CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

To support this study, a research of the literature related to the present topic was made. Only those closely relevant and recent scholastic studies were examined and the knowledge extracted. Some of the major studies with underpinnings for the present study of group work in language teaching were scrutinized.

2.1 Group work

Teachers must include work with partners and small group work in their language activities in order to adapt their instruction to the wide variety of students in their classes and help each student to develop communicative competence. The use of grouping makes possible a varied programme in which the pace of learning and the level of difficulty of the material can be matched to the competence of the different groups while other students are proceeding with their assignments. It makes it possible for students to work in depth, for example, on one aspect of cultural or social topic or one reading selection, and to gain, in addition, some breadth of knowledge from exposure to the work of other groups in the class.
Snow, Met and Genesse (1989) provide rationale regarding the benefits of intergrated skill, content-based instruction. An integrated approach ties language learning to cognitive and academic development, so content provides motivation and a cognitive base for learning and teaching language. Content also allows students to negotiate meaning with others, providing “conceptual or cognitive hangers on which language functions and language structures can be hung” (1989:202). In other words, students are able to explore ideas and reinforce concepts related to content and, at the same time, practice relevant language skills and functions.

Like researchers, teachers try to find solutions to teaching problems such as the shaping of input to the learner and managing the process of learning. According to Widdowson (1990:7), language teaching can be seen as a principled problem-solving activity; a kind of operational research which works out solutions to its own problems. The learning and teaching paradigm assumes that effective language teaching occurs because of planning, with planning including course designs, techniques of teaching methodology and professionalism on the part of the teacher, whilst instruction is learner-centred. According to Lewis and Hill (1992:46), effective language teaching means, giving the students a chance to speak.

Group work has many advantages in the language classroom, and one of them is that it increases language practice opportunities. By the lockstep system,
on the other hand, which means that "the teacher leads the class through a tightly controlled sequence of activities" (Wright:1990), learners are hardly given any time to practice the target language. Interaction, therefore, is the key to successful group work and this interaction helps to increase the quantity of speech.

Long (1983) and Krashen (1985) concur that when second language learners interact, focussing on meaningful tasks or exchanges of information, then each learner receives:

a. comprehensible input from his/her partner;
b. a chance to ask for clarification as well as feedback on his/her output;
c. adjustment of the input to match the level of the learner's comprehension;
d. the opportunity to develop new structures and conversational patterns through the process of interaction.

Many different kinds of group work pairings are possible, like mixed ability levels, shared ability levels or mixed ethnic or language background. The benefits of group work are:

- It reduces the dominance of the teacher over the class
- It increases the amount of learner participation in the class
- It increases the opportunities for the individual learner to practice and use new features of the target language
- It promotes collaboration among learners
- It assigns learners a more active role in learning
Experts and amateurs alike agree that motivation is very important, if not, the most important factor in language learning. Pit Corder (1981:8) states that "Given motivation, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data". The researcher thus believes that learners have to be exposed to language through appropriate task-based approaches, which would capture the interest of the students and thereby propel their intention to learn. Motivated learners will then be willing learners too. Thus, this is one of the reasons why individual tasks set by the teachers in group work have to be clearly defined. Tasks or worksheets are as important as the interaction of the students because the activities planned would have to trigger successful interaction and completion of the task. Teachers do not sometimes plan or prepare worksheets or tasks due to several reasons. Firstly, teachers find preparing worksheets time consuming. Secondly, during some lessons, teachers do not plan group work in advance and depending on the movement of the lesson, group work is only used with the teacher's discretion. This is to say, whenever the teacher feels like breaking up the class into groups, she would then do so. Group work, however, has to have a clear objective, without which, it is pointless because students will just talk about anything that comes to mind without any sense of direction and not knowing clearly about what they are required to do.

Johnson & Johnson (1991) define small group cooperative learning as a classroom environment where students interact with one another in small groups
while working together on an academic task to attain a common goal. According to current research in this area, small group cooperative learning seems to have educational and social advantages. Thus, cooperative learning groups are usually child-centred with an emphasis on group processes, problem solving, attitudes and social development.

