# Cooperative Learning: An Inclusive Method To Let More Students Produce The Target Language

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the benefits of cooperative learning method in language teaching. The writer starts with the fact that English is a very important language in this era. In the next session, the nature of cooperative learning is presented, completed with the characteristics, which are positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills and group processing.

The application of cooperative learning the language classroom gives some benefits. Two of them are that it is inclusive in that it accepts many different students, from the high achievers to the 'handicapped' ones, from the rich to the poor, from different ethnic groups. They are all accountable. Besides, cooperative learning method also gives more students more opportunities to produce the target language at the same time. Yet, teachers should consider the inappropriateness of the input from the students and gives corrections in the best way.

Key words: cooperative learning, language teaching, inclusive methods

## A. Background

In this globalization era, people are demanded to be able to master English as an international language to exchange all information about knowledge and events that happen around the world. English enables people to communicate with other people coming from other parts of the world. Nowadays, English is greatly exposed through many kinds of media such as television, radios, magazines, internets (in which English is mostly used) and through English courses. That is why people should be able to communicate in English since it plays an important role in the world.

"Communication is the art of transmitting information, ideas, and attitude from one person to another" Emery (Emery, 1989:187) says. If Emery's ideas of communication may be interpreted in this sense, communication means having the ability to express one's ideas, thoughts, feelings, and views to others, having the ability to understand the utterances made by others.

In order to prepare the young people to face the globalization era, the government applies curriculum that is believed to enable the students to really communicate in English. Schools apply a communicative approach in teaching English with the expectation that the teacher will teach English communicatively to make the students use the language in the real life.

Considering that the approach was not very successful, which might be the result of misapplication, competency-based curriculum fills in for the communicative one.

A competency-based curriculum aims at making possible the students to execute certain utterances to transfer information in a natural way. This curriculum is believed to be better than the old one as the students are expected to gain the competencies in each subject, including English.

Whatever the curriculum is, however, if it is not well applied, the result will no be promising, resulting in the fact that the students will not be able to perform well in communication. It needs ways of organizing the class on how to design students' interaction so as to improve the quality of learning and the involvement of them in the practice or production period.

## B. Factors Influencing the Success of Language Learning

There are some factors affecting students to be successful in learning language, one of which is motivation. If a student has a high motivation in learning a language, he will try hard to be able to master the materials given in class. This is in line with what Harmer (1991:3-7) says that the motivation the students bring in the classroom is the biggest single factor affecting their success. It means that the students learning language will get success in whatever condition if they really want to learn. Whether the condition is supporting or not, they will still be motivated in learning the language.

According to Harmer (1991), motivation can be divided into two, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The term extrinsic motivation means that the students learn the language enthusiastically due to factors coming from outside the individuals. Those factors can be the need to pass the exam, the hope of financial reward, or the possibility or future travel.

The term intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, means that the students learn the language enthusiastically because of factors coming from within the individual. Thus, a person might be motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process itself or by the desire to make themselves feel better.

Some researchers and methodologist have come to the view that intrinsic motivation is especially important for encouraging success. Even where the original reason for taking up a language course, for example, is extrinsic, the chances of success will be greatly enhanced if the students come to love the learning process.

Considering the fact that motivation does play a very crucial role in learning a language, efforts to maintain it is highly recommended for everyone involved in language learning. According to Harmer (1991: 53) there are three areas where the teacher's behavior can influence students' continuing participation. They are:

**Goals and goal setting**: it is believed that motivation is closely bound up with a person's desire to achieve a goal. Yet, we have to be sure which goals, long-term or short-term one, can directly influence students' day to day participation.

Long-term goal in language teaching might be the mastery of English, the passing an exam (at the end of year), the possibility of a better job in the future, etc. Short-term goal, on the other hand, might be the learning of small amount of new language, the successful of writing an essay, or the ability to partake in the school's discussion.

It is right that long-term goal is virtually important, yet, it is too far. Students may loose their motivation when the materials are too difficult for them. They cannot maintain their motivation with the long-term goal. Short term goals, on the other hand, are by nature closer to the students' day-to-day reality. It is much easier to focus on the end of week than on the end of the year. Hence, teachers should be able to help students achieve their short-term goals and they will put effects on the students' motivation.

**Learning Environment**: teachers sometimes face the fact that they cannot, or even may not, choose their classroom. Then, can they blame the class environment as the factors that influence their students' motivation?

Of course, they should not do so. They can create or decorate their classroom so that it is attractive that will result in students' increased motivation. When a student walks into an attractive classroom at the beginning of the course, it may help to get their motivation for the process going. When they come to an unattractive classroom motivation may not be initiated.

Decorating a classroom to be more attractive is, however, less important than the emotional atmosphere that teachers are able to create and sustain. It will trigger the students to be active and participate fully in the class. That is why they have to be careful when responding to the students, especially in the giving of feedback and correction. There is a need for a supportive, cooperative environment to suit the various learner types. More important is that the teachers' rapport will create the right condition for motivated learning.

**Interesting Classes**: what is meant by interesting classes here is that the class situation that makes the students interested in both the subject and the activities carried out in the class to achieve the goal. Students needs to be interested in the activities they are joining to sustain their motivation. Thus, teachers have to provide a variety of subject and activities to keep the students engaged.

Those three ways of sustaining students' motivation indicates that teachers need to structure the class into a more effective way. Structuring a class is not only a matter of arranging the chairs and students seat but also setting the students-students interactions so that they yield the best result.

