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Exploring Effective English Language Teaching Methods for Inclusive Primary Classrooms in the South West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract

Purpose: Teaching methods remain key to the effective implementation of inclusive education, as teachers select approaches based on learners' needs and contextual demands. This study investigated frequently used teaching methods for enhancing pupils' performance in English Language in the South West Region of Cameroon. The methods examined were Cooperative Learning (CL), Explicit Teaching (ET), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Methodology: The study adopted a quasi-experimental design using pre-test and post-test scores. Questionnaires and an observation checklist were used for data collection. A purposive sample of 132 pupils was drawn from two inclusive primary schools: Inclusive Government English Primary School (IGEPS) Muyuka and IGEPS Man-O-War Bay, Limbe 3. Sixty-six pupils constituted the experimental group and were taught using CL and ET, while 66 formed the control group and were taught using CLT. Data were analyzed using pupil t-test and z-test.

Findings: Post-test results showed higher mean scores among pupils exposed to CL and ET than those taught using CLT. At IGEPS Muyuka, the experimental group obtained a mean score of 14.25 compared with 8.63 for the control group, while at IGEPS Man-O-War Bay, the respective means were 14.76 and 10.90.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study recommends strengthening teachers' competencies in CL and ET to enhance instructional effectiveness. The study contributes to theory by providing empirical evidence on the complementary use of CL and ET in improving English Language learning outcomes. Practically, it identifies contextually relevant approaches for inclusive classrooms and provides evidence to inform teacher training, inclusive education policies, and instructional guidelines in Cameroon.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching Methods, Inclusive Primary Classroom*

JEL Codes: 121, 124, 128

Background

The primary purpose of teaching at any level of education is to bring fundamental change in the learner (Tebabal & Kahssay, 2011) and facilitate the process of knowledge transmission. Teaching is the process that involves bringing about desirable changes in learners so as to achieve specific outcomes (Ayeni, 2011). Ganyaupfu (2013) believes that, the application of appropriate teaching methods leads to high level learning outcomes and best suit the specific objectives of what is being taught. Till date, questions about the effectiveness of teaching methods on learner learning, have consistently raised considerable interest in thematic field of educational research (Hightower 2011). Adunola (2011) maintains that, teachers need to be conversant with numerous teaching strategies in order to meet the individual needs of learners and help them achieve highly and academically. Research on inclusive education and teaching methods have for long been of interest to educationists (Adunola, 2011) because they play a key role on international educational stance and development.

Worldwide, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) Articles 7 and 24 has propagated “education for all” as an agenda for all states to ensure and achieve. With this global law, the preamble of the constitution of the Republic of Cameroon in 1996 made primary education compulsory and guaranteed all children’s rights to education, which implicitly includes children with disabilities. The 1998 Education framework Act N° 98/004 guarantees equal access to education without discrimination. Following a 2000 presidential decree, public primary education is tuition-free. In addition to that, law N° 0004/022 passed in 2004, regulates provision of private education. This 2004 law led to the sprout of numerous private educational schools that cater for children with disabilities.

With the availability of access and free-tuition to education, there has been a rise in the number of learners especially those with disabilities in Cameroon’s classrooms. This calls for a need to ensure proper inclusiveness that considers the age, content, teaching method, type of disability and resources for successful implementation of teaching and learning outcomes. To meet with the demands of inclusive education in Cameroon, the Cameroon Primary School Curriculum for English sub-system (2018), lays emphasis on the use cooperative learning in the teaching of debates, listening comprehension, discussion, adventure stories, short plays, sounds in English Language, reading comprehension, reading aloud, drama, speaking and dictation as well as composition. Team work is encouraged by MINEDUB (the Ministry of Basic Education) for the use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, interjections, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, vocabulary, sentence and spelling and other areas of English language such as handwriting. It therefore encourages the use of CL and group work in primary schools. Aside the prescription of MINEDUB on cooperative learning, a plethora of schools merge cooperative learning, explicit teaching and communicative language teaching. These teaching methods are described below:

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Singh and Agrawal (2011), view cooperative learning as the learning process in which individuals learn in small groups with the help of each other to achieve a common goal. Cooperative learning is therefore, a strategy that teachers use in the classroom to help learners achieve better in their studies and it helps in building positive interaction among learners by providing an equal chance for them to be active in the learning process. Hennessey and Dionigi (2013), Velda et al (2020), Reinhard (2021)), outlined three stages to implement CL: the pre-implementation stage, the implementation stage and the post-implementation stage.

