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A Review of Cooperative Learning in EFL Classroom

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Abstract: This paper reviews the literature on the effects of cooperative learning (CL) among students and teachers. The purpose of this paper is to find out the effectiveness of cooperative learning in helping to improve students' academic performance, as well as the impact of the implementation of CL on students' and teachers' attitudes and on students' anxiety, motivation, and interest. Many studies have found that CL is an effective teaching method worldwide in the 21st century. In these studies, researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data by using various instruments, such as experiments, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, and they applied different methods to analyze data, including theory analysis, thematic analysis, descriptive and inferential analysis. Findings from the reviewed research showed that the use of the CL can help students improve their academic performance, and most students and teachers showed positive attitudes towards the implementation of CL. In addition, using CL in English classrooms had also been found to help students reduce anxiety and develop motivation and interest. In China's English classes, compared with cooperative learning, the traditional English teaching focuses more on competitive and individualistic learning. Based on the results of previous literature studies, the researcher suggests that China's teachers can consider to apply the CL technique in English classes, which may improve students' academic performance and attitudes.

Keywords: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, English teaching method.

1.   Introduction

Cooperative learning is regarded as an effective teaching method and has been widely used worldwide. American scholar Vermette (1998) believed that cooperative learning is the most important and successful model of education reform in recent decades. According to many previous research findings, a lot of students had made great progress by the use of cooperative learning, and most of the students expressed that the implementation of cooperative learning made their learning easy and pleasant, and greatly improved their learning ability.

Although the theory of cooperative learning was introduced to China in the late 1980s, it has not received the attention it deserves. Furthermore, China's Ministry of Education promulgated the Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Trial) in 2001, which clearly stipulated that education in China must develop students' ability to cooperate actively. However, the practical effect of cooperative learning in China is not good, and its value has not been recognized by most schools. Actually, in China, cooperative learning faces huge challenges in practice, mainly because traditional teaching methods still play a leading role in China's classrooms, including the teaching of Egnlish as a Foreign Language (EFL). This traditional instruction emphasizes competition rather than cooperation. As a result, most teachers and students in China often show a preference for traditional teacher-centered methods, and some of them even tend to resist the

application of learner-centered cooperative teaching methods.

Unfortunately, according to the 2019 English Proficiency Index released by the Swedish educational institution EF, it showed the English proficiency of 100 non-English speaking countries and regions. Among them, China ranked 40th and belonged to the middle level, and there had been little progress in the past decades. Therefore, Chinese traditional English teaching methods can no longer meet the modern educational requirements, and English teaching reform is imperative. Johnson and Johnson (1999) put forward a statement, cooperative learning is more beneficial than other types of learning such as competitive learning and individualistic learning. Based on the advantages of CL, researchers strongly recommend that it should be used in China's English classrooms, because it can break the rigid classroom teaching model in the past and eliminate the disadvantages of traditional teaching to a certain extent, thereby improving students' academic performance. All in all, the cooperative learning method is not only a trend but also a necessary direction for future teaching in English language teaching. In order to understand the meaning of cooperative learning and how to implement the use of cooperative learning, the researcher decides to conduct this study.

2.   Literature Review

2.1   Definition of Cooperative Learning

Slavin (1990) regarded cooperative learning as a "teaching model" in which students studied in groups and were evaluated by the performance of the whole team. And Kagan (1994) described cooperative learning as a community activity in which learning was carried out through the exchange of information. Within this framework, team members are responsible for their own knowledge building and facilitating the learning of other team members. Cooperative learning in student-centered teaching techniques has been seen as an effective means of increasing learner retention, building communication and social skills, and developing students' critical thinking abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan,1994).

2.2   Characteristics of Cooperative Learning

Johnson and Johnson (1994) outlined five characteristics of cooperative learning:

Positive interdependence

Positive interdependence makes people work together for goals and care for each other's learning. In a word, each member of the team is responsible for the group's success and has his or her fair share of the work.

Face-to-face verbal interaction

To provide abundant verbal, face-to-face interaction, where learners gathered together to discuss their assignment. Such a close distance allows them to communicate easily and friendly.

Individual accountability

Each student has the responsibility to perform the tasks assigned to him or her. All members are aware that everyone has a role to play in completing the activities. There are a number of ways of accomplishing individual accountability; For example, in a group assignment paper, each member signs his or her own completed part.

Group processing

Throughout the activity, group members are aware of their learning at the metacognitive level. Group processing provides students with the opportunity to give and receive feedback, and improves the skills of each group member. Students can learn a lot explicitly by cooperating with others.

