СЕРІЯ «Педагогіка»

UDC 378.091.2:316.023.4]:[378.018.8:373.5.011.3-051]:[378.016:811.111]

https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-5274-2023-13(27)-648-659

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TRAINEE TEACHERS' SMALL GROUP AND PAIR WORK IN EFL METHODOLOGY TRAINING SESSIONS

Abstract. Most of the research evidence shows that learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) can benefit significantly from learning with their peers in numerous ways. In the case study described in the article a shift from English as a goal of learning to English as a means of learning the EFL methodology was made. The trainee teachers at Foreign Languages Department, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University learn the content of the PRESETT Core Curriculum English Language Teaching Methodology Bachelor's Level focusing on and learning to use English. It is in line with one of the key design principles of the Curriculum: it is developed in English and is taught through the medium of English. For delivering content on this practical course a range of teaching approaches intended to promote high levels of interaction and student involvement in their own learning processes is used. According to the author, an effective interaction can be achieved by using small group and pair work in methodology training sessions.

The purpose of this research is to define trainee-teachers' attitude towards small group and pair work as they take their course in EFL Methodology and to measure the impact of English medium instruction (EMI) via trainee-teachers' self-assessment of their progress in English.

The data gathered from focus group discussions, questionnaires, interviews and reflective reports provided the author with the insights into the trainee teachers' attitudes towards and preferences of working in small groups or pairs as well as their reflections on its influence on their English language proficiency. Sample size for experiment constitutes 26 EFL trainee teachers. The findings were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively which provided a more comprehensive and insightful understanding of the research topic. The results showed that trainee teachers highly appreciate EMI and admit the growth of their English language proficiency. They prefer using small group work to pair work in most activities

suggested. Both observation and participants' responses registered instances of their referring to the Ukrainian language (L1) and therefore increases the importance of monitoring and scaffolding trainee teachers' small and group work.

Keywords: activity types, English medium instruction (EMI), EFL Methodology, English language proficiency, modes of interaction, New Generation School Teacher project.

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НАВЧАННЯ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ В МАЛИХ ГРУПАХ ТА ПАРАХ У МЕТОДИЧНИХ МАЙСТЕРНЯХ З КУРСУ МЕТОДИКИ НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

Анотація. Більшість результатів наукових досліджень свідчать, що при вивченні англійської мови як іноземної, здобувачі освіти можуть отримати значну користь від навчання у співпраці зі своїми однолітками. У статті наголос з англійської мови як мети навчання перенесено на використання англійської мови як засобу вивчення курсу «Методика навчання англійської мови» (МНАМ). Методична підготовка вчителів англійської мови на факультеті іноземних мов Уманського державного педагогічного університету імені Павла Тичини здійснюється відповідно до типової програми, розробленої робочою групою спільного проекту МОН України та Британської ради в Україні «Шкільний учитель нового покоління» (2013-2020) для здобувачів вищої освіти ОС «бакалавр». Програма розроблена англійською мовою та викладається засобом англійської мови, що дає можливість студентам зосередитися на англійській мові та одночасно навчатися її використовувати. Для опанування змісту цього практичного курсу використовується низка підходів до навчання, спрямованих на сприяння високому рівню взаємодії студентів та їхнього залучення у власний процес навчання. На думку автора, ефективної взаємодії можна досягти за допомогою роботи в малих групах та роботи в парах на заняттях з методики, які проходять у формі методичних майстерень (тренінгів) і виключають традиційні лекції. Мета цього дослідження полягає у з'ясуванні ставлення майбутніх учителів англійської мови до групової і парної роботи при вивченні курсу МНАМ та їхньої оцінки впливу навчання МНАМ засобом англійської мови на рівень володіння англійською мовою.

