

COOPERATIVE-CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract

Joyful and cooperative learning atmosphere will truly improve students' learning. Moreover over past sixty years the language teaching focus shift to students centered learning. Indeed cooperative learning is mostly advocated.

In cooperative learning, students develop their own understanding of teaching materials while at the same time, they also encourage and help their friends in the same groups to comprehend teaching materials and get better understanding. All group members must be active and have responsibility to achieve group's goal. The role of teachers to monitor the group process and result is essential so there will be no dependent member.

Most study showed that cooperative learning is able to encourage students to overcome their difficulties in language learning since peer discussion and peer support help them. Thus, students' comprehension in language learning improves.

Keywords: cooperative learning, students' comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Klimova (2012) describes that over the past 60 years, there is a significant shift of current trends in foreign language teaching (FLT) that the focus on control, shifts to focus on understanding whereas teachers currently should help students understand the purpose of learning and develop their own purpose.

The trend indicates that teachers now should apply students centered learning in their teaching. Teachers' role now is to facilitate the learning activities, encourage students to be more active in the classrooms. Teachers should encourage and support in students' learning by motivating them to create a friendly learning atmosphere for working together in understanding the material taught.

Moreover, Klimova states that collaborative or cooperative learning is being advocated. It is learning methodology that

consists of a range of concepts and techniques for enhancing the value of student-student interaction.

In doing so, the role of teachers in creating classroom activities to set better learning atmosphere is essential as stated by Duderstadt in Jones and Jones (2008) that "It could well be that faculty members of the twenty-first century college or university will find it necessary to set aside their roles as teachers and instead become designers of learning experiences, processes, and environments"

Consequently, the writer is interested in discussing cooperative learning which the writer believes is able to respond to current challenging world and help teachers to utilize the methodology so that students will be well equipped to comprehend the learning materials.

Cooperative Learning

Roger (1992) defined cooperative learning as group learning activity organized in such a way that learning is based on the socially structured change of information between learners in group in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others.

Highly structured cooperative learning designed by teachers allows students to develop their own understanding of key concepts of material taught all the while encouraging and assisting their friends. Moreover (Jones & Jones, 2008) cooperative learning promotes language acquisition by providing comprehensible input in developmentally appropriate ways and in a supportive and motivating environment, especially for English Language Learning students (Kagan, 1995).

In doing so, the role of teachers in planning cooperative learning activities is essential, since teachers must create activities and monitor the group process so that all members in the group actively participate to achieve groups' goal and all members help each other / work together. Teacher also must make sure that low status students will actively participate within the group, meanwhile the high status students do not dominate the group and leave/ignore other members behind. Teachers must explain that different intellectual abilities are required in

cooperative learning, that no one student has all of the abilities needed, but that each member of the group will have some of the abilities.

Furthermore, in planning cooperative learning, teachers have several roles as described by Yahya and Huie (2002):

1. teachers make pre-instructional decisions about grouping mixed ability students and assigning appropriate group tasks.
2. teachers have to be able to explain both the academic task and the design of cooperative structure to students and then must monitor and intervene them when necessary.
3. teacher is also the one who is responsible for evaluating student learning and the effectiveness of each groups' work (Cohen, 1998).

Five elements of Cooperative Learning

There are five essential elements that are necessary to construct effective cooperative learning experiences (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991). These five elements form the 'five pillars' of cooperative learning which Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) use as their basis for utilizing such practices in the college classroom. A visual representation of this concept is presented in figure 1 below.

Figure 1.



(Foundation Coalition, 2008)

Positive Interdependence

Positive Interdependence is the belief that the individual is dependent on the contributions, inclusion, and success of the others in the group in order to be successful. Those with a strong sense of positive interdependence believe that there is value in learning from the ideas and contributions of others and that “group members sink or swim together” (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991). According to this belief, “if there is no positive interdependence, there is no cooperation.”

Furthermore, teachers must explain that each group members must learn the material taught and ensure that each students must contribute to the group. The whole members are dependable whether the group is able to achieve the goal or not, in other words, whether the group members sink or swim together as stated by Johnson, Johnson & Smith (1991).

Promotive Face to Face Interaction

As Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991) describe, promotive interaction is an essential part of cooperative learning because face-to-face interaction provides the critical verbal and non-verbal feedback. It happens when students are given time in class to discuss, ask questions, encourage and support each other in the completion of their task. Students must comprehend that in cooperative learning, it is not only the final product that matters, but also the ongoing dialogue process is critical of groups' success.

Individual Accountability

Individual accountability make sure that “students learn together, but perform alone” (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991). If we understand that the whole point of cooperative learning is to give students with the resources they need to subsequently perform better on

their own, than individual accountability strengthens the group dynamic as well as individual performance (Foundation Coalition, 2008).

In cooperative learning, though the task is done in group, the score taken is both groups and individual work. Each group member is responsible for their individual performance as well as groups' performance.

Social Skills

According to Johnson, Johnson & Smith (1991) of all the competencies needed for cooperative learning to be effective, students should have instruction in leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills.

