

Application and Exploration of Cooperative Learning in English Classroom

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Abstract

The new curriculum reform emphasizes the change of students' learning style and the reform of classroom teaching form, which requires teaching to develop towards the direction of autonomy, cooperation and inquiry, one of the important and specific goals is to change the ubiquitous passive acceptance of students' learning style, advocating students' participation in cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is a teaching activity that takes heterogeneous learning groups as the basic form system, utilizes the interaction between dynamic factors of teaching to promote students' learning, takes group achievement as the evaluation standard, and achieves teaching objectives together. Taking English classroom as an example, this paper discusses the application of cooperative learning in language learning. First, it introduces the concept and theoretical basis of cooperative learning, and its value and application in language learning. Secondly, through the analysis of cooperative learning practices in English classrooms, the main influencing factors and coping strategies of cooperative learning effectiveness are summarized. Then, effective regulation methods are proposed from the perspective of teachers and some suggestions are put forward to improve the application of cooperative learning in language learning. Finally, some suggestions on the future research of cooperative learning are put forward.

Keywords

Cooperative Learning; Language Learning; English Classroom; Influencing Factor.

1. Introduction of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a teaching method that emphasizes the importance of group work and collaboration among students. This approach to learning has been widely studied and adopted in various educational settings, and has been shown to have a number of benefits for students, including improved academic performance, increased motivation, and the development of important social and interpersonal skills. In this paper, we will explore the concept of cooperative learning, its theoretical foundations, and its practical applications in educational contexts.

The theory of cooperative learning is based on the idea that learning is a social process that occurs through interaction with others. According to Aronson and Patnoe (2011), cooperative learning involves "students working together in small groups to achieve a common goal, with each individual responsible for their own learning as well as the learning of their peers" (p. 31). This approach to learning is grounded in social constructivist theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and that learning is most effective when it is situated in a meaningful context.

Cooperative learning has been shown to be effective in a variety of educational contexts, including language learning, math, science, and social studies. In language learning, for example, cooperative learning has been found to be particularly effective in improving students' speaking and listening skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). In math and science, cooperative

learning has been shown to lead to improved problem-solving skills and greater conceptual understanding (Slavin, 2015). In social studies, cooperative learning has been used to promote critical thinking and civic engagement among students (Kagan, 1994).

2. Theoretical Perspective on Cooperative Learning

Theoretical perspectives on cooperative learning provide a basis for understanding the underlying principles and mechanisms that make this approach to teaching and learning effective. And Slavin's (1983) theoretical perspectives on cooperative learning provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of this approach. The four major theoretical perspectives are social cohesion, cognitive development, motivational enhancement, and individual accountability.

The social cohesion suggests that cooperative learning promotes positive relationships among students, which can improve their academic performance. When students work together in a supportive and collaborative environment, they are more likely to feel connected to their peers and motivated to succeed. Social cohesion is fostered through positive interdependence, which means that students perceive that their success is linked to the success of their peers. This creates a sense of shared responsibility and encourages students to work together to achieve their goals.

The cognitive development presumes that cooperative learning provides opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking. By working together to solve complex problems, students can develop their cognitive abilities and deepen their understanding of the subject matter. Cognitive development is fostered through cognitive elaboration, which means that students actively process and elaborate on new information through discussion and interaction with others.

Another perspective is motivational enhancement which indicates that cooperative learning can enhance students' motivation to learn by providing opportunities for them to take ownership of their learning and to feel a sense of accomplishment. When students work together to achieve a common goal, they are more likely to be motivated to succeed. Motivational enhancement is fostered through positive interdependence and individual accountability, which means that students are held accountable for their contributions to the group's success.

The last one is individual accountability which shows that cooperative learning can promote individual accountability by requiring each student to contribute to the group's success. When students are held accountable for their contributions, they are more likely to take their responsibilities seriously and to work hard to achieve their goals. Individual accountability is fostered through both positive interdependence and the use of group rewards and recognition. Some examples of application of cooperative learning are presented in Table 1. It depicts how these theoretical perspectives can be applied to cooperative learning in different subject areas. There are other figures have contributed to the development and understanding of cooperative learning. For example, Aronson is known for his work on the jigsaw technique, which involves dividing students into small groups to learn and teach each other about different aspects of a topic. Slavin has developed a number of cooperative learning models, including the STAD (Student Teams Achievement Divisions) and TGT (Teams-Games-Tournaments) models. Johnson and Johnson have developed the Cooperative Learning Model, which emphasizes positive interdependence, individual accountability, and face-to-face interaction.

