



The Pedagogical Value of Group Work as an Alternative in Instruction in The Moroccan EFL First-Year Baccalaureate Grammar Classes

Elmostafa Omarakly ¹

¹ Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco

Corresponding author email: mostafaomarakly@gmail.com

Info Article

Received: 9 April 2025

Revised: 22 May 2025

Accepted: 29 May 2025

Online Version: 30 May 2025

Abstract

This study aimed to examine the pedagogical value of group work in grammar classes. To this end, the study adopted three major interrelated criteria: grammar self-concept, grammar engagement, and grammar achievement. Methodologically, the study used a quasi-experimental design. Two intact groups of 72 students were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. The experimental group benefited from group work activities while the control group relied on traditional whole-class instruction. The study used three research instruments: a Grammar Self-concept scale, a Grammar Engagement Scale, and a Grammar Achievement Test. The Independent Samples t-test results revealed statistically significant differences in favour of the experimental group in all three investigated variables. Additionally, the results showed that the experimental group marked a statistically significant improvement between the pre- and post-stages of the study in all three areas, which was not the case for the control group, particularly at the grammar self-concept and engagement levels.

Keywords: Self-Concept; Engagement; Achievement; Individual Learning; Whole Class Instruction; Group Learning

This is open access article under the [CC-BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) licence



INTRODUCTION

Group work is one of the well-theorized and researched instructional practices that have been used extensively in various language educational settings. Most of the accumulated theory and practice show that allowing students to collaborate in groups is much more effective and much more productive than having them work individually or competitively (Ediger, 2001; Frey, Fisher, & Everlove, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2013; Qin, Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Qin et al. (1995) state that "structuring learning situations cooperatively results in students interacting in ways that promote each other's success and structuring situations competitively results in students interacting in ways that oppose each other's success, and structuring situations individualistically results in no interaction among students" (p.72). Unlike the conventional whole-class instructional methods, group work transforms the students' role from passive knowledge recipients into active knowledge builders. Based on their meta-analysis of more than 375 studies, Johnson and Johnson (1989) assure the superiority of cooperative learning experiences over traditional individualistic and competitive modes of instruction in maintaining healthy and dedicated relationships between learners, promoting their psychological well-being, and heightening their achievement. Multiple further investigations assure that students who are engaged in group work activities realize greater language development than those who are instructed using conventional linear ways of instruction (Assia & Said, 2014; Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Odehova, Nevska, & Perlova, 2022).

Also, research findings assure that cooperative learning activities result in greater quality problem-solving than individualistic or competitive ones, chiefly with non-linguistic problems (Qin et al., 1995).

However, simply splitting students into groups may not always bring the expected positive learning outcomes. Reversely, some types of learning groups might hinder, rather than facilitate, students' learning and create a sort of disharmony and dissatisfaction among learners (Qin et al., 1995). The operationalization and application of group work vary widely across different educational streams, leading to non-consistent and, sometimes, conflicting research findings (Johnson et al., 2000; Qin et al., 1995; Thanh-Pham et al., 2009, cited in Thanh, 2011). The generic belief among most pedagogists is that group work can be applied to any educational context and lead to excellent pedagogical outcomes at different levels. Nevertheless, the available empirical evidence unveils that the culture of group work cannot be easily transferred from one educational setting to another. Thanh-Pham et al. (2009) reported that over 50% of the research conducted on cooperative learning in non-Western educational contexts found it to be inappropriate and even worse than conventional teaching methods (cited in Thanh, 2011). Whereas group work practices have largely been recognized to foster students' conversational skills as they increase their talking time and allow them to freely express themselves (Madjid, 2020; Rospinah, Ampa, & Nappu, 2021; Siahaan, 2019), numerous concerns have been raised about the quality of this interaction and its impact on the grammatical aspect of students' language (Collins & White, 2014; Kuiken & Vedder, 2002; Shehadeh, 2011). In this sense, it is worth stating that the results of group work have not always been consistent across different investigations (Gaith, 2003; Yaryari, Kadivar, & Mirzakhani, 2008; Err, 2012; Zainalipour, Zarei, & Heydari; Kuiken & Vedder, 2002).

Additionally, it was unveiled that factors such as group size, age, gender, social environment, and culture have an enormous influence on group formation and its outcomes (Assia & Said, 2014; Duyen & Huan, 2017; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014). Correspondingly, the current study endeavours to operationalize the concept of group work in a way that accounts for the peculiarities of the Moroccan EFL context and evaluates its pedagogical value in grammar instruction in a way that aligns better with the current views of the learner and grammar pedagogy. More precisely, the study aims to check whether or not group work practices, compared to traditional whole-class instruction, have any significant positive impact on the pedagogical value of instructional and learning activities in the Moroccan EFL grammar classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Notion of Pedagogical Value and Its Key Criteria

The phrase 'pedagogical value' appears in the titles of numerous educational publications (Bowman, Hodges & Wineman, 1999, Bahrani & Soltani, 2011; Hazari, North, & Moreland, 2009; Sousa, Neves & José Damásio, 2022) and is used almost synonymously with other comparable phrases such as 'educational value' (Back & Hwang, 2005), and 'educational usability' (Hadjerrouit, 2012) to denote similar connotations that have basically to do with the key pedagogical requirements needed for more successful teaching and learning. These requirements differ from one study to another, depending on the nature of the pedagogical tool explored and the context in which it is implemented. Back & Hwang (2005) used three criteria for examining the educational value of performance assessment: improvement and advancement, sincerity and enthusiasm, and individuality and wholeness. Likewise, Hazari, North, & Moreland (2009) implemented four key criteria for investigating Wiki's pedagogical value: learning or pedagogy, motivation, group interaction, and technology. Similarly, Hadjerrouit (2012) explored the pedagogical usability of wikis using four criteria: added value, motivation, differentiation, and collaboration.

