



Small Group Tuition

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on small group tuition in the Arab World context.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of small group tuition on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on small group tuition in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of small group tuition interventions that have been delivered in the Arab world.



Summary of the research in the Arab World

Small group tuition is defined as one teacher or professional educator working with two, three, four, or five students. This arrangement enables the teacher to focus exclusively on a small number of learners, in the classroom or on their own in a separate classroom or working area. Intensive tuition in small groups is often provided to support lower attaining learners or those who are falling behind, but it can also be used as a more general strategy to ensure effective progress, or to teach challenging topics or skills.

Teachers adopt this intervention strategy in their classroom particularly to target students who are falling behind, meet individual student needs, and address the difficulties they face in learning skills. This strategy is commonly used in schools but evidence from the Arab world is inconclusive, as working in small groups often occurs concurrently with other interventions (e.g., reading comprehension skills). Very few studies in the Arab world have evaluated the effectiveness of this type of intervention on students' overall performance. Studies available, however, showed evidence of the impact of the collaborative learning process during the small group tuition intervention on the development of students' interpersonal and communication skills.

Cooperative learning is when students work together in small groups to achieve shared goals. That is why studies like Aljadoa (2016) and Alghamdy (2019) investigated the effectiveness of this approach on students' performance. Aljadoa (2016) investigated the effect of cooperative learning strategies to improve reading comprehension skills in Arabic for female students in Saudi Arabia. Saudi adolescents struggle with reading comprehension skills and to improve this skill, the teacher divided the experimental group (n=25) into smaller groups to implement the cooperative learning strategy and raise their academic abilities. Results indicated that the cooperative learning strategy was mostly effective because it met individual students needs and improved their reading comprehension and affected their affinity for reading when compared with their peers in the control group. It also improved their thinking skills and gave students the opportunity to participate and interact with their peers (Aljadoa, 2016). In the same context, Alghamdy (2019) revealed that tenth-grade male students showed a significant improvement in their English skills when their teachers



implemented the cooperative learning strategy in their classrooms for 12 weeks. Students were able to understand different lessons well with the CL method than with the individual learning. Not only that, students reported that this approach enabled them to make new relationships with their classmates, respect different opinions, and perform different roles in their group. Furthermore, students presentation skills developed, and they were able to take responsibility of their learning. As a result, students motivation and self-confidence increased. However, findings of the same study showed that low achiever EFL students were depending on high achiever learners to carry out the task, and there was a poor group member distribution and supervision by the teacher.

In another study conducted in Jordan, Rababah (2017) investigated the impact of reading storybooks and writing journal activities on print and phonemic awareness of kindergarten children. Children in the experimental group (n=25) participated in 24 small-group reading sessions that included a print focus, and 14 writing journals for at least twice per week for over a 14-week period. Whereas children in the control-group (n= 25) participated in conventional instruction methods only. Post-test results indicated a significant positive influence from reading storybooks and writing journal activity and demonstrated greater gains in pre-literacy skills (i.e., print and phonemic awareness) compared to children in a control group. This is mainly because reading aloud supports the teaching of a child's concept of story, development of literary appreciation, the sharpening of awareness of the elements of design, and introducing literary elements. Additionally, findings of study showed evidence that implementing these activities in small groups are ideal for teaching early literacy skills because it allows the teacher to meet the children at their needs while allowing their independency and autonomy in their work.

Implementing small group tuition in class created an atmosphere of fun where students feel more engaged and active in their learning. In an exploratory study conducted in Oman, small group tuition was adopted in a science class to implement different active learning activities (argument-based and debating activities) for grade 10 female students (Al-Balushi & Martin-Hansen, 2019). Learning activities given to students in small groups facilitated the collaborative interactions and helped them cope with the different cognitive demands of the



learning activity. This was evident in students discussions, during the debating activity and then in their individual written responses after the conclusion of the debating activity. The debating activity facilitated the negotiations, nurtured a persuasive discourse, and constructed shared understanding among peers. This has in turn empowered students engagement and motivation and helped them to better understand the abstract models and scientific theories and reshaped their scientific judgements. Al-Balushi and Martin-Hansen (2019) also argued that involving students in scientific argumentation led to better quality of their arguments.