Table 1. Some theoretical perspectives applied to cooperative learning

Theoretical Perspective	Key Principles	Application in Different Subject Areas
Social Cohesion	Positive interdependence promotes cooperation and shared success	Group projects, peer editing, collaborative writing assignments
Cognitive Development	Active engagement and interaction promote learning and retention of information	Group discussions, role-playing activities, problem-solving tasks
Motivational Enhancement	Intrinsic motivation and self-determination promote engagement and investment in learning	Student choice in group formation, opportunities for self-reflection and evaluation
Individual Accountability	Accountability for individual contributions promotes responsibility and effort	Group quizzes, peer evaluations, group rewards and recognition

3. The Significance of Cooperative Learning

3.1. Give Play to the Main Role of Students

In traditional teaching, teachers talk and students listen, and the cooperation between teachers and students is also the question and answer between teachers and students. Students are regarded as the containers of knowledge, and their thinking runs under the guidance of teachers from beginning to end. The application of cooperative learning makes English classroom embody two main bodies of teaching. At this time, the teacher is the organizer of classroom learning, and only explains the basic knowledge. The question-and-answer practice between teachers and students is just to make the teacher understand the students' understanding and application of the language, so as to play an exemplary role for the students' practice.

3.2. Cultivate Students' Self-study Ability

In order to have a better performance than others in class, students often consciously and seriously preview the dialogue in the new class, so as to be able to read the text. When you encounter words and sentence patterns you can't understand, try to solve them yourself. For example, students communicate with each other, consult teachers and students, look up dictionaries and so on.

3.3. Promote Students to Help Each Other and Improve Together

English group cooperative learning transforms students from onlookers into participants. It advocates that in the process of group learning, students who have mastered certain knowledge and skills should teach them to other members of the group, so as to achieve the purpose of "everyone teaches me, and I teach everyone". As a lecturer, in order to teach clearly and thoroughly, students must carefully read, analyze and process the materials they have learned, which objectively improves their own mastery of the knowledge they have learned.

3.4. Improve Students' Thinking Level

Cooperative learning provides students with more opportunities to speak English. It gives all students a chance to participate in activities, and even those who are introverted and reluctant to speak are willing to talk. For example, when asking the group to make as many sentences as possible, students will always think positively and strive to innovate and surpass.

3.5. Cultivate Students' Organizational Ability

Due to the different learning levels of cooperative learning group members, the sentence patterns of dialogue practice are also difficult and easy. In the process of organizing dialogue practice, who asks who answers, who speaks first, who speaks last, students need to make

timely and proper arrangements and adjustments according to the actual situation. All these work is the cultivation and exercise of students' organizational ability.

4. Applications of Cooperative Learning in an English Classroom

4.1. The Application in English Listening Teaching

Learning English is for communication, and listening is the foundation of communication. Students can only communicate better if they have good listening skills. In traditional English classrooms, teachers train students' listening skills by playing listening materials repeatedly and checking the answers. However, this single teaching method is difficult to stimulate students' interest in learning, activate their enthusiasm and initiative, and the teaching effect is not ideal. Under this teaching mode, students learn passively, lack interest, often lose focus in class, and have low learning efficiency and quality. The application of cooperative learning in English teaching can change this teaching situation, improve classroom teaching efficiency and teaching quality.

In English teaching, it is difficult for teachers to have the energy and time to take care of every student, and they cannot grasp all students' mastery of knowledge in a timely manner. In cooperative learning, teachers can first clarify the learning tasks, propose the key points and requirements of assessment, let students know what to do, and then based on students' learning situations, and considering factors such as the number of students and seating arrangements, divide students into reasonable groups for small group cooperative learning. After listening to the recording, the teacher should give students sufficient discussion time, allowing each student to have a chance to speak. In the process of group discussion and communication, the group leader should pay attention to each group member and mobilize their enthusiasm for participating in the discussion and communication. After the internal discussion and communication of the group, the groups should communicate with each other, share with each other, achieve a collision of various thoughts, diverge students' thinking, promote students' thinking development, and improve their English learning ability.

After the inter-group communication, the teacher can replay the listening material and provide each group with the opportunity to supplement. After each group completes the supplement, the teacher can announce the correct answers, guide the group members to conduct self-evaluation and inter-group evaluation. After self-evaluation and inter-group evaluation, the teacher should conduct an evaluation and praise the excellent performance of the groups. The establishment of learning groups can be long-term to enhance students' sense of honor, motivate them to strive for the honor of the group, and continuously improve their academic performance.

4.2. The Application in English Speaking Instruction

English speaking ability refers to the ability to express one's thoughts and emotions in English to achieve the purpose of communication. Speaking is an important aspect of English learning, and the ability to express oneself orally is a basic skill that students should possess because effective communication relies on oral expression. The quality of students' English speaking abilities directly affects their ability to learn English.

The new curriculum standards require students to express their personal views and opinions on given topics and engage in simple communication and interaction using spoken language. To improve students' oral expression abilities, teachers need to create more opportunities for students to speak English. Currently, students are afraid to use English to express themselves because they fear making mistakes. Some students study diligently and have good grades in English, but they have difficulty breaking through in speaking. To change this situation, teachers can organize students to engage in cooperative learning. For example, teachers can provide

given topics or assign corresponding learning tasks to guide students in discussing and communicating with each other, thus creating opportunities for students to practice speaking English and continuously improve their speaking abilities.