Based on the insights drawn from these studies and adhering to the most widely accepted learning theories that guide diverse pedagogical practices, including group work, the current study relied on three major independent, but closely interrelated criteria for measuring the pedagogical value of group work in the Moroccan EFL grammar classes, namely grammar self-concept, grammar engagement, and grammar achievement.

Grammar Self-concept

Self-concept has often been used interchangeably with several other related interdependent self-constructs like self, self-esteem, self-image, self-perception, self-belief, self-worth, self-efficacy, self-confidence, etc., which all reflect a specific view toward oneself (Byrne, 1996; Rosenberg, 1965). It is described as an overarching term that encompasses various self-terms that portray how an individual perceives himself or herself in terms of ability, value, worth, limitations, strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, values, etc. (Byrne, 1984; Calhoun & Morse, 1977; Slavin, 2006). It aligns well with the earliest views of the term, like those of James (1890), who reckons that "a man's self is the total of all that he can call his own" (cited in Green, 1997).

Within this perspective, James (1890) suggests that the self consists of the material self, the spiritual self, and the social self. The material self includes the body as its innermost part, family, and other personal possessions. The social self refers to the recognition that an individual gets from others. The spiritual self refers to the man's inner or subjective nature and his psychic abilities or tendencies, such as his self-feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Along the same line, Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton (1976) propose a well-validated multidimensional-hierarchical conceptualization of the construct, suggesting that self-concept consists of two major parts: a general self-concept at the top of the apex and other domain-specific self-concepts at the bottom of the hierarchy. The general self-concept encompasses academic and non-academic self-concepts, which, in turn, include more specific academic areas and skills along with social, emotional, physical, and other non-academic self-concepts. Furthermore, Shavelson et al. (1976) state that self-concept is organized, multifaceted, hierarchical, stable, developmental, descriptive and evaluative, and differentiable.

Drawing on these conceptualizations, the current study defines grammar self-concept as the students' perception of their grammar knowledge and competence in the Moroccan EFL First-Year Baccalaureate Classes. This perception comprises both students' self-descriptive and self-evaluative beliefs.

Grammar Engagement

The early interpretations of engagement linked it to observable forms of behaviour such as accommodation to school rules, routines, and regulations (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1992). Nevertheless, most of the definitions that followed emphasize the psychological and multidimensional nature of the construct, underlying at least three to four of its subcomponents that have widely been recognized and validated by different scholars (Appleton et al., 2006; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Veiga & Robu, 2014; Veiga, 2016).

Behavioural engagement is the first and the most explicit facet of students' engagement; it draws basically on the students' direct involvement in school activities (Appleton et al., 2006). It is indicated in multiple ways that ranging from simply following the school rules to participating in the student council (Fredricks et al., 2004). Chapman (2003), Fredricks, et al. (2004), Appleton et al. (2006), Veiga, Reeve, Wentzel, & Robu (2014) among several other specialists reckon that students who are behaviorally engaged, do their work, participate in the learning processes, ask relevant questions and solve task-related problems, and take part in school extra-curricular activities.

Another less-explicit facet of students' engagement is cognitive engagement, which is frequently equated with the learner's psychological investment in learning. The term refers to the learner's thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills (Fredricks et al., 2004). It is about the amount and the quality of cognitive endeavour that students invest in learning. It is manifested in the use of diverse learning strategies and metacognitive strategies to maximize the learning opportunities (Chapman, 2003; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990, cited in Fredricks et al., 2004).

Unseparated from the behavioural and cognitive aspects of engagement is affective engagement, also labelled emotional engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Veiga et al., 2014) or psychological engagement (Appleton et al., 2006). Affective engagement essentially targets the questions related to students' attitudes toward teaching, learning, and assessment activities. It encompasses students' positive and negative

reactions such as interest, boredom, sadness, and anxiety regarding teachers, classmates, academics, and school (Fredricks et al., 2004). It is also known as identification with school and learning practices (Appleton et al., 2006). That is to say, whether students feel a sense of belonging and attachment to the faculty, staff, students, and school environment. Mohamadi (2017) adds that affective engagement is about self-perception of the value of the task and a sense of self-accomplishment when performing the task.

The current study defines 'grammar engagement' as a multidimensional construct that combines what is behavioural with what is cognitive and affective to reflect the degree of students' involvement in different learning activities in the Moroccan EFL First-Year Baccalaureate grammar classes.

