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## The Application of Cooperative Learning to English Teaching for Five-year Junior College Students Majoring in Preschool Education

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<sup>1</sup> Yao Zhimin, <sup>2</sup> Lee Keok Cheong

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, City University, Malaysia & Sichuan Preschool Educators' College, China 913707742@qq.com

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, City University Malaysia, [lee.cheong@city.edu.my](mailto:lee.cheong@city.edu.my)

### Abstract

*Over the past decades, the study of cooperative learning has become one of the focuses of language teaching research. It has been studied by many researchers from various aspects. But little research has been done about the application of cooperative learning on the English teaching in five-year junior colleges. The theory of cooperative learning is the knowledge basis of this paper. By the practice and application of cooperative learning strategies in the five-year junior college students majored in preschool education, it is expected to explore the general method patterns and strategies of cooperative learning in the English teaching to five-year junior college students. What's more, after cooperative learning has been operated on the students, the analysis will be done on the effect of the English learning interest, attitudes and grades by some experimental ways such as observation, questionnaires, interview, class practicing and data analysis. All the data yield the findings as followings:*

- 1. Cooperative learning arouses learners' desire to learn the language. There exists obvious difference between the experimental class and the controlled class.*
- 2. The English proficiency of students in the experimental class has been improved. However, the controlled class did not. Therefore, cooperate learning has positive effects on improving the students' English proficiency.*
- 3. The students' cooperative ability has been improved. Most of the learners in the experimental class have a preference for cooperative learning and they could cooperate with each other very well. The thesis proves that cooperative learning is effective in improving learner's English academic achievement, language learning motivation and the cooperative ability.*

**Keywords:** *Cooperative learning, teaching mode, five-year junior college, English achievement*

## **Introduction**

### **1. Problem Statement**

In secondary schools and universities, the teaching and learning style is mainly characterized by passive acceptance. In the teaching method, one-way transmission teaching is still relatively common. With emphasis on teachers' teaching and ignoring students' independent construction. In teaching evaluation, result is emphasized, process is ignored, competition is overemphasized and cooperation is despised.

The author works in a Preschool Educators' College. Part of the students are junior high school graduates who usually spend five years to finish their college study. In the previous teaching process, teachers usually attached great importance to the cultivation of professional knowledge, but often ignored the cultivation of students' cooperation skills. Such positioning is no longer in line with the needs of social change, because in the real world, there is cooperation at every level of work. The current one-child policy has left many students with no sense of cooperation. Colleges should not only teach students professional knowledge, but also strengthen their sense of cooperation and improve their interpersonal skills, so that students can adapt to the requirements of the job smoothly. In order to adapt to the development of vocational college education, it is urgent to study the teaching methods of various courses according to the characteristics of education and improve the students' comprehensive cooperative consciousness and cooperative skills. Cooperative learning is just such a learning strategy. Knowledge and skills are acquired through cooperation, and emotions, attitudes and values are cultivated through cooperation, which is an effective way of learning. Cooperative learning not only promotes the improvement of students' academic performance, but also lays the relevant ability foundation for the later stage of study or work. Through this study, the author tries to provide some theoretical and practical references for implementing cooperative learning in English teaching for the five-year college students, cultivating students' cooperative awareness, and effectively changing students' learning methods.

### **2. Purpose and Significance**

Cooperative learning can improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning, reducing the burden on teachers and students. It can also protect the self-esteem of underachiever. In order to achieve good results, every student in the cooperative learning group will take the initiative to help the underachiever, so that the underachiever can feel the warmth of the group and enhance their confidence. Cooperative learning can increase the communication opportunities among students and enhance the awareness of mutual assistance among cooperative members. What's more, it can improve students' learning initiative. In traditional teaching, teachers always grasp the direction of learning, and students' main task is to follow the teacher's thinking, and their learning initiative is rarely reflected. In cooperative learning, students can make their own review plans and activities, and choose their own partners. There are plenty of opportunities to express your views in the process of

collaboration. Listening to others' opinions provides a broad space for students to display their initiative, stimulates students' interest in learning, makes students in a positive mental state in learning, and improves the effect of learning.

