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## APPLYING COOPERATIVE LEARNING TO COLLEGE STUDENTS TO ENHANCE THEIR COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

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### ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning has proved to be an effective method for both teachers and students and it has been found to have many positive benefits to foreign language teaching. This paper was aimed at applying cooperative learning to college students for English as a foreign language (EFL). The participants of the study were summer three Art students of Mettu College of Teachers Education. Accordingly, all participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques for the questionnaire and Focus group discussion. Qualitative data were obtained and analyzed qualitatively. The major findings of this study suggested that cooperative learning helped significantly to enhance the college learners' oral communicative skills and their motivation toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Furthermore, the findings revealed students' contradictory views regarding native language use and whether CL could help them improve their language skills. Sometimes, students switched to their native language to clarify points or communicate with group members since, as noted in the observations, a large percentage of language classrooms allowed students to use their native language during group discussion.

**Keywords:** Cooperative Learning, Language Classrooms, communication skills.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st Century, English has become the common international language, the language most frequently used to communicate when two people are not native speakers of the same language. As a result, instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a priority around the globe. But instructional methodologies have not always kept pace with these changing realities. In countries where there is not a surrounding population of active English speakers, the language is still often taught as a traditional classroom subject, similar to math or geography. Technology, however, now offers opportunities for authentic interaction with people from other cultures that can be incorporated into the classroom (Chang & Lehman, 2002).

Learners not only bring their age, gender and culture, but also their own individual approach, talents and interests to the classroom. Laird (2005) refers to learner diversity as an asset to be capitalized on to promote profound, meaningful learning. Cooperative learning has proved to be an effective method for both teachers and students. Cooperative learning activities allow students to have opportunities to practice the knowledge they have learned and to develop social and learning skills (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006). It can also help students develop skills in oral communication. In addition, cooperative learning is a teaching method that offers the opportunity for groups to work interdependently and get feedback from others (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006).

Learners not only bring their age, gender and culture, but also their own individual approach, talents and interests to the classroom. Cooperative Learning allows learners the opportunities to process externally, to work with their peers, and to share responsibility for a task. However, high-ability learners complain about being held back by their slower teammates; low-ability learners complain about being discounted or ignored in group sessions; and resentments emerge when some team members fail to pull their weight. Cooperative learning is set of instructional strategies “which employs small teams of pupils to promote peer interaction and cooperation for studying academic subject and seen as learners diversity as an asset to be capitalized on to promote profound, meaningful learning (Laird, 2005). Johnson & Johnson (1999) contend that Cooperative Learning is “the instructional use of small groups so that students’ work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning”. Therefore, Cooperative Learning conspicuously is not simply putting students together in groups and giving them tasks to do, but an environment in which teachers have to guarantee that the subsequent four elements transpire. Cooperative learning activities allow students to have opportunities to practice the knowledge they have learned and to develop social and learning skills (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006). It can also help students develop skills in oral communication. In addition, cooperative learning is a teaching method that offers the opportunity for groups to work interdependently and get feedback from others (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006). Therefore, it is significant to apply the cooperative learning to College students for English as a foreign language classes.

### Research Questions

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions were set

- a) How often teachers are applying cooperative learning to enhance students’ communication skills in language instruction or not?
- b) How do cooperative learning increase students’ communicative skills?

- c) To what extent the learners give an important value to cooperative learning that happens inside the classroom?

### **Objectives of the Study**

#### ***General Objectives***

The general objective of this is applying cooperative learning to college students to enhance their communicative skills.

#### ***Specific Objectives***

Based upon the main objective, this study is intended to achieve the following specific objectives:

- d) To check up whether teachers are applying cooperative learning to enhance students' communication skills in language instruction or not
- e) To investigate how cooperative learning increase students' communicative skills.
- f) To find out whether the learners give an important value to cooperative learning that happens inside the classroom.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **What is Cooperative Learning?**

Cooperative Learning is defined as a system of learning techniques and concreteteaching, rather than an approach, in which students are active agents in the process of learning through small group structures in order that students can work together to maximize each other's and their own learning (Liang, 2001). Slavin (1995) defined as cooperative learning is a teaching method in which students work in small groups to help one another to learn academic content, and students are expected to discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current knowledge.

### **The Five Elements of Cooperative Learning**

According to Jolliffe (2007) cooperative learning consists of five basic elements: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skill, and group processing. Each of these five elements would be discussed in the following sections.