Through a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) study Aleid and Abdulaziz (2015) examined the use of peer learning as a teaching strategy to improve students' attainment in Saudi Arabia schools. The effects of using peer tutoring and manipulatives were examined among 24 classes of fourth grade students (aged 10 and 11) in elementary schools in Saudi Arabia and were assigned to either the experimental or control groups. The intervention occurred at least once a week for 30 minutes over a 12-week programme to teach students fractions and decimals. Results of this RCT demonstrated significant gains in students' performance and attitudes towards mathematics as a result of the peer learning and increase of their social relationships. Students' communication skills improved and the reciprocal process in the peer tutoring improved the ability of both the tutor and tutee to become more engaged in their learning. Aleid and Abdulaziz (2015) argued that this positive gain is determined to happen when teachers planned the lessons, structured the activities, and prepared the necessary materials for the lesson.

Small group tuition was also used as a strategy to teach students problem solving skills. To this end, Alzayed (2015) examined the benefits of problem-based learning (PBL) for students working in smaller groups. Through collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from both students and teachers, Alzayed (2015) found out that PBL enabled female secondary students in Bahrain managed their own learning when they were exposed in their small groups to a problem relevant to their course (Islamic education). This intervention helped students acquire teamwork skills, expand their knowledge, and increase their confidence level. This result occurred because students worked together as one team to achieve a



common goal and solved the problem given to them by their teacher. Despite these benefits, findings of this study showed that this teaching approach was challenging to adapt and implement in classroom due to: 1) being regarded by teachers and students as a time-consuming approach due to the time needed to complete a task, and 2) the efforts and skills that are required from teachers to have in order to ensure successful implementation of this approach.

It is also argued that using technology (i.e., ipads) in small group tuition facilitated students learning and delivery of instruction. For instance, findings of a recent study conducted by Alanazi (2019) showed that grade one Saudi students in the experimental group performed better in categorizing different types of animals and plants and demonstrated a higher level of justifications in their view findings about the biological content when they used the iPad in comparison with their peers in the control group. Ipads usage made learning fun and increased their motivation and engagement. Results also indicated that children not only enjoyed their learning with the use of ipads but also demonstrated a greater understanding of the subject.

Researchers highlighted some potential barriers to the implementation of small group tuition as an intervention for developing students learning. For instance, Aljadoa (2016) highlighted lack of teacher training and appropriate resources. In another mixed method study also in Saudi Arabia, Albuhaire (2015) revealed that primary school Arabic language teachers had generally low understanding of collaborative learning and its benefits towards students interdependence and interaction level among peers when they are divided into groups. The hierarchical education system in Saudi Arabia, in addition to the overloaded curriculum, limited regional infrastructure, lack of resources and educational aids and above all the insufficient quality and inadequate quality of teacher training for collaborative learning hindered teachers' understanding and therefore the possibility of small group tuition implementation in their classrooms.

Overall, there is scarce evidence regarding the impact of small group tuition on academic performance or learning improvement among school students in the Arab world. However, there is some indirect evidence of the positive effects of this type of intervention in other areas of study such as collaborative learning and problem-based learning. What has been found is that activities performed in



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small groups help create an environment of social interaction, participation and engagement. As a result, students' understanding improved and they were able to produce better work in class.



Summary paragraph:

Evidence of small group tuition in the Arab world is still inconclusive, however, studies that have taken place have shown promising results on students' social and academic skills. Studies in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, and Oman reported that this arrangement provides students with opportunities to interact and be more engaged in their learning. A study of small group tuition in Saudi Arabia found significant improvements to students' Arabic reading comprehension skills in addition to their interaction and cooperative learning.

However, researchers have recommended teachers to be more prepared and trained in applying small group tuition in the classroom. Furthermore, textbooks and curricula in some contexts are considered as potential barriers. That is why in some contexts (i.e, Saudi Arabia), textbooks and curricula were recently developed according to modern strategies to facilitate teachers' work in following students' progress, detect their individual needs, and choose appropriate strategies that could be more suitable to the development of their learning.

To date, research on small group tuition is limited in this region despite the few reported benefits particularly to the development of the Arabic language. More research is needed in this area, including using sample of students and teachers from various course subjects and from different contexts in the Arab world. Additionally, inductive approaches are also needed to collect in-depth information about students perceptions and feelings about working in small groups.



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Search Terms

Small group tuition/ tutoring/ teaching/ instruction; group work; dyad/paired teaching.

Databases searched

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