In a cooperative learning group, every student gets a chance to exercise. They can seek answers and get help in cooperative learning. By collecting materials for self-study and asking questions, students discuss with each other, help each other and even argue or debate with each other, which maximally promotes students to use their hands, brains and words, cultivates their awareness and ability of active participation, and cultivates students' ability of analysis and expression, so that every member of cooperative learning can make the same progress in learning.

Compared with individual learning, cooperative learning is always accomplished by two or more learners together. This kind of group learning style is conducive to reducing students' fear, because the group effect can make a single learning member feel the power of the group, so as to no longer bear the pressure due to individual learning tasks, at least the psychological pressure of individual learning will be reduced to a certain extent. Make them dare to ask, happy to answer, so that they really realize that the classroom is their own world of activity, they are the master of learning. At the same time, in the group discussion and learning, the teacher should visit, participate, become a member of the group, or listen to the students' opinions, or give good guidance and patient guidance. The relationship between teachers and students is equal and mutual help, and the classroom atmosphere becomes very relaxed and active.

### **Literature Review**

The study and practice of cooperative learning has a long history in the West. As early as the 1st century AD, the ancient Roman School of Quintilian pointed out that students could benefit from teaching each other. In the 18th century, the English educators, Bethel and Lancaster, made extensive use of cooperative learning groups in England. When it was founded in New York City in 1800, the concept of cooperative learning was introduced to the United States and inspired by the American educators Park F. And Dewey J. which is widely used from then on. Since the 1970s, scientific research has been carried out on the concrete application of cooperative learning in the classroom. In the United States, there is a boom in cooperative learning research. Researchers began to systematically study the application of cooperative learning in the classroom. Although the systematic study of cooperative learning began just 30 years ago, the practice of cooperative learning has been widely spread in dozens of countries, such as the United States, Russia, Canada, Israel, Germany, the United Kingdom and other schools. These researchers have made in-depth studies on the effectiveness of cooperative learning at different levels, group formation, specific implementation strategies and so on, and have achieved certain results.

From the development stage, the research of cooperative learning can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage is the start-up stage of cooperative learning. From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. The main characteristic of this stage is that cooperative learning researchers begin to study the theoretical problems of cooperative learning. They get inspiration from group teaching, ability grouping teaching and other teaching practices, and seek theoretical basis from social psychology. Some cooperative learning strategies, such as the "group-game-competition method", were developed during this period. The second phase lasted from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. Substantial progress has been made in cooperative learning. The main characteristic of this stage is that cooperative learning researchers put forward many effective cooperative strategies from various experimental studies, the theory of cooperative learning is becoming more mature, the influence of cooperative learning is gradually expanding, forming a very promising teaching school. Most strategies for cooperative learning are developed in this stage. "Division of student group performance", "group assisted individual", "group investigation", "block stitching", "common learning" and so on. The third phase is from the mid-1980s to the present. The main characteristic of this stage is that, on the one hand, cooperative learning continues to develop to maturity, and on the other hand, cooperative learning and other related teaching theories appear the trend of integration. For example, "cooperative mastering learning" and "integration of cooperative learning and direct teaching" appear. The concept of cooperative learning has begun to penetrate into every level of the school, and is no longer limited to the classroom. Many schools have widely adopted the concept of cooperative learning in management and other aspects, and has achieved remarkable results.

From the current internal and external research literature on cooperative learning, cooperative learning is actually a general term, is a complex, multi-layer concept. Researchers at home and abroad have given different definitions of cooperative learning according to different theories and perspectives. Slavin, one of the founders of cooperative learning and a famous American social psychologist, defined cooperative learning as: "Cooperative learning refers to the classroom teaching technology in which students engage in learning activities in a group and get rewards or recognition according to their whole group performance." Johnson brothers (Johnson D. W & Johnson R. T) of the Cooperative Learning Center of Suminda University in the United States believe that; "Collaborative learning is the use of groups in teaching, where students work together to maximize their own learning and that of others." Dr. Sharon of Tel Aviv University, a famous educational psychologist and an important representative of cooperative learning, believes that "cooperative learning is the general term for a series of methods to organize and promote classroom teaching. Collaboration between students in the learning process is an essential feature of all these approaches." Professor Garski of the University of Kentucky defines cooperative learning as "essentially, cooperative learning is a form of teaching, which requires students to engage in learning activities together in some heterogeneous groups composed of 2 to 6 people and jointly complete the learning tasks assigned by

