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**COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD  
TO TEACH ENGLISH LANGUAGE GRAMMAR**

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## **PREFACE**

Grammar of any language constitutes an essential part of it. The responsibility of every teacher is to find and to choose a suitable and effective method to turn the grammar parts of the lesson into an exciting and profitable event. Student's motivation, interest and involvement into study, when he or she is the one to decide what and how to learn, may be a key solution to make grammar lessons understandable and successful.

The present MA thesis is aimed at the analysis of the existing information about teaching English language grammar and revealing the potential of cooperative learning as an alternative and possible for implementation method of active learning that provides students with opportunities to find the learning style that develops not only their knowledge of the language but also their ability to learn. It promotes independent study and the atmosphere of mutual trust and friendliness, which are the main principles of The National Curriculum (2011) in Estonia.

The paper consists of the Introduction, two chapters and the Conclusion with enclosed supplementary materials. The introductory part discusses in short the importance of teaching grammar and argues that the implementation of the cooperative learning style does not only correspond to the National Curricula but it also foreshadows positive attitude of students towards studying grammar. Chapter I The Cooperative Learning Method Implementation in Practice, focuses on various methods of teaching grammar and reviews in detail the cooperative learning approach to grammar teaching. In Chapter II The Cooperative Learning Method to Teach Grammar in the EFL Class, lesson plans and results of surveys conducted among teachers and students are presented, depicted and evaluated. The Conclusion summarizes the outcomes of the research and comments on the hypothesis.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **GRAMMAR TEACHING THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY**

To teach or not to teach grammar and how to do it was and has always been the topic of numerous researches. Every methodology author tries to persuade his/her followers that there are considerable positive results of his/her approach. Which one to choose is the decision every teacher has to make taking into account the National Curriculum, the personalities and needs of students, the teaching environment and the aims and objectives to follow.

Some researchers, such as Stephen Krashen (1985: 58) in his Natural Approach to Language Teaching diminishes the importance of grammar as he believes that comprehension of foreign speech is significant in language acquisition; “grammatical structures do not require explicit analysis or attention by the language teacher, by the language learner, or in language teaching materials” (Richards, 2001: 180). Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the main goal is to be in the target language environment without the possibility to use your native one, i.e. the native speaker, at least in the role of a teacher, is needed. That is the reason why this approach may work and be proved successful by many teachers and researchers all over the world, but is not applicable in Narva where the English native speaker is rarely met. It can be a good method to use together with some other grammar-based techniques as it develops the communication skills of a learner and promotes spontaneity and ability to participate actively in any language situation.

On the other hand, there are methods that are mainly based on grammar teaching. The Grammar-Translation method, or the so-called Traditional Method, focuses mainly on writing and reading, and it introduces explicit grammar rules to the learner. Mukalel in his book Approaches to English Language Teaching asserts that though this method is not widely used now and does not provide the sufficient material for the development of learner’s communicative abilities but “the fruits in regard to the mastery over the written language are great” (Mukalel, 1998: 55). The learners that study a language through the Grammar-Translation method are proficient in spelling, handwriting and word forms.

Both these methods and their followers lack one or another part essential for proficient language usage. As a result, they are not the ones used in the modern world. They gave their way to approaches that combine both communicative activities and

grammar studying in different proportions according to the teachers' methodology of language teaching.

### **Why to Teach Grammar?**

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010:1) defines grammar as the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences; or, a person's knowledge and use of a language. Considering these definitions, we can conclude that grammar along with vocabulary makes our speech meaningful and understandable. Moreover, English language lessons are aimed to teach students not only to perceive but also to produce language. That is why the complete understanding of grammar rules is essential.

Thornbury (1999: 15) in his book *How to Teach Grammar* highlights reasons why grammar is in the foreground in foreign language teaching. First, it is a kind of sentence-making machine that gives a limitless linguistic creativity to a learner. Moreover, when it comes to a written language a text without grammar fails to deliver information. Then, grammar organizes the language into neat categories and offers a structured system that is easy to follow. The lack of grammar instructions can bring to sooner fossilization and it may simply be impossible for some learners to learn a language through communication only.

The Estonian National Curriculum for Basic school (National Curriculum General Part, 2011: 2) in Appendix 2, Subject Field: Foreign languages states, in article 1.3, that all four language skills have to be developed according to the Common European Framework of References for Languages, so at least two of them, writing and speaking, need a good command of English grammar.

To sum up, grammar does not have to be the centre of learning but an essential part of it that makes our speech cohesive, coherent and, finally, beautiful.

### **How to Teach Grammar?**

In light of the foregoing, grammar has to be integrated into the language lesson. The method chosen by the teacher or applied in the students' book is likely to influence the comprehension and mastering of grammar points. Thornbury (ibid.: 22) mentions that the way how the learner arrives at these rules plays an important role in understanding them. Some teachers present them on the blackboard or use various grammar tables accompanied by oral instructions (the deductive approach), which is direct and can be very effective, but sometimes it is seen as dull, over-technical and demotivating; others

provide students with examples to work out the rules themselves (the inductive approach), which is teacher-independent but cognitively demanding.

To turn back to the National Curriculum Appendix 2 (National Curriculum, 2011: 3) in connection with the methodology of teaching, if one reads paragraph 1.3, he or she will encounter with the following statement in The Description of the Subject Field:

Foreign language instruction calls for open and flexible teaching methods, which enable the instruction to be adjusted according to learners' needs.

The essential principles in learner-centred teaching of foreign languages are:

- 1) learners' active participation in the study process, their knowledgeable and creative use of foreign languages and formation of learning strategies;
- 2) accord between the content of the study materials used in language teaching and learners' interests;
- 3) use of different forms of active learning (including pair work and group work);
- 4) the changed role of teachers from intermediaries of knowledge to partners who guide students in the process of acquiring knowledge; and
- 5) versatile study materials adjusted and revised based on the goals and needs of learners.

Active learning and learner-centered teaching as the main principles of teaching have to be applied to all parts of the lesson in order to create the learning environment that promotes independent study using various working methods. It is important to note that transferring to a new way of teaching is certainly not a one-day event. Usually it takes years and even a new generation of teachers and students should replace the old one in order to switch completely to something not so common yet. That is the point why it is essential to try to research new methodologies that can be a success all over the world but not suitable right here and right now.

Together with changing educational programmes both the teacher and students have to change their teaching and learning styles, which is a problem to deal with. It is also common knowledge that teaching material used at schools, though good, professional and familiar, cannot be replaced due to economical reasons. What is more important, there are no teaching materials that fully correspond both to our National Curriculum and to active learning characteristics and demands with complete instructions for teachers. Obviously, the Internet is full of such materials but it takes time and effort to adopt them in full.

### **The Cooperative Learning Method**

The Estonian National Curriculum is a comparatively new document to implement in schools. Innovative teaching methods may be alien and frightening for teachers who have their own habitual style. Some of them are more accepted and recognized, others are occasionally used. In addition, the teaching materials are not up to date and promote the traditional ways of presenting grammar. These are the reasons why cooperative learning

that is proved successful in many countries and so widely used for projects, research and speaking activities in Estonia, is surprisingly rarely used in Narva schools to teach English language grammar.

The present thesis promotes cooperative learning as an alternative and possible for implementation method of grammar teaching that provides students with opportunities to find a learning style that develops not only their knowledge of language but also their ability to learn, which is applicable to any other subject. Moreover, it backs up one more aim pointed in Appendix 2 of the Estonian National Curriculum (National Curriculum General Part, 2011: 4) about the formation of the independent learner who is able to search for information and to apply it successfully in his/her studies.

Cooperative learning, as an example of active learning and learner-centered teaching, is a well-known method that can be applied to any part of or the whole lesson and can be used with students of all ages and language proficiency (Johnson et al., 1981 (cited in McKeachie, 2006: 214)). It represents the mixture of deductive and inductive approaches to grammar teaching as the student is provided with the information about a grammar rule but he is responsible for studying this rule and examples himself together with his group mates. The student learns both how to learn and how to teach and evaluates his or her own achievements. As soon as one is able to teach his or her group mates a topic, he will become an expert in it. The teacher only encourages classroom activities and helps students research their own solutions. The outcome is the most important objective: learners obtain information, express and comprehend a topic.

### *Introduction to Cooperative Learning*

The beginnings of the cooperative learning theory took their roots in the 1900s but the theory has become popular and widely used only recently. David and Roger Johnson, leading researchers of the method, define cooperative learning as working together to accomplish shared goals and to maximize student's own and his or her team members' learning (Johnson, 1994: 1). Their theory is backed up by such famous researchers as Spencer Kagan and Robert Slavin.

Spencer Kagan (1999:1) states that cooperative learning has been proved by researchers to have significant positive effects on students of any age, race, social class, language proficiency and academic competence. The following arguments for implementing this method in class are presented by him in his article *Cooperative Learning: Seventeen Pros and Seventeen Cons Plus Ten Tips for Success*. The characteristics of each principle are summarized below:

- **Academic Achievement** – in a situation of consistent use positive results are gained.
- **Self-Esteem** – better academic results and acceptance by group-mates increase the feeling of social and academic esteem.
- **Empathy** - students learn to accept feelings, thoughts and ideas of others and to adopt different ways of thinking.
- **Social Skills** - all types of social skills (conflict resolution, leadership, teamwork, etc.) are developed.
- **Social Relations** – it promotes friendship and caring among learners.
- **Class Climate** – the atmosphere of trust and acceptance leads to increased liking of subject, class, teacher and school.
- **Responsibility** – students are more initiative and feel more responsible for the outcomes they receive.
- **Individual Accountability** – every student contributes to the lesson and equally participates.
- As a result, the **Participation increases** as the learners do not work on their own but in teams; they have more opportunities to express themselves.
- **Social Orientation** – working in groups learners begin to see others as someone to work with rather someone to beat.
- **Self-Knowledge and Self-Realization** – students learn about their inner-self during the teamwork and develop the characteristics they lack.
- **Workplace Skills** – students learn how to work in teams, preparing them for the interdependent team-based workplace of the 21st century.

Taking into account all these points and the opinions of the scholars, it can be concluded that cooperative learning provides positive attitude towards learning, motivates and encourages learners to develop themselves, promotes active participation in studying and makes teaching and learning more effective (Kessler et al., 1992: 127). It “has positive effects on the classroom and school climate” and creates “positive relationships and psychological health” (Johnson et al., 1994: 9). Finally, according to Slavin, cooperative learning “helps students to master traditional skills and knowledge as well as develops the creative and interactive skills needed in today’s economy and society” (Slavin, 2010: 10).

### *Cooperative Learning and Grammar*

As stated above, cooperative learning creates students’ motivation and interest in studying. According to Thornbury (1999: 26) studying grammar is insufficient without

interest, which is the main principle of teaching and if one's lesson lacks it, then nothing will replace it. Moreover, he asserts that it is the teacher's task to choose relevant and involving activities and materials that will serve well.

One more strong side of cooperative learning is that almost any teaching material can be easily adapted and used in a cooperative learning environment. The teacher's responsibility is to establish this method with his or her students, to provide them with necessary scaffolding and to guide them in their development.

With regard to the written above the following assumptions can be made in connection with the introduction of cooperative learning in teaching English language grammar:

- It is possible to adapt the existing teaching materials to teach grammar in cooperation.
- The proposed method is useful and approachable for teachers and students and it can be established as the main and not time or effort consuming method that involves students into study and develops their learning abilities.
- Cooperative learning meets the demands of the Estonian National Curriculum in full.

