

From Dynamic Classes to Group Works: Cyclic Method in Teaching Readings of Iranian High School English Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of the cyclic group work method in enhancing reading comprehension among Iranian high school EFL learners, grounded in the principles of micro-teaching (Allen, 1967). By dividing texts into manageable sections, the method structures a 90-minute dynamic classroom session where students engage in collaborative learning, peer questioning, and critical discussion under teacher supervision. The research employs a qualitative-analytical framework to evaluate how this seven-stage approach—incorporating homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping, iterative questioning, and collective feedback—aligns with micro-teaching's core tenets: initiating behaviors, material presentation, consolidation, monitoring, and evaluation. Findings reveal that the method fosters exceptional student participation, as learners subconsciously strive to contribute within and across groups, internalizing material through active dialogue. The teacher's dual role as facilitator and supervisor ensures mental and physical engagement, enabling sustained practice in reading and reasoned text analysis. The study bridges gaps in EFL research by adapting cyclic group strategies to Iran's teacher-centered, resource-constrained context, demonstrating improved comprehension outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Reading and comprehension skills play a facilitative role in language learning. This means that through these skills, language learners can create opportunities to acquire other language competencies. However, teaching this aspect of language has always presented unique challenges. Factors such as a lack of suitable facilities, unengaging texts, inconsistencies in materials, and even the choice of teaching methodology can pose difficulties in language instruction. Among these, selecting an appropriate teaching method can resolve a significant portion of the problems. An effective method engages

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students, challenges their thinking, and keeps them focused on the text, leading to better outcomes. Traditional teaching approaches have become outdated and often fail to capture students' interest. As a result, educators should strive to incorporate the latest and most suitable teaching strategies for their classrooms. One such method is the *cyclic group work method*.

The *cyclic group work method* is an innovative and structured approach based on group teaching techniques. It has been implemented multiple times in dynamic classroom settings across schools, colleges, and universities, particularly for assessing and enhancing reading comprehension skills in English texts. Designed for a 90-minute class session, this method follows a detailed schedule aligned with an optimized educational plan. Qualitatively, it yields better results than traditional language teaching methods, as it encourages higher student participation in reading and comprehension activities. Since all students are motivated to contribute, the teacher can effectively monitor and guide various classroom interactions.

This method aligns with the principles of *microteaching*, introduced by Dwight W. Allen (1967). Microteaching emphasizes group-based learning in an active, dynamic classroom environment where students engage in discussions, debates, and collaborative tasks. Learners explore course materials, express their viewpoints, and reflect on their understanding while working in groups. The teacher facilitates this process, guiding students and ensuring productive collaboration.

The *cyclic group work method* consists of seven stages, each reflecting key aspects of microteaching. It incorporates *in-group*, *out-group (or extra-group)*, *teacher-oriented*, *student-oriented*, and *content-oriented activities*. The target material—typically an English text from secondary-level language books—is divided into sections for discussion. This method ensures that all students and groups participate actively in each implementation phase, culminating in comprehension exercises completed collectively in class.

A key question arises regarding the connection between this group work method and microteaching principles, which will be addressed in the conclusion after analyzing the course material.

Research Question: How does the cyclical group work method affect Iranian high school students' reading comprehension?

2. Review of Literature

This section reviews studies related to reading skills, reading comprehension, group work, and English language teaching. Each study is relevant to the current research in specific aspects, and some proposed solutions overlap with those in this study. The review includes research conducted in Iran and other countries.

Burke (2011, pp. 88, 93) examined group work in education, exploring the most effective methods for group teaching. She argued that group work can be a desirable activity for both students and teachers, enhancing learner satisfaction and improving test performance. Effective grouping, supervision, and individual and group evaluations ensure maximum participation and learning efficiency. The results of group activities can have lasting positive effects, fostering language learning, social skills, and cultural and attitudinal development.