Дані, зібрані під час обговорень у фокус-групах, анкетувань, інтерв'ю та на основі рефлексивних звітів 26 учасників, були інтерпретовані як кількісно, так і якісно, що дало змогу повніше і глибше зрозуміти тему дослідження. Результати дослідження показали, що майбутні учителі дають високу оцінку

навчанню МНАМ засобом англійської мови та визнають його позитивний вплив на володіння мовою. Вони віддають перевагу роботі в малих групах над парною роботою при виконанні більшості із запропонованих активностей. На підставі спостереження за роботою у методичних майстернях та відповідей самих студентів зафіксовано вживання рідної мови під час взаємодії в парах та групах, що підкреслює необхідність моніторингу і підтримки викладачем такої роботи.

Ключові слова: види активностей/ вправ, володіння англійською мовою, форми організації освітньої діяльності, дисципліна «Методика навчання англійської мови», проект «Шкільний учитель нового покоління».

Statement of the problem. Ukraine's move towards Europe and the wider world has brought into focus the need for higher standards of English among the country's citizens. The improvement that is needed can only be achieved if standards of English teaching are raised at every level of the education system. The approach of teaching and examining English simply as a school subject, with an emphasis on knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is now neither relevant nor sufficient as there is a strong need to see the foreign language as a means of active communication or as a life skill. Raising the standards of English teaching in schools and universities has become the primary objective of the new Pre-Service Teacher Training (PRESETT) Curriculum at Bachelor's level for trainee teachers of English (the Curriculum) [1]. It is the result of the joint project of Ministry of Education and Science Ukraine and British Council, Ukraine 'New Generation School Teacher' (2013-2019). According to its key design principles the methodology programme is placed at the core of language teacher education at Foreign Languages Department, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University. Moreover, the curriculum is designed in English and is taught through the medium of English. Observing this principle is very important in the Ukrainian context as the contact with the target language is mainly limited to the classroom and therefore the trainee teachers have more possibilities to practise English.

Analysis of the recent researches and publications. The uniqueness of the profession of a teacher of English as a foreign language compared with teaching other subjects, is highlighted by Hammadou and Bernhardt (1987). They state that: "Being a foreign language teacher is in many ways unique within the profession of teaching. Becoming a foreign language teacher, too, is a different process from that which other future teachers' experience. This reality is rooted in the subject matter of foreign language itself. In foreign language teaching, the content and the process for learning the content are the same. In other words, in foreign language teaching the medium is the message" [2, p. 302]. The authors emphasise that teaching a foreign language "is the only subject where effective instruction requires the teacher to use a medium the students do not yet understand".

The phenomenon of teaching content in a language other than learners' home language is described by researchers with a number of terms. The North American tradition includes 'immersion' or 'content-based learning' or 'content-based language learning' or 'content-based language education' while in Europe and other countries such labels as 'content and language integrated learning' (CLIL) or 'integrating content and language in higher education' or 'English-taught programmes' or 'English medium instruction' (EMI) are used [3, p. 37]. In this article the label 'English medium instruction' (EMI) is used as defined by Maraco et al. (2018): "The use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English." [3].

Another important design principle of the Curriculum is the recommendation to use a range of teaching approaches for delivering its content, intended to promote high levels of interaction and student involvement in their own learning processes. The course in EFL Methodology the participants in the case study were taking is practical in its nature and rejects traditional lecturing. The author suggests that an effective interaction in methodology training sessions can be enforced by such modes of interaction as small group and pair work if used taking into account trainee teachers' preferences and needs. The education in Ukraine nowadays undergoes a difficult period. As many students in the world were able to return to their physical classrooms for study as soon as the COVID-19 epidemic ended, the Ukrainian students in most instances still have to continue learning online due to the war against russain intrusion. This requires special efforts on the part of both the teacher and the students.

