

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING ‘LEARNING TOGETHER  
INSTRUCTION’ IN IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION  
AMONG EFL UNDERGRADUATES IN THE KINGDOM OF  
SAUDI ARABIA**

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**AUTHOR DECLARATION**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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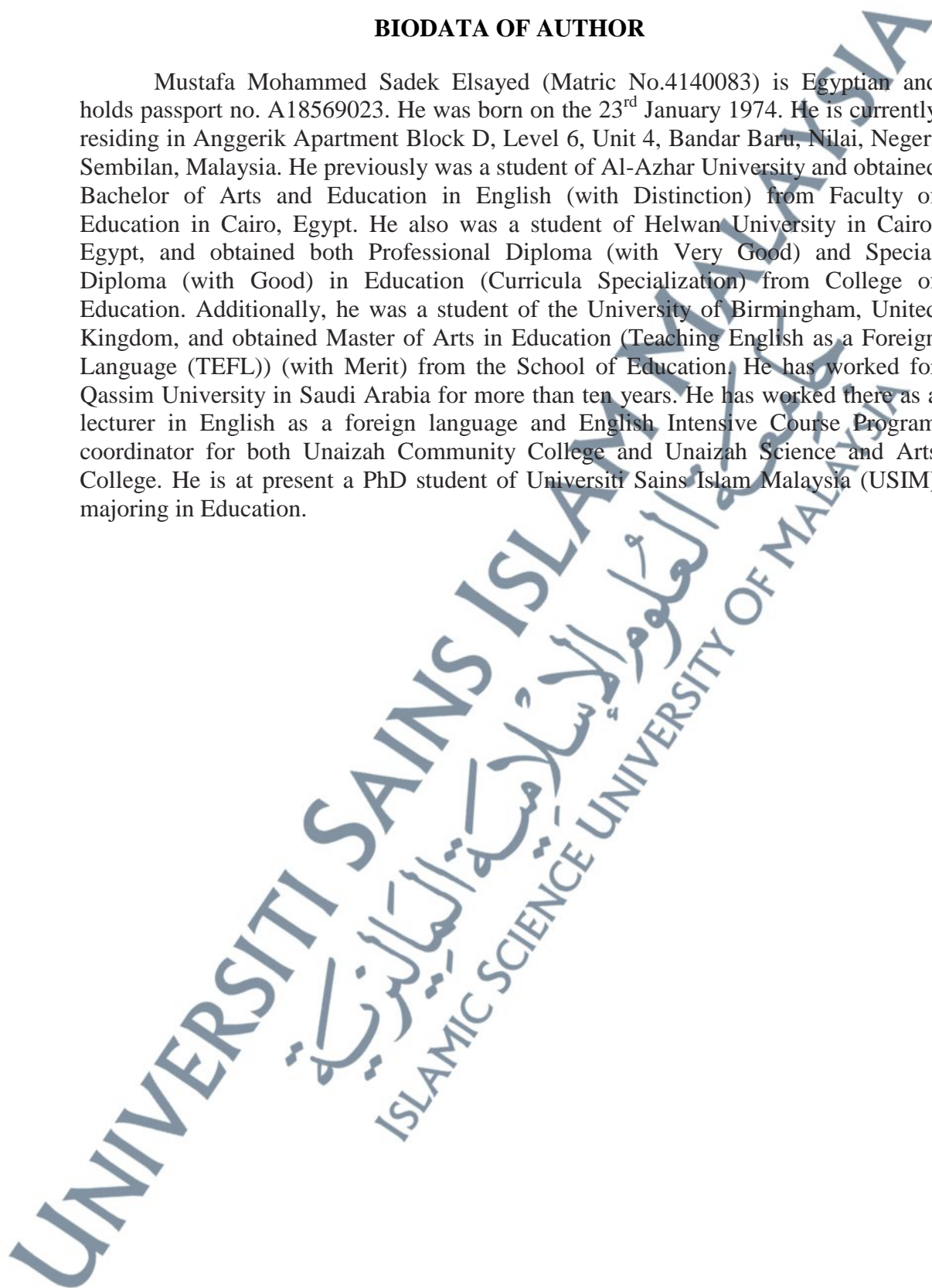
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## DEDICATION

To the souls of my late great grandmother and my late father “May Allah, Glory be to Him, forgive their sins, accept them among His good servants, shower them with His Mercy and make them among the dwellers of the paradise”.

