

THE APPLICATION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN FOREIGN
LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

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Through a review of the literature, it is distinct that the outcome of most research on the result of application of cooperative learning in foreign language teaching is effective. In most studies, cooperative learning refers to a set of teaching and learning strategies that use small groups as the basic form of the classroom structure. All group members engaged in tasks, and interaction is required in which all members have accountability to contribute to and learn from the other members. Group members are not simply hearing about, reading about, or observing as in traditional classroom. This approach can help students to learn actively and effectively.

According to the findings of most studies, the focus of education should be shifted from a teacher-dominated to a student-centered one. The role of the teacher should be to assist students to learn by themselves. Through the results of the study, the students have more motivation to engage in the learning process in cooperative learning classroom than in traditional whole-class teaching classroom. The center of the classroom is transferred from the teacher to students. Cooperative learning provides students more opportunities to practice the foreign language. In order to solve the problems, the group members work together interacting with each other. In

this way, students take benefit of more opportunities to practice foreign language by discussing, interpreting, clarifying and making presentations. In a word, the purpose of cooperative learning is to cultivate learners' abilities to use foreign language on the basis of their participation.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Over the last twenty years, the teaching of language has been shifted from a more traditional approach to a more practical approach on what learners can do actually with language. Learners have become the center of teaching and learning. Cooperative learning emphasizes providing students with opportunities to learn by themselves and from their peers. Slavin (1996) stated that, “in cooperative classrooms, students are expected to help each other, to discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current knowledge and fill in gaps in each other's understanding” (p.18).

The cooperative learning strategy promotes students' active learning by creating simulated real-life language environment. With the implementation of cooperative learning in the foreign language teaching, students are provided with more opportunities to participate, experience, interact and cooperate in foreign language learning. In the cooperative group, students work together, interacting face to face, with the identical goal of learning, as well as assisting each other. Through the process of completing learning tasks, students' positive interdependence, individual accountability and social skills are cultivated.

Statement of the Problem

The problem expressed as questions are, “How does cooperative learning help teachers to teach foreign language? How does cooperative learning help students to improve their foreign language?”

Definition of Terms

Cooperative Learning. It is an approach that is designed to engage students learning actively through inquiry and discussion with their peers in small groups. (Davison, 1992)

Foreign language. It is a language not the mother tongue of the local people and not usually used in their country. (Wikipedia, 2010)

Teaching methods. It likes the pedagogy, or a way to guide students to acquire new knowledges, develop social skills as well as cultivate learning abilities. (Wikipedia, 2010)

Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over one hundred and five (105) days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included “cooperative learning,” “foreign language,” and “teaching methods.”

Methods and Procedures

A brief review of literature on cooperative learning employed by foreign language learners was conducted. A second review of the literature investigating foreign language teaching was also conducted. The findings were summarized and recommendations made.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

In 1896, John Dewey suggested that students should not only learn from teachers but also from their peers. Later, the modern cooperative learning approach emerged. In the late 1930s, owing to the efforts of sociologists and psychologists, especially Lewin, the modern cooperative learning approach developed. Lewin's research emphasizes the essential of active involvement in group work to assist students to learn from peers, train new skills, as well as learning ability. During the 1970s, group work methods arose as a new effective approach in the United States which influenced other countries, and turned into one of the well-known educational theories in the world. After that, many American educational researchers supported cooperative learning--D. W Johnson, R. E Slavin, R. T Johnson, and N. Davision and Israeli educational researchers: Y Sharan, S. Sharan, Z. R. Mevarech.

Definitions of cooperative learning

It is difficult to provide a precise definition of cooperative learning since various definitions of cooperative learning exist. Cooperative learning has defined by Olsen and Kagan (1992) as that "cooperative learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others" (p.8). Cooperative learning is regarded as a system of group work methods which includes two absolutely necessary criteria of positive interdependence as well as individual accountability (Jacobs and Ball, 1996). The positive interdependence

requires identical philosophy of a group that they "sink or swim together" (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p.27). Cooperative learning has been defined as "small groups of learners working together as a team to solve problem, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal" (Artz & Newman, 1990, p.448). In short, the approach of cooperative learning requires the students' involvement, cooperation, interaction, interdependence and responsibility for the assigned tasks, objectives and goals.

The leading American advocates of cooperative learning include Robert Slavin, Roger Johnson and David Johnson, and Spencer Kagan. Johnson and Johnson (1999) stated, "Cooperative learning promotes a situation in which students work together in small groups to maximize the learning of all members, sharing their resources, providing mutual support, and celebrating their joint success" (p.26). Kagan (1989) focuses on the use of various approaches to promote active learning, team developing, and group relationship. Slavin utilizes methods from Roger Johnson, David Johnson and Spencer Kagan, and contributed to the specific cooperative learning structures' development.