Pre-Implementation

This first step in this stage is specifying instructional objectives, where the teacher explains the reason for using CL and describes its benefits.

The second stage is determining group size and assigning learners to groups. It is usually advisable for the group size to range from two to four depending on the CL task. The groups can be formed heterogeneously.

The third stage is arranging the classroom. The classroom can be arranged such that learners can interact and move easily.

The fourth stage is planning instructional materials. Instructional materials should be chosen in such a way that they allow each individual to contribute to the group's success.

The fifth stage is assigning group roles. The teacher can carefully choose or assist learners to choose roles making sure that learners alternate roles. Some of the roles include: a starter (first person to use materials), encourager/task maker (motivates others to work), reader (reads print instructions aloud to the group), praiser (reinforces the responses to others), researcher (locates and obtains information and materials and refund them after use), reporter (explains and presents the findings of the group to the whole class), recorder (writes down all important contributions of the group), understanding coach (makes sure that everyone understands what has been taught), checker (assures that everyone has completed the task. The teacher has as main duty to ensure that group members carry out their roles.

Implementation

This is the stage where learners play the most important role as they are directly involved in the tasks assigned them. Working together, they exercise responsibility in roles such as; working together, listening to one another, keeping records of their work and progress, producing the assessment task and working collaboratively in the group. Giving that this stage is focused on the activities and participation of the learners in the group, teacher's role shifts from that of a "boss" to that of a facilitator. In serving as a facilitator, the teacher monitors the behavior of the group members, intervenes, when need be, assists with the needs of the group and motivates which could be in the form of praise (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991).

Post Implementation

This is the stage where the teacher takes over his role as the evaluator. According to Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991), the main activities at the implementation stage are centered around the teacher. In this light, he is involved with providing closure through summary of the main points discussed at the implementation stage. Every learning outcome is determined by an evaluation, hence the teacher in this stage evaluates the group and individuals and provides feedback to the group. Lastly the teacher gives room for reflection to be able to determine the effectiveness of the group work, obtain feedback and make possible adjustments for better learning outcomes.

EXPLICIT TEACHING

Explicit teaching is a teacher-led method proposed for learners with learning disabilities in the classroom. It is a method where the teacher pilots the teaching-learning process by clearly showing the learners what and how to do a particular task through demonstration and periodic checks on understanding (Tara, 2021). Explicit teaching effectively functions when teachers expose the outline of teaching to the learners, using different methods such as advance organizers (visual, verbal and physical) to bridge the gap between prior knowledge and new content to be taught and graphic organizers for learners with disabilities to enhance their vocabulary, comprehension and inferential knowledge (Dexter & Hughes, 2011). Explicit teaching can be divided into three sequential steps: modelling, guided or directed practice and independent practice (Gauthier, Bissonnette & Richard, 2013).

The modelling stage is the stage which promotes the understanding of the learning objectives for learners with disabilities. In the modelling stage, the teacher demonstrates the task to be taught by showing the learners what has to be done. In this process, the teacher states the what, why, how, when, where and what they are doing. Using the simple to complex method of presentation, teachers present the content to the learners for easy comprehension. With the explicit teaching method, teachers explain or demonstrate the skill or content in the way that facilitates learners grasps and implementation of the skill or knowledge. This is achieved by applying explicit teaching method through the use of simple, clear, concise and consistent language.

In the guided practice stage, learners engage in teaching-learning activities such as group work. This helps the learners with disabilities achieve the desired learning objectives, gain confidence and motivation to continue learning. This also benefits the teacher and the learners in that, the teacher interacts with learners and ensures all learners with disabilities have understood the lesson while the learners are given the opportunity to provide feedback on what they have learned.

In the independent practice stage, learners with disabilities practice what they have learned in new learning situations by applying what they have understood. In this stage, learners have the opportunity to test their understanding and also to identify other learners with disabilities within the group who need additional support for better outcome.

