

APPLYING COOPERATIVE LEARNING TO ENGLISH TEACHING FOR ENGLISH AS A
FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) STUDENTS

Approved by Kimberly Tuescher

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Zhou Xiaoshuang (Ivy)

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Abstract

APPLYING COOPERATIVE LEARNING TO ENGLISH TEACHING FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) STUDENTS

Zhou Xiaoshuang

Kimberly, D Tuescher Ph.D.

Cooperative learning has proved to be an effective method for both teachers and students, and it has been found to have many positive benefits to foreign language teaching. According to the benefits of cooperative learning for EFL students, it is significant to apply the cooperative learning to the EFL classroom.

This paper provides descriptions of the elements of cooperative learning and the significance of each element in cooperative learning. In particular, it discusses the benefits of cooperative learning to EFL students. Then it analyzes the methods to use cooperative learning, and explains the process of two cooperative learning activities: JigsawII and Round Table. Finally, the study suggests that when an instructor applies cooperative learning in the classroom, there are some issues the instructor need to be considered, such as group size, forming groups, the roles of teachers and students, and the individual and group assessment.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning has proved to be an effective method for both teachers and students. Cooperative learning activities allow students to have opportunities to practice the knowledge they have learned and to develop social and learning skills (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006). It can also help students develop skills in oral communication (Slavin, 1995). In addition, cooperative learning is a teaching method that offers the opportunity for groups to work interdependently and get feedback from others (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006). It creates a language environment for EFL students who lack the foreign language environment. Therefore, it is significant to apply the cooperative learning approach to English as a foreign language classes.

According to Sapon-Shevin, Ayres and Duncan (1994), cooperative learning is good for all students and that it is part of a comprehensive school reform effort. However, the question of how to apply cooperative learning in an EFL class is worth researching for the purpose of practical application as well as scholarly learning. In addition, a scholarly review helps highlight issues that may need to be considered when applying cooperative learning in an EFL classroom.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed is, “how to apply cooperative learning as an effective teaching strategy for English teaching?”

Definition of Terms

Cooperative learning. a teaching method in which students work in small groups to help one another learn academic content, and are expected to discuss and argue with each other, in order to assess each other's current knowledge(Slavin, 1995).

EFL English as a foreign language

Delimitations of Research

The research was conducted through the Karrmann Library of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, and Google, over a sixty (60) days period. Primary searches were conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included “cooperative learning,” “English teaching,” “EFL” and “advantages of cooperative learning.”

Method of Approach

A brief review of literature on the definition of cooperative learning was conducted. A second review of literature states and analyzes the benefits of cooperative learning in English teaching. A third review of literature on the methods to apply cooperative learning in English teaching was also conducted. A fourth review of literature on the issues of the implementation of cooperative learning in the foreign language classroom was conducted last. The findings were summarized and recommendations made.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Five Elements of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is defined by Slavin (1995) as a teaching method in which students work in small groups to help one another to learn academic content, and students are expected to discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current knowledge.

Several researchers consider that cooperative learning consists of five basic elements: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skill, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Jolliffe, 2007). Each of these five elements would be discussed in the following sections.

Positive interdependence.

Positive interdependence is creating the sense that "we sink or swim together;" group mates learn the assigned material and ensure that all members of the group learn the assigned material. Group members must recognize that they link to each other in such a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). According to another expert Slavin (1996), the group's success depends on positive interdependence. Strong positive interdependence can make students perceive the need to cooperate (Kagan & Kagan, 1998). Positive interdependence generally exists when group members promote each other's achievement and believe that through mutual cooperation and effort their goal can best be reached (Carroll & Williams, 2007).

Face-to-Face interaction.

Face-to-face interaction is defined by Johnson and Johnson (1994), as individuals encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to achieve, complete tasks, and produce in order to

reach the group's goals. Face-to-face interaction is a way which through promotive interaction that members become personally committed to each other as well as to their joint goals (Glanz, 2004).

Individual accountability.

Individual accountability is the element that provided for each group member to assess against a standard and hold responsibility for their contribution to achieve goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Johnson and Johnson asserted that the purpose of cooperative learning is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Individual accountability is the key to ensure that each group member is strengthened through group work. The existence of individual accountability lets students have more motivation to learn (Kagan & Kagan, 1998).

Interpersonal and small group skill.

The interpersonal and small group skill is about giving constructive feedback, reaching a consensus, and involving every member, which is necessary for effective group functioning (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). When students participate regularly in cooperative activities, all students gain enduring intellectual abilities (Huss, 2006).

Group processing.

Processing means giving members time and a procedure to analyze how well their groups are functioning and using skills. When cooperative learning groups are used, the teacher observes the groups, analyzes the problems they have met, and gives feedback to each group on how well they are working together (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). A clear development process can control over the quality of the work produced (Jolliffe, 2007).