Nobody argues the important role that group and pair work plays in second language classrooms. It involves frequent learner-learner interaction and provides the learners opportunities to learn from one another. When it comes to EFL teacher training the researcher shares the opinion of Hammadou and Bernhardt who focus on group work as an interaction patten necessary to provide instruction, which is "desirable, but not necessary for effective instruction in other subjects" [2]. Group work is consistent with the sociocultural approach, which views learning as a social process occurring through interaction among learners in situated contexts [4]. To complete a variety of tasks, learners must work collaboratively, and this highly cognitive process allows them to learn from one another. Vygotsky's theory posits that learning can happen through interaction between two people, one being the expert and the other being the novice [5]. Learners involved in group work can change the role of expert and novice as they all have different strengths and weaknesses. In this light, Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind serves as the theoretical foundation for the group work. Harmer (2007) has observed that group work is a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language [6, P.166]. The issue of the group size is frequently discussed while it comes to this

mode of interaction. Group work usually implies "small" group work, that is, students in groups of perhaps six or fewer in order to give students more opportunities to speak. [7, P.393]. Harmer's stated that group work involves five people. [6, P.165]. Beebe & Materson (2003) argued that the dynamics of group size is an important component of group work [8]. A small group is often considered to consist of three or more; groups of two are not encouraged for group work because there are not a sufficient number of individuals to generate creativity and a diversity of ideas [9]. In general, it is suggested that groups of four or five members tend to work best. Larger groups decrease each members opportunity to participate and often results in some members not actively contributing to the group. In situations where there is a shorter amount of time available to complete a group task, such as an in-class collaborative learning exercise, it is suggested that smaller groups are more appropriate.

Assigning group members is another issue that can add to the success of the group. Group members can be assigned randomly. This has the advantage of maximizing heterogeneity of the group [10] and is an effective way of assigning group member in large classrooms. If the class size is small and the instructor is familiar with most of the students, the instructor can select the group members based on known attributes of the class taking into account performance levels, academic strengths and weaknesses, ethnicity, and gender [11]. On the other hand, the class can be allowed to self-select their groups. The advantage of it seems obvious as it gives the comfort of working with learners you like and sympathise with. However, the research points out to some disadvantages. Self selected groups often gravitate toward friends and roommates [9]. This can result in the students self-segregating and spending more time socializing than working on the group project [12]. Felder and Brent (2001) conclude that that groups which are assigned by the instructor tend to perform better than self-selected groups [13].

In this research, the differentiation between group and pair work is made and groups are assigned both randomly and through trainee teachers self-selection procedure therefore giving them opportunity to experience various contexts and formulate their attitudes.

The purpose of the research. The purpose of this research is to consider the pros and cons of small group and pair work from the perspective of trainee-teachers as they take their EMI course in EFL Methodology online. The three research questions were formulated:

1) What are the trainee teachers' attitudes to small group and pair work in EFL methodology training sessions?

2) What are the trainee teachers' preferences of activity types using a small group or pair work in synchronous online sessions?

3) What do the trainee teachers say about the influence a small group and pair work in EFL methodology training sessions had on their English language proficiency?

26 trainee teachers volunteered to participate in the research who were the representatives of three academic groups of Foreign Languages Department at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University. They were the third-year students having methodology training sessions three times per week each semester. They were in their fourth, out of 6 in total, semester of methodology course. Methodology courses start in the third semester of their training programme allowing a focus on language improvement in the first year, thus preparing students to study Methodology in English. Methodology in their programme is concerned with the application of knowledge in real situations rather than about knowledge itself and it is called to provide a bridge between theory and practice.

Results and Discussion. To answer the first research question about trainee teachers' attitudes to small group and pair work in EFL methodology training sessions the focus group discussion with ten respondents selected randomly was organised. Based on their responses the list of statements describing different attitudes to these modes of interaction was generated. Then, all the participants of the study filled in the questionnaire 1. The 18 items asked the trainee teachers to respond in 3-point Likert scale format. The last item (19) gave the space for expressing any other participants' ideas. The response continuum was: Never, Sometimes or Always. The findings are given in Table 1.