Grammar Achievement

As with any other construct, grammar has been conceptualized and measured in diverse ways. Traditionally, grammar is defined as "a set of rules which specify all the possible grammatical structures of the language" (Lock, 1995, p.1). As stated by Richards and Schmidt, grammar is "the description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language" (p.230). Harmer (2002) states that "studying grammar means knowing how different grammatical elements can be strung together to make chains of words" (p.32). Chomsky (1965) uses linguistic competence to refer to an idealized native speaker's intuitive knowledge of rules and structures.

However, grammar is not simply about stringing words into meaningless blocks of phrases and sentences, nor is it just about distinguishing poorly structured sentences from well-formed ones. However, it is also about creating and exchanging meanings that fit diverse social contexts. Hymes (1972) treats linguistic competence as a vital component of communicative competence. Nonetheless, he reckons that in addition to the mastery of linguistic code, more focus should be devoted to the conditions that surround the language use as the feasibility of a statement, its appropriateness to the context of use, and the degree of its frequency in different social contexts. Larsen-Freeman (2014) views grammar as a multidimensional system in which form, meaning, and use work together to reach effective communication.

Grammar achievement may be approached from at least two different angles. The first angle is a syntactocentric one, and it tries to predict an 'ideal speaker's knowledge of the language by examining the accuracy of phrases, sentences, and clauses. The second perspective is a communicative one, and it centers on analyzing what linguistic forms are and how they are used to convey various meanings within and beyond the sentence level, depending on various contextual considerations (Purpura, 2004).

To strike a balance between both views, the current study defines 'grammar achievement' as the student's ability to recognize the target grammatical structures and use them accurately and appropriately in different contexts.

Group Work and Its Forms

Group work is an umbrella term that covers an extensive array of pedagogical practices in which two or more students interact and work together to pursue pre-specified instructional goals and objectives (Brown, 2001). The concept overlaps with numerous comparable terms, notably collaborative and cooperative learning, which represent two distinct approaches to group work. While collaborative learning emphasizes the idea of students' working together' and coordinating with one another to accomplish a common goal, cooperative learning dictates that each learner accomplishes a specific aspect of the learning problem before joining the individual efforts together (Dillenbourg, Baker, Blaye, & O'Malley, 1996). Still, both collaborative and cooperative learning require learners' active interaction and contribution to one another's learning. Henceforth, group work should be interpreted as incorporating both collaborative and cooperative learning in ways that guarantee every group member's active participation in the completion of the assigned task (Cohen & Lotan, 2014).

Slavin (1991) recommends five group learning methods that have been widely researched and applied in diverse contexts, namely Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, Teams-Games-Tournament, Jigsaw, Team Accelerated Instruction, and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition. These group work methods all consist of four to six students with mixed ability levels, genders, and racial or ethnic

backgrounds, and seek to enhance individual as well as group performance and achievement. Nevertheless, each method uses specific techniques and follows precise procedures. In Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, the group members work collaboratively to master new material, then sit for individual quizzes, which are graded and combined to form the team score. In Teams-Games-Tournaments, students of similar performance levels compete with the members of other teams to display their mastery of the subject matter and increase their team scores. In Jigsaw activities, the academic material is broken down into smaller sections, which students try to master independently and/or collaboratively before teaching them to their teammates and/or other groups' members. In Team Accelerated Instruction, students are placed in individualized materials according to a placement test and work on the same material at their own pace, and check each other's work against answer sheets. In Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, students work in pairs within their groups on a series of cognitively engaging reading and writing activities, such as reading stories to one another, summarizing stories, responding to a story, etc.

Whereas Jigsaw and Integrated Reading and Composition can be implemented for teaching skills such as listening, reading, and writing, along with vocabulary, Teams-Achievement Divisions, Teams-Games-Tournaments, and Team Accelerated Instruction can be used to address instructional objectives and contents for which single-correct response options might be developed.

The Pedagogical Value of Group Work in EFL Classrooms

Numerous research attempts have been undertaken to approach the pedagogical value of group work from various perspectives. Some of these attempts centered on whether and how cooperative learning can impact students' self-concept. Modaber and Far (2017) examined the effect of cooperative learning on secondary students' self-esteem using a quasi-experimental design. The results of this study show that cooperative learning has a significant impact on students' self-esteem. Following a similar research methodology, Sadeghi and Ganji (2020) examined the effect of cooperative learning on Iranian university students' class engagement, self-esteem, and self-confidence. This study confirms that cooperative learning significantly improves students' self-confidence, self-esteem, and engagement better than individual learning.

Along the same lines, but with a more specific focus on the interconnection between cooperative learning practices and students' engagement, Herrmann (2013) compared students' in-class participation and their approaches to learning before and after experiencing cooperative learning. In this study, it was revealed that the students participated more actively in the collaborative learning tutorials than in the ordinary student presentation tutorials. However, they did not mark a significant improvement in their approaches to learning. In this regard, Liao (2005) researched the effect of cooperative learning versus whole-class teaching on motivation, strategy use, and grammar achievement with two groups of English language learners. The results of this study demonstrate that cooperative learning has large positive effects on motivation and strategy use and medium-to-large positive effects on grammar achievement.

