

The Application of Cooperative Learning in Primary School English Teaching in China

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Staci Strobl". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

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iii

Abstract

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL PAGE	i
TITLE PAGE	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	
Definition of Terms	2
Purpose of the Study	2
Significance of the Study	3
Methodology	3
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	3
The Concept of Cooperative Learning	3
The Necessity of Cooperative Learning	4
Implementation of Cooperative Learning	8
Problems of Implementation of Cooperative Learning	11
Summary	12
III. CONCLUSION, AND REFERENCES	12

Chapter I Introduction

Cooperative learning is a teaching theory and strategy. The definitions of cooperative learning by domestic and foreign experts and scholars are not consistent, but the connotation of cooperative learning can be understood from it. “The cooperative learning proposed by the educator David Koonts has been applied in teaching practice since the 1980s. It is of great help to academically feel the classroom learning atmosphere and stimulate students' learning initiative” (Deng Shengjie, 2019). Therefore, in the article, the writer would like to study the following aspects: First, what is cooperative learning? Second, what are the advantages and disadvantages of cooperative learning in primary school English teaching? Third, how best can teachers be educated or trained to use the technique? Fourth, what problems may encounter in implementing the technique in their classrooms to these challenges?

Statement of the Problem

Although a large number of primary schools in China have carried out the exploration of the English classroom group cooperative learning model, the challenges in implementation have not been adequately documented. All in all, it is necessary to better understand cooperative learning in primary school English classrooms. When there is a problem, the teacher directly organizes the students to have a group discussion. This situation provides students with the opportunity to think independently and learn independently. The paper will start with a description of cooperative learning, and its advantages and disadvantages, as understood in the field of English language education. Then, the following research issues will be explored:

1. The problem of implementing cooperative learning in primary school English classroom in

China

2. How to optimize the ability of English teachers in China to implement cooperative learning strategies

Definition of Terms

Study exhibition: The study exhibition is a study group. They are assigned together. In response to the questions raised by the teachers, communicate and discuss with each other. Finally, show the results of the question to other students and teachers.

Cold-field group: A cold field group refers to a group that everyone looks at each other when discussing a problem. At the same time, no one is talking and the scene is embarrassing.

Purpose of the Study

The important goal of this research is to explore the implementation of cooperative learning strategies in primary school classrooms. The research has the following sub-goals:

1. The concept of cooperative learning: What is cooperative learning?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of cooperative learning?
3. The problem of implementing cooperative learning in primary school classrooms.
4. How to implementation of optimize cooperative learning.

The results of this research will be valuable for future English teachers or those who have become English teachers and can help them improve classroom efficiency.

Significance of the Study

Considering that English plays a vital role in education in China today, the results of this research will be beneficial to the practical use of this educational teaching. Whether for new teachers or experienced teachers, cooperative learning is a very important tool. Its use can improve the efficiency of English teaching. Therefore, this study analyzes the problems in implementing group cooperative learning in primary school English classrooms and corresponding strategies that can grow its use. The hope is to strengthen teachers' understanding and use of group cooperative learning.

Methodology

The main research methods of this research are literature review and self-exposition. Through reading a large number of related articles, I will describe the concept of cooperative learning and its application mode in primary school English classrooms, combining this with my own practical experience, summarizing the current problems of implementation of the technique in primary school English classrooms in China, and proposing the strategies to solve those problems. In addition, I will explore how to optimize cooperative learning strategies to make English classroom more efficient. In conducting my literature review, I used the following keyword searches in academic sources databases: "Cooperative learning,"

Chapter II Review of Literature

"The cooperative learning proposed by the educator David Koonts has been applied in teaching practice since the 1980s. It is of great help to academically feel the classroom learning atmosphere and stimulate students' learning initiative (*Deng Shengjie, 2019*). Cooperative learning

is a teaching theory and strategy. The definitions of cooperative learning by domestic and foreign experts and scholars are not consistent, but the connotation of cooperative learning can be understood from it. "Cooperative learning is a kind of learning mode which is processed in groups. Three kinds of learning are included: interaction between teachers and students, interaction among students and interaction among teachers" (Wang Juan, 2012). I think the most important form of cooperative learning in the classroom is the use of group activities. In the classroom, teachers often engage in group activities to advance learning content. Through group activities, students can better practice, and both feel and embody the knowledge they have learned.