4.3. The Application in English Reading Instruction

Reading instruction is an essential component of English teaching and has a significant impact on developing and improving students' reading comprehension abilities. It not only improves students' ability to acquire information but also lays a solid foundation for more in-depth English learning and application. However, there are still many drawbacks in current English reading instruction. For example, the teaching model is too single and fails to take into account students' individual differences, resulting in top students feeling unfulfilled while struggling students are left behind. The teacher dominates the classroom and does not fully tap into the subjective initiative of students, making it difficult to have equal dialogues between teachers and students. Reading instruction mainly emphasizes independent learning, with little interactive activity, which makes it hard to achieve collective progress.

Applying cooperative learning to English reading instruction enables students to complete reading tasks together. During cooperative learning, students can first express their opinions and ideas within their group and then each group can elect a representative to speak in front of the whole class. After all groups have spoken, the teacher can organize students to evaluate and select the winning group and reward them accordingly. For example, teachers can first let students discuss and communicate in groups, understand the content and English culture contained in the text. Based on the full discussion and communication among students, the teacher can organize students to hold an "English Debate" to allow students to fully express their views and opinions and improve their English reading ability. In this way, students can fully tap into their personal learning potential, truly participate in the learning process, attach importance to this course from a mental perspective, and inevitably achieve good learning results. During the discussion and communication process, teachers should encourage students to use English to improve their English expression and application abilities.

4.4. The Application in English Writing Instruction

The level of English writing ability reflects students' overall English proficiency. However, in English teaching, writing instruction has not received the attention it deserves, and students' writing ability has consistently failed to meet expectations. The traditional method of English writing instruction generally involves teachers first teaching composition methods, then assigning topics, and students completing the assignments within the designated time in or outside of class, followed by the teacher grading and commenting on the work. This traditional writing instruction model places more emphasis on writing results than on the writing process, which not only takes up more time but also has low efficiency, and students lack interpersonal communication during writing, which makes them lose interest in English writing.

The current English curriculum standards advocate for "organically combining English teaching with emotional education, creating various cooperative learning activities, promoting mutual learning and mutual assistance among students, experiencing a sense of collective honor and achievement, and developing a spirit of cooperation." Obviously, the traditional writing instruction method is far from meeting these requirements and needs to be reformed.

In cooperative learning, different members have different viewpoints, and everyone's viewpoints can be mutually integrated to better improve writing ideas. During the writing process, students can first discuss and communicate within their group, determine their arguments, and build the writing framework before proceeding with the actual writing. After completing the writing, students should return to their group for discussion, mutual evaluation, and mutual revision. The process of mutual revision among students is also a process of mutual

learning, which not only helps them to identify their own problems but also allows them to learn from the strengths of others.

5. Strategies to Enhance the Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning

5.1. Scientific Group Establishment

The formation of study groups is the premise of cooperative learning activities. Teachers should carefully study and design the groups of students, so that the overall level of each group is basically the same, so as to ensure that each group carries out fair competition. Groups generally follow the principle of "heterogeneity within groups, homogeneity between groups" and are composed of 4-6 people.

The grouping is not only required to start from the age characteristics and thinking characteristics of students, but also requires reasonable differences in gender, personality characteristics, ability tendency, learning level, family background, social background and other aspects of the group members, so as to give play to their strengths and advantages in learning. After the group is established, the members of each group must be required to love each other, honesty, democracy and equality, reflecting the group strength and spirit.

5.2. Clarify the Goals and Responsibilities

Clear learning objectives and division of responsibilities are the key elements of group cooperative learning. In the process of cooperative learning, each member should have clear cooperative learning objectives and specific division of responsibilities. Only when the division of labor is clear and the responsibility lies with the person, can all team members participate in the project, understand their respective roles and master their assigned tasks, so that the cooperative learning can be carried out orderly and effectively.

It is worth reminding here that the goal of "group cooperative learning" is the learning goal jointly established by the members of the group and the direction of the group's joint efforts. This requires group members not only to strive for the realization of personal goals, but also to work together to help other group members to achieve the expected cooperative learning goals.

5.3. Cultivate Team Spirit and Cooperation Skills

Cultivating team consciousness and cooperation skills of group members is the key point of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is not a kind of individual learning behavior, but a collective behavior. In order to achieve the common learning goal, each member needs to have enough teamwork awareness and cooperation skills. That is, group members must understand each other, trust each other, and often communicate effectively; Members should not only be responsible for their own learning, but also for the learning of other students in the group, to help and support each other, form a strong sense of collective responsibility, and properly solve various conflicts that may occur, to build a harmonious, friendly close partnership.

Cultivating team consciousness and cooperation skills of team members mainly includes: mutual trust, solidarity and mutual help awareness and skills; the awareness and skill to express oneself actively; learn the awareness and skills of group discussion; respect the awareness and skills of others to speak; awareness and skill to deal with disputes in a friendly manner.

6. Conclusion

Cooperative learning teaching mode is of great significance to the learning and growth of students at all stages. Under the guidance of this teaching mode, students can complement each other's advantages and promote each student to face learning with a positive attitude. But all these advantages are based on teachers' effective implementation of group cooperative

learning, which requires us to keep up with the latest pace of cooperative learning research while constantly exploring and summarizing truly effective cooperative learning, pay close attention to its latest results, and link cooperative learning with the frontier of development. So as to guide English learners to improve their language ability and English classroom teaching.

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