The interaction of the five elements makes cooperative learning able to achieve the learning objectives. The above five key elements of cooperative learning have emerged as critical to

actual cooperation, without these elements, cooperation can not be effectively carried out (Jolliffe, 2007; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1998).

The Benefits of Cooperative Learning to EFL Learners

In past years, many researchers have found that cooperative learning is an effective teaching method. According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), there are few instructional practices which have been more successfully implemented in the past 60 years than cooperative learning. Cooperative learning has been found to have many positive benefits to foreign language teaching.

Research has shown that cooperative learning can help students develop skills in communication. Cooperative learning is the opportunity for groups to work together and for students to talk to one another. This method creates a positive learning environment for students and allows students to have more opportunities for communication (Brecke & Jensen, 2007; Zhang, 2010; Duxbury & Ling, 2010). According to Daniels (2005), cooperative learning structures give students a framework of support for their language learning experience. From this framework, students will facilitate confidence in their language skills, so they will be comfortable in their learning environment and become more eager to speak out in class. She also pointed out that cooperative learning can increase language production, by integrating cooperative learning structures into foreign language lessons, the percentage of students' active production of language can increase from 22% to 47% at any moment of speaking time. Additionally, cooperative learning can ensure that students talk meaningfully and in relation to the task. They have to talk to succeed in the task and they are motivated to succeed through the task being interdependent (Jolliffe, 2007). When students use language for learning tasks, they must work together to complete a particular objective and make their ideas clear to others and

extend themselves a bit to appreciate another's perspective on a problem (Strickland and Feeley, 2003). It is an excellent way of conducting communicative language teaching.

There is a growing consensus among researchers about the positive effects of cooperative learning on student achievement. Working together to achieve a common goal produces higher achievement and greater productivity than working alone (Johnson, & Johnson, 1994). In contrast to cooperative and individualistic learning, cooperative learning will promote higher achievement (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1998). And cooperative learning is able effective in promoting academic achievement with students of all ages (Hornby, 2009). Willis (2007) found that when students learned with their group members they experienced a greater level of the understanding of concepts and ideas than in individualized classes.

In addition, several studies have found that cooperative learning can increase student relationship. Johnson and Johnson (1994) found greater friendship and more cross-racial interaction in cooperative learning environments compared to that of individualized classes. Students care about one another and want one another to succeed; they will help one another to learn (Slavin, 1996). Healthy relationships with other classmates allow for personal growth and responsibility (Zhang, 2010).

Slavin (1995), Brecke and Jensen (2007) reported that cooperative learning promotes students' learning motivation. Students in cooperative learning classes feel that their classmates want them to learn (Slavin, 1995), and increase intrinsic motivation and better leadership skills (Brecke & Jensen, 2007).

Increased self-esteem is an important outcome of the cooperative learning method. Cooperative learning activities build supportive classroom communities, students learn to listen and respect each other, therefore everyone can feel that they are at the centre at the same time

(Willis, 2007), and more participation will inevitably increase students' self-confidence and self-esteem (Zhang, 2010). Students believe that they are the valuable and important individuals. It's positive for their learning. (Slavin, 1995).

From this brief explanation, it is easy to find that there are many theories about why cooperative learning can be an effective teaching strategy and why cooperative learning is effective in English teaching.

The Methods to Use Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom

There are varieties of methods that can be used to support cooperative learning in the classroom, such as Jigsaw, 3 Step interview, Student Team Achievement Divisions, Learning Together, Group Investigation, and many more (Slavin, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 1994, 1999, 2009; Kagan, 1992). The finding in the Slavin's study shows that all cooperative learning methods share the idea that students work together to learn and help their teammates to learn as well as their own. Each cooperate method has its own characteristics and applicability to different curriculum areas (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

In foreign language classrooms, teachers should use the appropriate methods to get the most benefits from cooperative learning. Such methods include Round Table for writing, Jigsaw in reading, and Think-Pair-Share to develop oral and aural skills have been successfully applied in the classroom (Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1995). There are the brief introductions to these cooperative learning methods as following:

Jigsaw II.

Jigsaw II teaching was developed by Slavin (1995); group mates share information with each other in this technique. This is a useful activity to teach reading. Slavin summarized the procedure to apply Jigsaw II:

1. Students receive expert topics and read assigned material to locate information.
2. Students with the same expert topics meet to discuss them in expert groups.
3. Experts return to their team to teach their topics to their teammates.
4. Students take individual quizzes covering all topics.
5. Team scores are computed based on team members' improvement scores, and individual certificates, a class newsletter, or a bulletin board recognizes high-scoring teams.

Round Table.