The Concept of Cooperative Learning

Important representative of cooperative learning, the Johnson brothers of the University of Minnesota believe: "Cooperative learning is a way of using small groups in teaching to enable students to carry out learning activities together to maximize the learning of themselves and others" (Wang Tan, 2001: 35). Effective cooperative learning includes at least the following five key elements: active interdependence, simultaneous interaction, individual responsibility, interpersonal and group learning skills, reflection and planning (Balloch, 2015). Chinese scholars have also defined on the basis of learning from Western scholars. For example, Wang Tan believes: "Cooperative learning aims to promote mutual assistance and cooperation among students in heterogeneous groups to achieve common learning goals, and is based on the overall performance of the group. The teaching strategy system" (Wang Tan, 2001: 48). The author believes that cooperative learning involves heterogeneity in its basic organizational form, based on collective teaching and individual independent learning, relying on the interaction and cooperation of members in the group to achieve the established learning goals, so that each member can develop and evaluate the overall performance of the group Standard learning activities.

The Necessity of Cooperative Learning

Cooperation and competition are situations often encountered in people's social life. A model of cooperation and competition can also be created in classroom learning, which can maximize the enthusiasm of students in learning, and cultivate students to unity and support of each other. Competition can further stimulate their potential and improve students' learning motivation. Related research in Educational Psychology has shown that "cooperation within a group and the introduction of a competition mechanism between groups have better results". (Deng Shengjie, 2019: 146) This can play a role in comprehensive training of students, especially in the cultivation of skills. Therefore, primary school English teachers can comprehensively apply group cooperative learning by using activities to play a positive role in many aspects. For example, when teaching songs and ballads, students should be involved. For example, groups can compete in English songs to see which group sings the most and best English songs, and then conduct a review to determine the best group. Groups can also compete for spelling English words. The teacher puts out a letter so that each group can quickly spell out new words. These words must contain the letter the teacher just said. According to Zheng Shuzhen said: "For elementary school students, such a requirement is a process in which the brain is stimulated and the learning may be retained." (Zheng Shuzhen and Sheng Qunli, 2002) And Sheng Qunli said: "Elementary English teachers can design many such games and competition activities according to their learning needs. Because the primary school students do not learn many English tasks in each class, doing so would let them better remember content and use this content in the future."(Zheng Shuzhen and Sheng Qunli, 2002)

Advantages of Cooperative Learning

Huang thought that "Cooperative learning activities let students become familiar with each other, especially in a group. When they first start cooperative learning, they often cannot find a

way or how to proceed. However, with the development of cooperative learning, students became more and more familiar with it. The more clearly their respective strengths and weaknesses are, the more quickly they can integrate everyone's resources and make their team more competitive.” (Huang Ronghuai, 1999: 26) In particular, some students with relatively introverted personalities, because of the smaller number of students in the group, are also more able to let go of any fear. This becomes a good exercise for their courage and self-confidence. It gives them the opportunity to speak in the group. In the future, it will be easier for them to stand up and speak bravely in the class. Therefore, through the development of group cooperative learning, students can grow rapidly under the exercise of more abundant and diversified learning tasks and forms of cooperation. Since English is a language, language is used to communicate and convey thoughts and emotions. Through the form of role-playing, the group students can fully cooperate and communicate, which can also improve the cohesion of their group, so that the group students can cooperate more and more. When solving some problems, they are able to show their uniqueness. Their engaged demeanor also enhances their team cohesion and competitiveness. English learning, like other learning, requires students to fully participate and better take initiative. Therefore, he said “group cooperative learning provides students with more opportunities and motivation, and teachers are essential to give full play to their leadership role.”((Huang Ronghuai, 1999: 26))