Table 1

The Trainee Teachers' Attitude to Small Group and Pair Work in EFL Methodology Training Sessions

#	Statements	Never		Sometimes		Always	
	Working in small groups or pairs I:	**Number of responses/percentage (%)**					
1.	extensively practice my English-speaking skills	-	-	-	-	26	100
2.	improve my listening skills in English	-	-	-	-	26	100
3.	like to get immediate feedback from peers about my language mistakes	4	15	12	46	10	39
4.	prefer to correct grammar, lexical and pronunciation mistakes of my peers	8	31	14	54	4	15
5.	communicate with my peers without the fear of making mistakes	-	-	4	15	22	85
6.	like to do tasks with my peers	-	-	-	-	26	100
7.	exchange resources and the ways to better remember and understand information with peers	-	-	3	12	23	88
8.	am less worried to share my thoughts with peers than with the teacher	-	-	-	-	26	100
9.	understand what my peers feel when speaking out their ideas	-	-	-	-	26	100
10.	feel I use English more and more fluently	-	-	-	-	26	100
11.	understand and remember what we learn in methodology better	-	-	-	-	26	100
12.	feel more confident now to express my opinion to peers than at the beginning of the course	-	-	-	-	26	100

13.	want to improve my language skills	-	-	-	-	26	100
14.	use Ukrainian without hesitation when I forget an English word	18	70	4	15	4	15
15.	always try to paraphrase when I forget an English word	-	-	6	23	20	77
16.	express my opinion no matter who my peers are	-	-	16	61	10	39
17.	share my ideas more freely when I like or have friendly relationship with the peers	-	-	4	15	22	85
18.	turn to discuss other things instead of doing the task when I happen to work with my friends or peers I like	10	39	16	61	-	-
19.	… (other)	-	-	-	-	-	-

All trainee teachers agreed 100% that small group and pair work provided them with ample opportunities to practice speaking and listening skills (statements 1, 2) and motivate them to improve English (statement 13). Statements 3, 4 and 5 showed what trainee teachers say about committing mistakes or being corrected during small group and pair work. 22 respondents (about 85%) had no fear of making mistakes while 4 participants (15%) confirmed its presence. 39% of the trainee teachers liked and 15% disliked when their mistakes were pointed out, almost half of the participants (46%) admitted its possibility at times only. At the same time 31% of respondents never corrected other peers' mistakes themselves, 54% did it sometimes and 15% always corrected. It is notably that all participants declared the less degree of tension talking to peers than to teachers (statement 8), their understanding of their peers' emotional state to speak out (statement 9) their liking to collaborate with peers to accomplish tasks (statement 6). Statement 7 indicated that 88% always shared the resources and their learning strategies and the remaining 12% did it, but not regularly. Statements 11 and 12 contain the information about trainee teachers' attitude towards their content learning and all the participants agreed that they always remembered what they learnt in methodology better and were more confident in expressing opinions due to small group and pair work in comparison with the beginning of the course. Statements 14 and 15 are intended to get trainee teachers attitude to using Ukrainian: 70% never shifted into L1 without hesitation while 15% sometimes used L1 and 15% always did it. Statements 16-18 were focused on influence of the composition of small groups or pairs on trainee teachers' performance. 36% of respondents always expressed themselves freely, while to 62% group composition mattered sometimes. At the same time 85% gave their preferences to work with peers they like, and only 15% of trainee teachers considered the issue important to them at times. No other suggestions were made by the participants (statement 19). Noteworthily, there is a correlation between responses to statements 5 and 17 demonstrating the absence of fear of making mistakes while working with peers they sympathize with, which was characteristic to 85% of respondents.

The interview that followed the questionnaire cast the light on some reasons for trainee teachers to respond in this or that way. Though the trainee teachers had

some fear of committing mistakes in communication with the peers, they admitted that the tension is lesser in comparison with communicating with the teacher. They also underlined that their preference of being or not being corrected depended on the person who corrected the mistake and the way they corrected. They readily accepted correction from peers they liked or respected and if they were corrected in an 'understanding' and 'supportive' way. The arguments for not being corrected were the following:

1) freer speaking activities were to focus on fluency, not accuracy;
2) peer who corrected had to have a good command of English;
3) mistakes were learning steps.