teachers. In each group, students usually engage in a variety of learning activities that require cooperation and mutual assistance." Wright, a famous British educator, and Mevarick, a famous Israeli educator, believe that "cooperative learning is a learning environment in which students learn together in a group to achieve a common goal." Wen-ze, a famous Canadian psychologist, believes that "cooperative learning is a teaching method in which teachers assign students to heterogeneous teams or groups randomly or in a planned way to complete assigned tasks. Chinese educator Wang Hongyu believes that "cooperative learning refers to a teaching strategy system that takes group learning as the main form of classroom teaching and promotes students to learn together in heterogeneous groups according to certain cooperative education and methods, so as to use cooperative interpersonal communication to promote students' cognition. Wang Tan, a representative scholar of the research and practice of cooperative learning in China, defines cooperative learning as a relatively comprehensive one so far. He believes that "cooperative learning is a teaching strategy system aimed at promoting students to cooperate with each other in heterogeneous groups to achieve common learning goals, and based on the overall performance of the group as a reward.

The author summarizes the most essential characteristics of cooperative learning as follows:

1. With group activities as the basic form, the construction of a group follows the principle of inter-group homogeneity and intra-group heterogeneity, and implements intra-group cooperation and inter-group competition.
2. Team members cooperate with each other.
3. Group members rely on each other to promote learning and achieve goals together.
4. Based on team performance.

## **Research Methods**

### **1. Basic information of experimental class and control class.**

The author is the English teacher of Class 1 and Class 3 in Grade 2 of 3+2 junior college majoring in preschool education. Five-year college students' English basic knowledge is poor. Many students have learning difficulties and bad habits. The author set class 1 as the experimental class and class 3 as the control class. There are 60 students in class 1, all of whom are girls, and 62 students in class 3, two of whom are boys.

### **2. Determination of experimental indexes**

The author conducted two English learning motivation tests on the experimental class and the control class. There were 122 students in total. 122 questionnaires were sent out each time and 122 were collected. Both tests were valid questionnaires. Through the final examination results of experimental class and control class comparison, students' academic performance is measured. The influence of cooperative learning on students' cooperation and cooperative skills is analyzed through questionnaire survey.

Questionnaire survey and interview are used to analyze the application of cooperative learning on students' cooperative attitude.

### **3. Implementation**

After fully understanding all aspects of the students in the experimental class, the teacher arranges the students sit nearby one another in a study group. According to the principle of heterogeneity within the group and homogeneity between groups, there is one good student, two medium students and one poor student. Each group has a leader and a reference officer. The group leader should have the awareness of the overall situation, good academic performance, certain organizational ability, and certain prestige among the classmates. The group leader is responsible for the system, and the recorder should be responsible for recording details. The members of each group sit next to each other. If necessary, they can sit around to facilitate communication and discussion.

According to the large number of students in the class, the whole class was divided into 10 groups according to the heterogeneity within the group and the homogeneity between the groups, with 6-7 people in each group. Assign tasks to each group a week in advance. The 10 groups were divided into two parts, five groups in each part, and completed the above five tasks respectively. The first group is responsible for reading the words, reading the text, knowing the words in the word list, reading the text. Make sure you read every word in warming-up, text, grammar, integrating. The second group is responsible for translating the text. The third group is responsible for understanding the text, paragraphs and general ideas. The fourth group is responsible for finding out the main phrases and important sentences of the text. The fifth group is responsible for looking up books, surfing the Internet, copying or printing background information. Text, grammar, and division of tasks within the group to complete the task. The learning process is organized by each group leader. The steps generally include: data collection, data exchange, re-integration and common learning.

In the second round of cooperative learning, the five groups of students in the two parts were selected respectively and re-formed into groups with five students in each group. There are 12 groups in the two parts. Each group has its own leader, recorder, spokesman, timekeeper, inspector, noisemaker, controller, sometimes a small number of people can be more than one. Members of each group completed each of the five tasks. As an expert, each member of the team can introduce their knowledge to other team members in turn, or they can carry out learning activities in a certain way. The ultimate goal is that each member of the team can master all the five tasks.