In connection with this, Jafari and Ansari (2012) compared the writing accuracy and text production of a collaborative writing group and an individual writing group. The results of this study show that the students who wrote collaboratively outperformed those who wrote individually. Similarly, Assia and Said (2014) addressed the effect of small-group interaction on the Algerian EFL students' grammatical accuracy. This study discloses that learners' interaction positively affected learners' grammar development, even if the growth was gradual. In the same vein, Zarifi and Taghavi (2016) compared the effect of cooperative grammar learning and traditional grammar learning in the Iranian EFL context. The results of this study showed significant statistical differences in favor of cooperative grammar learning.

Although the studies above assure the multi-dimensional benefits of group work practices, especially in terms of enhancing students' self-concept, engagement, and achievement, there exist few other studies that could not confirm the same conclusions. For instance, Gaith (2003) arrived at no statistically significant differences in the students' academic self-esteem and feelings of school alienation after implementing cooperative learning. Yaryari, Kadivar, and Mirzakhani (2008) also reported no improvement in the students' self-concept despite the improvement in their social skills and academic performance. Furthermore, Er (2012) concluded that the effect of cooperative learning on foreign language self-concept

was insignificant. The same conclusion is reached by Heydari, Zarei, and Zainalipour (2013), who found that collaborative learning increased female students' confidence significantly. However, it did not result in any significant impact on male students' confidence. These inconsistencies are further emphasized by Kuiken and Vedder (2002), who detected no statistically significant differences between the group work students and individual work ones, neither in terms of recognizing nor using the grammatical structures targeted in the study.

With these mixed non-conclusive findings and the multiple variables that interfere with the dynamics of group work and its outcomes (Thanh-Pham et al., 2009, Assia & Said, 2014; Duyen & Huan, 2017; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014), the current study is conducted with the major purpose of operationalizing the concept of group work in a way that accounts for the characteristics of the Moroccan EFL classrooms and check whether it can help serve the grammatical aspect of students' learning.

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

The sample of this study was convenient. It consisted of two intact classes of First-Year Baccalaureate students from a public high school in a semi-urban area in the region of Sous-Massa, Taroudant, Morocco. The two classes were randomly classified as control and experimental groups. The total number of students in both groups was 72, including 33 male and 39 female students. The control group consisted of 36 students, including 22 females and 14 males, whereas the experimental group consisted of 36 students, including 17 females and 19 males. The median age of the participants is 17 years old. They all studied English as a mandatory school subject for two successive academic years. They were taught the same syllabus by the same instructor for the same duration during the same school year, 3 hours per week.

Research Instruments

To measure the key constructs addressed in the study, three major research instruments were used: a Grammar Self-Concept Scale, a Grammar Engagement Scale, and a Grammar Achievement Test.

The Grammar Self-Concept Scale was adapted from Badiozaman (2012). It is based on well-validated self-concept scales by Marsh, Relich, and Smith (1983), Marsh (1990), and Boersma and Chapman (1977). The adapted scale consists of 18 items, 4 of which are negatively worded. The items are all grammar-specific and address the self-descriptive and evaluative aspects of students' grammar self-concept. They required the students to indicate the extent to which each statement was true or untrue for them on a four-point scale that ranges from false and mostly false, which signify a low or negative level of self-concept, to mostly true and true, which signify a positive or high level of self-concept.

The Grammar Engagement Scale was constructed by Badiozaman (2012) based on well-recognized engagement scales such as the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement by Coates (2010). The adapted scale includes 18 items, 4 of which are negatively worded. The items measure the degree of students' behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement in grammar classes by determining the extent to which each statement applies to them using four-point Likert scale options that range from false and mostly false, which signify a low or negative level of engagement to mostly true and true which signify a positive or a high level of engagement.

The Grammar Achievement Test was exclusively developed for the current study. It was constructed in line with the curriculum's objectives and materials in use. The test consists of 20 multiple-choice items that measure the students' grammatical knowledge and ability to apply the target grammatical structures in context. The 20 items were equally split among five major grammatical points targeted in the study, namely articles, simple past and past continuous, relative pronouns, and passive voice. The test's highest possible score is 20 points, and the time set for it is 40 minutes.

Validity And Reliability of Research Instruments

To strengthen the validity and reliability of the research instruments implemented in the study, several steps were undertaken. For the Grammar Self-Concept and Engagement Scales, the two scales were decided upon after a close review of the literature; the two scales' items were carefully analyzed and complemented with other domain-specific items to foster their validity, and, then, coupled with the Arabic translation to obtain more valid responses from the participants. As for the grammar achievement test, it was created based on the textbook used and other supplementary materials. Efforts were exerted to make it lengthy enough, appropriate enough, contextualized enough, and relevant to the themes covered during the treatment period. To ensure its content validity, the test items were equally split among the grammatical structures focused upon in the study. Additionally, the pre- and post-tests were deliberately kept identical to avoid any possible threats that could result from the use of two "non-identical tests," (Gay et al., 2011) except for the order of the post-test items, which was changed to minimize any potential pretest effect on the students' final performance. Additionally, the interval between the pre- and post-tests was deliberately increased to over two months to prevent any possible memory effect on the students' scores.

Finally, the research instruments were validated by other researchers before putting them on trial with 10 students from another group not involved in the actual study. Overall, the research instruments proved to be straightforward and feasible, with a high internal consistency level that reached ,902 for both the Grammar Self-Concept and Engagement Scales.