Social skills

It is important for students to have enough social skills, which include leadership, communication, trust, and conflict resolution skills so that they can cooperate effectively. Group learning activities provide opportunities for communication and interaction among members. Leadership, decision-making, and conflict management are integral parts of group work, and teachers should encourage students to use these skills in the classroom.

2.3 Cooperative Learning Methods

There are many cooperative learning activities, each cooperative method has its own characteristics and applicability to different curriculum areas. EFL teachers should choose appropriate cooperative learning methods and apply them to the classroom to make full use of them. Kagan (1994) and Slavin (1995) pointed out that some of these methods have been successfully applied in the classroom, such as 'Round Table', 'Jigsaw', and 'Think-Pair-Share'. According to Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000), the modern cooperative learning methods in the table are as follows:

Table 1: Modern cooperative learning methods

Researcher/ Developer	Date	Method
Johnson & Johnson	Mid 1970s	Learning Together (LT)
DeVries & Edwards	Early 1970s	Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT)
Sharan & Sharan	Mid 1970s	Group Investigation (GI)
Johnson & Johnson	Mid 1970s	Constructive Controversy
Aronson & Associates	Late 1970s	Jigsaw Procedure
Slavin & Associates	Late 1970s	Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD)
Cohen	Early 1980s	Complex Instruction
Slavin & Associates	Early 1980s	Team Assisted Instruction (TAI)
Kagan	Mid 1980s	Cooperative Learning structures
Stevens, Slavin & Associates	Late 1980s	Cooperative Integrated Reading & Composition (CIRC)
Kagan	Late 1980s	Inside-Outside Circle
Kagan	Early 1990s	Three-Step Intervie

3. Discussion

Some surveys indicate that the second language/foreign language acquisition model supports cooperative learning. This paper aims to provide information related to cooperative learning based on the literature review of other scholars' previous research. Cooperative learning has been used for decades and is considered to be an effective teaching method to improve students' academic performance. A list of studies related to CL is included in this article as follows:

Table 2: Current studies related to CL

No	References	Research Title	Methodology	Findings
1	DEMİREL (2019)	Cooperative Learning in EFL Classes: A Comparative Study on Vocabulary Teaching	Experiment	There is a significant difference between the experimental and the control group in favor of the experimental group.

2	Alrayah (2018)	The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning Activities in Enhancing EFL Learners' Fluency	Mix method (experiment and interview)	The result shows that there is a statistically significant correlation between cooperative learning activities and the improvement of English learners' oral fluency.
3	Fekri (2016)	Investigating the Effect of Cooperative Learning and Competitive Learning Strategies on the English Vocabulary Development of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners	Experiment	There is a significant difference between the two experimental groups and the control group, but the experimental group taught through the cooperative learning method performs better than the experimental group taught by competitive learning instruction.
4	Wei & Tang (2015)	Cooperative Learning in English Class of Chinese Junior High School	Mix method (experiment,question naire and interview)	The cooperative learning method can certainly improve students' academic achievements compared with the traditional English teaching.
5	Al-Tamimi& Attamimi (2014)	Effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing speaking skills and attitudes towards learning English	Mix method (experiment and questionnaire)	The experimental group shows a significant improvement in speaking skills after using the CL technique, while the control group using the traditional method has no significant difference before and after the test. Meanwhile, students in the experimental group have a more positive attitude towards CL than the control group.
6	Er & AtaÇ, (2014).	Cooperative learning in ELT classes: The attitudes of students towards cooperative learning in ELT classes	Mix method (questionnaire and Interview)	There are significant differences between male and female students in cooperative learning and individual learning. It turns out that boys are more likely to study alone than girls.
7	Ning & Hornby (2014)	The impact of cooperative learning on tertiary EFL learners' motivation	Experiment	Participants in the intervention group significantly improve their intrinsic motivation, while the control group does not show any significant improvement.
8	Celik, Aytın & Bayram, (2013)	Implementing cooperative learning in the language classroom: opinions of Turkish teachers of English	Focus group interviews	Although teachers believe that group learning is beneficial, the standardized EFL curriculum and students' attitude towards cooperative learning have caused

				difficulties for Turkish learners to implement this method.
9	Kupczynski, Mundy, Goswami, & Meling (2012)	Cooperative Learning in Distance Learning: A Mixed Methods Study.	Mix method (survey and questionnaire)	No significant differences are found in the quantitative paradigm. However, in the qualitative paradigm, there are some differences. 98.82% of the comments are concerned with brain-storming, collaboration, communication, engagement, feedback, participation, and quality of learning.
10	Talebi & Sobhani (2012)	**The Impacts of Cooperative Learning on Oral Proficiency**	Mix method (experiment and interview)	The oral performance of the experimental group at the end of the course is better than the control group, which means that cooperative learning methods can improve learners' oral proficiency.