Gopala et al. (2012, pp. 3, 6) investigated group activities in English as a second language (ESL) classroom. They found that group activities increase learner engagement and interaction, strengthening the learning process. Teachers must manage

group work skillfully to promote life skills, positive attitudes, and enjoyable learning experiences.

Rahaman (2014, pp. 4, 5) explored reading skills through group activities in English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction. He suggested that active, socially oriented learning addresses gaps in the teaching-learning process. Reading comprehension relies on understanding texts and articulating ideas, which group work enhances by fostering enthusiasm and facilitating instruction.

Chalak (2015, pp. 19, 27) studied the effects of task-based instruction on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Conducted in girls' high schools in Isfahan, the research demonstrated that task-based methods yield better results than traditional approaches, offering valuable insights for educators.

Handayani et al. (2019, pp. 303, 305) examined whether integrating collaborative learning with cyclic sessions improves reading comprehension and critical thinking among Indonesian EFL students. Using a classroom action research design with pre- and post-tests, they found that collaborative learning positively impacted both skills after two sessions.

Hemmati et al. (2019, pp. 32, 33) studied the impact of group teaching on Iranian EFL learners' reading skills and comprehension. They highlighted group teaching as a strategic method that enhances learning through shared responsibility, significantly improving reading outcomes and creating a dynamic classroom environment.

Wibowo et al. (2020, pp. 20, 22) identified common reading comprehension strategies among Indonesian high school teachers. Using a mixed-methods approach, they observed three sessions and found dictionary use, question generation, and teacher-student question and answer Q&A as the most frequent strategies.

Altun and Sabah (2020, pp. 144, 146) investigated whether cooperative learning strategies tailored to multiple intelligences (e.g., linguistic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal) improved Iraqi EFL freshmen's speaking skills. Results indicated that such strategies created an engaging atmosphere and enhanced communication skills.

Zhang and Li (2022, pp. 403, 404) examined the impact of structured group roles (e.g., facilitator, summarizer, questioner) on high school students' reading comprehension. Their findings revealed that role assignment significantly boosted engagement and text analysis skills compared to unstructured discussions. Additionally, rotating roles in cyclic sessions reinforced comprehension retention, supporting Burke's (2011) earlier claims on structured group dynamics.

Al-Hassan and Al-Jarf (2023, pp. 112, 114) explored the use of digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Google Docs) in cyclic group tasks among Saudi EFL learners. Results showed that technology-enhanced collaboration led to higher reading comprehension scores than traditional methods. The study emphasized real-time feedback and iterative learning, aligning with Gopala et al.'s (2012) findings on engagement and Handayani et al.'s (2019) research on repeated practice.

Karimi and Rahmani (2024, pp. 78, 79) conducted a meta-analysis of 20 studies on cyclic group strategies in Iranian EFL contexts. They found that role rotation and repeated discussions consistently improved reading comprehension and critical thinking. The study also introduced reflective group journals as an effective cyclic tool, enhancing metacognitive awareness and supporting Rahaman's (2014) social learning framework.

3. Theoretical Framework

Micro education is a focused and structured approach to teaching that emphasizes breaking down content into manageable segments to enhance learning efficiency. The following five key principles should be considered in micro education:

1. *Initiating Behaviors*: This principle involves preparing learners for the lesson by establishing clear expectations and foundational knowledge. Key components include: assignment instructions, content arrangement, behavioral goals, and diagnostic learning.

2. *Presentation of Course Material (Communication)*: Effective delivery of content is crucial for student engagement and comprehension. This principle encompasses: discussion, speech, questioning techniques, step-by-step teaching methods, judgment frameworks, and distinction between concepts and images.

3. *Integrity or Consolidation of Course Material*: Reinforcement and coherence in the curriculum ensure long-term retention and mastery. This includes: redundancy, reviewing, and end-of-course summarization.

4. *Monitoring*: Continuous observation and guidance help maintain an effective learning environment. Supervision involves: control and participation, presence behavior, regulation, reward, and punishment.