McRae (1991) suggests that learners should be encouraged not to learn and repeat examples of language, but to develop thinking skills, and by way of this, acquire the target language. Language learning therefore is moving beyond the traditional four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing to include the fifth skill of thinking. Presently in classrooms, the mechanics of grammar practice, repetitions and reinforcements are no longer emphasized but is moving into an area where students' reactions and responses are of utmost importance. Thus, language learning through group work would provide the students with the opportunities of acquiring these thinking skills.

Entwhistle, Thompson and Tait (1992) claim that the aims of group work are to encourage meaningful discussion, problem solving, synthesizing, explaining, listening, questioning, giving feedback, building self confidence, decision making and even leadership qualities. However, there are many factors that either prevent the success of group work or those that can promote it. The factors may range from time management, student organization in the management of their group, the manner the activities are organized or planned by
the teacher, and finally, the negotiation of meaning by the learners. Long and Porter (1985) support the use of small group work from evidence collected after reviewing a number of projects. They concluded that group work maximizes class time and introduces variety into the types of communicative acts learners are led to perform.

Harmer (1991) claims that group work increases the amount of student talking time and provides opportunities for students to use language to communicate with each other. At the same time, group work offers enormous potential for oral work, tasks where decisions have to be taken, joint reading tasks, cooperative writings and many other things; it also has the great advantage of allowing different groups of students to be doing different things at the same time. Bligh (1986) purports that many kinds of people make good teachers because teaching is not one simple, single operation, and it is unreasonable to expect any one person to be able to do all the teaching jobs well. He claims that the intimate personal context of small group situation is one that may be uncongenial to the person who would rather deliver a straightforward talk and keep students at a distance, but the majority of teachers probably enjoy small group work once they have acquired the necessary techniques, though some may have difficulty in accepting certain desirable changes in their own habits.

A study carried out by Golden (1986:94) reveals that readers come up with interpretations, which draw upon personal knowledge and textual information.
This can be due to the fact that each text can generate multiple meanings within
the individual reader and across different readers. These same readers in Golden's
study had expressed their interest in group work discussion, for example,
"...because if you don't understand you can discuss it..." and "... other people's
thoughts may make you understand parts that you didn't understand before..."
Small group discussion is therefore also a way of thinking about literature that
may not ordinarily arise from the text only.

In a paper presented by Csete et al. (1998) the four major learning points
discovered in group work are as follows:

1) group learning is no better than other instructional methods in
overcoming problems in implementation;

2) the potential and benefits of group learning may not be immediately
recognized by students;

3) teachers wishing to employ work methods must know what particular
barriers their particular learners face, and take measures to help
learners overcome the barriers; and

4) research must be carefully designed if it is to arrive at an accurate
understanding of what is going on when students are given group
learning tasks.

The study highlights that if group work methods are to be proven as a
solution in helping students achieve a complex array of skills, detailed studies that
critically evaluate what students are actually achieving need to be conducted; and that there is a need to give careful consideration as to how to effectively arrive at an understanding of what is going on when students are given group learning tasks.

Burgess (1994) suggests that students must be given opportunities to develop their own skills and in particular reference to group work activities, the class should be broken down into small groups and these students should also understand what is required of them while undertaking the language tasks. This is to maximize individual talking time, minimize the potential for student loss-of-face, and provide a situation conducive to students correcting one another while carrying out the tasks. Burgess purports that there should be three or four people per group plus a group leader. Through listening, speaking and collaborating in small groups, students become more motivated and their time and energy in class is well spent.