Taking into account all these assumptions, the following hypothesis has been formulated for the present research:

*Cooperative learning, as a way to teach English language grammar is assumed to help significantly in enhancing learners' grammar competence and their interest in learning English.*

## **CHAPTER I**

### **COOPERATIVE LEARNING METHOD IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE**

This chapter refers to the question of cooperative learning theory contribution to education by suggesting a full description of a cooperative learning environment, teacher's and students' roles and possible ways of organizing cooperative learning activities in English grammar classes.

The traditional teacher-centered way of conducting classes becomes no longer acceptable or effective. Both teachers and students are in need of a revolutionary learning strategy that will help them to create an entirely new generation of individuals who are able to communicate at a higher level and to develop their interpersonal skills that they will use at a daily basis not only at school but also throughout their lives.

It becomes more and more clear that language fluency and ability to express yourself no matter the topic are the main objectives nowadays. Krashen (Krashen, 1995: 55) is convinced that "language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning". He also mentions that we should not lessen the importance of grammar as a supplement to acquisition, but it has to be introduced in a way that does not prevent students from speaking and expressing their thoughts, as they are afraid of making grammar errors (Krashen, 1995: 57). The main point is not whether we should choose between the communicative way of teaching and the grammar-based approach but to choose the way **how** grammar should be taught. Transforming grammar lessons into something different from traditional teaching, when students are not sitting in a row and no silence is needed, can help to explore the curriculum like never before: enjoying it, creating an acceptable context for language development, offering a range of benefits, and helping students to succeed academically. That is where cooperative learning comes out into a stage.

As reported by Slavin (Slavin, 2010: 2) cooperative learning offers the solution for a wide range of educational problems such as developing thinking skills and higher-order learning, improving social relations and behaviour, enhancing their interest and preparing students for and increasingly collaborative work force.

#### **1.1. Creating a Cooperative Learning Environment**

The key point in bringing the cooperative learning theory to life is creating appropriate educational conditions. Although there is no single universal model for cooperative learning, there are things that are compulsory.

Mara Sapon-Shevin emphasizes that cooperative learning will not survive in the situation of isolation, competition or interpersonal indifference. It has to take place in complete cooperation and peer support in order to create a safe and inclusive community (Sapon-Shevin et al., 1994: 48).

Moreover, as soon as you have decided to adapt cooperative learning in your classroom as a specific part of a lesson (grammar, reading, writing, etc.) or as the only one approach to develop all language skills, this has to become an everyday routine (Sapon-Shevin et al., 1994: 48). This is the way to master it completely and to achieve the maximum result.

The number of cooperative learning methods is very high and every teacher is able to choose the ones that will “facilitate optimum development of a learner’s ability to communicate in a target language” (Ning, 2011: 62). Ann Fathman and Carolyn Kessler in their article *Cooperative language learning in school context* refer to Davidson and Worship summarizing the critical to successful cooperation attributes (Fathman, 1992: 128)

- a suitable group work task or activity;
- student-to student interaction in small groups;
- a well structured interdependence to ensure cooperation;
- individual learner responsibility to the group.

### *1.1.1 Team Formation*

Team formation is not something you can do straight before the class. David and Roger Johnson advise to take the group size, selection, duration, and roles assignment into consideration beforehand (Johnson et al, 1991: 60).

According to Johnson the size of a group depends on the task time limit, skills needed and resources availability, however, pairs and foursomes are usually the best solution. Ning takes the position of Johnson providing three reasons why foursomes are appropriate (Ning, 2011: 64):

1. The seating arrangement allows pairs of students to turn around and form foursomes with to others behind them.
2. Foursomes allowed pair work within a team, which doubled participation and lines of communication.
3. Small teams are easy to manage for students, allowing for individual participation and accountability.

Johnson affirms that the group members selection done by a teacher usually has the best mix (Johnson et al, 1991: 61). He advises that each group should be heterogeneous containing high-, medium- and low-achieving students, for the reason

that in such groups “more elaborative thinking, more frequent giving and receiving of explanations, and greater perspective talking in discussing material seem to occur”. That leads to better understanding and quality of cooperative work.

Concerning the duration of time each group should stay together, scientists come up with the idea that, although, each person has to learn to cooperate with every single person in his/her class, it is better to let the group stay stable until they are successful. In other words, a teacher who breaks up the group which has some troubles, does not let them to obtain the skills necessary for problem solving collaborating with each other.

Another efficient idea suggested by Johnson demonstrates that students can be assigned to different roles that will consist of helping each other to work effectively together (Johnson et al, 1991: 63). That will promote positive interdependence, which is considered to be the most important outcome of the cooperation. Cooperative learning is not about succeeding individually, the success comes when each member of the group understands the material at the same level as others. Each student being in a role of a “helper” contributes towards achieving a common result. The roles can be chosen from the following list offered by Johnson (Johnson et al, 1991: *ibid*):

- a summarizer – restate conclusions and answers;
- a checker – ensures that all group members understand the material and know how to explain the answer;
- an accuracy coach – deals with other members’ mistakes;
- an elaborator – relates the present material to previously studied;
- a research-runner – searches for necessary materials and communicates with other group and a teacher;
- a recorder – writes everything down and shapes the report;
- an encourager – is responsible for all members’ participation in the process;
- an observer – keeps track on how well the group is cooperating.

These roles develop students’ social skills effectively and each student can be assigned to more than one role and change it every time a new task is given in order to practice all of them. Moreover, they ensure that students behave collaboratively and understand that they have only two ways out: to sink or to swim together.

### *1.1.2. Planning Instructional Materials and Structuring the Task*

Johnson emphasizes that all materials need to be distributed among group members in such a way that each member is involved in achieving a common goal (Johnson et al,

1991: 62). They have to correspond to one of the following characteristics: either materials interdependence or information interdependence.

To provide material interdependence it is advised to give only one copy of the material to the group in order that they need to share it ensuring their cooperation. Information interdependence can be achieved by providing each student with one part of the material needed to complete the task. As a result, if one fails to report his part, the whole group fails.

In addition, several aspects are to be considered by a teacher before students start doing the task (Johnson et al, 1991: 64). Johnson points out that teacher has to be sure that students clearly understand the task, which is crucial in order to avoid students' frustration. Complete understanding results in students' ability to perform better as a group and to handle more ambiguous tasks than individual students do. Secondly, the objectives of the lesson should be explained and related to students' previous knowledge, which increases the probability that students will focus on the right thing. On top of that, teacher provides students with all necessary definitions, examples and task procedure to follow and, finally, ensures that students understand the task by asking them specific questions to find out if they are ready to begin working.

### *1.1.3 Elements of Cooperative Learning*

Cooperative learning productivity may be expected only if five basic elements are included. Taking the leading researchers', such as Spencer Kagan and David and Roger Johnson, point of view into consideration, those conditions are (Johnson,1994: 2; Kagan, 2001: 1):

1. Clearly perceived positive interdependence;
2. Considerable promotive Face-to-Face interaction;
3. Clearly perceived individual accountability and personal responsibility to achieve the group's goals;
4. Frequent use of the relevant Interpersonal and small-group skills;
5. Frequent and regular group processing of current functioning to improve the group's future effectiveness.

**Positive interdependence** is the most important element in cooperative learning. There are two students' responsibilities: 1. to learn some new material, and 2. to check that all group members have learned it too (Johnson et al, 1994: 2). Positive interdependence only exists when each student understands that their work benefits because of their coordinated efforts towards achieving a common goal, i.e. a whole group success depends on each member's unique contribution to get the joint result.

Structuring positive interdependence is the teacher's task and can be reached by a number of ways.

- *Positive goal interdependence.* A common goal not an individual, which has to be a part of the lesson, for all group members to follow unites students and makes them believe that they can only reach it together.
- *Positive reward – Celebrate interdependence.* Regular joint rewards, based on the result the group achieves doing their task together, on the efforts they made and on the success they have, enhance the quality of cooperation. There can be a group grade or and individual test grade, but in the case with individual marks, the group members should have bonus points if everybody gets a good result for the test.
- *Positive resource interdependence.* As it was already stated above, students have to depend on each other on the basis of materials, which can be distributed between group members so that each member has his own part, or they can work together with only one copy of the materials to ensure cooperation.
- *Positive role interdependence.* It is achieved by assigning each student with a specific role (see p. 12). These roles not only create high-quality learning but also give the teacher more freedom, as he/she is not able to check continually the understanding of every student.

All these types of positive interdependence work well together and increase students' achievements only on condition when all of them are present.

**Face-to-Face promotive interaction** “exists when students help, assist, encourage, and support each other's efforts to learn” (Johnson et al, 1991: 26). Even a talented person cannot do everything alone and has to have an efficient and effective help. Promotive interaction components are the following:

- Providing feedback;
- Challenging and reasoning each other's conclusions;
- Advocating the exertion of effort;
- Behaving in trusting and trustworthy ways;
- Being motivated to strive;
- Creating atmosphere of low anxiety and stress (Johnson et al, 1994: 3).

**Individual accountability and personal responsibility** appears in the situation when any group member's work can be taken in order to check the success of a whole group. That is why individual testing is still vital in cooperative learning as the purpose of this method is to create a stronger individual out of each member. After participating in cooperative lesson, it is expected that every student will be able to perform better on

his/her own (Johnson et al, 1994:4). Johnson also mentions several ways to structure individual accountability:

- The small size of the group;
- Individual testing;
- Oral presentation of group results by a randomly selected student;
- Group observation in order to record the frequency of each member contribution;
- Asking students to teach new material to someone else.

Cooperative learning promotes studying the material together in order to perform it later alone.

**Interpersonal and small-group skills** are the ones to think about before adapting the cooperative learning technique in the class. All class members, or at least the majority of students, have to be socially skillful, i.e. trust and support each other, communicate accurately and unambiguously, accept every member as individuality and be able to resolve conflicts constructively (ibid). Effective interaction can and must be previously taught and students should be motivated to use them while cooperating. In order to develop students' social skills up to a high level, the teacher can reward a student by adding extra point to their works or verbally praise them if all group members demonstrate proper cooperative skills.

**Group processing** is a kind of feedback each group gives to the teacher after the work is finished. They evaluate each member's actions on whether they were helpful or not and decide on which actions are good to stick to and which it is better to avoid. It gives both the teacher and students the possibility to maintain good relationships, develop social skills, praise each other for good behaviour and results, and celebrate the success of the group. Along with group processing it is necessary to have a whole class processing from time to time, made not only by the teacher but by the students, in order to report the observations about the whole class achievements. The most important aspect of such processing is students' feeling of being successful, appreciated, and respected what leads to enthusiasm and commitment to learning (Johnson et al, 1994: 5).

These five elements are the main principles to distinguish cooperative learning groups from all other types of group work.

#### 1.1.4. Cooperative Learning vs. Group Work

Some teachers believe that cooperative learning is a time waste and does not bring any positive results for the reason that they confuse it with other types of group work, such as small-group discussions and group projects.

Cooperative groups are more than a group of students who just work together and there are some critical differences that distinguish one thing from another. In his article, Joseph Cuseo compares cooperative learning with other types of group work (Cuseo, 1992: 1) and it is possible to complete the following table of comparison between traditional learning groups and cooperative learning groups.