## **Result and Discussion**

After three months of cooperative learning in English teaching, the students of the experimental class and the control class have a very significant difference in cooperation awareness and cooperation skills. Cooperative learning can effectively promote the development of students' cooperative consciousness and cooperative skill level. The above data show that the whole class of the experimental class has the sense of cooperation, while 67% (29%+38%) of the students of the control class have the sense of cooperation. The final grade is divided into four grades. The final exam score accounts for 70%, class notes and homework account for 10%, attendance account for 10%, and class performance account for 10%. If students are active in class, they can get extra points, so that their final grades can be linked to their cooperative learning activities in class. 81% (50%+31%) of students in the experimental class actively participated in group activities and took the initiative to undertake tasks. 40% (11%+29%) of students in the control class actively participated in group activities. In group activities, a large number of tasks need to be completed through intra-group cooperation and inter-group competition. Only in the teaching mode of cooperative learning in class can students have the courage to cooperate with others, be good at cooperating with peers, be willing to cooperate with members of the group, help each other and encourage each other to complete learning tasks. Individual performance can only improve if team performance improves. When good information was available, 85% (25%+60%) of students in the experimental class were able to share it with everyone. The control class was 49% (20%+29%). In the process of discussing and solving problems together, students can pool their wisdom, broaden their horizon and enlighten their thinking. By division of labor and cooperation, they can develop their strengths and avoid their weaknesses, complement each other's strengths, and approach the goal faster and better. 95% (74% +21 %) of students in the experimental class were able to approve of others' achievements, compared to 70 % (42% +28%) in the control class. In the process of cooperation, students can learn how to care for and help others, improve interpersonal skills, learn to cooperate with people of different backgrounds and abilities, and experience the happiness of success and collective honor in the competition and cooperation with others, improve the expectation of achievement, and effectively promote the development of cooperation awareness and cooperation skills.

In the process of teaching, 68% of the students in the experimental class could actively speak English, while only 6% of the students in the control class. 68% of the control class wanted to speak but were afraid to. Cooperative learning in English class, especially in oral English class, can give students the opportunity to show themselves and meet the needs of self-development. Students can get more help and inspiration from teachers and classmates, can have more successful experience, greatly stimulate the students' interest in learning, students gradually formed an internal, lasting motivation to learn the influence of cooperative learning is mainly reflected in those students with poor or medium grades. Therefore, cooperative learning can improve

students' interest in learning English and improve their attitude towards learning English.

The comparison of test scores between the experimental class and the control class shows that the average score of the experimental class is higher than that of the control class. Cooperative learning can improve students' achievement level to some extent. Through investigation and analysis, five-year junior college students majoring in preschool education generally learn professional courses seriously, while thinking English has little to do with the future work. They are lack of motivation to learn the language. Students with good academic performance are only willing to work alone and do not want to communicate with other students or poor students. The implementation of cooperative learning group activities, to a certain extent, improve the interest of the students in learning English, especially for students with medium grades. It has stimulated their enthusiasm in English, but it will take a long time for their performance to be significantly improved.

After a semester of experiments and researches, a series of experimental results have been obtained through theoretical research, model construction, questionnaire survey, interview and other methods. The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of these results.

1. The application of cooperative learning in public English teaching of preschool education majors in five-year college can effectively promote the development of students' cooperative consciousness and cooperative skills.
2. The application of cooperative learning in the public English teaching of preschool education majors can effectively improve the interest of students in learning English and improve their learning attitude.
3. Cooperative learning can effectively improve the English scores of five- year junior college students majoring in preschool education, and improve the accuracy and fluency of students' oral English.



## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

After several months of cooperative learning teaching attempts, some positive results have been achieved. Due to the limitations of time and conditions, there are still many problems. Cooperative learning theory has many implications for teaching.

### **1. Cooperative learning requirements for testing and evaluation.**

For a long time, the testing and evaluation of English teaching in China has laid emphasis on students' memorization and written expression ability, but paid little attention to listening and speaking. The application of cooperative learning in the classroom has put forward new requirements for the test and evaluation of classroom teaching. Improve the method of testing and assessment, strengthen the test of students' communicative competence.