Courtney's (1996) research on peer group oral tasks concludes that if these tasks are selectively and sensitively embedded in a wider second language curriculum, they have the potential for effectiveness simply because the construction of the tasks themselves has the possibility of mirroring a greater proportion of known learning factors. However, using this information does not necessarily imply a determinist perspective, but merely a desire to give students the best possible opportunities to practice and develop their oral skills in a
classroom environment. Jones (1995) proposes that explicit instruction be given to perspective second language learners in small group discussions; and for active student participation, the teacher should encourage a certain degree of informality in the classroom as according to Jones, the major obstacle lying in their way may in fact be a culture-specific apprehension of the classroom as a situation that calls for respectful reticence.

Long (1990) cites five benefits of group activities in comparison with teacher-fronted whole class instruction: increased quantity of students' language use; enhanced quality of the language students use (e.g. the range of functions); more opportunities to individualize instruction; a less threatening environment in which to use the language; and greater motivation for learning. Nevertheless, Long points out that not all group work promotes learning as some group activities appear to have been created merely by putting the words "in groups" or "in pairs" in front of what were formerly individual activities, without making any changes to encourage learners to cooperate with one another. Therefore, Long suggests that for effective interaction to take place, students will generally need more guidance and encouragement.

In conclusion, group work have the potential for effectiveness in language teaching and learning if teachers are clear on the learning objectives of the group activities planned for the learners, the interests and language abilities of the group
of students, the complexities of the tasks set and finally, teachers should ensure that the group activities allow for the participation of each group member.

2.2 Arguments on group work

In order to develop a better understanding of both the advantages and disadvantages of group work, the researcher feels that it is necessary to engage in more data-based research, with groups of learners and preferably of a longitudinal kind. However, in a wider context of language teaching methodology, various objections could be made to account for the role of group work in second language learning, which could in certain ways contribute to learner difficulties. Bygate (1988) cites several disadvantages of group work. Firstly, he found that there is a possibility that group work at least allows, and at worst encourages, fossilization and the use of deviant L2 forms. Similarly, Aston (1986) gives an example of how negotiation of meaning by learners of a monolingual background can lead to the negotiated acceptance of non-standard rather than standard L2 forms. Ellis (1994) cites this as reason for considering that inter-language may not be a form of input to the learner. He also says that error occurrence has often been associated as much with teacher-centred methods as with informal conditions of language learning. The second main objection to group work pointed out by Bygate is that it is not necessary, and this according to him is suggested on two counts. Firstly, it may not facilitate language learning or the development of oral skill for learners to use independent units in conversation; and secondly teacher-fronted structured teaching can, or more efficiently, incorporate exposure to
dependent units in context. However, Bygate also argues in defence of group work whereby, given that the learner already knows the rules of conversation through his experience of his L1, the transfer of his knowledge of L2 forms to conversation can be taken for granted and valuable time is thus saved for other things. Another answer to this objection according to Bygate could be found by studying the development of fluency, for if fluency could be shown to develop, then presumably it would follow that conversational interaction is an appropriate way to develop it.

Group activities developed in western countries have been advocated for use in foreign and second language learning internationally. Jacobs et al. (1996) reported that Southeast Asian language educators feel group activities are appropriate to their contexts and that they are already making use of group work in their teaching. However, there were key problems cited in using group work such as low motivation, significant variation in proficiency levels, and large classes. The recommendation by language researchers is made that the literatures on cooperative learning and task-based language teaching may provide insights into methods of increasing the effectiveness of group activities, while at the same time, educators will want to use their own local knowledge to adapt group methods to fit their particular contexts.

Prabhu (1987) voices sentiment against group work activities. He terms them as Muddled-Modeling, Faulty Feedback, Chaotic Classrooms and Native
Noise. He believes that in muddled-modeling, learners are provided with poor models of the target language. In contrast with a teacher-fronted classroom, the teacher does most of the talking and is able to correct errors immediately. Porter (1983) however negates this by saying that students do not produce more errors while speaking in groups nor do they seem to learn erroneous language from their group members.

Despite the above arguments on some of the negative aspects of group work, many previous studies have shown that with careful planning and selection of group work activities, students would be provided with the best possible opportunities to practise and develop their oral and communication skills in a classroom environment.

