a few phrases. During the activity I would quietly sit in a corner and took notes while my students talked. If their conversations were flowing well, I never interrupted them to correct a mistake. I took notes, which I shared with my colleagues and told them how I intended to work with them later. Today, it is even possible if needed to record the whole experience, and to analyze it after the lesson.

Conclusion. Being foreign language teachers, we teach communication in a foreign language. I believe we should tell the students that in the future, they may be the sole means for people to understand each other by being interpreters, or by speaking to a foreigner. They should not worry about mistakes, nor apologize for their “bad” English. Naturally we should work at mistake correction, especially when preparing our students for tests and examinations. If we watch a round table discussion or walk around the class listening to dialogues and hear, say, many students pronounce [ze] instead of [the], we know what to do, which phonetic drill to use at one of our lessons. If many students misuse some words or make the same grammar mistake, we may give them some revision exercises later and advise that they use a dictionary. Dealing with mistakes is easy but helping students use English as a communication tool is much more difficult. Once you notice that they start really speaking, let them do it. When they greet you in the street many years later with the phrase you taught them: “Hi, how is it going with you?” in English, as they used to do at school or University, it is obvious that you have managed to really teach them a useful skill.

РАБОТА В ПАРАХ ИЛИ РАБОТА В ГРУППАХ: ЧТО ЛУЧШЕ ДЛЯ ОБУЧАЮЩИХСЯ?

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются парная и групповая формы работы как пример организации учебного процесса на занятиях по английскому языку. Подчёркивается, что использование разнообразных схем рассадки и вариантов группировки обучающихся важно, поскольку это даёт студентам возможность взаимодействовать с разными людьми и учиться друг у друга, а также способствует развитию сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: парная работа; групповая работа; полезные стратегии; режим взаимодействия «преподаватель–студент»; взаимокоррекция; самокоррекция.