DEMİREL (2019) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of cooperative learning and traditional method in terms of vocabulary achievement. The researcher used an experiment as their method of research. Participants were 36 freshmen at Selcuk University School of Foreign Languages in the 2007-2008 Academic Year, and they were randomly divided into two groups, 18 students in the experimental group received cooperative learning methods, while the other 18 students in the control group got traditional teaching methods. The instruments of the study included a pretest, a posttest, 8 reading texts, worksheets, posters, and quizzes. The collected data in this study were the scores of the pre-test and the post-test, and the data used t-test statistics, including independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test for analysis through SPSS. The findings of the study show that the experimental group of students who received the cooperative learning method have better vocabulary test results than other students who had been taught by traditional methods.

A study was carried out by Alrayah (2018) to explore the effectiveness of cooperative learning activities in improving oral English fluency among students at the Ottoman Islamic University of Sudan. This study used a mixed-method, including experiment and interview. Participants were 48 first year-students, they were assigned to experimental and control groups. The researcher collected data by recording interviews for testing fluency and analyzed data by using descriptive and inferential statistics methods in SPSS. The result shows that the average scores of the two groups have no significant difference in the pre-test, but in the post-test, the average score has a statistically significant difference for the experimental group. In other words, cooperative learning activities have improved oral fluency for these first-year students.

Fekri in 2016 conducted a study to examine cooperative and competitive learning methods on the acquisition of English vocabulary achievement by Iranian EFL intermediate learners. The author applied an experiment design, the instruments were an Oxford Placement Test and vocabulary tests including pretest and posttest. Respondents were 45 intermediate learners who were randomly chosen from four language institutes in Tehran, Iran, and they were equally divided into three groups: one control group and two experimental groups. One experimental group was taught by cooperative learning, the other experimental group was taught by competitive learning, and the control group was taught by the traditional teaching method. The data were collected from the results of an Oxford Placement Test and vocabulary tests, and the data were analyzed by using one-way ANOVA and independent sample t-test. The findings of this study

reveal that both cooperative and competitive learning methods are effective in English vocabulary performance for Iranian EFL intermediate students. But, the experimental group through cooperative learning instruction shows greater progress than the experimental group by the use of competitive learning strategy.

Wei1 and Tang (2015) conducted a study in a Chinese junior high school to introduce the discovery that implementing cooperative learning methods can enhance students' English academic performance and increase students' interest and change their attitudes in learning English. In this study, the method used was a mixed-method, including the experiment, questionnaire, and interview. Respondents were 104 students. 53 students were assigned as the control class, including 25 girls and 28 boys, and 51 students were assigned as the experimental class, including 24 girls and 27 boys. The data were collected from the pre-test and post-test, the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire, and interview. The data were conducted by the theory analysis and descriptive analysis, including the highest, lowest, and average scores, and the portion of students with scores above 90 and 125. The results of the experiment show that the students in the experimental class have greater progress than the students in the control group. Before the test, the students in the experimental class and the control group performed almost the same, 18 students in the experimental class failed the test. After the test, only 7 students in the experimental class failed the test, and even the scores of these 7 students improved a lot. The findings from the questionnaire and interview are about students' views on the pros and cons of CL. The advantages of CL can stimulate students' interest, promote students' participation, and cultivate students' self-confidence. However, its shortcomings might lead to decentralized responsibilities, unclear goals, and lack of independent learning time.

Al-Tamimi and Attamimi (2014) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning in helping Yemeni university students improve their English speaking skills and attitudes. This research applied a quasi-experimental design including sixty undergraduates who studied in the first year of the English Department at Hadhramout University, Yemen. The data were collected from oral tests with pretest and posttest, and five Likert scale - questionnaires before and after the experiment. The data were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistical methods including mean scores, standard deviations, paired sample t-test, and "d" effect size. The research results show that there is a significant improvement in the students' oral skills and attitudes after the use of cooperative learning instruction.

A study was conducted by Er & AtaÇ (2014) to investigate the University prep school ELT students' attitudes towards cooperative learning. This research used questionnaires and interview methods, and their participants were 166 and 16 respectively. The data were collected from a questionnaire and the data were analyzed by using the descriptive method. The results of the questionnaire survey show that students are in a strong position in cooperative learning, but they claim the negative aspects of this method in interviews. Although they talk about the benefits and gains of cooperation, most male students worry about the negative effects of cooperation.