The trainee teachers expressed their unwillingness to impose their learning strategies, but they eagerly shared the resources with peers. Trainee teachers reporting an increased English fluency was not assigned exclusively to small group and pair work but surely it added to it. As for using L1 in small group and pair work trainee teachers mentioned that they did not only 'paraphrase' the entire utterance due to forgotten word but also used online dictionaries or refer to synonyms or descriptive language.

To answer the research question about the activity type preferences in using a small group or pair work the trainee teachers filled in questionnaire 2. The list of 12 activity types excluded the ones, such as jigsaw reading, as highly improbable for pair work. At the time the research was conducted the learning took place online via Google Meet synchronous sessions, which also influenced the list of activities for consideration. Participants' attitudes are presented in the diagram (see picture 1).

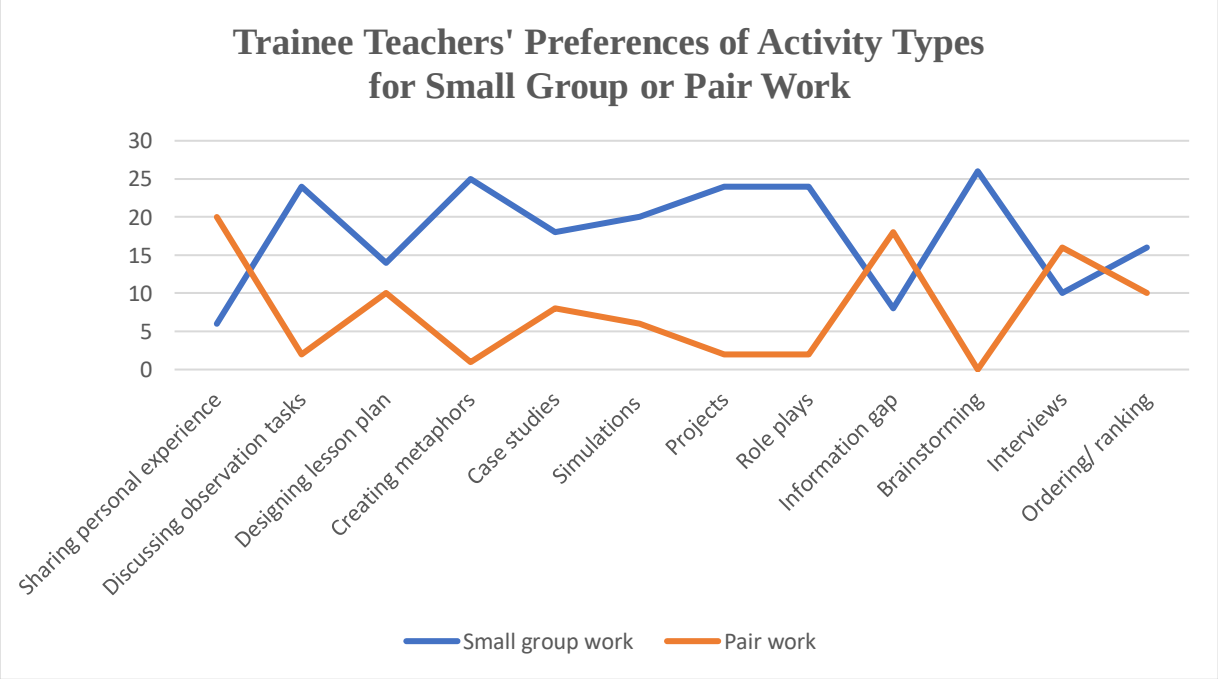


Fig. 1. *Trainee Teachers' Preferences of Activity Types for Small Group or Pair Work*

As seen from the diagram the greater difference between small group and pair work lies in discussing observation tasks, creating metaphors, simulations, projects, role plays which trainee teachers preferred completing in groups while they enjoy sharing personal experience in pairs. It accounts for the possibility to generate more ideas from more peers for accomplishing the task in the first case, and to have a chance to talk about one's experience or learn about the partner's experience in the latter case. The lesser contrast was found between designing lesson plan, case studies, information gap, interviews, ordering/ ranking in terms of doing them in groups or pairs. Here the trainee teachers claimed that having too many opinions, especially differing opinions made it too hard to reach consensus and therefore allowing a task fulfilment. These findings are useful for further planning sessions in the course.