Tetzlaff (2009) summarized explicit teaching into five step models: Orientation that begins with clear instructions about the purpose of the lesson, presentation where the teacher guides learners through their problem solving process, structured practice where detailed discussion is done on lesson with questions to check understanding, guided practice where individual questions are tailored to meet individual needs of each learner, lastly, independent practice where learners complete an assignment by themselves to gain full proficiency.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Language plays a vital role in teaching, giving that, it is the main medium through which content is communicated and learning processed and internalized. Communicative language teaching (CLT) method is one of those teaching methods which have been efficient in teaching languages because of its inherent potential to facilitate communication. The need to improve language learning through other means other than the traditional language teaching methods like the grammar translation led to the rise of communicative language teaching. According to Savignon and Sandra (1997) the main emphasis of communicative language teaching is interaction with the language with the main goal being the means and understanding of the content.

Classroom learning is done by means of proper communication with one another and the teacher. The communicative language teaching method is a teaching method that enables learners to share their personal experiences alongside their learning experiences while learning the target language (Nunan, 1991). The goal of communicative language teaching is not to prioritize grammatical competence (Færch, 1983) but to communicate in the target language which facilitates understanding. The role of the teacher in CLT is that of a facilitator and not an instructor. As children use the target language to study, their verbal and oral abilities develop before they start reading and writing. This does not necessarily need a textbook for the skills to be acquired.

The main goal of CLT is to build students' communicative abilities in a target language. The CLT constitutes oral activities because they include active conversations, creative and unpredicted responses from students. CLT helps to promote collaboration, fluency and comfort in the target language. According to Mitchell (1994), role play, interviews, group work, information gap, opinion sharing and scavenger hunt are the main activities used when applying the CLT method.

The CLT has been criticized for prioritizing the function of a language (what one can do with a language knowledge one has) over the structure of a language (the grammatical systems of the language). This can leave learners with serious gaps in their knowledge of the formal aspects of their target language (Swan, 1985). The CLT discards a language that a learner might already know as they are not made use of.

Also, CLT has been criticized for having the potential of enabling students be in possession of communicative competence without being able to make full use of the language. This gives birth to learners who are proficient in a language but cannot necessarily make full use of that language.

This can limit an individual's potential with that language, especially if that language is an endangered language (Ridge, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Primary school learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms in Cameroon have continuously demonstrated poor performances in English language. English language is the major language of instruction in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. Aside this, English language is one of the compulsory subjects offered all over the country from primary school through secondary school (form 1-5). The low performances experienced at the primary school level most often extent right up to higher education because of the weak foundation from the primary school. These poor performances have been greatly linked to the teaching methods employed by the teachers. To solve this problem from the root and boost performance of learners especially with disabilities, the Ministry of Basic Education (2018) introduced cooperative learning and explicit teaching methods as effective teaching methods for the acquisition of skills in English Language in primary schools in Cameroon. Despite this introduction, primary school teachers still largely make use of the Communicative Language Teaching method which is mundane. This work seeks to investigate the efficiency of cooperative learning, explicit teaching and communicative language teaching methods in the acquisition of skills in learners with disabilities in the South West Region of Cameroon.

Methodology

The study was an experimental one and the quasi experimental study was implemented. The population of the study was drawn from 2 schools in the Fako division of the South West region of Cameroon comprising 132 pupils. From this total population of the study, 32 pupils came from Inclusive Government English Primary School 1 (IGEP) Muyuka and 100 pupils came from IGEPS Man-O-War Bay in Limbe 3. Four (4) teachers were selected for the study from the 2 schools. The sample was purposively chosen because the schools had been earmarked for the practice of inclusive education in Fako division. After selecting the sample population for the study, a four-day seminar was organized for the class teachers in order for them to acquaint themselves with skills in Cooperative learning and Explicit teaching.

After the seminar, a pre-test was administered to all participants in the 2 schools to ascertain their level of comprehension of English language. The pre-test covered areas in listening comprehension, picture talk, reading comprehension and picture composition. After the pre-test, participants were divided into the control and the experimental groups in the 2 schools. In both schools, all those in the control groups were exposed to the communicative language teaching method and those in the experimental groups were exposed to the cooperative learning and explicit teaching methods. The groups had the following participants /learners: IGEPS Muyuka, 16 learners in the control group and the other 16 in the experimental group. In IGEPS Man-O-War Bay, 50 learners in the control group and 50 learners in the experimental group.

The treatment was administered immediately after the post test was done. The teachers who had been trained during the four-days seminar used the skills they had gained on cooperative learning and explicit teaching to teach the learners in the experimental group while communicative language was used to teach the learners in the control group. During the treatment, 20 English language lessons were covered in 4 weeks. After the 4 weeks of teaching, a post-test was administered.