To my beloved kind-hearted mother “May Allah, Glory be to Him, bless her, provide her with good health and happy long life”. My grandmother and my mother together tried their best to bring me up well, did their utmost to show me what is right and what is wrong, helped me, worked hard during the day and stayed up late during the night to take care of me and offer me an easy comfortable life, supported me physically, financially and emotionally, encouraged me, guided me to the right path, urged me to reach my goals and achieve my dreams, and motivated me to take the long way of being personally, academically and professionally successful. Without their great sacrifices and sincere efforts, I could not be the man who I am today. May Allah, Glory be to Him reward them well for all what they have offered, done and made for me.

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## ABSTRAK

Sepanjang tiga dekad yang lalu, para penyelidik telah merumuskan bahawa strategi pembelajaran kooperatif, khususnya teknik Pembelajaran Bersama (Learning Together) memberi kesan positif terhadap pencapaian pelajar dalam pelbagai bidang akademik di tahap pendidikan yang berbeza. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian mengenai kesan strategi pembelajaran kooperatif terhadap pencapaian pelajar dalam bidang pendidikan tinggi khususnya tahap kefahaman membaca di konteks EFL (Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing) di kalangan pelajar Saudi adalah masih terhad. Penggunaan teknik Pembelajaran Bersama jarang di gunakan oleh pengajar dalam kelas membaca di konteks EFL di Arab Saudi walaupun hasil kajian penyelidikan yang lalu telah menyarankan bahawa ia akan meningkatkan perbendaharaan kata pelajar dan meningkatkan pemahaman mereka mengenai teks bacaan tersebut. Kebanyakan pelajar Arab Saudi yang mempunyai tahap pendidikan yang berbeza tidak dapat membaca dengan cekap atau memahami apa yang mereka baca di dalam konteks EFL kerana beberapa faktor, termasuk kebergantungan terhadap kaedah tradisional. Melalui aktiviti Pembelajaran Bersama, pelajar ini dapat menggunakan pengetahuan, persepsi dan pengalaman mereka untuk meningkatkan kemahiran pemahaman bacaan mereka di konteks EFL.

Setelah mengkaji kajian literatur yang lalu, tiada kajian khusus yang menumpukan kepada penggunaan Pembelajaran Bersama di dalam kelas membaca konteks EFL di kalangan pelajar Saudi. Oleh itu, kajian ini direka untuk melihat keberkesanan penggunaan Pembelajaran Bersama dalam meningkatkan kefahaman bacaan konteks EFL di kalangan mahasiswa Arab Saudi, dengan membandingkan penggunaan Pembelajaran Bersama dengan kuliah tradisional. Antara objektif lain kajian ini adalah mengkaji persepsi pelajar terhadap kaedah Pembelajaran Bersama. Di samping itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tingkah laku pelajar sambil di dalam menggunakan kaedah Pembelajaran Bersama.

Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kaedah campuran, khususnya quasi-eksperimen campuran untuk mendapatkan data kuantitatif dan kualitatif dari pelajar Saudi di dalam konteks EFL. Eksperimen ini telah dijalankan di dalam kursus Bacaan dan Perbendaharaan kata Bahasa Inggeris di peringkat ketiga yang mempunyai nilai tiga kredit dengan tiga jam pengajaran setiap minggu, sepanjang semester pertama tahun akademik 2016/2017. 80 pelajar kursus mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini, dengan 40 pelajar sebagai peserta dalam kumpulan eksperimen dan 40 pelajar sebagai peserta didalam kumpulan kawalan. Pembelajaran Bersama digunakan dalam kumpulan eksperimen dan pengajaran kuliah tradisional digunakan dalam kumpulan kawalan untuk mengajar sembilan kemahiran pemahaman bacaan, khususnya, pratonton, mengimbas, membuat kesimpulan, mengenalpasti topik, memahami idea-idea utama, mengenal pasti corak organisasi dan pengecualian, meneka perkataan yang tidak diketahui, mencari dan meringkaskan idea dari buku teks universiti yang diberikan selama sembilan minggu.