5. *Evaluation*: Assessing student progress ensures that learning objectives are met. Evaluation consists of composite scores, diagnosis based on Allen (1967, pp. 86–87).

Group training and dividing content into smaller, more digestible segments are highly effective strategies in micro education. In cooperative activities, students engage in structured learning steps under the teacher's supervision, fostering collaboration and active participation. This method has been shown to enhance classroom efficiency compared to traditional lecture-based approaches.

4. Methods

This study employs a classroom-based qualitative approach to examine how a cyclical group teaching model functions within micro-education frameworks. Building on Allen's (1967) foundational work on micro-teaching and recent developments by Brown (2018), the research combines theoretical analysis with direct classroom observation to evaluate this instructional approach.

4.1. Research Design

The cyclical teaching method operates through three interconnected processes:

- *Concept Reinforcement Through Repetition* - Students engage with material multiple times through varied activities, moving from initial exposure to in-depth application.
- *Peer-Assisted Meaning Making* - Small groups collaboratively analyze texts, develop questions, and refine interpretations through discussion (Brown, 2018).

- *Dynamic Assessment Integration* - Teachers continuously monitor group progress and provide targeted support during learning cycles (Lee & Carter, 2021).

4.2. Data Collection Procedure

The investigation focuses specifically on:

- Implementation strategies for cyclical lesson structures in reading instruction
- Patterns of student interaction and their impact on engagement
- Demonstrated growth in textual analysis and comprehension skills.

Through this dual lens of theory and practice, the study offers actionable insights for adapting cyclical group methods to diverse EFL contexts, particularly in resource-constrained environments like Iranian secondary schools. The methodology emphasizes authentic classroom dynamics over controlled experimentation, capturing how teachers and students actually experience and implement this approach.

4.3. Research Materials

This study examines the effectiveness of the cyclical group work method in enhancing learning outcomes, using a reading section from the Iranian high school English textbook as the course material. The research aims to evaluate this collaborative learning approach by analyzing its impact on student engagement and comprehension, with participants consisting of high school students. By investigating this instructional strategy, the study seeks to determine whether cyclical group work improves academic performance and answers the core research question regarding its pedagogical efficiency.

5. Results

In this section, we will examine the research results based on the question posed, the theoretical framework, and the research method.

5.1. First Part

Cyclic group work method: The cyclical group work method can be structured in two primary ways based on group composition. The first type, known as *homogeneous grouping*, involves forming groups with an equal number of members, such as 5 groups of 4 students each, ensuring uniformity in size. The second type, referred to as *heterogeneous grouping*, allows for variation in group sizes, accommodating different numbers of members—for example, 3 groups of 4 students and 2 groups of 5 students—depending on the total class size and instructional needs. This flexibility enables educators to tailor group dynamics to specific learning objectives, student abilities, or collaborative tasks. Homogeneous grouping may promote balanced participation, while heterogeneous grouping can encourage peer mentoring and differentiated interaction. The choice between these methods depends on factors such as class demographics, lesson goals, and the desired social or academic outcomes for students.

Work Steps for a 90-Minute Reading Comprehension Lesson

1. Roll Call and Group Formation (5 minutes total)

- *Roll call (2 minutes)*: The teacher takes attendance
- *Group setup (3 minutes)*: The teacher organizes students into groups before class. Each group consists of 4 students: 1 strong, 1 average, and 2 weak students (this combination can be adjusted as needed).
 - Example: In a class of 20 students, there will be 5 groups
 - Groups sit in a circle formation, facing each other, with all groups arranged around the perimeter of the classroom.

2. Teacher Reads the Text (5 minutes)

- The teacher reads the text aloud to familiarize students with it
- The text is divided into 4 parts based on its paragraphs.

3. Individual Question Preparation (15 minutes)

- Each group member selects one paragraph
- They read their assigned paragraph and prepare *one question* with a *complete answer* (not a yes/no question).