Research Procedure

Once the validity and efficiency of the research instruments were ensured, the participants were required to complete the grammar self-concept and engagement scales and then sit for the grammar achievement test.

Before the experiment began, the experimental group students benefited from a short workshop on group work procedures. Additionally, the students were placed in mixed-ability groups based on their diagnostic test results and given different roles to serve within their groups, namely facilitator, notetaker, checker, and spokesperson. Furthermore, the students were required to switch their roles in each class and work together to complete the assigned exercises and activities.

During the experiment, the experimental and control groups were taught the same language skills and contents by the same instructor, following the official syllabus. In each unit, the two groups' students were exposed to the four language skills along with vocabulary and one of the target grammatical points as suggested in the textbook. However, while the control group students were taught the target grammatical structures, using mainly the presentation-practice-production model in a traditional competitive-individualistic atmosphere, the experimental group students were taught the same structures following the principles of Teams-Games-Tournaments (Slavin, 1991). More precisely, the students worked in mixed-ability cooperative groups and were guided in a step-by-step inductive manner to discover and practice the target language forms. Then the groups competed with each other to demonstrate their mastery of the grammatical structures in response to various interactive PowerPoint games and exercises. The treatment lasted for three months.

Post the treatment, both groups completed the grammar self-concept and engagement scales and took the Grammar Achievement Test again. The collected results were subjected to a detailed analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The present study began with the assumption that group work practices can increase pedagogical value in teaching-learning activities better than traditional whole-class methods of instruction. To check this hypothesis, the students' pre- and post-study data were recorded and computed using Independent Samples t-test and Paired Samples t-test.

Table 1. Independent Samples t-Test Results of the Differences in Grammar Self-Concept, Engagement, and Achievement Between the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the Pre-Test and the Post-Test

Criteria	Groups	N	Test	Mean	Standard deviation	t- value	Sig. Value	Sig. level																																																						
Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	26,6667	7,87764	,592	,556	Not Sig.																																																						
	Control			27,7778	8,05379				Self-concept	Control	36	Post-test	49,0278	9,27204	-7,746	,000	Sig.	Experimental	31,2778	10,15202	Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	31,1389	11,09994	,401	,690	Not Sig.	Control	32,1667	10,65699	Engagement	Experimental	36	Post-test	57,6667	10,90740	-8,604	,000	Sig.	Control	33,7222	12,64371	Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	4,6944	1,60035	,887	,338	Not Sig.	Control	5,0000	1,30931	Achievement	Experimental	36	Post-test	12,5833	2,48855
Self-concept	Control	36	Post-test	49,0278	9,27204	-7,746	,000	Sig.																																																						
	Experimental			31,2778	10,15202				Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	31,1389	11,09994	,401	,690	Not Sig.	Control	32,1667	10,65699	Engagement	Experimental	36	Post-test	57,6667	10,90740	-8,604	,000	Sig.	Control	33,7222	12,64371	Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	4,6944	1,60035	,887	,338	Not Sig.	Control	5,0000	1,30931	Achievement	Experimental	36	Post-test	12,5833	2,48855	-4,593	,000	Sig.	Control	9,6944	2,83669						
Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	31,1389	11,09994	,401	,690	Not Sig.																																																						
	Control			32,1667	10,65699				Engagement	Experimental	36	Post-test	57,6667	10,90740	-8,604	,000	Sig.	Control	33,7222	12,64371	Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	4,6944	1,60035	,887	,338	Not Sig.	Control	5,0000	1,30931	Achievement	Experimental	36	Post-test	12,5833	2,48855	-4,593	,000	Sig.	Control	9,6944	2,83669																		
Engagement	Experimental	36	Post-test	57,6667	10,90740	-8,604	,000	Sig.																																																						
	Control			33,7222	12,64371				Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	4,6944	1,60035	,887	,338	Not Sig.	Control	5,0000	1,30931	Achievement	Experimental	36	Post-test	12,5833	2,48855	-4,593	,000	Sig.	Control	9,6944	2,83669																														
Grammar	Experimental	36	Pre-test	4,6944	1,60035	,887	,338	Not Sig.																																																						
	Control			5,0000	1,30931				Achievement	Experimental	36	Post-test	12,5833	2,48855	-4,593	,000	Sig.	Control	9,6944	2,83669																																										
Achievement	Experimental	36	Post-test	12,5833	2,48855	-4,593	,000	Sig.																																																						
	Control			9,6944	2,83669																																																									

Table 1 summarizes the statistical differences between the experimental and control groups in the pre- and post-stages of the study. Before the beginning of the study, both groups exposed almost comparable mean scores in the three research variables examined, namely grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement, with minute differences in favor of the control group. The pretest mean scores of the experimental group range between 26,6667 for the grammar self-concept, 31,1389 for engagement, and 4,6944 for achievement, whereas the pretest mean scores of the control group range between 27,7778 for the grammar self-concept, 32,1667 for engagement, and 5,0000 for achievement.