2.3 Learner Difficulties in the ESL Classroom

In the teaching and learning environment of the ESL learner, emphasis has always been placed on the output of the learner rather than the process that the learner goes through to produce the output. This study intends to examine the difficulties that the learner experiences in group work activities in particular, and language learning in general.

2.3.1 Learning styles

Learning is an active process of translating new knowledge, insights, and skills into behaviour. Three domains of language learning identified by Cawley et
al. (1976) are: cognitive, related to facts, theories, concepts, and problem-solving; affective, related to attitudes, feelings, values, and beliefs; and psychomotor, referring to new skills and new ways of making and doing things. Learners therefore have their own preferences for ways to learn, adapting their learning strategies to suit their environment in all three domains; these learning preferences are often referred to as learning style (Davis, Hafsah and Ruru, 1994). Claxton and Ralston (1978) concur that when an individual is participating in a learning task, the learning is usually accomplished more rapidly and retained longer if it is presented in ways that the individual prefers. Therefore, teachers cannot be held responsible for the differences in ability in students, but what should be stressed is that teachers are responsible for motivating their students and for making sure that students are involved in the learning process (Cole, 1982). Teachers also need to be aware of the learning style preferences of their students and of their preferred way of instructing the language class, and adjustments need to be made to accommodate the students' needs (Whitman, 1986) and to show the students how to be responsible for their own learning.

2.3.2 Factors influencing teacher and learner roles

There are several factors that can be accounted for classroom language learning. These factors influence the roles the individuals adopt or are given in the classroom learning process as well as how these individuals interpret their roles. Classroom language learning therefore is seen as a group activity.
According to Wright (1991), during the group's activity, people may modify their behaviour and change their roles in the light of the contribution of others; and that roles are likely to change because group activity is dynamic. Consequently, Wright suggests that there are several factors that influences teacher and learner roles in the classroom. Firstly, \textit{interpersonal factors} which include social role and status (status and position have a great influence on the sorts of role a teacher or learner may fulfil as they underpin all role behaviour): attitudes and beliefs (our attitudes and beliefs may influence how much social distance we feel or choose to keep and whether or not we choose to impose power on others); personality (in group activities like classroom language learning, it is likely that one's personality will affect the role one takes and the role too may affect the individual's personality and thus give rise to certain modes of behaviour); motivation (if there is high motivation, either integrative or instrumental, among learners, it is likely that they will seek to synchronize their roles with their teacher's roles and to cooperate the arduous task of learning the language in order to maximize the benefits they will receive).

The second point is \textit{task-related factors}. In the context of classroom language learning, there are various tasks, which teachers and learners have to perform which may seem as goal-directed. The two main components of a task - the cognitive aspect and the affective aspect - will involve the learning group in two ways: a) task-related activity or interactivity b) interpersonal activity or inter-personality. The task may be difficult or complex if the learner has a
negative attitude towards it, or its content, or the people with whom he is doing the task. The teacher therefore has to think about what happens when groups work on tasks and what aspects of a teacher's role are solitary or cooperative.

The last factor that Wright mentions is **group processes**. In a study carried out by Tuckman (1965), he gives four stages that a small group goes through in its formation: **Stage 1: Forming** - In the group, there is anxiety. There is great dependence on the leader (the teacher) and a great deal of behaviour directed towards finding out the nature of the situation and also what behaviour is acceptable. At the same time, the learners will attempt to find out what the task is, what the rules are for carrying out the task and the methods that are appropriate. **Stage 2: Storming** - There is now conflict between sub-groups and also rebellion against the leader. Opinions are extreme and there is resistance to group control. Role relations are not agreed upon. All this behaviour is a resistance to the demands of the task. **Stage 3: Norming** - The group develops cohesion: norms of behaviour emerge and participants begin to accept group control. Conflicts are forgotten and members begin to support each other. At this stage, cooperation is the rule and there is open exchange of views and feelings about the task and each other. **Stage 4: Performing** - All individuals' problems are resolved and there is a great deal of interpersonal activity. Members' roles in the group now lose their rigidity and become more functional. At this stage solutions to the problems of the task are found and all efforts are devoted to completing the task.
2.3.3 The role of language anxiety