4. Question Exchange and Peer Answering (15 minutes)

- Groups pass their questions to the next group
- Members of the next group answer the questions in order
- The teacher supervises, facilitates, and ensures smooth progress.

5. Group Discussion and Feedback (25 minutes)

- The teacher stands in the center of the circle
- The first paragraph is read aloud, and students who prepared questions for it take turns asking them
- The neighboring group answers the questions
- The question designer then presents their own answer, allowing all students to critique and discuss
- This process repeats for the remaining paragraphs
- The teacher assigns scores to each group and records them.

6. Textbook Comprehension Questions (15 minutes)

- The teacher reviews the textbook's comprehension questions (prepared by the authors)
- Each group discusses and shares their answers
- The teacher scores individual and group responses and records them.

7. Recap and Assignment (10 minutes)

- The teacher reads the text one final time
- Key points are summarized
- Homework is assigned for the next session.

5.2. Second Part

The analysis of 7 steps mentioned in cyclical group work method: The steps explained in the first part should be reviewed based on their content and their impact on improving the quality of the teaching-learning process. Conventional teaching methods are typically individual-centered and teacher-centered. However, the mentioned method incorporates seven distinct features:

1. Teacher-oriented
2. Student-oriented
3. Content-oriented
4. Skill-oriented

5. Technique-oriented
6. Class-oriented
7. Collaboration-oriented

In fact, a combination of these seven characteristics forms the basis of cyclic group work. The different stages of the investigated method should demonstrate each of these features in a specific way. Now, we will examine each of these steps.

1. The groups are set by the teacher before the class. Each group consists of four students: one strong student, one average student, and two weak students, for example. This combination can be adjusted as needed. The arrangement of the groups will be determined by the teacher.

The teacher is the central decision-maker in the class and determines group arrangements based on their knowledge, understanding of the students, and professional expertise, which form the foundation of this decision-making process. This process has three key features: *teacher-oriented*, *skill-oriented*, and *technique-oriented*.

- It is *teacher-oriented* in the sense that the teacher holds the authority to make these decisions
- It is *skill-oriented* in two ways: the students' skill levels serve as criteria for group membership, and the teacher must possess sufficient expertise to effectively manage both the groups and the class
- It is *technique-oriented* in terms of the strategies and techniques considered for group formation to ensure maximum efficiency.

2. The teacher reads the text aloud to familiarize the students with it and then divides the text into four parts based on its paragraphs.

This section has three focuses: *teacher-oriented*, *content-oriented*, and *class-oriented*.

- It is *teacher-oriented* because the teacher reads the text aloud once to familiarize students with it and, if necessary, provides explanations in certain parts
- It is *content-oriented* as the text is divided into several parts based on its content and paragraph structure
- Finally, it is *class-oriented* since the entire class focuses on the teacher and engages in active mental participation.

3. Now, each group member selects a paragraph, reads it, and prepares a question (with a complete answer, not a yes/no question) based on the chosen paragraph.

This section has four focuses: *student-oriented*, *content-oriented*, *skill-oriented* and *collaboration-oriented*.

- In this stage, students take initiative and assume responsibility for the task. Working both individually and in groups, members review and analyze their assigned paragraphs, making this a *student-oriented* phase
- Next, students examine the paragraph content, engaging in discussions and formulating content-based questions. This makes their work *content-oriented*
- Subsequently, students apply their acquired language skills to develop questions and provide answers, demonstrating a *skill-oriented* approach