Traditional Learning Groups (Small group-discussion and group projects)	Cooperative learning groups
<p><b>1. Group formation</b> Random choice of group members usually based on seating arrangement or students' preferences.</p>	<p><b>1. Group formation</b> Creation of the optimal learning environment by the intentional selection done on the basis of predetermined criteria (ex. Academic achievement, personality profiles, etc.)</p>
<p><b>2. The length of interaction</b> Short period of time (a part of one lesson or longer in order to complete only one task).</p>	<p><b>2. The length of interaction</b> Regular cooperation over an extended period until the whole group is successful.</p>
<p><b>3. Interdependence</b> Only individual performance is important. Group members are responsible for their own not others development.</p>	<p><b>3. Interdependence</b> Group's goal is a common product that will be reached by working equally, having a specific and essential role to play. Group is expected to be a kind of a family where they trust, encourage, and help each other.</p>
<p><b>4. Individual accountability</b> Students get the same grade for their group-work, which makes high-achieving students dislike such activities as they</p>	<p><b>4. Individual accountability</b> Though the group is working towards a common goal each student is graded individually, but if all group members</p>

contribute more effort than others.	achieve a high result or a low-achieving student improves his result cooperating with others, then everybody receives extra points.
<b>5. Development of social skills</b> Strictly academic goals without any attention to social skills development.	<b>5. Development of social skills</b> Social skills are taught beforehand and constantly during the process of cooperation by the teacher who guides the group's communicative abilities.
<b>6. Teacher's role</b> Students usually work on their own after receiving the task.	<b>6. Teacher's role</b> The teacher is constantly involved into the process by encouraging, complementing the positive cooperative behaviour, clarifying the task, or issuing timely question to keep the process going.

**Table 1.** *The Critical Differences (Cuseo, 1992: 1)*

The features mentioned above are essential to benefit from the cooperative learning method and to realize all your expectations towards group learning. Johnson makes a note (Johnson, 1994: 1) that cooperative learning cannot exist in the situation when one student does all the work while others just pretend to be a part of a team. It has to be structured, managed properly, and follow these really important rules.

#### *1.1.5. How to Be an Effective Cooperative Group*

The main positive side of cooperative learning is that cooperative skills are not only useful in class but also essential for most life situations (work, family, friendship, and hobby). Learning how to be an effective group will help to develop your cognitive abilities as well as your ability to work with others. Wilbert McKeachie comes up with some suggestions for students of how to be an effective group:

1. Be sure everyone contributes to discussion and to tasks.
2. Do not jump to conclusions too quickly. Be sure that minority ideas are considered.
3. Do not assume consensus because no one has opposed an idea or offered an alternative. Check agreement with each group member verbally, not just by voting.
4. Set goals – immediate, intermediate, and long-term – but do not be afraid to change them as you progress.
5. Allocate tasks to be done. Be sure that each person knows what he or she is to do and what the deadline is. Check this before adjourning.
6. Be sure there is agreement on the time and place of the next meeting and on what you hope to accomplish.

7. Before ending a meeting, evaluate your group process. What might you try to do differently next time? (McKeachie, 2006: 215)

There are definitely more ways to maintain cooperation but these are the basic ones to follow and to start with to make learning more productive. On the one hand, it can be a challenge for both the teacher and students to transform a traditional familiar atmosphere of learning as well as the way of thinking. On the other hand, students become more interested in and willing to study in the environment what develops both their mental and social skills.

Considering all ideas mentioned above an assumption is made that they can be applied to teach English language grammar at school, hence, they are used in the current study.

## **1.2. The Teacher's Role in Cooperative Learning**

The way classroom activities are organized and the choice of teaching strategies used is the responsibility of the teacher. Therefore, the role of the teacher is of a big importance and it will be discussed in this part.

There are many things to take into account when applying cooperative learning. The first thing each teacher should keep in mind is that he or she needs to be a guide for the students throughout all the time, so it is advised to be completely aware of all the methods, strategies and types of cooperative group work to be confident in a new and unknown environment. As soon as the students see their teacher's confidence, competence, optimism, and enthusiasm towards the new way of teaching, they will be also ready to try it. Secondly, it is important to decide on group size and group members' selection, arrange the room to be comfortable and prepare all the materials for the activities beforehand.

Next step to take is to decide what type of cooperative learning you are going to adapt. David and Roger Johnson distinguish three different types – formal, informal, and cooperative base groups (Johnson, 2008: 26). They mention that all three types can be used with the same class even during one lesson.

The teacher's role changes according to the style he or she chooses to apply. In *formal cooperative learning* teams, where students work together for one class period to several weeks on a specific task, the teachers role includes the following (Johnson, 2008:ibid):

- Prepare for the lesson (groups, materials, roles, etc.)
- Be really clear when describing a task and a cooperative structure including the criteria you will use, positive interdependence, and expected behaviour.

- Monitor if the strategy works and the behaviour is appropriate.
- Assess the process of working in groups and see if students are really learning.

As a concrete cooperative learning lesson plan Johnson suggests the one below:

Grade level: _____ Subject Area: _____ Date: _____ Lesson: _____ <hr/> <b>Objectives</b> Academic: _____ <hr/> Social Skills: _____ <hr/> <b>Preconstructional Decisions</b> Group Size: _____ Method of Assigning Students: _____ Roles: _____ <hr/> Room Arrangement: _____ <hr/> Materials: _____ <hr/> ◇ One Copy Per Group ◇ One Copy Per Group ◇ Jigsaw ◇ Tournament ◇ Other: _____ <hr/> <b>Explain Task and Cooperative Goal Structure</b> 1. Task: _____ <hr/> 2. Criteria For Success: _____ <hr/> <hr/> 3. Positive Interdependence: _____ <hr/> <hr/> 4. Individual Accountability: _____ <hr/> 5. Intergroup Cooperation: _____ <hr/> 6. Expected Behaviours: _____ <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <b>Monitoring and Intervening</b> 1. Observation Procedure: _____ Formal _____ Informal 2. Observation By: _____ Teacher _____ Students _____ Vistors 3. Intervening For Task Assistance: _____ <hr/> 4. Intervening For Teamwork Assistance: _____ <hr/> 5. Other: _____ <hr/> <hr/> <b>Evaluating and Processing</b> 1. Assessment of Members' Individual Learning: _____ <hr/> 2. Assessment of Group Productivity: _____ <hr/> 3. Small Group Processing: _____ <hr/> 4. Whole Class Processing: _____ <hr/> 5. Charts and Graphs Used: _____ <hr/> <hr/>
--

6. Positive Feedback to Each Student:
7. Goal Setting for Improvement:
8. Celebration:
9. Other:

**Table 2.** *Cooperative Lesson Planning Form (Johnson, 2008: 27)*

The plan provides all the points the teacher has to work on during the formal cooperative lesson and can be used as it is or be adapted by the teacher to suit her or his and students' needs and expectations. Moreover, the lesson plan can also work as a perfect way to master cooperative learning methodology and can be completed on a regular basis in order to create a ready and handy lessons' plans bank to be used later with other classes.

*Informal cooperative learning* groups stay together for a shorter period of time (several minutes to one class period) and are aimed to focus students' attention on the material to be studied, to maintain brainstorming, material rehearsal or to summarize the previously studied material. The students' task consists of three different types of discussion – before, during and after the new material is presented. The teachers' task here is to organize these discussions, to introduce the topic (ex. Brainstorming), to present new material in segments (after each segment students do the task to fix new knowledge), and to organize the final discussion to see how well students understand the topic (Johnson, 2008: 30)

Finally, after trying both formal and informal cooperative learning methods and achieving success with them it is possible to create *cooperative base groups*. They are groups of students that work together during a long period of time (semester, a year, or several years). This type of cooperative learning is more than just working together during the class, it consist of checking each others essays and homework, solving each-others non-academic problems, preparing for the tests and exams. The teacher's role here is to maintain groups effectiveness, ensuring that their cooperation follow the five basic elements and creating the schedule and specific tasks to deal with (Johnson, 2008:31).

Ideally, moving from one type of cooperative learning to another and adopting all of them will create strong social relationships and support between group members, increase their academic achievement and personalize the educational experience, which will be an excellent base for future life.

### 1.3. Cooperative Learning Methods

After cooperative learning is introduced to students, the next stage is to implement cooperative learning methods in practice whose role in the context of raising students' interest and academic achievement is in the focus of the current research.

There are several different methods of cooperative learning but two of them are of the main importance: *Learning Together Method* by Johnson and Johnson and *The Structural Approach* developed by Spencer Kagan. Both can be used by one teacher as they have many areas in common in both theory and practice (Kagan, 2001: 1). "Among the areas of convergence in the two models are belief in the importance of Positive Interdependence, Individual Accountability, Social Skills Development, and Face-to-Face Interaction" (ibid).

While the *Learning Together Method* was discussed above in sub-chapters 1.1 and 1.2 and is good in order to establish and organize cooperative learning in class and bring it to perfection, the Kagan's *Structural Approach* will be covered below.

The main idea and goal of the structural approach is to create, analyze, and employ different structures. Spenser Kagan defines the structure as a set of steps that can be used repeatedly from lesson to lesson no matter the subject or the topic of the lesson itself (Kagan, 1989:1). The number of structures developed by Kagan and his colleagues is high and reaches "over 150 repeatable, step-by-step, content-free ways to structure the interaction of students with each other, the curriculum, and the teacher" (Kagan, 2001:1). These are ready-made tools that each teacher can freely use in order to simplify their work. As soon as the teacher knows at least one structure, he or she can use it every lesson with different topics and classes and generate plenty of activities. The Kagan's formula is the following: Structure + Content = Activity (ibid).

As for concrete cooperative learning structures for grammar, Melissa Agnew and Stefanie McKoy, who have written and published their book *Cooperative Learning and Grammar* with the help and approval by Kagan's publishing company, suggest a number of them presented below to be used by teachers (Agnew, 2012: 2-16):

- **RallyCoach.** Students work in pairs solving a set of questions prepared by the teacher. They take turns to solve the problem and coach each other. If the answer is correct they praise each other.
- **Quiz-Quiz-Trade.** A whole class is involved. Each student has a grammar card with a question and finds a partner to quiz. After asking the question, the student gets quizzed by a partner and then trade cards and continue with another student.

- **Sage-n-Scribe.** Students work in pairs and share a pencil or a pen to solve problems. One student instructs the other how to correct a sentence, for example. Then he checks and praises for success. Partners switch roles.
- **Find Someone Who.** Each student has a worksheet prepared by the teacher and circulates around the room to find a partner. Then they ask each other a question and fill in the form, check each other and look for another partner. As soon as the worksheet is completed, the task is finished. Later students can compare their answers with their teammates.
- **Fan-n-Pick.** Can be done in pairs or groups. Each student has a set of question cards and holds them in a fan. He or she asks another student to pick a card and to answer the question. If the answer is right, the student receives a compliment, if not they try to find a right answer together. Then roles are rotated clockwise.
- **ShowDown.** Each group of students receives a set of question cards. One student has to be the Captain who reads the question to others. Working alone, all students write the answer on a piece of paper. When everybody is ready, the Captain commands to show the answers and checks the accuracy. The role of the Captain goes over to another person.
- **Find-n-Fix.** Each group has a Captain who reads the card with three sentences, one of which is incorrect. Others have to find the incorrect sentence individually and write its number. Then everybody is ready, they show the answers and check if they are right. After that they fix the sentence on their worksheets. The captain role is rotated.

Kagan makes a note that these structures can be applied to the curriculum in a number of ways (Kagan 2001: 1). There are no strict rules to follow and teachers can be flexible in designing a cooperative lesson in order to find ways to motivate and inspire students.