Group Processing

Providing time for individual and group reflection will increase the quality of cooperative learning teams by strengthening intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. Allowing students to give constructive feedback to their friends fosters metacognitive awareness while also strengthening group synergy and allowing for continuous improvement (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991).

Some Activities of Cooperative Learning

There are a lot of activities of cooperative learning. The writer will eliminate to the most exercised cooperative learning strategies as David Bohlke (2014) explains as follow:

Think/Pair /Share

1. Students first think silently about a question posed by teacher
2. They next pair up and exchange thoughts
3. The pairs share their responses with other pairs, teams, or the entire group

Round Robin Brainstorming

1. The class is divided into teams of 4-6 students, one student is appointed as the recorder
2. An open-ended question is posed and "think time" is provided
3. Team members share their responses round robin style. Each group member gives an answer until time is called. The recorder writes down the group's answers
4. Team answers are shared with the class as a whole

Numbered Heads Together

1. A team is established and each member is given a number (1,2,3,4 etc)
2. Each group receives a question to answer. Group members work together to answer the question until they can all verbally answer the question
3. The teacher then calls out a number and the student is asked to give the answer for the team

Three-Step Interview

1. Students work in pairs. One student interviews another about an announced topic
2. When time is called, students switch roles as interviewer and interviewee
3. Next, two pairs join to form groups of four
4. Each member of the original pair takes turns introducing his/her partners and sharing what the partner had to say

Value Line

1. Using a Likert scale, the teacher presents a controversial issue and asks students how they feel about this issue
2. Students form a rank-ordered line and are numbered from 1 to 10
3. Groups of four are formed by pulling one person from each end of the value line and

two people from the middle. They discuss the issue.

Jigsaw Reading

1. Students are divided into "expert groups". Each group receives one piece of the jigsaw
2. Group members collaborate to become experts so that they can later teach it to others
3. The teacher regroups students into cooperative groups, each consisting of at least one member from each expert group
4. Students share their pieces orally

Team Pair Solo

Students do problems first as a group, then with a partner, and finally on their own. It is designed to motivate students to succeed at problems that initially are beyond their ability. By allowing groups to work on problems they could not do alone, first, as a group and then with a partner, they progress to a point they can do alone.

Study on Cooperative Learning

1. Many researches have been conducted on Cooperative learning and most result indicated that cooperative learning is an effective strategy in improving students' learning and understanding. As reported by Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1998) that between 1924 and 1997, over 168 studies have supported the statement that cooperative learning is effective for students over 18 years old.
2. New Horizons, 2008, Johnson & Johnson, 1994, Slavin, 1996, Williams, 2007 state that forty years of research has shown that when compared to other methods of instruction, cooperative learning is one of the most effective ways for students to maximize their own learning and the academic accomplishments of their classmates.

3. The writer's study on cooperative learning strategy in her classroom shows that cooperative learning activities are an interesting teaching strategy that make students better comprehend the material taught.

a. The Increase of Students' Comprehension

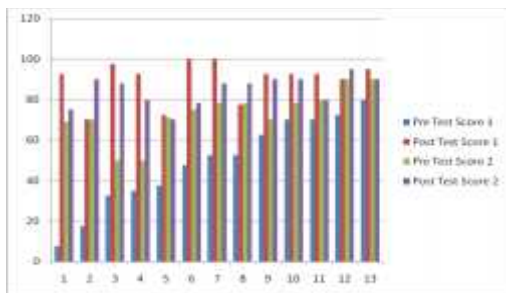


Figure 1. Pre Test - Post Test score

Figure 1 indicates that students' comprehension increase after the teacher utilizes cooperative learning strategy.

We can notice that the score of pre test 1 to post test 1 that was performed before midterm test showed significant improvement. Furthermore, the score of pre test 2 to post test 2 that was performed after midterm test was also showed improvement.

b. Students' thought of cooperative learning activities

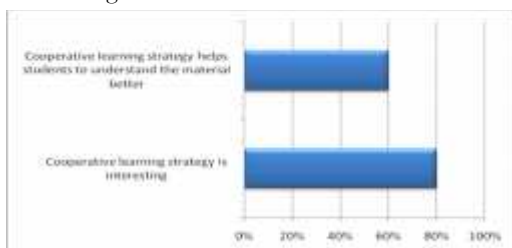


Figure 2. Students' thought of cooperative learning activities

Figure 2 illustrates that 80% of students think that classroom activities that utilize cooperative learning is interesting. Moreover 60% of students consider that the strategy help them to understand the material taught by the teacher better.

CONCLUSION

Cooperative learning strategy if utilized correctly under five pillars, certainly will enhance students' performance since the strategy are able to create supportive learning atmosphere. The role of teachers in directing the process is also important so that all group members will have positive interdependence, interaction, individual accountability and also develop social skill during the learning process so that finally the groups' goal is achieved.

Most research also remind the importance of teachers in monitoring cooperative learning to ensure that all group members are active and accountable in achieving group's goal. Teachers must encourage students not to be dependent to high competence member.

Furthermore, the benefit of cooperative learning is not only on academic benefit especially in language learning but also social-emotional benefit, such as the skill to work together.

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