Group cooperative learning does not simply require teachers to give students every task, but more importantly, lets them discover more resources, share more views, learn more knowledge, and master more learning through group cooperative learning methods. Therefore, it is necessary to increase everyone's enthusiasm for participation on this basis, so that they can be more actively immersed in the primary school English classroom. In Jin's book, she wrote: “In the process of carrying out primary school English classroom teaching activities, the group cooperative learning

mode can provide students with more opportunities to show themselves, avoiding the problem of students to suppressing their desires by not expressing them. Conversely, when students have the opportunity to express themselves, their enthusiasm for active learning will rise, which in turn will increase their interest in English learning.”(Jin Yule, 2005) At the same time, Wang Tan said: “ in the process of group cooperative learning and communication, when students encounter problems, there are differences in the opinions of different students. These personality differences can also stimulate students to be more active in learning by learning from each other's weaknesses, brainstorming, and innovatving solutions.” (Wang Tan, 2002:18) The ability to test questions will also be improved to a certain extent, which is of great effect for students to form good interpersonal relationships, cultivating a good sense of cooperation in communication and cooperation skills. It is an important way to promote the development of students' core literacy in English.

Disadvantages of Cooperative Learning

There are a few problems that one may encounter when using cooperative learning strategies.

First, in the process of teaching the lower grades of elementary school students in primary school English class, because “the students are young, they do not understand the cooperative learning mode of the group, which leads to imbalanced division of labor among the members of the group after the teacher divides them into groups.”(Liang Ruiyi, 2001: 16) It is not clear enough. Many group leaders feel that they do not need to participate in the study and discussion, but supervise other members. And this unclear division of labor within the group may lead to psychological gaps in students, and group cooperative learning will evolve into individual competitive learning, which is not conducive to the cultivation of students’ core English literacy.

Second, in the process of teaching the upper grades of elementary school students in primary school English classroom, the individual differences between students naturally become

more and more obvious. Teachers often ignore the group learning after the process of organizing students around capacity. This has led to some “low-advanced students” who are unwilling to participate in group learning. All group tasks are supported by advanced students, which ultimately leads to increasing differences in the individual level of group members.

Third, individual students may not participate in the discussion. The specific performance is as follows: after the start of “discussion,” some students still focus on their own topics and do not seek the help of the same group of partners. Even some students were in a daze, neither speaking nor listening to others, killing the time for "discussion" by themselves. At this time, teachers often ask the student to participate in the discussion, or ask the group leader to organize, or ask the same group of students to give him help and guidance. At the same time, “discussion” has become a stage for individual outstanding students, that is, one person speaks and five people “look on and watch.” The specific performance is as follows: When answering questions in a group, several students who like to speak in their respective groups express their own opinions on almost every question, while other students only listen. Over time, the number of speakers will decrease. At the same time, the number of students who asked and answered questions during the “study exhibition” has also decreased, and some students have not spoken in class for a long time.

Implementation of Cooperative Learning

Targeted Training for Teachers

Through the analysis of the above problems, it can be seen that if the group cooperative learning model in the actual application process is unreasonable, it affects the development effect of the group cooperative learning. Therefore, it is necessary for English teachers to continuously explore effective applied teaching strategies through practical teaching activities, so as to improve the effectiveness of the application of group cooperative learning in primary school English

classroom teaching. The poor performance of cooperative learning is because teachers lack a correct understanding of it and do not know how to carry out it. Therefore, training in this area is needed. Hao Huiyan said: “First of all, through theoretical learning by reading and engaging in professional development presentations on the subject, teachers can understand the concept of cooperative learning, clarify the concept of cooperative learning, and work to master the implementation and management strategies of cooperative learning.” (Hao Huiyan, 2018) “Secondly, by observing excellent cooperative classrooms, teachers personally experience cooperative learning, understand the basic process of cooperative learning, reflect on their own problems, and understand the timing and specific operation methods of cooperative learning. In addition, the training of teachers should also pay attention to the change to other aspects of their teaching.” (Hao Huiyan, 2018) Cooperative learning puts more emphasis on student subjectivity and student-student interaction. Teachers should change their traditional concepts, define themselves as facilitators and participants in cooperative learning, actively and patiently guide students to cooperate, put themselves on an equal footing with students, and create a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere to facilitate cooperation .

Deliberate Arrangement of Cooperation Group

In the group study mode, the most critical and core thing is to group students in a fair and scientific way. Under normal circumstances, group cooperative learning consists of 4-6 students. (Zhang Hongliang, 2017: 68) The leader of each group is selected by teacher designation or democratic election. The leader is required to have a certain level of coordination and organization skills within the group, and expression skills. The should also have a strong sense of responsibility and collective honor and so on. Each group should strive for relative stability, facilitate systematic evaluation, and then form group cohesion and competitiveness.