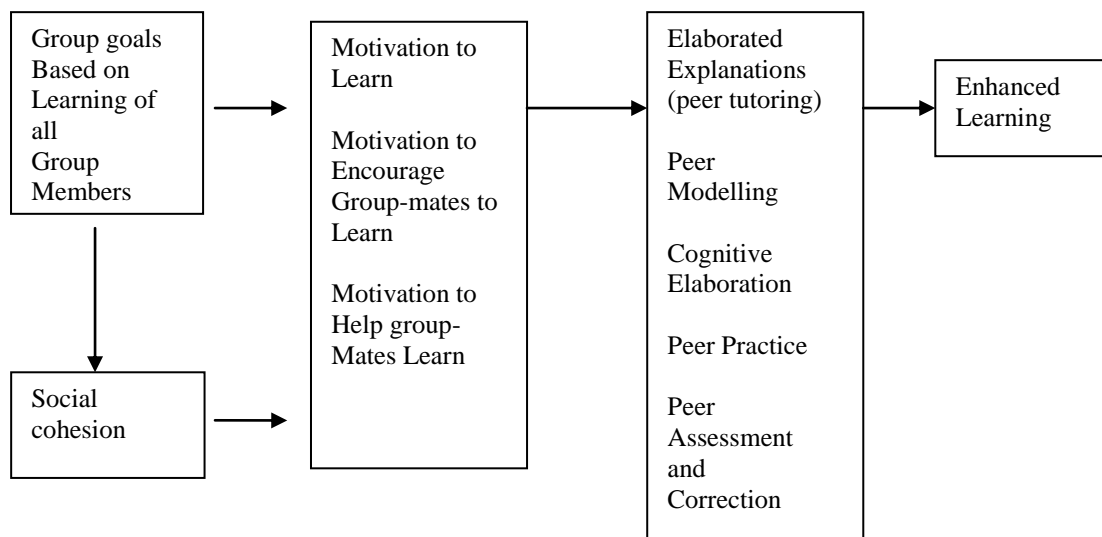
To sum up, both the *Structural Approach* and the *Learning Together Method* serve to create the environment of cooperative learning and can be used, adopted and practiced by the teacher with students of any age and language proficiency. Moreover, these methods need an effort to be done in order to include new structures and principles into your everyday class routine. However, finally teachers will be able to use them skillfully with little or no effort.

The study of these methods is important for this research and they will be used to investigate the possibility of adopting them in Narva schools.

### 1.4. Positive Outcomes of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is declared a successful strategy by modern educators. A variety of teaching methods that are offered for implementation guarantee positive interdependence and individual accountability among all kinds of students working together to achieve a common goal. It is proved by Slavin (Slavin, 2010: 7), Johnson and Johnson (Johnson, 1994: 7), and Mara Sapon-Shevin (Sapon-Shevin, 1994: 2) that all students are able to work equally well and benefit from a classroom where it is normal to be different. Cooperative learning has a value even for students with disabilities, behaviour problems and the ones who are gifted.

When comparing with competitive and individual learning, cooperative learning results in enhanced student achievement (Slavin, 2010: 8). Slavin presents his idea in a model below:



**Table 3.** *How Cooperative Improves Learning (Slavin, 2010: 8)*

Moreover, students engaged in cooperative learning develop creative thinking skills, improve interpersonal relationships, and have a higher motivation and interest in study, heightened self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward learning (Johnson, 1994: 7).

Cooperative learning is aimed to create a student-centered climate in the classroom where students feel more relaxed and find it easier to perform, either learning or speaking. Many students are afraid of speaking in front of a whole class, of making mistakes, because they are worried about criticism, feel shy, and are scared of bad marks. In cooperative groups, these things are less likely to happen. Students learn much faster and with fewer difficulties in the atmosphere of mutual trust and encouragement.

The first chapter of this research clearly shows the importance of cooperation in creating motivation, developing social skills and improvement of learners' achievements. The first part is based on the approaches of creating a cooperative learning environment and describes the main principles of it, whereas the second part is focused on the role of a teacher, and the third offers a number of methods and structures to use while planning a lesson, and finally, the fourth part suggests a list of positive outcomes. However, the findings of all the studies discussed above lack an insight into the educational settings of English language grammar class in Narva schools, though define the research area.

The analysis done above will help to perform a similar research of possibility to implement cooperative learning in local environment and prove its purposefulness and effectiveness. It will be more convenient to start with slow transformation from traditional way of teaching by practicing a new method during one specific part of a lesson and bringing it to perfection. That will serve as a way to become accustomed to it and to implement it later in other parts of the lesson.

## CHAPTER II

### THE COOPERATIVE LEARNING METHOD TO TEACH GRAMMAR IN THE EFL CLASS

This chapter describes in details the implementation of the cooperative learning method in practice in order to prove that it can be used successfully in foreign language grammar teaching and learning. Moreover, it reports on whether it results in higher learners' academic achievements and interest. The study is conducted by means of the Estonian National Curriculum analysis, by establishing a cooperative learning environment in the class and its assessment, and the analysis of the lesson organization and students' academic results in English. Additionally, students' opinions received with the help of questionnaires are presented and discussed.

#### 2.1 Cooperative Learning Appropriateness according to the Estonian National Curriculum

One of the aims of the present paper is to find out whether cooperative learning corresponds to the Estonian National Curriculum. After studying the general part of the National Curriculum for basic schools and its Appendix 2. Foreign languages and keeping in mind the characteristics and outcomes of cooperative learning discussed in Chapter 1 the following conclusions have been made:

- Division 2 *Learning and Educational Objectives* paragraph 3 (National Curriculum General Part, 2001: 2) mentions the importance of creating a self-aware, creative, curious person who is able to think critically, feels herself/himself confident in different roles in society, is positive and responsible for their actions and consequences of these actions, and is capable to develop their skills and knowledge up to a higher level. Moreover, it is emphasized that the school and the teacher are responsible for creating the learning environment that helps that development. In other words, the creation of a socially mature and adequate individual who can adopt the skills and knowledge received at school in his/her future life, which is the main objective of cooperative learning, stands at the forefront of national education.
- Paragraph 4 in the same Division (National Curriculum General Part, 2001: 3) lists the general competences most of which (six out of seven) can be achieved by cooperative learning adaptation. This method can contribute to the development of the following ones: *value competence*, when person is able to behave according to moral

norms and to value other people, cultures and nations; *social competence*, which is the potential to cooperate with other people does not matter their sex, age, nationality, or social level; *self-management competence*, when one is able to see his/her strengths and weaknesses and find ways to deal with them; *learning to learn competence*, an ability to plan your learning and to follow that plan, to obtain new skills and knowledge, and to be ready to use them later; *communication competence*, which is aimed at the ability to express oneself, to present ideas clearly and relevantly; *entrepreneurship competence*, which points out the ability to set goals and to carry them out, to participate in joint activities and to be responsible for the result.

- Division 3 *Concept of Learning and the Learning Environment* (National Curriculum General Part, 2001: 4) affirms the school and the teacher are responsible for bringing up a person whose knowledge, skills and values can be copied in everyday life. The student should be able to set goals and to accomplish tasks both individually and cooperatively, at the same time obtaining the necessary skills for a lifelong process. Education has to promote the atmosphere of trust, friendliness, faith, equality and support in separate group and in all of society.
- If to talk specifically about language teaching and study, Appendix 2 *Foreign Languages* in the *Description of the Subject* (National Curriculum Appendix 2, 2011: 7) reveals the essential role of pair and group work at all stages of study and points motivation, positive attitude and interest towards language learning as the main principles of a positive atmosphere in the classroom that develops students' willingness to study language.

All points stated above can find their reflection in main principles of the cooperative learning method and as a result can be achieved by implementing this strategy in practice.

## **2.2. Cooperative Learning Implementation to Teach English Language Grammar in Narva Schools**

The analysis of the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic School objectives shows the urgent need in creating a new generation of people who are able to think critically, solve problems creatively, be a representative of a society and to use obtained skills successfully throughout their lives. This brings us to an idea of using a new teaching

strategy, which will act as a useful and valuable, but not time-consuming tool for teaching that is possible to combine with other teaching practices.

Following the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic School requirements and keeping in mind that the cooperative learning method seems to fulfill most of them, the present study aims at finding out whether the method works by taking a case of a particular English language class with a particular teacher.

### *2.2.1 Research Methodology*

The style of the research employed in this paper is an experiment, as two groups of students are compared under controlled conditions, and generalizations about the efficacy of the applied method on students' interest and academic achievement are made by means of a pretest and a post-test. The pretest is aimed to show the initial level of grammar knowledge on a specific topic and the level of interest before introducing cooperative learning. The post-test is believed to show the increase in students' interest in grammar study and academic achievement on a specific grammar topic.

According to Cohen's sample types variety (Cohen et al, 2007, 113), the sample used in the present research is a non-probable sample, as it does not represent the whole population but is aimed at a particular group of people in a small-scale research. It is also a convenience sample, which has been chosen from the nearest possible individuals available and accessible at the time, i.e. as the author of the present paper does not teach at school herself, the companion teacher was found to try cooperative learning while teaching grammar with her classes receiving all instructions, tasks, materials and plans from the researcher. Moreover, the sample is purposive, as it has been chosen for a specific purpose to study the effect of cooperative learning on student's motivation and academic achievements in English language class.

The experimental group consists of Narva School of Humanities basic school students of the same class (6<sup>th</sup> grade), who are separated in two groups to study English however, have one teacher. The positive sides of that sample are the students' random division into groups and that they have the same teacher, i.e. the same teaching style and teaching programme are used. All students are at the beginner's level of language proficiency.

The experiment is based on five steps. Three steps took place in both groups and two more steps in a group where cooperative learning was used to study grammar:

1. Pretesting on grammar topics studied before to find out the level of knowledge that has been already obtained.
2. Conducting several grammar lessons to revise the material (Group 1 – 13 students - practices the traditional way of studying, Group 2 – 15 students - the cooperative one).
3. A post-test on grammar topics revised to compare the level of knowledge students of different groups have after the experiment.

Two more steps the cooperative learning group had are the following:

1. Pretesting students on the initial level of interest in English language grammar.
2. Post-testing and comparative analysis of students' interest level before and after the experiment.

### 2.2.2. *Pretesting Students on Grammar Topics*

The analysis of students' initial knowledge on grammar topics should be started from the observation of the classroom environment and teaching methodology that took place before the experiment.

The cooperative learning method had never been used before in both groups neither for grammar nor for practicing other language skills. Lessons were mainly teacher-centered. Active teaching was represented by group projects, group discussions, and games.

The Coursebook used is *Enterprise 1* for beginners by Virginia Evans and Jenny Dooley, in which there is a traditional emphasis on systematic learning of grammar. Grammar sections are represented in a conservative manner when the rule comes first and then it is practiced through a set of exercises.

The grammar topics that were studied before the experiment and were checked during the pretest are Present Simple and Past Simple tenses usage. The students of both groups had studied them separately and the main objective then was to combine them together in order to teach students to choose the right one according to the meaning of the sentence and the time words and expressions used.

The pretest had two exercises, the first one on Present Simple and the second one on Past Simple, and it checked the students' ability to form positive, negative, and interrogative sentences. There was no rule repetition before the test purposely to check student's real knowledge of the topic. The text of the test is provided below:

## Pretest

Student's name .....Class.....

### Exercise 1. Present Simple

Put the verbs in brackets in the present simple.

Hi! My name e.g. is (be) Laura, and I'm ten. There 1)..... (be) five of us in our family. My parents, Steve and Helen, 2)..... (work) at a school. They 3)..... (be) teachers. My big brother, Michael, 4)..... (be) nineteen. He 5)..... (go) to university. He 6)..... (study) very hard. My sister Liz, 21, 7)..... (work) at a restaurant, but she 8).....(not/like) it. She 9)..... (want) to be an actress. I want to be a doctor. What 10).....you..... (want) to be?

Points ...../10

### Exercise 2. Past Simple

Put the verbs in brackets in the past simple.