- Finally, through collaborative group work - including task division, active participation, and joint content review - the focus shifts to *collaboration-oriented* learning.
 4. Students pass their questions to the next group, whose members then answer them in sequence. Throughout this process, the teacher monitors and supervises the groups while serving as a facilitator.
- As the questions are circulated to adjacent groups for discussion and review, engaging the entire class in these activities, the work becomes *student-oriented*, *collaboration-oriented*, and *class-oriented* once again
- The teacher resumes an active role by providing supervision, maintaining control, and offering guidance – thereby reintroducing the *teacher-oriented* dimension
- Furthermore, all class members must employ instructional techniques for effective group management, content analysis, and collaborative classwork. This demonstrates the *technique-oriented* aspect of the learning process.
 5. The teacher moves to the center of the group circle and reads the assigned sections. Students who prepared questions for these sections then read them aloud, while members of the adjacent groups provide answers. Following this, the question designer from each group presents their response for the entire class to hear and evaluate. Throughout this process, the teacher guides students as needed. Additionally, the teacher assesses and records a score for each group's performance during the activity, documenting it in the class roster.
- At this stage, all members participate fully in reviewing, analyzing, critiquing, and evaluating the material. Every class component and students become actively engaged, embodying the characteristics of a truly dynamic learning environment. In fact, all seven features manifest and cycle repeatedly throughout this phase
- Here, we observe that the class—taking into account students' language proficiency and academic levels, the teacher's expertise, and available classroom resources—operates at near-peak efficiency, achieving optimal educational effectiveness.
 6. The teacher and students now review the textbook's comprehension questions, with each group sharing their perspectives on every question. During this activity, the teacher assesses and scores both individual respondents and groups, recording the results in the class roster.
- As in the previous stage, the class demonstrates activity across all seven levels, with all members maintaining peak efficiency and effectiveness. In fact, during these two stages (5 and 6), the fully dynamic nature of the class becomes clearly evident. This method serves as an exemplary model of an active, dynamic classroom environment.

7. In the final step, the teacher reads the text one last time, highlights key points, and assigns homework for the next session.
- The concluding class phase exhibits three distinct features: it is teacher-oriented, content-oriented, and class-oriented. This transition marks the class's gradual return to a normal activity level. During this final stage, all class activities are summarized, bringing the session to its conclusion.

In following these seven stages and incorporating the seven key features, the class progresses much like an airplane - moving systematically through preparation, takeoff, flight, landing, and post-flight checks. This structured approach facilitates active learning within a dynamic classroom environment, ensuring maximum educational impact and efficiency.

6. Discussion

In this section, we will discuss, examine, and analyze the issue based on the question posed, the theoretical framework, and the research method.

Examining Activities Based on Allen's (1967) Micro-Teaching Method (pp. 86-87)

Five key principles guide micro-teaching implementation:

1. Initiating behaviors
2. Presentation of course material (communication)
3. Integrity/consolidation of course material
4. Monitoring
5. Evaluation

First Principle: Initiating Behaviors

The teacher explains the task instructions for each section to the students. Content is divided according to group size, with each section assigned to specific group configurations. Students both pose and answer questions within their groups, then critically evaluate responses during class discussions. This facilitates collaborative group work while allowing individual members to contribute perspectives.

Second Principle: Material Presentation

Group-discussed materials undergo collective presentation, review, and critique. The sequence involves:

1. Intra-group discussion
 2. Question formulation
 3. Group response development
- Subsequent inter-group activities include:
- Circulating questions to adjacent groups for review
 - Systematic class-wide evaluation

Paragraph concepts are examined through teacher explanations and student-generated Q&A exchanges.

Third Principle: Material Integrity

All groups analyze a unified textbook passage, challenging participants to:

- Critically examine text

- Develop relevant questions
 - Construct substantive answers
- The material receives comprehensive class review with all components thoroughly discussed.

Fourth Principle: Monitoring

The teacher facilitates and supervises by:

- Rotating among groups
 - Guiding text analysis
 - Overseeing Q&A sessions
- Both intra-group and inter-group discussion skills receive qualitative assessment through verbal evaluation of paragraph treatment.

Fifth Principle: Evaluation

During final review sessions, the teacher:

1. Assesses group and individual performance
 2. Records evaluation metrics
 3. Reinforces key learning points
- This completes the instructional cycle while consolidating knowledge gains.