Different learning groups

There are several kinds of learning groups. Some will facilitate the students' learning while others will impede their learning due to the inappropriate teaching method in the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend the distinction between them. The following distinction (see Table 1) is based on Johnson and Johnson's (1999) clarification of the Cooperative Group (CG) by comparing it with the Pseudo-Learning Group (PLG) and the Traditional Classroom Learning Group

{TCLG}

Table 1: The distinctions between the Cooperative Group (CG), the Pseudo-Learning Group (PLG) and the Traditional Classroom Learning Group (TCLG) (Johnson and Johnson, 1999)

The elements compared between PLG, TCLG and CG.	PLG	TCLG	CG
The degree of participation	No interest in working together	With the feeling of having to work together	Willing to work together
Shared-goal	Seemingly shared-goals existed	No shared-goals	Shared-goals existed
The goal structure	On the surface, they cooperate; under the surface, they compete.	Competitive and individualistic	Cooperative
Interpersonal relationship	See each other as rivals	Insincere	Friendly
Behavior	Distrust, mislead and confuse each other; hide information from each other	Seek others' information, no motivation to share. The hard working and conscientious members feel exploited	Discuss together; assist and encourage each other
The result	The sum of the whole is less than the potential of the individual members.	Those hard working and conscientious students' performance are hindered.	The group is more than a sum of its parts and all students perform better than work individually.

Reasons for using cooperative learning

The reasons for applying cooperative learning are mainly from two aspects--the

different goal structures and the comparison between the cooperative learning method and the traditional whole-class teaching. Jacobs (1988) believes that simply putting students together in a group does not guarantee the occurring of cooperative learning. The goal structure, influencing the whole learning process, affects the success of the group activities in the cooperative learning. He explains vividly the three different types of goal structures in the language classrooms-- the cooperative, the competitive and the individualistic goal structures. Besides, learning goals are also considered important by Johnson (1995), Johnson and Johnson (1999) and Ghaith (2002).

As far as the factor of interaction is concerned, Johnson (1995) suggested that “a cooperative goal structure promotes positive collaborative interaction among students. A competitive one promotes cautious and defensive student-student interaction. And an individual goal structure allows for little or no student-student interaction” (p.112). Johnson and Johnson (1999) proposed that “cooperatively structured situations result in students interacting in ways that promote each other's success, competitively structured ones result in students interacting in ways that oppose each other's success, and individualistically structured ones result in no interaction among students” (p.31).

The group activities with cooperative learning goal structure are more active and effective than the competitive instruction and individualistic instruction based on the evidence over 100 correlative studies (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, as cited in Ghaith, 2002). These researchers discovered that the cooperative learning goal

structure encourages positive learning motivation towards the foreign language, as well as the contributions to the academic achievement, the improved positive independence and the individual accountability.

Compared with cooperative learning approach, the traditional whole-class teaching that regards the whole-class as a teaching structure has various problems. Crandall (1999) mentioned several advantages for using cooperative learning in foreign language classrooms, including reducing anxiety, promoting interaction, providing experiential input and output, stimulating motivation, increasing self-confidence as well as self-esteem. All those advantages are the lack of the traditional whole class teaching method.

Key elements of cooperative learning

Cooperative learning utilizes small, heterogeneous groups, which usually includes four or five members, who work together toward a common goal in which each member is individually in charge of a part of an outcome. The most successful cooperative learning strategies share five essential factors: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability or personal responsibility, social skills and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Positive interdependence is defined by Sharan (1980) as the dual responsibility that the students are demanded in cooperative learning situations: learn the assigned material and ensure that every member of the group learns it. That is to say, students should perceive that they “sink or swim together” and each member’s efforts are indispensable to the success of the group (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p.27). With group cooperation--interpersonal interaction as well as positive interdependence

--students make significant achievements (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Face-to-face promotive interaction is defined by Johnson and Johnson (1992) stated that as learners gathering together, facing each other, contributing their views, exchanging ideas, which are essential to complete the task and the group's goal. When learners encourage each other by providing explanations and constructive feedback, they are likely to feel accepted and valued, less anxious and stressed, and expect to participate and assist others in turn (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

“Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual student is assessed and the results are given back to the group and the individual” (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p.27). It focuses on the individual group member's performance, which means each student individually responsible for his or her own and other group member's learning and every member is in charge of the achievement of the group's goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Social skills are essential in cooperative learning, since simply put students without social skill in cooperative groups can not guarantee the quality cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). The interpersonal and small group skills should be taught to students to facilitate high quality cooperation and well group relationships between group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). In order to achieve group goals, group members need to develop not only target language but also social skills.