1. When ..... (you/buy) your car?
2. Jane Austen ..... (write) her first book at the age of fifteen.
3. Robert ..... (not/marry) Julia until 1988.
4. Sir Alexander Fleming ..... (receive) the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1945.
5. Peter ..... (not/ appear) to be very happy with his new job.
6. When ..... (Columbus/discover) America?
7. “.....(you/enjoy) the party?” “Not really. It was boring.”

Points ...../10

Total ...../17

### Grade scheme:

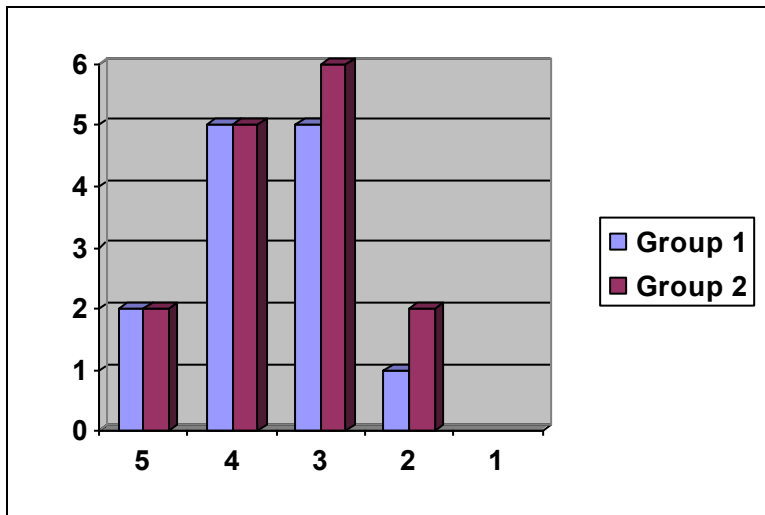
**17-16 – “5”; 15-14 – “4”; 13-12 – “3”; 11-10 – “2”; 9-0 – “1”.**

(Enterprise 1 Test Booklet, 2010: 10; 26)

All tests were checked and the results of the two groups were analyzed and compared.

The results are the following:

- In Group 1 (13 students) the average grade was 3.61 and it is satisfactory.
- In Group 2 (15 students) the average grade was 3.46 and it is satisfactory but a little bit lower than in Group 1.



*Table 4. The Comparison of Pretest Grades*

The graph above illustrates that both groups were at almost the same level before the experiment and proves that it is possible to use this sample to prove that cooperative learning plays an important role in raising student's academic achievements, as after applying the cooperative method in one group the post-test will show whether two groups will have different results or not.

### *2.2.3. Pretesting Students' Interest in English Language Grammar Study and Willingness to Work in Cooperative Groups*

According to the pretest results, it was decided that cooperative learning was to be employed in Group 2, as their average grade was lower, which created an extra challenge for the cooperative method. Correspondingly, the traditional way of teaching was used in Group 1. For the reason that nothing was changed in the way the teacher organized lessons in Group 1, the pretesting and post-testing of students' interest in English language grammar study took place only in Group 2 because there was a real chance that after being imposed to a new method of practicing grammar rules, students interest would become higher and they would feel confident while working together.

Before planning the pretest and post-test, the literature was analyzed in order to find out whether students' interest in English Language grammar study and their willingness to work in cooperative groups have been studied before. In the case of the interest, a research made by Andreas Johansson (Johansson, 2010: 11) investigates in questions 1 and 2 the students' interest and their opinion toward grammar study importance. The outcomes of his findings are The students' attitude towards cooperative

learning is more widely explored by the researchers. Positive findings are made by Matt Bower (2010), Keritha McLeish (2009), Kiran Akhtar (2012), etc. They

The questions that were used in the present paper are quiet standardized as the students chosen for the experiment are still young and need simple questions to answer in order to give them the opportunity to reflect in full.

The pretest questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1 and the questions serve the following purpose:

- Questions 1-2 reflect the students' interest in grammar study.
- Question 3 shows how each student self-evaluate the level of grammar knowledge he/she has.
- Questions 4-6 research the students' willingness to cooperate and illustrate whether they are accustomed to some point with the cooperative method.

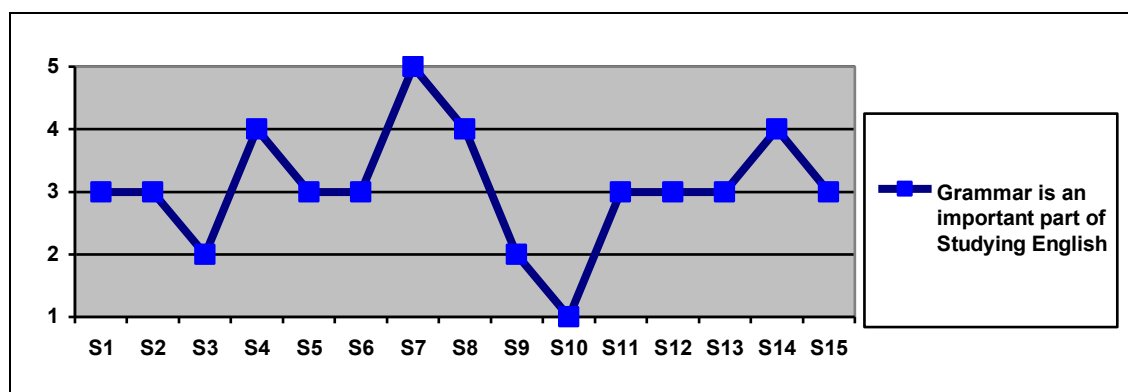


Table 5. Pretest. Question 1

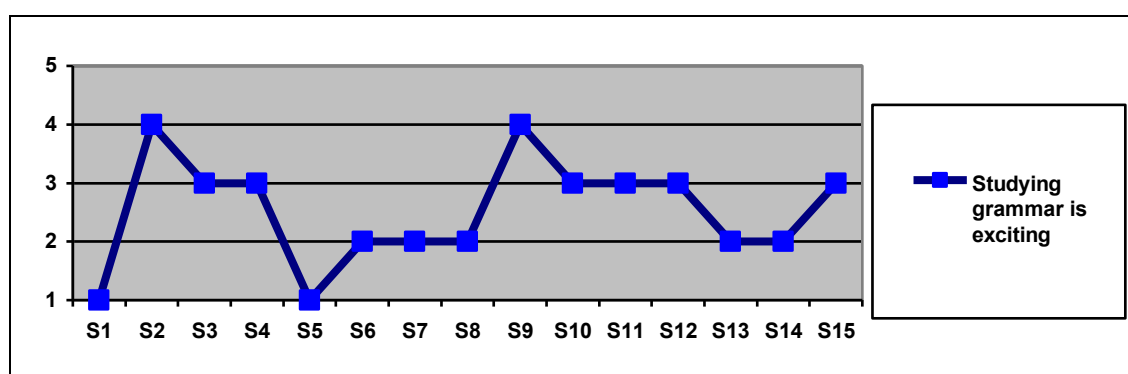


Table 6. Pretest. Question 2

The graphs above represent the students' opinion whether they consider grammar study important and exciting. Only one out of fifteen finds grammar important with addition of three students who mostly agree with this statement, and only two students see grammar lessons as more or less exciting. The majority of students either

doubts the importance and excitement of grammar lessons or regards them as boring and not compulsory. These figures can serve as a proof of student's low interest in English language learning.

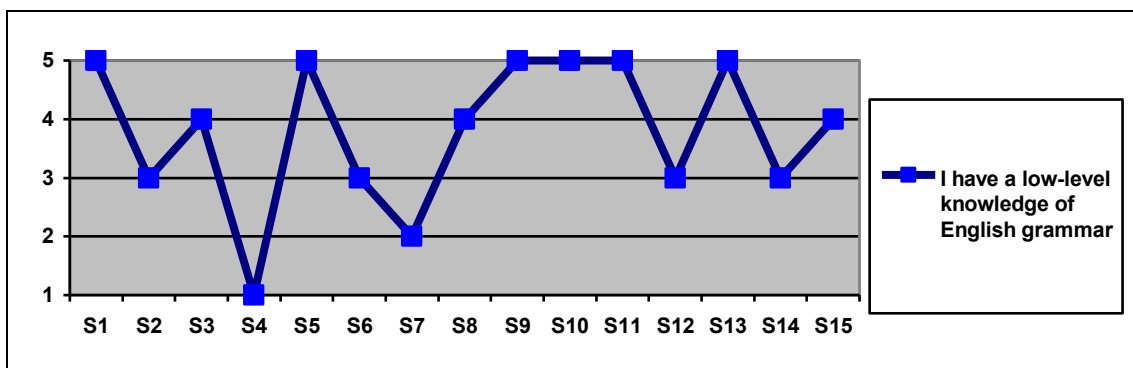


Table 7. Pretest. Question 3

The answers above reveal the students' negative evaluation of their English language knowledge level. Ten out of fifteen judge themselves being at a low level and only two consider themselves successful. Low self-assessment can be a reason to low interest.