Data kuantitatif yang diperlukan untuk kajian ini dikumpulkan melalui dua instrumen iaitu soal selidik Pembelajaran Bersama, dan ujian pra dan ujian pos yang mengandungi teks bacaan yang sama. Data kuantitatif dianalisis dengan menggunakan ujian t. Prosedur pengumpulan data kualitatif melibatkan pengumpulan tulisan jurnal

penyelidik beserta nota lapangan, temubual bersemuka dengan 12 peserta dan temubual berkumpulan dengan dua kumpulan tumpuan yang melibatkan sembilan peserta. Semua sesi temubual direkodkan secara audio dan kemudiannya di transkrip secara verbatim. Semasa temubual, pemerhatian penyelidik telah direkodkan sebagai nota lapangan. Data dari sumber-sumber ini disusun dalam kategori, dan corak dan tema telah dikenal pasti untuk memahami persepsi dan pengalaman para peserta. Metodologi penyelidikan kualitatif yang digunakan dalam kajian ini terdiri daripada kaedah "interpretatif-deskriptif" dan memberi tumpuan kepada mengubah kata-kata dan tindakan para peserta ke dalam pembangunan tema dan implikasi yang berpotensi. Data-data ini dikodkan dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan pengekodan terbuka dan analisis tematik.

Tema yang diperoleh adalah: (a) Pengajar memberikan sokongan berterusan semasa pembelajaran bersama, (b) pembelajaran kemahiran kefahaman membaca EFL adalah lebih mudah apabila bekerja dalam kumpulan pembelajaran bersama, (c) bekerja dalam kumpulan pembelajaran bersama meningkatkan kemahiran membaca di dalam konteks EFL (d) pembelajaran kefahaman membaca EFL adalah lebih seronok apabila pelajar bekerja dalam kumpulan pembelajaran bersama, (e) pembelajaran bersama adalah strategi yang boleh digunakan dalam mengajar kemahiran EFL yang lain, (f) Strategi mencari bantuan pelajar diperluas (g) mengambil bahagian dalam aktiviti pembelajaran bersama menghasilkan suasana pembelajaran yang selamat dan interaksi pelajar yang positif dan (h) penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bersama di masa depan akan menghasilkan pencapaian murid yang lebih baik.

Penemuan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa Pembelajaran Bersama mempunyai kesan yang lebih tinggi terhadap pencapaian kefahaman membaca pelajar berbanding dengan kesan pengajaran kuliah tradisional. Berkenaan persepsi pelajar terhadap pembelajaran bersama-sama, purata skor persepsi untuk pelajar dalam kumpulan pembelajaran bersama menunjukkan hubungan yang kuat dengan pendekatan pembelajaran bersama. Akhirnya, terdapat korelasi yang signifikan diantara pencapaian, persepsi dan tindak balas pemahaman pelajar.

Data menunjukkan bahawa Pembelajaran Bersama mempunyai kesan positif ke atas kemahiran pemahaman pelajar secara keseluruhan. Manfaat kajian ini mendedahkan kesan positif Pembelajaran Bersama terhadap kefahaman membaca pelajar EFL dan mencerminkan bahawa peserta melihat strategi ini sebagai strategi yang berguna dalam kelas pemahaman membaca EFL mereka. Sebagai kesimpulan, berkenaan dengan sumbangan kajian ini terhadap ilmu pengetahuan, kajian ini adalah tambahan kepada bidang kajian empirikal pendidikan EFL dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi Saudi. Berkaitan dengan ilmu amalan pula, kajian ini amat mengesyorkan pensyarah EFL untuk menggunakan Pembelajaran Bersama dalam kursus pemahaman membaca EFL. Implikasi lain untuk kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa kajian masa depan perlu mempertimbangkan gaya pembelajaran mahasiswa EFL, gaya hidup dan motivasi dalam reka bentuk kajian mereka.