7. Conclusion

In this dynamic classroom model, the lesson text undergoes a comprehensive review, analysis, and scrutiny within a 90-minute session. All students actively participate in the teaching-learning process through structured group work, while the teacher assumes three key roles: facilitator, supervisor, and educator. Through iterative questioning and discussion, students collectively examine new material, with each group member fully engaged in critical dialogue. The continuous cooperative activities clarify course content for all participants while enabling teachers to achieve optimal instructional efficiency. This method's dynamic nature ensures exceptionally high student participation rates.

Addressing the research question, this method demonstrates that:

1. All students actively engage in textual analysis and discussion
2. Participants show strong motivation to defend their questions and answers
3. Peer-to-peer examination fosters deeper learning
4. Teacher explanations gain clarity through staged implementation

The method's effectiveness stems from its micro-teaching principles, which activate classroom dynamics and motivate universal participation in both group work and whole-class discussions.

The findings align strongly with Burke's (2011) framework for effective group work, particularly regarding supervision techniques and dual (individual/group) evaluation methods. Like Gopala et al. (2012) observed in ESL contexts, the current method's structured interactions enhance both linguistic and social competencies. The text-focused discussions corroborate Rahaman's (2014) findings on reading comprehension development, while the cyclical question-answer protocol mirrors Handayani et al.'s (2019) successful cyclic session design. Notably, the teacher's rotating supervision approach operationalizes Hemmati et al.'s (2019) concept of shared responsibility in reading instruction.

Recent studies further validate this model's efficacy. Zhang and Li's (2022) role-structured groups demonstrate comparable engagement benefits to this method's question-answer dynamics. The 90-minute intensive session parallels Al-Hassan and Al-Jarf's (2023) digital-enhanced cycles in achieving comprehension gains. Importantly, Karimi and Rahmani's (2024) meta-analysis confirms the long-term effectiveness of such cyclic strategies, particularly when incorporating reflective elements like this method's critical answer review phase. The model thus synthesizes three decades of research evidence while introducing practical innovations in micro-teaching implementation. The cyclic group work method aligns with contemporary research on dynamic classroom strategies in EFL, particularly in its emphasis on collaborative learning, structured repetition, and teacher facilitation. Studies such as Burke (2011) and Gopala et al. (2012) highlight the benefits of group work in enhancing engagement and comprehension, while Handayani et al. (2019) and Zhang and Li (2022) demonstrate the effectiveness of cyclic, role-based interactions in improving reading skills. However, this study extends existing research by integrating micro-teaching principles (Allen, 1967) into a structured, seven-stage process tailored specifically for Iranian high school EFL classrooms. The Iranian context presents unique challenges, including large class sizes, teacher-centered traditions, and limited exposure to communicative language practices. By focusing on Iran, this study addresses a gap in research on dynamic methods in under-resourced EFL settings, where traditional lecture-based approaches still dominate. The cyclic method's adaptability—balancing teacher guidance with student autonomy—makes it particularly suitable for Iranian classrooms, where fostering active participation while maintaining discipline is crucial. Additionally, the study builds on recent regional findings (Chalak, 2015; Hemmati et al., 2019; Karimi & Rahmani, 2024) to validate the method's local applicability, offering a replicable framework for similar educational environments. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research employs a qualitative-analytical approach without quantitative data to measure learning outcomes objectively, limiting generalizability. Second, the study focuses solely on reading comprehension, excluding other language skills (e.g., writing, speaking), which may affect the method's perceived efficacy in holistic language development. Third, the sample consists of Iranian high school students, and findings may not apply to different age groups or educational systems. Additionally, the method's success relies heavily on teacher expertise in group management and micro-teaching techniques, which may not be uniformly available in all Iranian schools. Finally, logistical constraints—such as fixed class durations and rigid curricula—could hinder the method's implementation in practice. Future research should incorporate mixed-methods designs, broader skill assessments, and cross-cultural comparisons to strengthen validity and applicability.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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