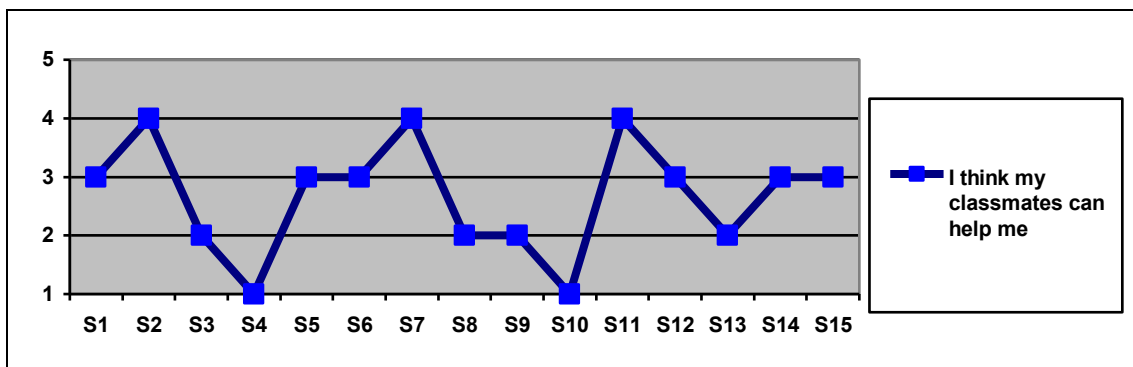


Table 8. Pretest. Question 4

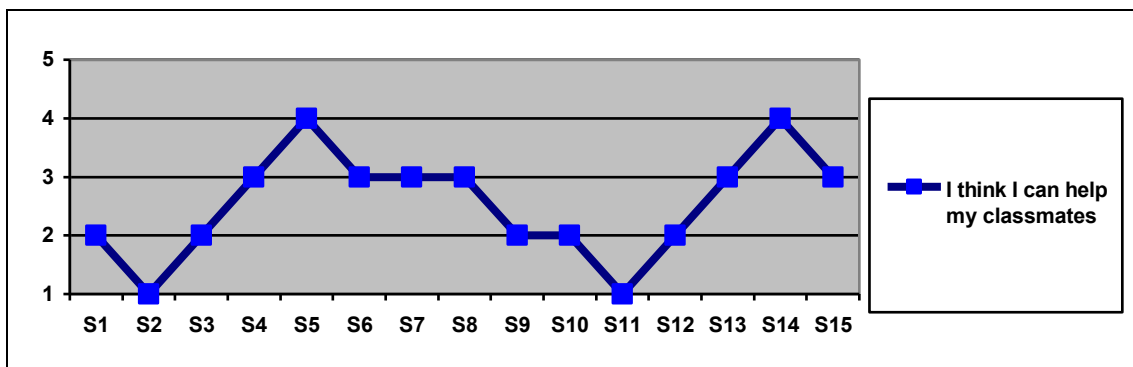


Table 9. Pretest. Question 5

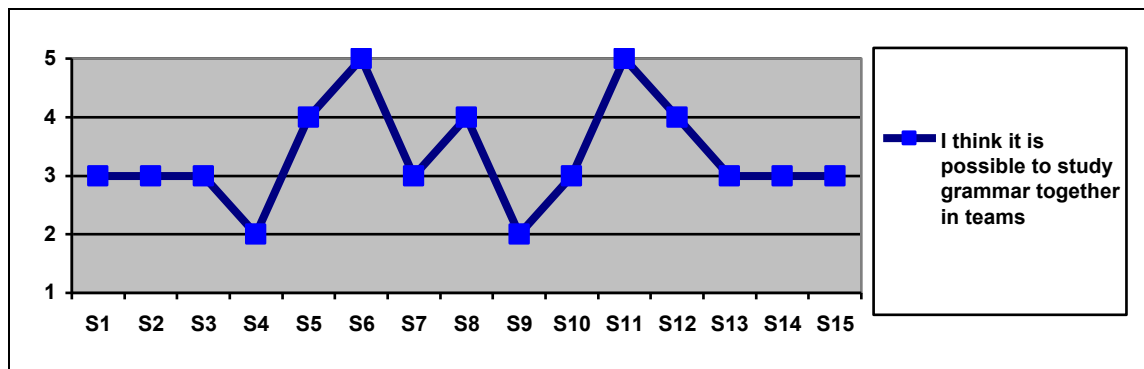


Table 10. Pretest. Question 6

The rest of the questions indicate students' attitude towards studying together and their belief in possibility to help each other and that the situation when the teacher is not the only one who can help you can be real. None of the students is completely sure that they can help each other or receive help back. Moreover, almost the half of them does not believe in that. However, more students are ready to study in groups, which is a good sign, as only two think it will not work out and they will not be an obstacle to establish a cooperative learning environment in the class.

Considering all the results, it can be concluded that students' interest in English language grammar study is not high and needs to be increased, as well as their belief in their ability to study on their own in mutual help and trust. The pessimistic evaluation of being at a low level of knowledge reflects the lack of confidence and individual accountability. The cooperative learning method is aimed at solving all these problems, i.e. can certainly be used with this group of students in order to achieve a positive result.

#### 2.2.4 Lesson Organization According to the Principles and Structures of the Cooperative Learning Method

At the beginning of the experiment, during the first lesson after the pretest, the teacher explained students of Group 2 the main principles of cooperative learning to make them distinguish it from other types of group work.

Later, all students were divided by the teacher in groups of three having one high-, medium and low-achieving student as group mates. Each group received their checked pretest papers with one copy of grammar rules to be shared. To make it clear, the teacher put a minus next to the incorrect sentence in the pretest without correcting it to let the students discuss their mistakes in their groups later. The first task teams

received were to study the grammar rules together and to make the error correction with complete explanations to each other.

While Group 2 was introduced to the cooperative learning method, Group 1 continued their studies, as they usually did. They listened to the teacher’s explanations of grammar rules, which were written on the blackboard and practiced them by doing grammar exercises in Enterprise 1 Grammar book individually or in turns, one sentence per one student without their choice explanation. No specific lesson plans were prepared by the researcher, as the teacher had the right to continue in a way she used to organize her grammar lessons.

After lesson 1, where Group 2 became acquainted with cooperative learning, they received three lessons during which, along with all other tasks, connected with vocabulary, speaking, writing, etc, students got grammar tasks organized in a cooperative way to practice Present Simple and Past Simple tenses and bring them to perfection. Four grammar tasks’ plans are presented below with their analysis.

### Grammar task 1.

<b>Find Someone Who</b>		
<b>Name</b> _____		
<b>Instructions:</b> Pair up and take turns solving one problem on each other’s sheet by underlining the verb in the sentence, then writing the verb’s tense (present simple or past simple) in the box provided. Do not forget to get your partner’s initials.		
<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Verb Tense</b>	<b>Initials</b>
1. Scientists view tiny things with microscopes.		
2. We play tennis in school on Wednesday afternoon.		
3. She doesn’t speak Chinese.		
4. My mum didn’t cook dinner last night.		
5. School finishes at three o’clock.		
6. My brother travelled to Ireland last summer.		
7. Where did she buy that DVD?		

8. They don't listen to pop music.		
9. We ate some pasta and drank some juice.		
10. Does your brother go to school on Saturday?		

Adapted from Cooperative Learning and Grammar book (Agnew, 2012: 38)

Each student receives a worksheet with ten sentences in both Present and Past Tense. The task is to find a verb in the sentence and to decide on its tense. Students move around the class until they find a partner to solve the first two sentences in turns. As soon as they both have answered, tutored each other and agreed on the right answer, they change the partner and repeat the procedure. After each student has all sentences done, they return to their teammates and discuss the results.

### **Grammar Task 1 Analysis.**

Firstly, it was a little bit difficult to organize the students. It was hard for them to choose a partner, so there was a mess and some noise in the beginning. After changing twice, the students felt more confident and managed to finish in ten minutes overall. As it was the first time this type of task was used, there is hope that later as they become more and more accustomed to cooperative learning tasks and recognize its structures easily, it will take less time and learners will be more organized.

During the task the student's mood was positive and they felt quite happy to stand up and to move around the class. Finally, when everybody returned to their groups, only three students had mistakes in their worksheets, which were explained to them by their teammates.

### **Grammar Task 2.**

#### **Find-N-Fix**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** For each set of problems, find the incorrect sentence. Indicate which is incorrect using the card with numbers 1, 2, or 3. When your team agrees, fix the incorrect problem by writing the correct verb tense above the incorrect word.

#### **1. In which sentence is the verb tense incorrect?**

1. Mr. Brown run a 5 kilometers marathon.
2. Yesterday we swam at the pool.

3. I read a good book last week.
<p><b>2. In which sentence is the verb tense incorrect?</b></p> <p>1. I walked to school yesterday.</p> <p>2. We grew plants in our garden.</p> <p>3. Billy jumped on the sofa.</p>
<p><b>3. In which sentence is the verb tense incorrect?</b></p> <p>1. Do you love animals?</p> <p>2. We writes a book about cars.</p> <p>3. Jane swims every weekend.</p>
<p><b>4. In which sentence is the verb tense incorrect?</b></p> <p>1. We play football in the garden.</p> <p>2. The cat are funny.</p> <p>3. Kate does not study Estonian.</p>
<p><b>5. In which sentence is the verb tense incorrect?</b></p> <p>1. The door is black.</p> <p>2. Sam play the piano.</p> <p>3. My dog has long ears.</p>

Adapted from Cooperative Learning and Grammar book (Agnew, 2012: 39)

Students work in their teams receiving one worksheet with a task to find the incorrect sentence. Each student acts as a Captain in turns. Captain reads the task and provides others with three sentences both in Present and Past Simple. Each student has three cards with numbers 1, 2, and 3 and decides which sentence is incorrect by choosing one of them. Everybody shows their card only when the Captain asks to reveal the answers. The team celebrates, if all members provide the correct answers and tutor each other, if somebody has it wrong.

### **Grammar Task 2 Analysis.**

The students liked the idea of having a chance to be a teacher (captain). As they changed roles, everybody was able to try different roles. There were mistakes in all groups, but only one group asked for the teacher's help, as they were not able to make the right choice. All others managed to tutor each other and in the end, when the teacher asked random students to explain their choice, they had no difficulties with that at all.

### Grammar Tasks 3 and 4.

<b>RallyCoach</b>					
<b>Instructions:</b> Write each verb in the past tense form in the box provided. Take turns working with your partner to solve the problem using RallyCoach.					
<b>Partner A</b>			<b>Partner B</b>		
Name _____			Name _____		
<b>#</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Past Tense</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Past Tense</b>
1	Grow		1	Drive	
2	Run		2	Throw	
3	Eat		3	Be	
4	Give		4	Tell	
5	Break		5	Fall	
6	Swim		6	Get	
7	Write		7	Catch	
8	See		8	Find	
9	Go		9	Sleep	
10	Come		10	Win	

Cooperative Learning and Grammar book (Agnew, 2012:47)

<b>Sage-N-Scribe</b>	
<b>Instructions:</b> Take turns working with your partner using Sage-N-Scribe. On your turn find the next irregular verb in the box and write it and its past tense form on the lines below.	
Be Dress Become Help Walk Begin Wash Buy Work Come Play Drive Open Eat Listen Feel Forget Want Give Clean Have Know Make Work Meet Put Read Say See Look Send Sit Speak Swim Take Teach Tell Think Write	
<b>Partner A</b>	<b>Partner B</b>
Name _____	Name _____

Both tasks are aimed at practicing irregular verbs and need two students to work together. In task 3, students need to solve problems in turns by writing the past tense of irregular verbs provided. While one student writes the answer he thinks is correct, the

other checks it and tutors if necessary. Then they change roles and repeat. In task 4, students need to choose irregular verbs from the list of verbs provided. The cooperative structure is similar to task 3 with only one difference. Here one student instructs the other by naming the irregular verb and telling its past tense form. The other student writes the answer down and they both agree whether it is right or wrong.

### **Grammar Task 3 and 4 Analysis.**

The tasks needed less activity than two previous ones, so students were less noisy, though participated actively in discussion. In task 3, students made many mistakes and even not all of them were corrected during pair discussion but only after during class discussion. Next day, while doing task 4, the dramatic improvement was noticed as the students were motivated to repeat irregular verbs at home in order to succeed next time and to earn extra points. Task 4 was completed faster with little or no mistakes.

Before having the final test on the topic both groups received the test example to practice in the class. It was the initiative of the teacher to organize one more cooperative task with Group 2, where they had to complete the test example together in groups discussing the answers and tutoring each other. The teacher only monitored them correcting only when a team was not able to agree on the answer. Group 1 practiced the test example in a traditional way by reading the sentence and giving the answer in turns. The teacher did all corrections.

#### *2.2.5. Post-testing of Students on Grammar Topics*

At the end of the experiment, both groups received a common test on the Present Simple and Past Simple topic. The test consisted of two tasks. In task 1, the students had to decide which tense to use with the verbs in brackets. Task 2 covered the topic of regular and irregular verbs, where all sentences were in the Past Simple and the task was to open the brackets with the right form of the verb in the Past Simple. The test text can be found below. The sentences were partly taken from the internet and partly developed by the researcher.

## Post -test

Student's name .....Class.....

### Exercise 1. Present Simple and Past Simple

Open the brackets by putting the verbs in bracket in either Present Simple or Past Simple.

1. She ..... (go) to Australia in 1994 and she liked it very much.
2. My father usually ..... (like) his steak well-done.
3. The dog ..... (eat) its toy last night.
4. The policeman ..... (talk) to the burglar yesterday.
5. .... (you /have) a test last week?
6. I often see her mother but she never ..... (speak) to me.
7. The gentleman ..... (speak) to his servant 2 hours ago.
8. The kangaroo always ..... (carry) its baby.
9. My friend ..... (talk) a lot every day.
10. The man ..... (drive) to the supermarket last weekend.
11. My brothers ..... (leave) for England last week.
12. My sisters ..... (leave) for England every year in June.
13. I don't like that man because he often ..... (laugh) at me.
14. Her sister never ..... (smoke).
15. The cat usually ..... (leave) its basket when it is hungry.