### **2. Cooperative learning puts forward higher requirements for teachers.**

In the implementation of cooperative learning teachers should pay considerable efforts and hard exploration. The success or failure of the classroom depends on the teachers and students to jointly manage the classroom activities effectively. Teachers must expand their knowledge structure through continuous learning in order to better educate others. In the cooperative learning teaching, the teacher becomes the classroom monitor and manager, and the responsibility is heavier. Teachers must be arranged and designed in advance. The content of lesson preparation is more. The task of group activities should be designed with moderate difficulty and the differences of individual students should be considered as far as possible. Both teachers and students should reflect on their shortcomings in cooperative learning and constantly improve them in order to cooperate more efficiently between teachers and students.

### **3. Cooperative learning requires appropriate textbooks.**

Cooperative learning requires students to participate in classroom interaction activities. However, there are not many classroom activities in advanced textbooks, which mainly involve teacher-student interaction rather than student-student interaction. Cooperative learning is mainly used in oral teaching, which requires some real language materials. This requires teachers to try to supplement and adjust the teaching content.

### **4. Cooperative learning requires for syllabus preparation.**

The old teaching mode only focuses on imparting knowledge and neglects interactive cultivation, so it cannot meet the needs of society. Learning English is to express, to communicate, to communicate. Group cooperative learning is an effective way for students to practice oral English. Its greatest value lies in cultivating students' ability to acquire language naturally through discussion and communication among students. With the gradual change of teaching mode, group activity, an effective means of classroom teaching organization, should be considered in the syllabus design.

## **Problems and countermeasures in the process of cooperative learning**

There are some problems in the process of implementing cooperative learning, especially in the early stage, there are many problems. As time goes on, the problem diminishes.

### **1. Out-of-control classroom discipline.**

The biggest disadvantage of cooperative learning is that it is not easy to maintain discipline in the classroom, especially in the early implementation of activities. To solve this problem, the author explains the discipline requirements before the activity. Teams that violate discipline will lose points in group competitions. 0.5 points per month. Although the score is not much, but the effect is OK. Each group has a voice controller, and students who violate discipline will be alerted. Sometimes distraction can be used to quiet classroom discipline. At the end of the class, remind the voice controller to summarize the discipline, but do not name and shame, praise the team with good discipline.

### **2. Cooperative learning activities spend more time in class and affect the teaching progress.**

Students have different abilities, weak cooperation skills, different personalities, inadequate pre-class preparation, unreasonable activities arranged by teachers, and sometimes inaccurate expectations of classroom conditions. As a result, cooperative learning activities spend more class time in classroom teaching, which affects the teaching progress.

### **3. Cooperative learning activities cannot last long.**

At the beginning of group activities, the students felt fresh and the cooperation scene was lively. After a period of time, they felt that it was not much fun, and their thoughts relaxed and the activities could not last long. I adopt a combination of variety and flexibility. Diversification refers to the change of space, time, content and mode of activity. Cooperative learning is arranged in the classroom or outdoors, the activity time can be in class or after class, often change the way of activities, and strive to have new ideas.

### **4. Imbalance of activity between groups.**

Due to the large differences in the individual students, the arrangement of groups is ill-considered, or there is no necessary explanation and proof, so in the process of activities, some groups are active, some groups are dull, some groups have good effect, and some groups have poor effect. Some students lack the sense of cooperation and responsibility, not good at cooperation, in the process of cooperation, good grades, active students are all down. Such relatively poor students have even less self-confidence and enthusiasm.

The countermeasures adopted are that the number of people in the cooperative learning group is generally limited to 2-4 people. When students master certain cooperation skills to adapt to the activity, it can be expanded to 4-6 people. When grouping, members should be considered in terms of gender, academic performance, ability and other aspects (such as 1 excellent student, 1 poor student, 2 intermediate students), and there is a certain degree of complementarity among members. Classroom cooperative learning mainly adopts the organization mode of intra-group heterogeneity and inter-group homogeneity, which is an important condition for fair competition of each group.

While guiding students to develop and apply learning strategies, teachers should also learn to cooperate, be good at cooperation, make full use of teachers' peer resources and share teaching materials and teaching plans with peers.

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