#### **Positive Interdependence**

Positive interdependence is creating the sense that "we sink or swim together;" group mates learn the assigned material and ensure that all members of the group learn the assigned material. Group members must recognize that they link to each other in such a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds. According to another expert Slavin (1996), the group's success depends on positive interdependence. Strong positive interdependence can make students perceive the need to cooperate. Positive interdependence generally exists when group members promote each other's achievement and believe that through mutual cooperation and effort their goal can best be reached (Carroll & Williams, 2007).

#### **Face-to-Face Interaction**

Face-to-face interaction is defined by Johnson and Johnson (1994), as individuals encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to achieve, complete tasks, and produce in order to reach the group's goals. Face-to-face interaction is a way which through promotive interaction that members become personally committed to each other as well as to their joint goals (Glanz, 2004).

### **Individual Accountability**

Individual accountability is the element that provided for each group member to assess against a standard and hold responsibility for their contribution to achieve goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Johnson and Johnson asserted that the purpose of cooperative learning is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Individual accountability is the key to ensure that each group member is strengthened through group work. The existence of individual accountability lets students have more motivation to learn (Kagan & Kagan, 1998).

### **Interpersonal and Small Group Skill**

The interpersonal and small group skill is about giving constructive feedback, reaching a consensus, and involving every member, which is necessary for effective group functioning (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). When students participate regularly in cooperative activities, all students gain enduring intellectual abilities (Huss, 2006).

### **Group Processing**

Processing means giving members time and a procedure to analyze how well their groups are functioning and using skills. When cooperative learning groups are used, the teacher observes the groups, analyzes the problems they have met, and gives feedback to each group on how well they are working together (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). A clear development process can control over the quality of the work produced. The interaction of the five elements makes cooperative learning able to achieve the learning objectives. The above five key elements of cooperative learning have emerged as critical to actual cooperation, without these elements, cooperation cannot be effectively carried out (Jolliffe, 2007).

### **Cooperative Learning Structures**

Cooperative learning can be used in for any type of assignment that can be given to students in lecture classes, laboratories, or project-based courses. Following are some of the structures that have been used, with some recommendations for how they may be effectively implemented.

### **The Benefits of Collaborative Learning**

According to proponents of collaborative learning, the fact that students are actively exchanging, debating and negotiating ideas within their groups increases students' interest in learning. Importantly, by engaging in discussion and taking responsibility for their learning, students are encouraged to become critical thinkers (Totten, Sills, Digby & Russ, 1989). For collaborative learning to be effective, there should be both "group goals" and "individual accountability" (Slavin, 1989). This means that the collaborative learning task must ensure that every group member has learnt something. Ideally, a collaborative learning task would allow for each member to be responsible for some concept necessary to complete the task. This implies that every group member will learn their assigned concept and will be responsible for explaining/teaching this to other members of the group. As most teachers have discovered, we usually learn more by teaching than we ever learnt as "learners"! Indeed this sentiment is backed up by research - it has been consistently found that students who learn most are those who give and receive elaborated explanations about what they are learning and how they are learning it (Webb, 1985).

## **Benefits of Cooperative Learning**

### ***Enhancing Learners' Cognitive Growth***

Cooperative Learning suggests that learning would be more meaningful if learners should experiment on their own learning instead of listening to the teacher's lectures. Furthermore, conflicts resolution will help promote students' cognitive growth (Murray, 1994). Vygotskian theory highlights that learners' cognition is reinforced when they are in the action of interacting with people in their environment and in cooperation with her/his peers. Therefore, in language learning it is indispensable to create an authentic and communicative environment in which learners can make myriad interactions with different people (Vygotsky, 1978). Eventually, Bandura's (1971) Social Learning theory stresses the importance of modeling and observing the attitudes, behaviors, and emotional reactions of others. Social learning theory explicates human behaviors in term of continuous interaction between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental impacts. Working in teams, consequently, provides learners with a variety of opportunities to learn from each other and to attain a higher cognition.

### **Enhancing Learners' Motivation**

To motivate learners, it is vital to increase learners' self-confidence, satisfy their needs and interests (Nunan and Lamb, 1996) and create a pleasant, relaxing atmosphere in the classroom (Dornyei and Csizer, 1998). In the Cooperative Learning classroom, a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere is formed and the self-esteem is strengthened since Cooperative Learning creates a strong social support system in which learners feel respected and connected to one another (Cohen and Willis, 1985). Teachers function as facilitators and interact with learners while circulating through the class and observing learners' interaction. Anxiety, moreover, is diminished and self-confidence is enhanced since the class attention is not focused on an individual but on a whole group and when an error is made, it becomes a teaching tool rather than a public criticism. Thus, learners feel free to expose their language without hesitation.