Points...../ 15

### Exercise 2. Regular and Irregular verbs

Open the brackets by putting verbs into Past Simple form.

1. I ..... (get) this book from the library.
2. I opened the door and ..... (look) inside.
3. Who ..... (close) all the windows?
4. We had a garage where we ..... (keep) our car.
5. I ..... (carry) my mother's shopping bag.
6. Ali ..... (cut) his knee.
7. The glass ..... (fall) off the table.
8. I ..... (not climb) over the fence.
9. The glass ..... (not break).
10. The plane ..... (land) ten minutes ago.
11. We ..... (sell) our old car.
12. We ..... (buy) a new car.
13. We ..... (live) in that house when I was a baby.
14. We ..... (walk) to school yesterday.
15. She ..... (smile) when she saw me.

Points...../15

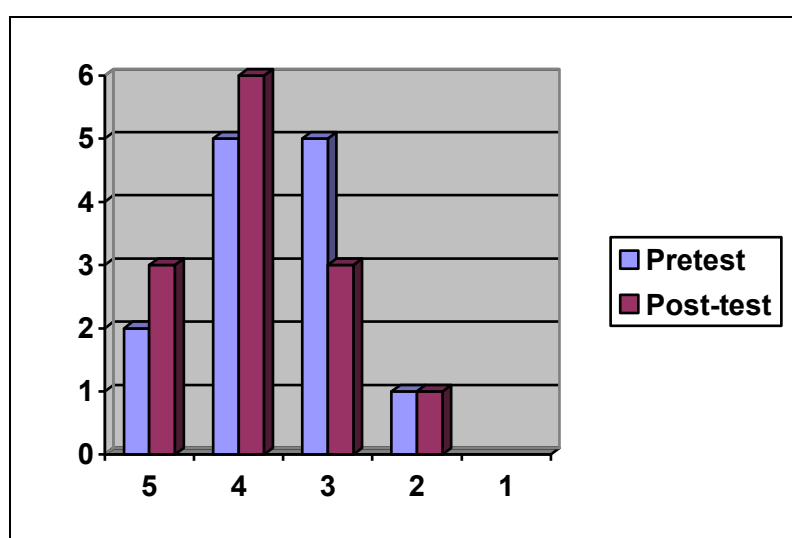
Total...../30

**Grade scheme:**

**30-27 –“5”; 26-23 – “4”; 22-20 – “3”; 19-16 – “2”; 15-0 – “1”.**

All tests were checked and the results of two groups were analyzed and compared. The results are the following:

- In Group1 (13 students) the average grade was 3.84 and it is between satisfactory and good.
- In Group 2 (15 students) the average grade was 4.13 and it is good.



*Table 11. Group 1 Pretest and Post-Test Grades Comparison*

A small improvement can be seen in students' grades, though there is still one person with unsatisfactory grade. The traditional way of practicing grammar topics leaves behind the students with poor knowledge. As soon as the whole class manages to complete the task by doing it in turns, sentence by sentence, the teacher does not see the point in explaining the topic one more time. The analysis of the results with the teacher revealed the following: the rule was presented only once and it was practiced by doing the exercises; the teacher agrees that she feels fine if at least one student gives the right answer hoping that all others will understand why the answer is like that. As a result, there are still students who do not understand the rule – they are the ones who do not listen and spend time doing something else.

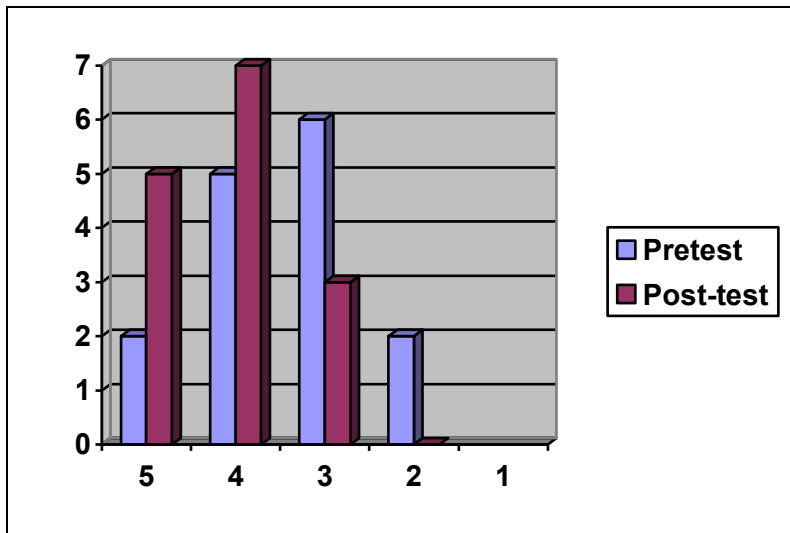


Table 12. Group 2 Pretest and Post-Test Grades Comparison

The average cooperative learning group result is almost one point higher and there are no unsatisfactory grades at all. The majority of students improved their results even though the class environment was unknown. Students were given the opportunity to recall the rule several tens of times. There was also an assurance that each student who made an error was not only corrected but received an explanation why it was wrong and how it was right.

By analyzing the post-test results of both groups, it can be concluded that the first part of the hypothesis has been proved and the cooperative learning method can serve as the one that can significantly improve students' academic achievements.

#### 2.2.6. Post-testing Students' Interest in English Language Grammar Study and Willingness to Work in Cooperative Groups

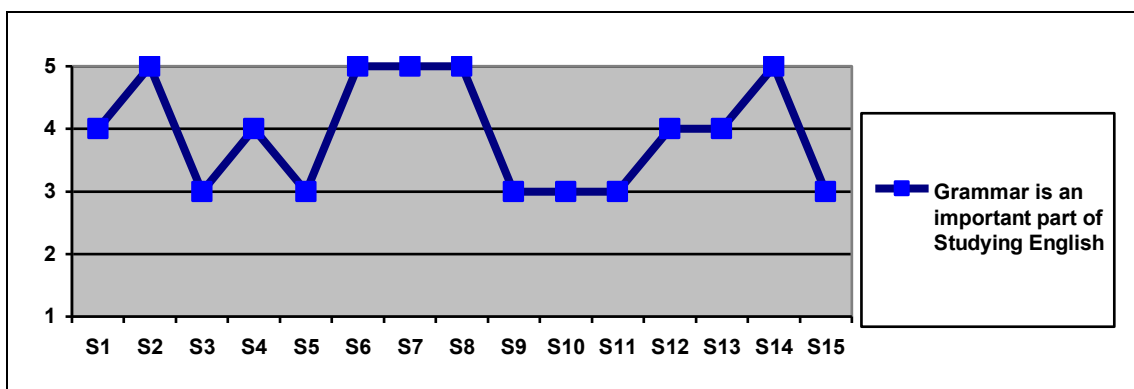


Table 13. Post-test. Question 1

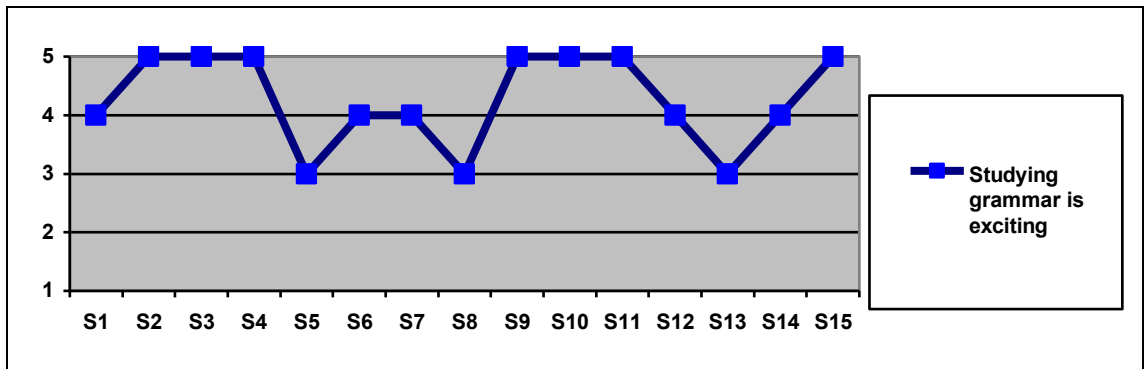


Table 14. Post-test. Question 2

The post-test results on the level of interest to English language grammar show that after being imposed to cooperative learning the majority of students think that studying grammar is important and exciting. While discussing the impression cooperative learning had on students, only one third of students do not find grammar always important, as they believe that constant vocabulary and speaking practice is more important, though understand that it is not possible to obtain a good level of language proficiency without grammar. Others are convinced that grammar is one of the basic elements of language study, as a result, has to be studied on a constant basis in a way that attracts student's attention.

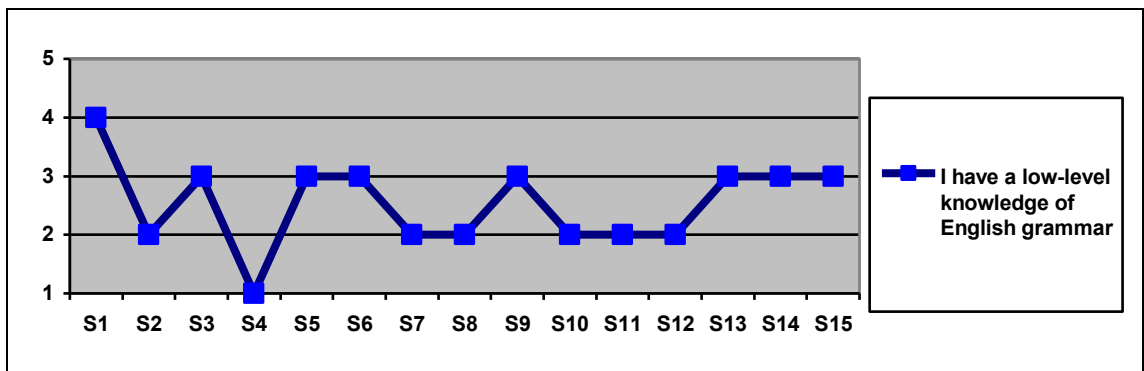


Table 15. Post-test. Question 3

The result of the question above shows that when students understand that it is possible to receive the explanation of grammar rules as many times as necessary and that errors are a common and normal thing to happen, they start to believe that their English grammar knowledge level is at least average and nearly half of the group now consider themselves to be good at grammar. That is also proved by the test grades. As soon as the student sees the positive result of his/her efforts he/she is more willing to continue to study and to enjoy the process, i.e. the interest increases.