## ABSTRACT

Over the past three decades, researchers have found cooperative learning strategy of learning together to have positive effects on students' achievement in various academic subject areas and different educational levels. However, there are limited studies on the impact of cooperative learning strategy of learning together on students' achievement in the area of Saudi higher education EFL reading comprehension. The use of learning together instruction is rarely supported by instructors in EFL reading classrooms in Saudi Arabia even though research studies have suggested that it will increase students' vocabulary and improve their understanding of the reading comprehension text. Large numbers of Saudi EFL students of different educational levels are unable to read efficiently or comprehend what they read due to some factors, including depending merely on traditional instruction. Through learning together activities, EFL undergraduates can use their knowledge, perceptions and experiences to improve their reading comprehension skills.

Upon review of the related literature, no study was found that focused on the use of learning together instruction in Saudi EFL reading classrooms. As a result, the present study was designed to investigate the effectiveness of using learning together instruction in improving reading comprehension among Saudi EFL undergraduates by comparing the learning together instruction and traditional lecture instruction. Another objective was to figure out the undergraduates' perceptions after providing learning together intervention. In addition, the study intended to examine students' learning together behaviors during learning together instructional activities.

The study employed an embedded concurrent mixed methods quasi-experimental design to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data from EFL undergraduates. The experiment was applied in a third-level English Reading and Vocabulary course, a three credit course, with three hours of instruction per week, over the full first semester of the academic year 2016/2017. Eighty EFL third-level students taking English Reading and Vocabulary courses took part in the study, with forty participant students in the experimental group and forty in the control group. The learning together instruction was used in the experimental group and the traditional lecture instruction was used in the control group to teach nine reading comprehension skills, specifically, previewing, scanning, making inferences, identifying the topic, understanding main ideas, identifying patterns of organization and exceptions, guessing unknown words, skimming and summarizing from the assigned university textbook for a period of nine weeks.

The required quantitative data for the study were collected through two instruments, namely, learning together questionnaire, and identical reading comprehension pre- and post-tests. The quantitative data were analyzed using t-test. The qualitative data collection procedures incorporated researcher's journal entries and field notes, face-to-face interviews with twelve participants and two student focus group interviews with nine participants. The interviews were recorded, and participants' responses were transcribed from audiotapes of the interviews. During the interviews, the researcher's observations were written down through the use of field

notes. Data from these sources were arranged into categories, and patterns and themes were identified to derive meaning from the participants' perceptions and experiences. The qualitative research methodology used in this study comprised the "interpretive-descriptive" method and focused on turning the participants' words and actions into the development of potential themes and implications. These data were coded and analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis.

Themes found were: (a) EFL reading comprehension instructor provided continuing support during the learning together instruction sessions, (b) learning EFL reading comprehension skills is much easier when working in learning together groups, (c) working in learning together groups improves EFL reading comprehension skills learning, (d) learning EFL reading comprehension is more fun when students work in learning together groups, (e) learning together is a strategy that can be used in teaching other EFL skills, (f) Student help-seeking strategies were widened due to learning together instruction, (g) participating in learning together activities produces secure learning atmosphere and positive student interactions and (h) the future use of learning together strategy would yield better students' achievement.

The findings of the present study showed that learning together instruction had a higher effect on undergraduates' reading comprehension achievement when compared with the effects of traditional lecture instruction. The study was further informed by the participants' perceptions of their own learning together processes. In the case of undergraduates' perceptions toward learning together instruction, the average mean of perception score for undergraduates in the learning together group showed a strong relationship with the learning together approach. Finally, it was found that the correlation between undergraduates' reading comprehension achievement, perceptions and reactions was significant.

The data suggested that learning together instruction had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension skills overall. The benefits of this study reveal the positive impact learning together instruction has on EFL undergraduates' reading comprehension and reflect that participants perceive this strategy to be useful in their EFL reading comprehension classrooms. In conclusion, the study could be a vital contribution to both knowledge and practice. With regard to knowledge, the study is an addition to the field of empirical literature of EFL education in the Saudi higher education context. Pertaining to practice, the study strongly recommends EFL lecturers to use the learning together instruction in undergraduate EFL reading comprehension courses. Another implication for this research suggests that future studies need to consider EFL undergraduates' learning styles, self-esteem and motivation in their intervention designs.

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