### **Enhancing Learners' Interaction**

There are numerous factors influencing interactive process such as motivation, self-esteem, empathy and anxiety (Brown, 2000). Teaching activities, moreover, impact the process. In a Cooperative Learning classroom, learners have chance to learn various social skills, several structures or activities to work together which can maximize the learners' interactions. Subsequent are certain common Cooperative Learning activities:

- **Think-Pair-Share (TPS)** – This is a cooperative learning strategy developed by Lyman in 1978 and can be defined as “a multi-mode discussion cycle in which students listen to a question or presentation, have time to think individually, talk with each other in pairs, and finally share responses with the larger group” . Think-Pair-Share reflects the essential elements for cooperative learning portrayed by Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1991).

### **Enhancing Learners' Achievement**

Research has found out that cooperative learning strategies enhance students' academic achievement. Cooperative learning also has some forms of competition among group members, but these forms of competition are intended to promote cohesiveness among group members reflecting group goals and individual accountability. Group goals and individual

accountability are factors contributing to achievement effects of cooperative learning. Providing students with an incentive to help each other and encourage each other to put forth maximum efforts increases the likelihood that all group members will learn. As well as individual grades and evaluations there is strong proof that group grades and team rewards are most successful for motivation (Slavin, 1995).

## **METHOD**

This research aimed to apply cooperative learning to English teaching for English as a foreign language (EFL) summer three art learners of Mettu Teachers College of Education. Therefore, the qualitative research method was employed in this study with a descriptive research design.

### **Research Site, Sampling, and Participants**

The site of the study was Mettu Teachers College of Education, in oromiyaaa, Ethiopia. The main subjects of this study were summer three Art learners of Mettu Teachers College of Education. The participants were chosen by using census sampling. The aim of this study was not for generalization, it developed deep examinations from a central phenomenon. It is supported by Creswell (2014) and Abrar et al., (2018) who emphasize that qualitative research does not necessarily having a large number of participants. Thus, the third summer students, having the smallest number of Art students were chosen as the participants of this study in order to get closer relationship and deeper information from them.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

### **Findings**

Based on this study, specifically in cooperative learning context, there were many interactive tasks that naturally improved the students' knowledge, language use and social interaction skills which could enhance their communicative skills. The application of CL in EFL classroom in this study was designed by applying cooperative learning activities. Cooperative activities tended to integrate the study of learning material, the language use in communication and create powerful learning opportunities. The findings that supported the questions in this study favored cooperative learning as a powerful instructional method to enhance the students' cooperation in terms of positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, simultaneous interaction and social skills. In a group discussion, team members were assigned to present the material and communicate the discussed subject to the class members in good English. Thus, cooperative learning could achieve the positive effects in language acquisition as well as enhancing motivation toward learning English. Likewise, the low-competence and high-competence students might be hand in hand to display their oral performance. Taken as a whole, the findings of this study revealed some advantages for English language classroom, namely, group work generated interactive language, promoted students' responsibility and autonomy and also group work could be used for individualized instructions.

### **Conclusions**

Cooperative learning is an effective teaching method both for teachers and students. In cooperative groups, students observe they link to each other in such a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds; they do their effort to achieve a common goal. Positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small

group skill and group processing are five key elements of cooperative learning. These elements make cooperative learning to achieve the learning objectives; without these elements, cooperation can't be effectively carried out.

For EFL learners, cooperative learning creates a positive learning environment for students to practice their English. It can help students develop skills in communication and improve their motivation to learn. Cooperative learning also has positive effects on student achievement, increases student relationships and increases self-esteem. These benefits of cooperative learning help EFL learners improve efficiency in their language learning. Cooperative learning is an effective teaching strategy in foreign teaching.

There are varieties of methods can be used to support cooperative learning in the classroom. Each cooperative method has its own characteristics and applicability to different curriculum areas. Speaking, listening, writing, and reading are four basic skills in language learning. According to the characteristics of these four skills, teachers should use the appropriate methods to get the most benefits from cooperative learning.

The success of cooperative learning depends on implementing in the whole process. The expected effect can be reached only when the group size is suitable, group is heterogeneous, teachers and students are aware of their responsibilities and every member has understood the assignment. In addition, individual and group assessment is an important component of cooperating learning application.

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