Carefully Selecting the Content of Cooperative Learning

For primary school English textbooks, the content of the textbooks is mainly composed of “vocabulary,” “grammar” and “sessions” and “paragraphs.” Primary school English teaching emphasizes the downplay of single vocabulary and grammar teaching. The “Primary School English Curriculum Standards” also point out that it is necessary to “adhere to the practical principles of English teaching and change the tendency to pay too much attention to the explanation and teaching of grammar and vocabulary.” Cooperative learning just conforms to this teaching philosophy.

Teacher's Role in Guidance and Regulation

When the group cooperative learning model is applied to the English classroom teaching in elementary schools, it is also necessary to pay attention to the important role played by teachers in it. They must fully participate in and guide and regulate the entire process of group cooperative learning. First of all, English teachers must clarify the main status of students, realize the importance of themselves as instructors, and surrender some coordination to students, such as cooperation operation procedures, task division, group evaluation standards, etc. Secondly, when actually carrying out group cooperative learning, teachers should fully participate by carefully observing the cooperation of each group member, and promptly discovering problems in the group cooperation process, such as speech hegemony, theme deviations, cold-field groups, etc. And take certain measures. Finally, it is necessary to guide students to reflect, not only self-reflection, but also mutual evaluation of members in the group, and evaluation of the performance of members in group cooperative learning, so as to promote students to become better and better.

Problems of Implementation in Cooperative Learning

Unreasonable Group Division

Although teachers have gradually realized the importance of applying the group cooperative learning model in primary school, they usually adopt random grouping methods to complete corresponding teaching tasks in practice. The disadvantage of grouping is that the average learning level of different groups will be quite different. For example, some groups are assigned to top students, while other groups are mostly academically disadvantaged. In this case, it is not only unfavorable for the group. The internal students learn from each other's strengths, and at the same time it is difficult to give students with learning difficulties the space to speak independently. If things go on like this, the mode of group cooperative learning not only fails to play its due role and value, but also makes the polarization of students' English performance in the class more serious and reduces the efficiency of English teaching.

In view of the unreasonable division of group cooperative learning, teachers can follow the principle of "heterogeneity within the group, and the same quality of the components"(Zhang Hongliang, 2017: 68) to groups, that is, students in a group can be composed of top students and students with learning difficulties, and the comprehensive learning level of different groups are balanced. The division of the group size involves a reasonable allocation according to the actual situation of the students in the class, although generally four to six students (Zhang Hongliang, 2017: 68) are the best. The teacher should try his best to divide the students with certain differences in personality characteristics, English foundation, learning ability, etc. As a group, the teacher must maintain the balance between the groups, so that students can learn from each other's strengths in the group, make progress together, and improve the cohesion of the group.

No Real Substance in Content

The key to the effective application of the group cooperative learning model is that teachers should give students the space to learn independently, so that students can reflect their personal advantages and their own uniqueness in group learning. However, there are still some English teachers who fail to truly understand the connotation of the group cooperative education model. They still use teacher indoctrination as the main body when conducting group discussions. The English teaching is too formal and lacks substantive content and cannot play its role and value in the English classroom.

In view of the lack of substance in group cooperative learning, teachers can solve the problem by optimizing the cooperative content. (Chen Yuling, 2002) Teachers should combine the current status quo of quality education, clarify the roles of teachers and students in the English classroom, and respect the dominant position of students in group cooperative learning. Teachers should also carefully prepare the content of group exploration in combination with the content of the textbooks during the lesson preparation stage, and comprehensively consider the students' basic level and learning ability to ensure that group cooperation plays a role in the English classroom.

Conclusion

In short, in the subject teaching activities of primary school English, teachers should be good at using the method of group cooperative learning, so that students can learn knowledge, master skills, and develop good moral qualities. They can also recognize the importance of rules and let them learn to communicate. Communicate and use English more proficiently to achieve these goals. I hope that the following teaching suggestions made by the author can be relevant to English teachers.

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