However, despite the exposed small differences, the independent samples t-test affirms that there are no statistically meaningful differences between the two groups, neither in terms of writing self-concept nor in terms of grammar engagement and achievement at the beginning of the study. The mean scores of both groups are far from the midpoints of the self-concept and engagement scales, which are 45 and the average score of the achievement test, which is 10 marks, suggesting that both groups started the study with low, unsatisfactory levels of grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement.

In contrast to the results of the pretest, which reveal that the two groups are close to each other in each of the research variables investigated, the posttest results demonstrate great variations between the two groups in each of these variables. The mean scores of the experimental group are 49,0278 for grammar self-concept, 57,6667 for grammar engagement, and 12,5833 for grammar achievement, while the mean scores of the control group are 31,2778 for grammar self-concept, 33,7222 for grammar engagement, and 9,6944 for grammar achievement. This means that the experimental group is roughly 18 points away from the control group at the level of grammar self-concept, approximately 24 points at the level of grammar engagement, and about 3 points at the level of grammar achievement.

The independent samples t-test affirms these differences at the 0.5 level. The two-tailed p-values are greatly smaller than the specified alpha value of 0.5 in all the three tests that were conducted, confirming the statistically significant differences between the two groups in favor of the experimental group. These results imply that the experimental group's grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement are quite satisfactory compared to those of the control group, which falls beneath the theoretical midpoints of the scales.

To test the significance of the changes realized between the pretest and the post-test for each group, a paired samples t-test was used. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Paired Samples t-Test Results of the Differences in Grammar Self-concept, Engagement, and Achievement Between the Pre-test and the Post-Test for Each Group

Criteria	Groups	N	Tests	Mean	Standard deviation	t- value	Sig. Value	Sig. level
Grammar Self-concept	Experimental	36	Pre-test	26,6667	7,87764	-11,027	,000	Sig.
			Post-test	49,0278	9,27204			
	Control	36	Pre-test	27,7778	8,05379	-1,621	,110	Not sig.
			Post-test	31,2778	10,15202			
Grammar Engagement	Experimental	36	Pre-test	31,1389	11,09994	-10,228	,000	Sig.
			Post-test	57,6667	10,90740			
	Control	36	Pre-test	32,1667	10,65699	-,564	,574	Not sig.
			Post-test	33,7222	12,64371			
Grammar Achievement	Experimental	36	Pre-test	4,6944	1,60035	-15,998	,000	Sig.
			Post-test	12,5833	2,48855			
	Control	36	Pre-test	5,0000	1,30931	-9,015	,000	Not sig.
			Post-test	9,6944	2,83669			

Table 2 depicts the changes that the experimental and control groups realized from the pretest to the post-test on each of the variables investigated, namely grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement. Overall, both groups made substantial gains between the two stages of the study, with more noticeable improvements in favor of the experimental group. This latter progressed from a mean score of 26,6667 on the pre-test to 49,0278 on the post-test with more than 22 points of difference at the level of grammar self-concept. It also jumped from a mean score of 31,1389 on the pretest to 57,6667 on the posttest, with more than 26 points of difference at the level of grammar engagement. Furthermore, the experimental group improved its grammar achievement mean score from 4,6944 to 12,5833. This means that it gained approximately 8 points of improvement over the treatment period.

As for the control group, it moved from a mean score of 27,7778 on the pre-test to 31,2778 on the post-test with more than 3 points of difference at the level of grammar self-concept. Likewise, it improved from a mean score of 32,1667 on the pretest to 33,7222 on the posttest with roughly 2 points of difference at the level of grammar engagement. Lastly, the control group progressed from a mean score of 5,0000 to 9,6944 with nearly 5 points of difference at the level of grammar achievement.

To check the statistical significance of these differences, a paired samples t-test was conducted. The two-tailed p-values ($p=.000$) as presented in Table 2 above show that the changes made between the pretest and posttest are statistically significant at the levels of grammar self-concept, grammar engagement, and grammar achievement for the experimental group ($p < .05$). In contrast, the control group did not demonstrate statistically significant improvements, except for grammar achievement. These findings suggest that the experimental group ended the study with more satisfactory and fairly good levels of grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement than the control group.

Discussion

The central aim of this study was to examine the pedagogical value of group work compared to traditional whole-class instructional activities in grammar classes. To this end, the study relied on three key independent but closely interrelated criteria, namely grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement. These three criteria were measured using a self-concept scale, an engagement scale, and an achievement test.

The study results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in all the three investigated variables, including grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that the experimental group marked a statistically significant improvement in each of the targeted areas between the pre- and post-stages of the study. This improvement was not the case for the control group, which remained stuck at approximately the same level it began with, especially at the levels of grammar self-concept and engagement.

These findings converge with those of many other studies that approached the pedagogical value of group learning from various perspectives. Firstly, they largely converge with several studies that assure the utility of group work in promoting students' self-concept in various EFL settings, such as Modaber and Far (2017) and Sadeghi and Ganji (2020). In the same way, the findings concur with many studies, such as Herrmann (2013) and Liao (2005), which confirm the effectiveness of group cooperation in maximizing students' involvement and investment in classroom activities. Additionally, the results agree with several other studies that reported significant statistical differences in students' grammar knowledge and competencies after undergoing cooperative learning experiences, such as Jafari and Ansari (2012), Assia and Said (2014), Zarifi and Taghavi (2016).