This study was conducted by Ning & Hornby (2014) to investigate the effect of cooperative learning on the motivation of college English learners in a university of China. The study used experiment method involving 100 respondents, who were randomly assigned as the intervention group (N = 52) and the other as the comparison group (N = 48), and adopted the LLOS (Language Learning Orientations Scale) to measure six aspects of learning motivation: intrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation. The data were collected from language learning orientations scale (LLOS) contained pretest and posttest, and the data were analyzed by t-test, effect sizes, and one-way ANCOVAs. The findings of this study are that the intervention group using the CL method for teaching has more intrinsic motivation than the comparison group guided by the traditional method, although the difference is only statistically significant. In addition, in the other five aspects of motivation, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

There was a study by Celik, Aytın & Bayram (2013) . The purpose was to investigate Turkish English teachers' views on cooperative learning. This study adopted focus group interviews to ask participants' experiences and understand

their views. The participants were fourteen English language teachers with different levels of experience from a famous university in the eastern Black Sea region of Turkey. The collected data came from participants' responses in the interview, and then, the data were conducted by a thematic analysis. It can be seen from the results that the participants have a good understanding of the overall concept of cooperative learning, and they generally believe that cooperative activities are beneficial to foreign language classes. However, due to standardized courses, students' attitudes and other classroom problems may pose challenges.

Kupczynski, Mund, Goswami and Meling conducted a study at a Hispanic-Serving Institution in 2012 to compare the effectiveness of online CL strategies in discussion forums with traditional online forums. They used both quantitative and qualitative methods such as survey and questionnaire. The study sample were 56 graduate student participants, including 35 females and 21 males. The collected data were from the survey responses about two open-ended questions, and the data used the qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis including descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA. The results of quantitative data reveal that there is no significant difference in student success between CL and Traditional formats, and the findings of qualitative data show that students in the cooperative learning groups find more learning benefits than the Traditional group.

Talebi and Sobhani (2012) conducted a study to explore whether the use of cooperative learning methods can significantly improve the oral English proficiency of English learners. They combined the two methods of experiment and interview, which consisted of 40 male and female students enrolled in a speaking course at the IELTS Center institute in Mashhad, Iran. Participants were divided into the experimental group and control group. In the experimental group, the teacher adopted cooperative learning techniques, such as Think-Pair-Share. The data were collected from IELTS sample tests, including the pretest and posttest, and the data were analyzed by using descriptive and t-test statistics. The result shows that in the pretest, the oral skills of the two groups are the same. But in the post-test, the average oral score of the experimental group is significantly higher than that of the control group. In other words, the implementation of the cooperative learning method can effectively improve the learners' spoken proficiency.

4. Conclusion

In summary, cooperative learning implementation is very important in the EFL classroom. In order to prove that CL is an effective teaching method to improve student performance, researchers continue to study its effectiveness.

According to DEMİREL (2019), there is a significant difference in favor of the experimental group, in other words, students who are taught by the cooperative learning method score significantly higher than those who are taught by the traditional method, and findings from Alrayah's (2018) study also show that cooperative learning activities have successfully improved students' oral fluency. Besides, some researchers have investigated students' attitudes after using cooperative technique in EFL classes. Er and Atac's (2014) study was carried out to examine EFL students' views on utilizing CL, and they were pleasantly surprised to find that the respondents can point out the advantages and limitations of CL. Most students prefer studying in cooperative learning environments, as they think that cooperative learning methods can improve their motivation, creativity, and productivity when different perspectives converge. The negative sides are the organization of the groups and the attitudes of the group members while studying on a task. Another study conducted by Celik, Aytın & Bayram (2013) find that teachers express positive support for the use of CL, but standardized EFL curriculum and students' attitudes towards CL make this method difficult to implement. In addition, Celik, Aytın & Bayram (2013) further proposed some drawbacks in implementing the cooperative learning method, for example, students keep speaking their native languages, group work is difficult to monitor and not all students participate equally.

Although the results of these articles show that cooperation is an effective teaching method to improve students' performance, its implementation still faces some challenges: First of all, a big class size makes it difficult to carry out group work, as the classes are very crowded. Secondly, a standardized curriculum has been considered to have a strong deterrent effect. Thirdly, students' English level is not enough to carry out such a cooperative activity in class, which

leads to some students' resistance to the idea of cooperative learning. Finally, the traditional teaching methods still play a dominant role in the EFL classroom.

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