Administering the post-test, another set of questions were administered to the post-test. This was to establish any significant improvement in the acquisition of skills in English language after the use of cooperative learning and explicit teaching in teaching (treatment). The test was given to both participants in the control and the experimental groups. The data was analyzed using the t-test and z-test values to compare performances of the 2 groups.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study on effective English language teaching methods for inclusive primary classrooms in the south west region of Cameroon. The analysis produced data on the teaching methods significantly used by teachers to enhance performance of pupils in English language and pinpoint the method largely understood by the pupils. The data was drawn from an experiment conducted on pupils and teachers on the rate of comprehension and use of cooperative learning (CL), explicit teaching (ET) and communicative language teaching (CLT).

Table 1: Presentation of pre-test Results (IGEPS 1 Muyuka)

Group	N	Mean	SD	SDX	t-Cal	Alpha Level	t-crit
Exp. Gr.	16	5.19	1.24	0.37	0.35	0.05	1.96
Control Gr.	16	5.06	0.75				

Key: N = Number, SD = Standard Deviation.

The table above shows the mean and standard deviation of pupils in the experimental and control groups in the pre-test as well as the t-calculated and t-critical value read at 0.05 level of significance. From the analysis, t-calculated (0.35) is less than t-critical value (1.96). This indicates that the mean performance of pupils in the experimental group was not better than that of those in the control group at the start of the study.

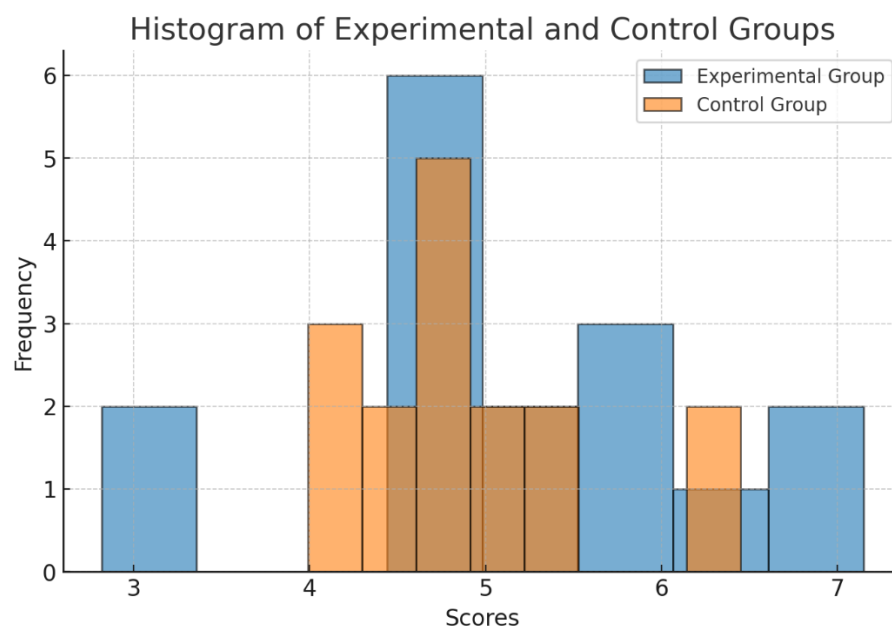
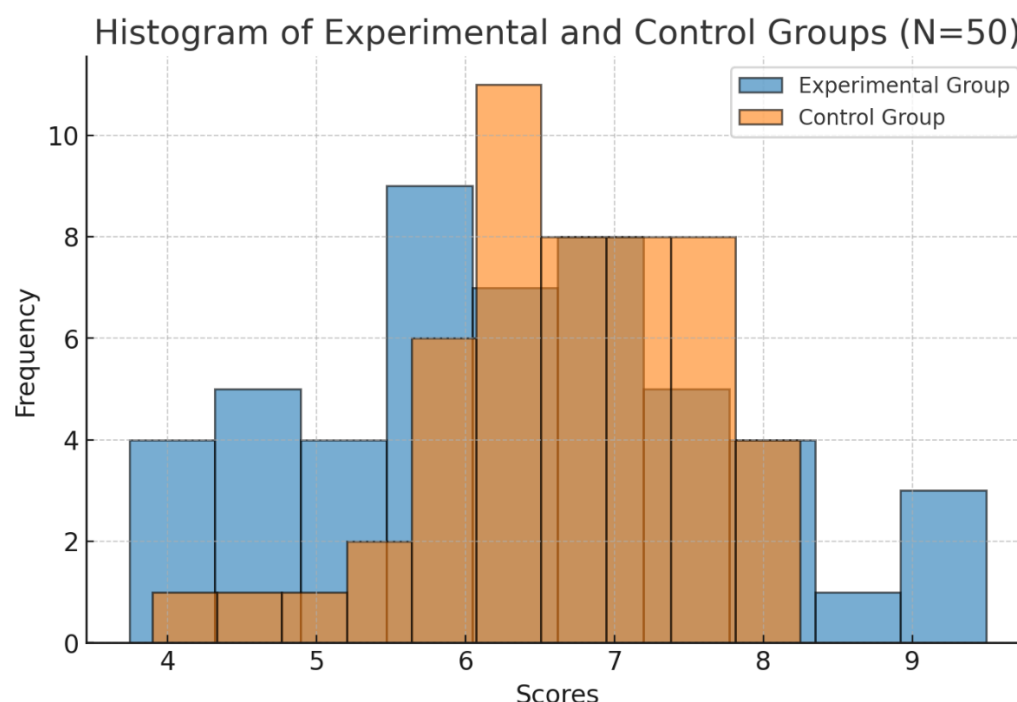
Figure 1: Presentation results of the experimental and control groups before training