These findings, however, do not align with other studies such as Gaith (2003), Yaryari, Kadivar, and Mirzakhani (2008), Er (2012), who did not detect any significant statistical differences in students' self-concept after implementing group work. Besides, they partially disagree with Heydari, Zarei, and Zainalipour's study (2013), which concludes that cooperative learning positively influences female students' confidence but does not affect male students' confidence. Moreover, the current findings are inconsistent with Kuiken and Vedder's (2002) study, which did not find significant differences between the cooperative and non-cooperative groups in the mastery of grammatical structures. Still, most of these studies suggest that careful development and proper implementation of group work activities over longer-term periods would lead to more positive pedagogical outcomes.

The results obtained in this study could be attributed to the dramatic changes that the students experienced in their roles in grammar learning. Instead of keeping the same role of passively receiving and absorbing the teacher's instructions and explanations, the group work activities adopted in the current study required students to actively engage in the process of knowledge building, raising questions, and seeking plausible answers to different language problems, correcting each other's errors, and contributing to one another's success. This positive sense of interdependence and accountability might have given them a sense of responsibility, eased their learning difficulties, and helped them develop a more positive attitude toward themselves and their learning gains.

CONCLUSION

The current study assures that group work activities are more pedagogically valuable than traditional whole-class instruction in the Moroccan EFL context in terms of enhancing students' grammar self-concept, engagement, and achievement. This conclusion contradicts some existing research findings that restrict the utility of group work practices to the Western educational contexts (Thanh-Pham et al., 2009, cited in Thanh, 2011), potentially encouraging more EFL teachers and practitioners to embrace group work strategies more confidently to address the learners' needs and interests. The literature demonstrates that grammar instruction in EFL contexts is replete with myriad challenges, especially in what concerns students' negative perceptions of the subject, disengagement, and lack of interest (Soomro, Abbasi, Kalhor, 2023; Waseel, 2020; Yusob, 2018). The findings of the present study suggest that group work can be exploited effectively to create a more comfortable, engaging, and rewarding learning environment where students develop more positive attitudes toward their learning, contribute actively to building each other's knowledge and skills, and pursue their learning goals and objectives more successfully.

However, these conclusions should be considered in light of several educational limitations that might restrict the generalizability of the study's findings. First, the sample of this study involves only two intact groups with 72 First-Year Baccalaureate students from a semi-urban area, which does not reflect the various socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the target educational setting. Accordingly, it is recommended to recruit larger samples of students from multi-educational contexts and levels to maximize the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, although the study relied on three criteria that are all desirable and essential for more successful students' learning, other studies might consider including other critical criteria to examine the pedagogical value of group work from other pertinent perspectives. Finally, it is highly recommended to complement the quantitative data with qualitative evidence to obtain clearer

insights into the pedagogical value of group work practices in teaching and learning other language skills and components.

REFERENCES

- Badiozaman, A. (2012). *A study on the relationship between Malaysian learners' self-conception academic writing and their engagement in one higher learning institution: a dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand*. Retrieved from: <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/4090>
- Assia, B., & Said, K. (2014). The impact of small group interaction on learners' grammatical accuracy achievement. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 3(2), 85-100. Doi: 10.5861/ijrsl.2013.511
- Back, S. G., & Hwang, E. H. (2005). A quasi-experimental research on the educational value of performance assessment. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 6, 179-190.
- Bahrani, T., & Soltani, R. (2011). The pedagogical values of cartoons. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(4), 19-22.
- Bowman, D. A., Hodges, L. F., Allison, D., & Wineman, J. (1999). The educational value of an information-rich virtual environment. *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments*, 8(3), 317-331.
- Brown, D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy (2nd ed.)*. Addison Wesley Longman. Inc. USA.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (2014). *Designing groupwork: strategies for the heterogeneous classroom third edition*. Teachers College Press.
- Collins, L., & White, J. (2014). The quantity and quality of language practice in typical interactive pair/group tasks. *TESL Canada Journal*, 47-47.
- Dillenbourg, P., Baker, M., Blaye, A., & O'malley, C. (1996). The evolution of research on collaborative learning In H. Spada and P. Reimann (Eds) *Learning in Humans and Machines*. Elsevier, 1(1), 58-94.
- Duyen, L.T.N., Huan, N.B. (2017). Factors influencing group work of students in learning English as a foreign language (EFL): A case study at a Vietnamese university. *Can Tho University Journal of Science*, (06), 9-16. Doi: 10.22144/ctu.jen.2017.021
- Ediger, M. (2001). Cooperative Learning versus Competition: Which Is Better? *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 23, 204-300.
- Er, M. (2012). Boosting foreign language self-concept in language classrooms through cooperative learning activities. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 69, 535-544. Doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.11.443
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of educational research*, 74(1), 59-109.
- Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Everlove, S. (2009). *Productive group work: How to engage students, build teamwork, and promote understanding*. Ascd.
- Ghaith, G. (2003). Effects of the learning together model of cooperative learning on English as a foreign language reading achievement, academic self-esteem, and feelings of school alienation. *Bilingual research journal*, 27(3), 451-474. Doi: 10.1080/15235882.2003.10162603