Round Table can be used for brainstorming, reviewing, or practicing. In this method, each group member has a designated turn to participate and make a written contribution to the group's project. The group has a writing prompt, task, or question (Kagan, 1992). Sequential form as following:

1. The teacher asks a question which has multiple answers, each student writes a response or a portion of a response.
2. After writing their response, they pass the paper to the next person.
3. Round Table can be done with one piece of paper per group or with one piece of paper per group member.
4. One group member may be asked to share with the whole class what their group has written.

Think-Pair-Share.

Think-Pair-Share was proposed by Professor Lyman (1981). This teaching method could encourage students to communicate with others and develop thinking. There are the steps of Think-Pair-Share.

1. The teacher poses a discussion topic or an open-ended question.

2. The teacher gives students the “think time” to think on their own.
3. After thinking, students work in pairs to share their ideas with each other.
4. Students share their responses with other partners or with the rest of the class.

The Issues in Implementing Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning groups are successful only when every member has learnt the material or has understood the assignment (Murdoch & Wilson, 2004). It is important to emphasize individual learning, so group members can help each other. When teachers applying cooperative learning in their classrooms, there are several issues need to be considered:

Group size.

Killen (2006) emphasized that the suitable group size should encourage all group members to remain attentive and focus on the learning task. In his view, group can vary in size from two to ten or more, but the size to four or five is optimal. Jacob (2006) also argued that four members in a group seem to be the most popular size. Williams (2002) advocated two factors in effective group size: the students’ comfort level and the nature of the assignment. As the circumstances change, then the size of the group changes. According to Glanz (2004), effective group size might depend on the age of the student and their experience in working cooperatively.

Forming groups.

Johnson and Johnson (1998), Jacob (2006), Felder and Brent (2001) encourage to use heterogeneous groups in cooperative learning. Most cooperative learning teams suggest a composition of one low-ability student, two medium-ability students, and one high-achieving student (Huss, 2006). According to the way to form group, Felder and Brent suggested that groups can be formed at random, and groups can be formed on the basis of some commonality, such as quiz grades. In addition, Jacob supplemented two other options exist for forming groups,

teacher can decide which students to work together, and students also can decide with whom they work together. No matter how teacher divides the groups, avoiding groups in which members of those minorities are isolated is an important element (Felder & Brent, 2001).

Teacher's roles.

Teachers play an important role in helping groups function well. In a cooperative learning classroom, teachers must be facilitators, guide on the side and take more skills than they use teacher-fronted instruction (Zhang, 2010). The teachers speak less than in teacher-fronted classes (Jacob, 2006). They prepare students for the tasks they will carry out, they assist students with the learning task, and they give few commands, imposing less disciplinary control (Harel, 1992).

Students' roles.

Each group member must be assigned a specific and distinct role to play in helping the group to achieve its goals, such as reader, recorder, monitor, captain, encourager, spell checker, and so on (Glanz, 2004). Learners are active participators and autonomous learners (Zhang, 2010). This has five roles: (a) facilitator is the member who coordinates the group's works; (b) recorder's responsibility is recording what the group has accomplished; (c) reporter tells others about the group's work; (d) timekeeper helps the group be aware of time constraints, keeps the group on tasks and fills in for missing group members; (e) observer of collaborative skill checks if group members are using a particular collaborative skill deemed important to the group's interaction (Jacob, 2006).

Individual and group assessment.

“Assessment is used to judge the quality and quantity of learning and award grades” (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, P.2). Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. Through assessment we can understand the value and the process of learning. The purposes for assessing

student performances include the following: (a) diagnosing students' present level of knowledge and skills; (b) monitoring students' progress toward learning goals to help form the instructional program, and (c) providing data to judge the final level of students' learning(Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS

Cooperative learning is an effective teaching method both for teachers and students. In cooperative groups, students observe they link to each other in such a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds; they do their effort to achieve a common goal. Positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skill and group processing are five key elements of cooperative learning. These elements make cooperative learning to achieve the learning objectives; without these elements, cooperation can't be effectively carried out.

For EFL learners, cooperative learning creates a positive learning environment for students to practice their English. It can help students develop skills in communication and improve their motivation to learn. Cooperative learning also has positive effects on student achievement, increases student relationships and increases self-esteem. These benefits of cooperative learning help EFL learners improve efficiency in their language learning. Cooperative learning is an effective teaching strategy in foreign teaching.

There are varieties of methods can be used to support cooperative learning in the classroom. Each cooperative method has its own characteristics and applicability to different curriculum areas. Speaking, listening, writing, and reading are four basic skills in language learning. According to the characteristics of these four skills, teachers should use the appropriate methods to get the most benefits from cooperative learning.

The success of cooperative learning depends on implementing in the whole process. The expected effect can be reached only when the group size is suitable, group is heterogeneous, teachers and students are aware of their responsibilities and every member has understood the

assignment. In addition, individual and group assessment is an important component of cooperating learning implementation.

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