Second language learners often show an apprehension when communicating using the L2, and this is especially prominent when they believe that their level of L2 competence is very low, thus resulting in language anxiety. In a study carried out by MacIntyre et al. (1997), the results of their research on the role of language anxiety clearly show that there is a correlation between language and anxiety whereby, compared with more relaxed students, anxious students tend not to express themselves as well as more relaxed students. The arousal of anxiety has made more students reluctant to speak and thus, if language learners do not choose to communicate, they cannot reassess their competence. In this context, MacIntyre (1995) purports that we can best view the link between anxiety and proficiency as reciprocal.

Many language teachers and researchers have been concerned about the possibility that anxiety may function as an affective filter, preventing a learner from achieving a high level of proficiency in a foreign language. According to Yukie Aida (1994), anxious students may be anxious in the classroom because they do not know how to ask questions to clarify their assignments or how to organize and process the information to enhance their understanding of the material. Some students may need the assistance from the instructor, but do not ask for help because they might view help seeking as a manifestation of weakness, immaturity or even, incompetence. Appleby (1990) reported that students are most irritated by teachers who are un-empathetic with their needs and
who are poor communicators. Thus, as a solution, he suggests that teachers, by being more responsive to students' needs, they can make it possible for anxious students to maximize their language learning by building a nonthreatening and positive learning environment, as well as by helping them acquire effective study and learning strategies.

2.3.4 Differing expectations in the ESL classroom

Philips (1972) argues that when there are any interactional difficulties between pupils and teachers as they engage in academic learning tasks, it generally leads to negative judgements and assessments of the pupils. If pupils are not conforming to the interactional norms of the classroom, then they cannot be assimilated into the framework within which the teacher operates; because of the teacher's authority, it is the pupils who are not defined as understanding. According to Shultz, Florio and Erickson (1982), the main reason for such interactional problems in the classroom is lack of knowledge by student and teacher of each other's culturally learned expectations for appropriate social behaviour. Erickson (ibid.) argues that any learning task requires two sets of knowledge: the Academic Task Structure (ATS), and the Social Participant Structure (SPS). The ATS is to do with the subject matter, while the SPS involves the social knowledge conventions that are necessary to learn the subject. Thus, in the school classroom, the child needs to get both right. In the ESL classroom, the pupils often do not know what they were meant to be doing, nor how they
were supposed to respond to the teacher’s questions or language activities set out for them. According to Thorp (1991), language classes serve as a bridge or safety net between students and their academic work. Two options are thus opened to teachers: they can accommodate to the interactional styles of their learners, or they can make the interactional demands of their classes more explicit. Recent explorations in task-based pedagogy have pointed out that learning outcome is the result of a fairly predictable interaction between the learner, the task, and the task situation. From the teacher’s perspective then, achievement of success depends largely on the degree to which teacher intention and learner interpretation of a given task converge. Recent trends in L2 pedagogy then, lay a greater emphasis on learner and teacher perceptions of classroom aims and events – thereby increasing the potential for misunderstanding and communication. Kumaravadivelu (1991) purports that for the success of task-based pedagogy, teachers and learners have to function as partners in the joint production of discourse in the classroom. The more a teacher knows about the learner’s personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive the teacher’s intervention will be. The purpose of section 2.3 and its following sub – sections has been to discuss learner difficulties that are linked to language learning related to group work. The role of the teacher as an organizer therefore, is not an easy and straightforward one and that teachers should never assume that the students have understood instructions. The aim of identifying and
discussing the above factors has been to demonstrate how classroom management and students’ roles, learning styles and language anxiety can contribute to learner difficulties. The chapter on the whole also attempted to offer a coherent explanation of how some classroom practices operate and contribute to learner difficulties.