Figure 1 above shows an insignificant difference in performance between the experimental and the control groups. At the start of the study, teachers of both groups had not been exposed to any form of training but for those in the control group whose teachers were cognizant with the communicative language teaching method and implemented.

Table 2: Presentation of pre-test Results (IGEPS Man – O – War Bay)

Group	N	Mean	SD	SDX	t-Cal	Alpha Level	t-crit
Exp. Gr.	50	6.7	1.51	0.31	1.06	0.05	1.96
Control Gr.	50	6.62	1.04				

From the analysis, t-calculated (0.31) is less than t-critical value (1.96). This indicates that more learners (1.06) were at the same level at the start of the study

Figure 2: presentation of results of experimental and control groups during training

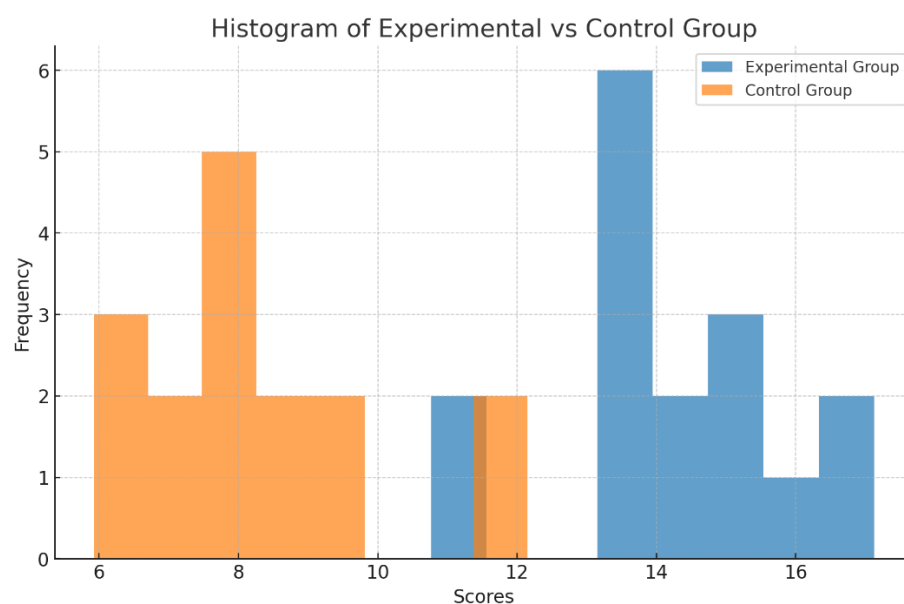
The diagram above shows that at the start of the study, there was no significant difference in performance of both groups. But as the study progressed, those in the experimental group performed lower than those in the control group who were familiar with the teaching method (communicative language teaching method) commonly used.