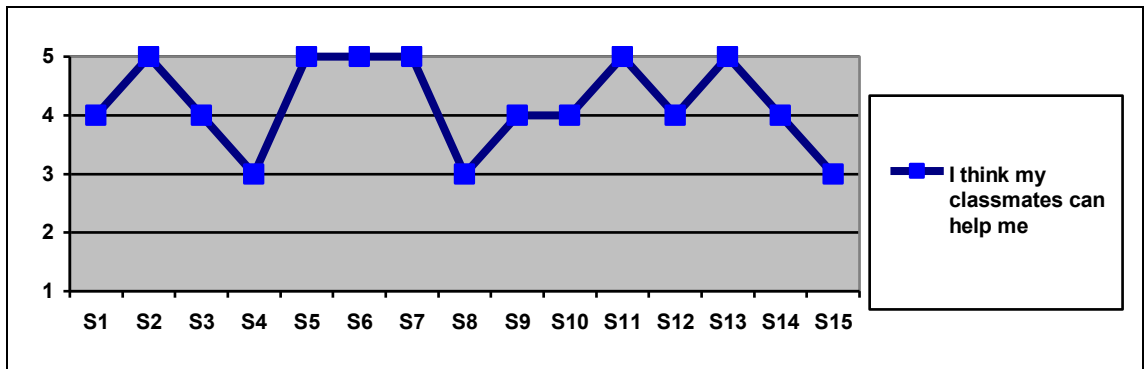


Table 16. Post-test. Question 4

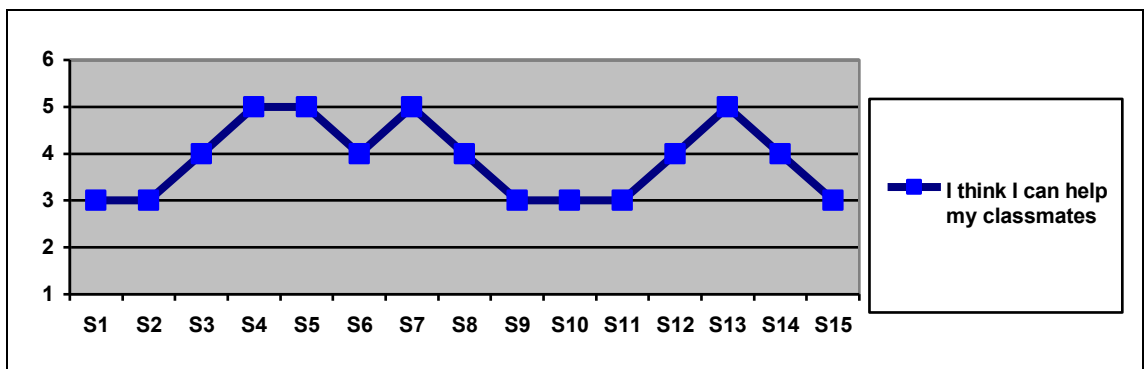


Table 17. Post-test. Question 5

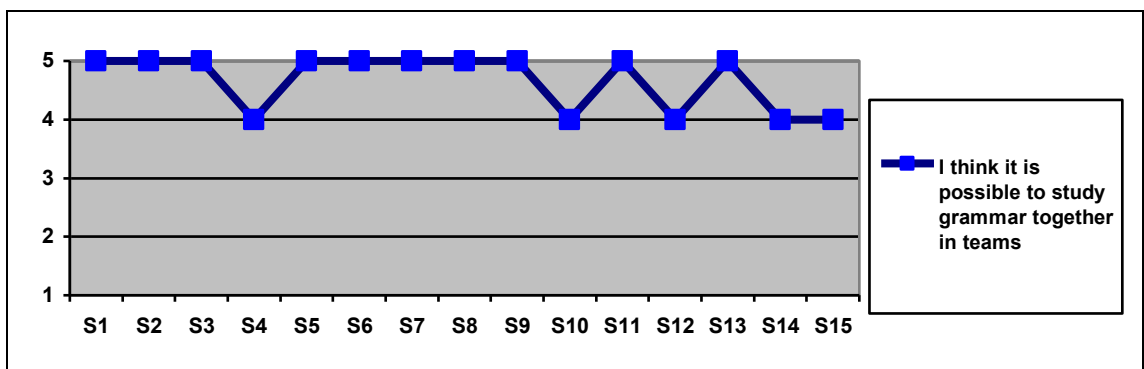


Table 18. Post-test. Question 6

The last three questions show the students' opinion towards cooperative learning after being imposed to it. Now they are sure that studying grammar in teams, when each person can help the other one or has the right to receive help from another student, is not only possible but also beneficial. Their self-esteem has risen and they believe that studying in the atmosphere of mutual trust and total help increases their academic achievements and create closer relationships between classmates.

To sum up, the majority of students were satisfied with the result of the experiment and they want to continue their study in cooperation. Moreover, they have told the other group about the way their classes were organized and now Group 1 wants

to try it too. The teacher is impressed with the results and will continue practicing cooperative structures in her lessons. Taking the analysis above into consideration, it can be argued that the cooperative learning method creates a positive learning environment in the class in order to improve students' academic achievements and increase the interest in grammar leaning.

The findings of the research show that the hypothesis has been proved in full and therefore the research ends up being successful.

## CONCLUSION

The present thesis presents how the cooperative learning method can be used in order to successfully create the environment where students' academic achievements and interest improves on the example of a group of basic school students. Keeping in mind that each teaching method used has to correspond to the National Curriculum, the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic School has been studied and considered. The cooperative learning techniques have been proved suitable for the objectives and goals of the curriculum and therefore have been implemented in a real classroom environment. Several lessons were conducted in a cooperative way and the results of the student's pretest and post-test on interest in grammar studies and academic achievement were analyzed and compared with the other group, where the traditional methodology was used.

Chapter 1 serves as a basis for the research and illustrates the main concepts of the cooperative learning method. It discusses the creation of a cooperative learning environment, its elements and methods that can be implied, moreover, it gives the explanation of the teacher's role and provides clear differences between cooperative learning and other types of group work. This part of the research has been based on the theoretical background developed by the researchers Spencer Kagan (1989), David Johnson and Roger Johnson (1991), Robert Slavin (2010), etc.

The major findings of the theoretical background are the following:

- Cooperative learning has five main principles that have to be considered in order to distinguish cooperative learning from other types of group work.
- Cooperative learning can be easily adopted by any teacher in any class, no matter the age or the level of language proficiency.
- Cooperative learning develops not only students' language knowledge but it creates a personality who will be able to adopt the acquired skills in his/her future life.
- Cooperative learning can be used regularly and it can replace the traditional methods.
- Cooperative learning is relatively inexpensive as it does not need any special teaching material, it is only necessary to learn the cooperative structures and then the teacher can implement them to any topic or subject of his/her class.

The empirical part of the paper presents the analysis of the National Curriculum for Basic Schools in terms of its goals and competences which can be achieved through cooperative learning. It also describes the implementation of the cooperative learning method in practice to teach English language grammar in Narva basic schools, which

resulted in being successful in raising student's level of academic achievements and interest in grammar study. The following findings have been achieved:

- Students are more interested in grammar study when it is taught in an active way that promotes constant repetition of the topic studied.
- The grammar lessons turn to be exciting when each student participates equally with others and the teacher in a lesson.
- Students are not afraid to make mistakes as it means that they will be tutored one more time and the material will be explained to them until they understand it completely.
- Students are ready to help each other, which results in the creation of the atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.
- The grades become better, as there are no more students in the class who lack the necessary attention they need to succeed.
- Students become more active and responsible for what and how they study.

The present study confirms the finding done by the researchers and proves that cooperative learning can be implemented as the main method of conducting lessons in Narva schools to increase students' interest in grammar studies and to assist with academic achievements.

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## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Antud töö kirjeldab koostöö õppemeetodi ja selle kasutamise võimalusi õppekeskonda loomisel, milles töö tulemused ja õpilaste uudishimu tõuseb Narva põhikooli näitel. Pole saladus, et iga kasutatav õppemeetod peab vastama Põhikooli riikliku õppekavale, selle kohaselt tema uurimine oli vajalik antud uuringu jaoks.

Oli tõestatud, et koostöö õppemeetod sobib Põhikooli riiklikus õppekavas esitatud eesmärkidega, mille tõttu oli proovitud reaalses klassis. Paar tundi oli läbiviidud kasutades koostöö õppemeetodi ja õpilaste tulemused grammatika teadmiste ja huvi taseme kontroll testis, mis olid läbiviidud enne eksperimenti ja peale seda olid analüüsitud ja võrreldud rühma tulemustega, kus oli kasutatud traditsiooniline õppemeetod.

1 peatükk on uuringu aluseks ning annab koostöö õppemeetodi mõistele tähenduse. Siin käsitletakse koostöö õppekeskkonna loomist, tema elemente ja meetodeid. Lisaks sellele peatükis on lahti seletatud pedagoogi roll ning võrreldes koostöö õppemeetodit teiste gruppitöö tüüpidega on toodud esile kindlad erinevused. See uurimus oli asutatud teoreetilisel taustal, , развитом исследователями Spencer Kagan (1989), David Johnson and Roger Johnson (1991), Robert Slavin (2010) jne.

Põhilised teoreetilise uuringu tulemused on järgmised:

- Koostöö õppemeetod omab viis põhiprintsiipi, millega tuleb arvestada koostöö õppemeetodi eristamiseks teostest gruppitööde tüüpidest.
- Koostöö õppemeetod võib hõlpsasti olla kasutatud erisuguse õpetajaga misthaes klassis, sõltumata vanusest ja keeleoskusest.
- Koostöö õppemeetod mõjutab mitte ainult õpilase keeleoskust, vaid see ka arendab individuaalseid ja sotsiaalseid oskusi, mis on vajalikud igale lapsele tulevikus.
- Koostöö õppemeetod võib olla regulaarses kasutuses ning traditsiooniliste meetodite asendaja.
- Koostöö õppemeetod on suhteliselt odav seoses sellega, et ta ei vaja spetsiaalseid õppematerjale. Vajalik on ainult ära õppida koostöö õppemeetodi struktuurid peale mida pedagoog on võimeline kasutada neid klassi erinevas teemas või aines.

Osa uuringust esitab Põhikooli riikliku õppekava analüüsi tema eesmärkide ja teadmiste vaatest, milleni võib jõuda koostöö õppemeetodi kasutamiseiga. Temas samuti on kirjeldatud koostöö õppemeetodi rakendamise viis praktikas, selleks et õpetada inglise keele grammatikat Narva põhikoolides, mis viiks õppe tulemuste ja grammatika huvi paranemiseni.

Järgmised tulemused olid saavutatud:

- Õpilased on rohkem huvitatud grammatika õppimises siis, kui ta on õpetatud aktiivse meetodiga, mis omakorda soodustab pidevat teema kordamist. Grammatika tunnid muutuvad huvitavamaks tingimusel, et õpilase osalemine tunnis on võrdne teiste õpilastega ja õpetajaga.
- Õpilased ei karda teha vigu, kuna see tähendab, et materjali seletatakse nii kaua, kuni nemad ei saa sellest täielikult aru.
- Õpilased on valmis abistama üksteistest, mis viib vastastiku usaldus ja arusaamise atmosfääri kujunemiseni.
- Hinded muutuvad paremaks, seoses sellega, et klassis enam ei ole õpilase, kes tunnevad tähelepanu puudust.
- Õpilased muutuvad aktiivsemaks ja vastutustundlikumaks selle eest, mida ja kuidas nad õppivad.

Antud uuring tõestab alguses tehtud hüpoteesi ning tõestab, et koostöö õppemeetod võib olla kasutuses kui põhiline õppetundide läbiviimise meetod Narva koolides, eesmärgiga tõsta tudengite huvi grammatika õppimiseks ja üldiseks õppeedukuse paranemiseks.

## Appendix 1.

### Cooperative Learning Student Survey (Pretest and Post-test)

As you complete the following survey, please think of your experiences in your school ONLY. Circle the answer which most closely reflects how true each statement is for you.

- 5 = Completely true  
4 = True Much of the Time  
3 = Sometimes True and Sometimes False  
2 = False Much of the Time  
1 = Completely False

1. Grammar is important part of studying English.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
2. Studying grammar is exciting.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
3. I have a low-level knowledge of English grammar.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
4. I think that my classmates can help me.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
5. I think I can help my classmates.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
6. I think it is possible to study grammar together in teams	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

Olen koostanud töö iseseisvalt. Kõik töö koostamisel kasutatud teiste autorite tööd, põhimõttelised seisukohad, kirjandusallikatest ja mujalt pärinevad andmed on viidatud.

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/töö autori allkiri/