- Hadjerrouit, S. (2012). Investigating technical and pedagogical usability issues of collaborative learning with wikis. *Informatics in Education-An International Journal*, 11(1), 45-64.
- Harmer, J. (2002). *The practice of English language teaching (3rd ed.)*. London: Longman
- Hazari, S., North, A., & Moreland, D. (2009). Investigating pedagogical value of wiki technology. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 20(2), 187-198.
- Herrmann, K. J. (2013). The impact of cooperative learning on student engagement: Results from an intervention. *Active learning in higher education*, 14(3), 175-187. Doi: 10.1177/1469787413498035
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. *Sociolinguistics*, 269293, 269-293.
- Jafari, N., & Ansari, D. N. (2012). The Effect of Collaboration on Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Accuracy. *International Education Studies*, 5(2), 125-131. D oi:10.5539/ies.v5n2p125
- Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R. (1989). *Cooperation and competition: Theory and research*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2013). The impact of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning environments on achievement. In J. Hattie & E. Anderman (Eds.), *International handbook of student achievement (372-374)*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Stanne, M. E. (2000). *Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Odehova, N., Nevska, Y., & Perlova, V. (2022). The effectiveness of cooperative learning in developing grammar skills. Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. Doi:10.20535/2410-8286.239888
- Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2002). The effect of interaction in acquiring the grammar of a second language. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37(3-4), 343-358. Doi:10.1016/S0883-0355(03)00009-0
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2014). Teaching grammar. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language (4th ed., pp. 256–270)*. National Geographic Learning/Cengage Learning.
- Liao, H. C. (2005). *Effects of cooperative learning on motivation, learning strategy utilization, and grammar achievement of English language learners in Taiwan* (Doctoral dissertation, University of New Orleans). <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1362&context=td>
- Lock, G. (1995). *Functional English grammar: An introduction for second language teachers*. Cambridge university press.
- Madjid, M. (2020). Improving speaking skill by using group work method. *JLA (Jurnal Lingua Applicata)*, 3(1), 1-9.
- Modaber, H., & Far, F. B. (2017). The effects of cooperative learning on students' self-esteem. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*. Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.582335
- Nystrand, M., & Gamoran, A. (1992). Instructional Discourse and Student Engagement. In: D.H Schunk & J. Meece (Eds.), *Student perceptions in the classroom* (pp. 149-179). Hillsdale: NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Purpura, J. E. (2004). *Assessing grammar* (Vol. 8). Cambridge University Press.
- Qin, Z., Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1995). Cooperative Versus Competitive Efforts and Problem Solving. *Review of Educational Research*, 65(2), 129–143. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543065002129>.

- Richards, J. C. (1992). *Language teaching and applied linguistics*. Pearson Education.
- Rospinah, R., Ampa, A. T., & Nappu, S. (2021). The effect of group work activities to improve students' speaking skill. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 9(1).
- Sadeghi, E., & Ganji, M. (2020). The effects of cooperative learning on Iranian university students' class-engagement, self-esteem, and self-confidence. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, 7(4), 89-109. Doi: 10.30479/jmrels.2020.12867.1590
- Shehadeh, A. (2011). Effects and student perceptions of collaborative writing in L2. *Journal of second language writing*, 20(4), 286-305. Doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2011.05.010
- Soomro, A. R., Abbasi, I. A., & Kalhor, I. A. (2023). A Study on Difficulties in Teaching Grammar to English Learners at Secondary Level in District Multan. *Journal of Policy Research (JPR)*, 9(2), 382-389.
- Sousa, C., Neves, J. C., & Damásio, M. J. (2022). The pedagogical value of creating accessible games: A case study with higher education students. *Multimodal Technologies and Interaction*, 6(2), 10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/mti6020010>
- Siahaan, B. L. (2019). Effect of group work strategy to the speaking achievement of second semester students of English study program at University of HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. *JETAFL (Journal of English Teaching as a Foreign Language)*, 5(1), 49-61.
- Slavin, R. E. (1991). *Student team learning: A practical guide to cooperative learning*. National Education Association Professional Library, PO Box 509, West Haven, CT 06516 (Stock No. 1845-1-00, \$18.95).
- Taqi, H. A., & Al-Nouh, N. A. (2014). Effect of Group Work on EFL Students' Attitudes and Learning in Higher Education. *Journal of education and Learning*, 3(2), 52-65. Doi:10.5539/jel.v3n2p52
- Thanh, P. T. H. (2011). An investigation of perceptions of Vietnamese teachers and students toward cooperative learning (CL). *International education studies*, 4(1), 3-12.
- Heydari, H., Zarei, E., & Zainalipour, H. (2013). Survey the effect of cooperative learning on confidence. *Journal of Educational and Management Studies*, 3(4), 360-363.
- Waseel, A. K. (2020). Exploring Problems in Teaching and Learning Grammar in EFL Context: A Review Paper. *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science (IJLRHSS)*, 3(7), 21-27.
- Yusob, K. F. (2018). Challenges of teaching grammar at tertiary level: learning from English lecturers' insights. *E-Academia journal*, 7(1), 149-158.
- Zarifi, A., & Taghavi, A. (2016). The impact of cooperative learning on grammar learning among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(7), 1429. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0607.14>