Group processing can be defined as the result of group activities that focus on discussing or describing every group member's performance, i.e. whether it was active and effective and whether to make changes in the performance (Johnson &

Johnson, 1999). The purpose of group processing is to improve the effectiveness of the group work by analyzing the collaborative information of group members' performances in order to fulfill the final outcome (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Effectiveness of applying cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is an effective way to facilitate the students to learn in classroom. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), the result of nearly 600 experimental and over 100 corresponding studies have shown that cooperative learning can benefit foreign language learners in the achievement, the psychological health and the social competence.

Cooperative learning can not only facilitates academic achievement but also cultivates students' creative and critical thinking, stimulates their motivation to think and learn which in turn improves their achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Psychological health is apt to develop in an atmosphere of assisting and caring for each other's success by the positive interaction in the cooperative learning, during which their self-confidence is strengthened (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Social competence is also advanced in the group interaction and experience when students involve in activities of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Leicester et al. (2000) stated, "Cooperative experiences are not a luxury. They are an absolute necessity for the healthy social and psychological development of individuals who can function independently" (p.25).

Students' role in cooperative learning

Students assume roles as participants and collaborators in the cooperative

learning classroom, which is very different from their roles in a classroom that uses traditional whole-class teaching. These new roles affect the effectiveness of cooperative learning reflected by students' behaviors before, during and after learning. Cooperative learners maybe undertake new responsibilities. In general, each member of a cooperative learning group has the following responsibilities (Flowers & Ritz 1994, p.11):

- a. Each group member should make constructive contributions to the group's efforts.
- b. Group members should encourage their fellow group members to contribute.
- c. Group members should keep each other on task, working toward their shared goal.
- d. Compromise is required from all cooperative learners.
- e. Those in a cooperative learning group should treat each other with care and respect. (p.11)

Students should take the efforts of their fellow group members seriously. Only when every group member tried his or her best can the whole group achieve the success (Flowers & Ritz, 1994). Students should do their utmost to figure out interpersonal problems within their groups, including compromise, while seeking teachers' help should be the last choice (Flowers & Ritz, 1994).

Teacher's role in cooperative learning

Compared with the role in traditional instruction, the teachers who use cooperative learning are considered to take on expanded responsibilities. They are

more like coordinators, conducting group members to assist each other to contribute to the final success; directors, leading students through the rough process; guiders, standing in the way of chaos, directing to the correct orientation.

Owing to a great deal of time on class is provided to students learning from each other, it seems that a teacher who uses cooperative learning techniques might have less work than one who uses traditional techniques. On the contrary, a teacher who uses cooperative learning has much more responsibilities (Flowers & Ritz, 1994). These include the following (Flowers & Ritz, 1994, p.12):

- a. Planning lessons, activities, and evaluation;
- b. Grouping students;
- c. Physical placement of students;
- d. Presenting and explaining the task to the students;
- e. Monitoring group activities and intervening when necessary;
- f. Helping students with social skills;
- h. Evaluating students. (p.12)

Cohen (1972) stated that teachers who use cooperative learning become used to "supportive supervision" instead of the traditional "direct supervision". Supportive supervision offers more opportunities for students to learn by doing.

Compared with traditional teaching method, teachers who use cooperative learning must not only prepare their knowledge instruction but also plan student activities and assessments (Flowers & Ritz, 1994). Therefore, sufficient preparation should be guaranteed in cooperative learning. Teacher should realize that argument

and conflict in the cooperative group cannot be avoided. Enough self control is necessary for teachers to let students resolve problems by themselves and their fellow students in a group. Teachers can help them after all the students' efforts failed (Flowers & Ritz, 1994).

When using cooperative strategies, teacher must provide enough time for the group members to communicate, due to students need a large amount of time to adapt to and trust each other, as well as accomplish different tasks at different situations (Flowers & Ritz, 1994). Some teachers might need time to adapt to provide groups with enough time in cooperative learning. However, the teachers need not to wait for the last group to complete their task before bringing everyone back together (Flowers & Ritz, 1994). On the contrary, the teacher might remind all groups with some statements such as: "There are only three minutes left, please hurry up." The teacher should encourage the groups usually accomplish group goals slower than the others, as well as enlighten the groups that lean to complete tasks quicker.

Cooperative learning in foreign language classroom

There have been many studies conducted on the topic of cooperative learning in foreign language classrooms. Dillenbourg, Baker, Blaye, and O'Malley (1996) analyzed the state of evolution of research on collaborative learning as follows: "For many years, theories of cooperative learning have tended to focus on how individuals function in a group. More recently, the group itself has become the unit of analysis and the focus has shifted to more emergent, socially constructed,

properties of the interaction” (p.189).