To answer the third research question about the influence a small group and pair work in EFL methodology training sessions had on their English language proficiency, the participants were asked to submit a reflective report of 350 – 500 words focusing on the impact the suggested modes of interaction had on their English. The analysis of the reports demonstrated thorough participants' confirmation that the impact is favourable and enabled to summarise the ways how their English language proficiency is influenced by pair and small group work, which:

1) gives the opportunities to use the English language in practice;

2) promotes active listening to respond to other peers' remarks;

3) allows to practice professional language: to use new terminology and other vocabulary items learnt from different resources during sessions and chapters for further reading;

4) makes almost impossible not to participate;

5) helps to notice and correct mistakes committed by themselves or peers;

6) helps to focus on fluency, i.e., to communicate meaning without too much stopping or hesitating;

7) gives more confidence over time;

8) helps to rehearse before presenting the information to the whole group.

Conclusions and perspectives. So, interacting with peers while learning EFL Methodology via English medium instruction provides ample opportunities for practicing English. Engagement in conversations, discussions, debates, projects helps trainee teachers improve their speaking and listening skills. It allows them to experiment with new vocabulary and sentence structures in a supportive environment. Under such condition, communication with peers happens more

naturally, unlike interactions with native speakers or teachers, as learners are likely to encounter similar struggles and challenges. Moreover, the encouragement and validation received from peers who understands the challenges of language learning can boost learners' confidence and enhance their self-esteem. Another positive aspect of interacting with peers is its motivational power. Healthy competition among peers can motivate trainee teachers to improve their language skills. Seeing their groupmates progress can inspire them to work harder and remain committed to their learning goals. Very often peers can provide immediate feedback on language usage, pronunciation, or grammar. This rapid feedback loop allows learners to correct their mistakes and refine their language skills faster. Also, through collaborative activities such as group projects, presentations, or discussions trainee teachers are encouraged to work together to achieve a common goal therefore developing their teamwork skills and enhancing their language skills simultaneously. While working together learners can exchange effective strategies for language acquisition by sharing resources, techniques, and study habits that have proven to be helpful, leading to more efficient and focused learning. One more important effect is emotional support. While still learning a foreign language the trainee teachers use it to learn Methodology content which can be challenging and frustrating at times. Peers who are going through similar experiences can provide emotional support and a sense of camaraderie. This can reduce anxiety and make the learning process more enjoyable. Over a longer time span, regular interactions with peers can lead to increased fluency. Engaging in conversations with different people improves adaptability and the ability to express ideas more smoothly.

In this case study the trainee-teachers were exposed to content learning and language learning simultaneously. The graduates from the PRESETT Bachelor's programme should demonstrate their knowledge, skills and qualities in 'knowing the subject of English', which is the part of 'The Profile of a Newly-Qualified English Teacher' [1]. As seen from the findings, the correlation is found between self-assessed language competence and confidence with academic subject learning, that is Methodology content in our case. The participants appreciate the possibility to take EMI courses, and, in most instances, it influences their choice of selective courses. It accounts for the fact that in the Ukrainian context especially in small towns and villages there are very few opportunities for practising English outside the learning environment. Still, the observation demonstrates trainee teachers' tendency to shift from English to L1 during the small group or pair work rather frequently and it raises the importance of monitoring and scaffolding their doing the tasks. Defining the reasons for it can be the focus of further investigation.

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