POST – TEST RESULTS

Table 3: Presentation of Post-test Results (IGEPS 1 Muyuka)

Group	N	Mean	S	SDX	t-Cal	Alpha Level	t-crit
Exp. Gr.	16	14.25	1.82	0.66	8.52	0.05	1.96
Control Gr.	16	8.63	1.90				

The analysis above show that, t-calculated (8.52) is greater than t-critical value (1.96). This indicates that the mean performance of pupils that were taught using CL and explicit teaching was significantly better than those taught using CLT.

Figure 3: Presentation of results of experimental and control groups after training

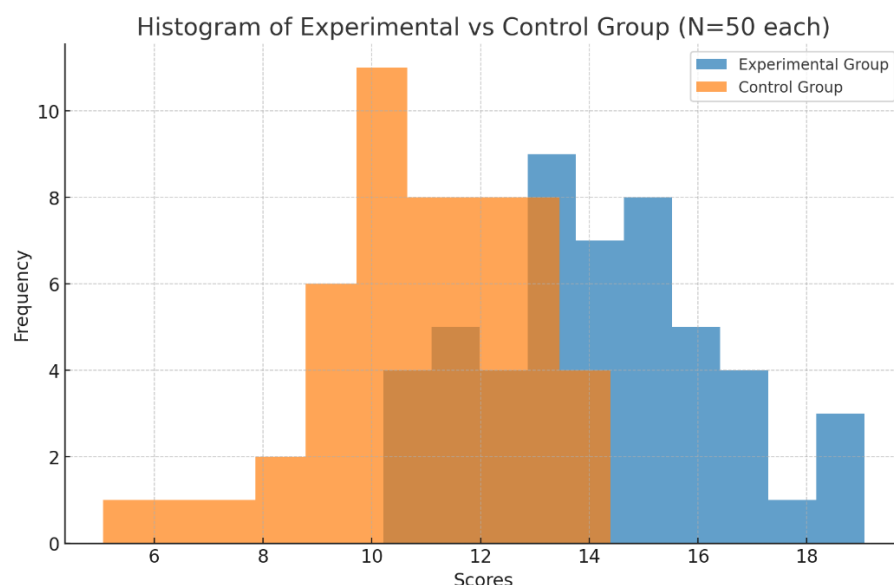
The graph above shows significant improvement in the performance of children in the experimental group after training the teachers and application of the post-test.

Table 4: Presentation of Post-test Results (IGEPS Man – O – War Bay)

Group	N	Mean	S	SDX	t-Cal	Alpha Level	t-crit
Exp. Gr.	50	14.76	2.32	0.35	11.02	0.05	1.96
Control Gr.	50	10.9	2.23				

The analysis above shows that, t-calculated (11.02) is greater than t-critical value (1.96). This indicates that the mean performance of pupils that were taught using CL and ET was significantly better than that of those that were taught using CLT

Figure 4: Presentation of result of experimental and control groups after the training seminar and post-test administration.



The graph above shows a significant difference in performance between the 2 groups. Those in the experimental group performed better than those in the control group after the teacher training seminar and post-test administration.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of cooperative learning and explicit teaching in the experimental group and communicative language teaching method in the control group, to teach English Language in two primary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The results showed that at the start of the study (pre-test), both groups performed poorly showing that none of the methods was efficiently used in teaching English Language. The performance at the pre-test goes further to discredit the communicative language teaching method because the method is often used by English language teachers. After teachers acquired skills in cooperative learning and explicit teaching through a four-day seminar and implemented in the classroom, a post test was administered. Results of the post-test indicated a significant improvement in English language in the children in the experimental group making use of the cooperative and explicit teaching methods. This study aligns with the prescription of team work (CL) by MINEDUB to teach nouns, verbs, adjectives, interjections, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, vocabulary, sentence and spelling and other areas of English language such as handwriting. Therefore, the study concluded that effective implementation of CL and ET can lead to creativity, innovation, academic performance and inclusivity in English Language.

RECOMMENDATION

The study strongly recommends, sufficient use of cooperative learning and explicit teaching methods by teachers in the classroom giving that its benefits cannot be over emphasized as proven by results from this study. For the sake of efficiency and proper practice of CL and ET, it is strongly recommended that teachers be trained both at the level of the teacher training colleges and on the job on the principles and practice of the CL and ET teaching methods.

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