In recent years, cooperative learning has been applied to foreign language teaching in the classroom. Cooperative learning and the English as a second or foreign language in classroom is a well integration (Kagan, 1995). There is a growing research based on the influence and effectiveness of cooperative learning in foreign language teaching in the classroom. According to Crandall (1999), cooperative language learning has the positive factors on language learning, increasing motivation, reducing anxiety, stimulating the motivation, promoting self-esteem, as well as supporting different learning styles. “The development of cooperative learning techniques in English as Second Language classrooms as an important element in successful classroom management” (Bassano & Christison, 1988 as cited in Nunan, 1992, p.4). Researchers and trainers of cooperative learning agree on the need to have a sufficient comprehension of cooperative learning and the necessary to apply it in the foreign language classroom. Understanding what happens during the implementation of cooperative learning methods could assist teachers to implement cooperative learning in their classrooms. Cooperative learning has been tested in David Johnson, Roger Johnson's Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota in the USA. Many famous scholars such as, Stuart Cook, Madsen Kagan, Bruner, Suchman, David Johnson, Roger Johnson, Slavin and so on have contributed to the development of cooperative learning in the classroom

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

Through applying the cooperative learning approach in the foreign language classroom and the analysis collected in the research, students not only obtain academic achievements, but also their improved attitudes toward language learning as well as foreign language learning abilities. Cooperative learning provides the active classroom atmosphere for students to interact with each other.

Cooperative learning can increase students' opportunities to practice the foreign language. In the traditional whole-class instruction, teachers talk for most period of time, leaving little time for students to practice the foreign language in the class. By contrast, in cooperative learning, the classroom center is transferred from the teacher to students who accomplish the tasks by interacting with each other. Students are afforded with adequate speaking time to practice foreign language in the classroom. With the large amount of interaction and negotiation among them, students enhanced their spoken language in a great extent in both accuracy and fluency, as well as the abilities to use the foreign language.

Cooperative learning can improve students' confidence in foreign language learning. Owing to the lack of confidence, students hesitate to involve in the activities of foreign language learning in traditional whole-class teaching classroom. In cooperative learning, however, students perceive themselves as accountability to the success of the group as well as to themselves, which enhances their confidence. The feeling of being accepted, appreciated and praised by the group members improves the students' confidence. Their confidences also boost by achieving the

final outcome.

Cooperative learning can promote students' active learning. Normally, students feel sleepy and bored in the traditional whole-class teaching, since they have no choice to select the materials or explore their field of interest. On the contrast, students are motivated to get involved in cooperative learning, which provides active learning atmosphere. In the process of cooperative learning, students discuss with the group members based on what they have previously collected, comprehended and analyzed and solve problems by themselves which is called learning while doing or active learning.

Cooperative learning can establish good teacher-student and student-student relationships. Compared with traditional classroom, the teachers act not only as instructors, monitors and evaluators, but also as facilitators and assistors who can help students to learn the foreign language in a relaxing atmosphere in the cooperative learning classroom. Besides, cooperative learning classroom provides an equal stage for the students. Even those who are not good at language learning have other special abilities. For instance, such a student may work well in organization, evaluation, or coordination. In the process of cooperative learning, whenever students come across difficulties, they turn to other group members for help. The interaction and responsibility help to reinforce their friendship.

Based on these conclusions and findings, the following recommendations are made. First, language teachers should create active learning atmosphere for students to learn by themselves. Teachers should provide enough group-learning periods and

draw students to involve actively in cooperative learning activities. By this way, enough input can be easily accepted and comprehended by students, while output can be offered at the same time. During the process of input-output, the learners acquire the knowledge of the foreign language actively and naturally.

Second, teachers should think carefully on which students can be grouped together in cooperative learning. English proficiency, students' preference, gender as well as personality should all be carefully taken into consideration. Students of limited English proficiency should be placed in appropriate groups, because they may have their special requirements, in order to motivate them to get involved from the very beginning. Teachers should listen to group members' discussion and offer guidance at the appropriate time. The excellent groups may be given awards as the encouragement. Teachers should motivate students to get involved by choosing materials matched to students' level of English.

Moreover, group processing needs to be emphasized to increase group effectiveness and solve the problems that occur in cooperative learning activities. Group processing can be a form of group discussion at the end of every class, which enables students to find problems related to their learning and learn to assess their performers so that their group as a whole can cooperate better and each person can play a more active role in their learning process. In a word, since cooperative learning may benefit both teachers and students, all of them need to learn to adapt to the learning approach and be patient for the coming forth of final outcome.

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