## C. Cooperative Learning and Its characteristics

One of the ways to set students' interaction is by designing group works with cooperative learning. Cooperative learning can be defined as a diverse body of concepts and techniques for enhancing the benefits of group activities. It also means the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson. Et. Al., 1993). Cooperative efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts (Your success benefits me and my success benefits you), recognizing that all group members share a common fate (We all sink or swim together here), knowing that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's colleagues (We can not do it without you), and feeling proud and jointly celebrating when a group member is recognized for achievement (We all congratulate you on your accomplishment!).

Not all group works are simply cooperative. There is a difference between "having students work in a group" and structuring students to work cooperatively. A group of students sitting at the same table doing their own work, but free to talk with each other as they work, is not structured to be a cooperative group as there is no positive interdependence. (Perhaps it could be called individualistic learning with talking.) There needs to be an accepted common goal on which the group will be rewarded for their efforts. In the same way, a group of students who have been assigned to do a report where only one student cares, does all the work and the others go along for a free ride, is not a cooperative group. A cooperative group has a sense of individual accountability that means that all students need to know the material or spell well for the group to be successful. Putting students into groups does not necessarily gain positive interdependence and/or individual accountability; it has to be structured and managed by the teacher or professor.

The first characteristic of cooperative learning is positive interdependence- the feeling among group members that by helping other group members, they are helping themselves. If students feel they are positively interdependent with their group mates, they are more likely to stay on task and to help one another learn. Helping one another to get success will increase the quality of their learning.

The second one is individual accountability - the feeling that all group members are responsible for participating in and learning from the activity. If students feel individually accountable, they are more likely to try to learn, rather than letting others do the work and the learning for them. There will be no one free riding on others.

The third one is promotive interaction, the interaction that students work together in which they promote each other's success by sharing resources and helping, supporting, encouraging, and applauding each other's efforts to achieve. There are important cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics that can only occur when students promote each other's learning. This includes orally explaining how to solve problems, teaching one's knowledge to others, checking for understanding, discussing concepts being learned, and connecting present with past learning. Each of those activities can be structured into group task directions and procedures.

The fourth characteristic is interpersonal and small group skills. Cooperative learning is inherently more complex than competitive or individualistic learning because students have to engage simultaneously in task work (learning academic subject matter) and teamwork (functioning effectively as a group). Leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills empower students to manage both teamwork and task work successfully.

The fifth basic element of cooperative learning is group processing. Group processing exists when group members discuss how well hey are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. Groups need to describe what member actions are helpful and unhelpful and make decisions about what behaviors to continue or change. Continuous improvement of the processes of learning results from the careful analysis of how members are working together and determining how group effectiveness can be enhanced.

Applying group work with such characteristics is believed to be improving the students' achievement. Even more, it is not only the achievement which increases but there are also some other aspects will. Cooperative learning will benefits the students in some aspects.

Group activities have become popular because they fit well with Communicative Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) and other trends in language education, such as task-based teaching and an emphasis on interaction (Long & Porter, 1985; Swain, 1993). Among the many benefits proposed for group activities are:

1. Increased student language production
2. Greater variety of language functions in student language production
3. Lower anxiety

4. More individualization of instruction
5. Higher motivation.
6. Greater enjoyment
7. Increased independence
8. Opportunities to learn to collaborate
9. Enhanced learning

**D. Cooperative Learning Makes Every Students Accountable**

Working together in a cooperative learning method, students are expected to play a certain role, in which there will never be the same role in one group. The role each member plays will determine the success of the group since it is correlated one another. If a group member cannot accomplish the task, the others will not either since the result of the first member is to be used by the next member to carry out his task. As a result, everybody needs to support one another to succeed for the sake of the group success. In conclusion, the existence of every group member is acknowledged.

As an example, there is a trend that low-performing students, or we can say "handicapped" students, will never be motivated in competitive-based classroom. It can happen because they cannot achieve the teacher-stated goal in the classroom since they are not capable of performing the same ad high achiever and they cannot find help. Teachers usually pay attention to the high achiever. Or if the teacher pays attention to them, it is just not enough because he has to divide his attention to say, 30 to 40 students at the same time. In the cooperative group, however, high achievers will help the low-performers master the materials given or tasks being done because if they don't get helped, their group will not gain success.

In a design called Jigsaw used in reading class, each student is given a specific task which they will bring it in the group. The reading is divided into the number of the group member. Each student has to master his part in a group called a master group. They discuss the same material so as to master it because they have to bring and explain it to the member of the previous group. Having finished discussing the materials in the expert group, students have to go back to the previous group bringing the materials read in each master group. Here, they help the other group members master the material which is in his part. Everybody needs to listen and they may ask questions so that they can have good understanding of the whole material. After that, they will have to be ready to answer some questions form the teacher, which might not be his part in the master group. That's why listening, asking, negotiating and answering must be their tools to be successful in getting the teacher's questions.

What they consider is the goal of the group since their score will be determined by both their individual and group performance. No one will consider whether their group mates are Javanese, Sumatrans, or even foreigners. They will only consider the fact that they have to help one another to gain success. The feeling of being helped and trusted will certainly make handicapped students will feel more comfortable and the proud of being able to help friends will make the high achievers dignified.

In conclusion, cooperative learning can make the group members feel accepted, no matter what race they are from, what level of knowledge they have, and even no matter what physical condition they look. This approach or method of students grouping is inclusive in that it accepts any student from different background, ethnics, or religion.

**E. Cooperative learning makes more students produce the target language**

Kagan (1995) states that language acquisition is determined by a complex interaction of a number of critical input, output and context variables.Language will be best acquired when the input is comprehensible, developmentally appropriate, redundant and accurate.

In cooperative learning, students need to communicate so that they get the answer of the questions they are asking. In order that they will get the expected answer, they will be forced to use expressions or language which is comprehensible. This will be the input for the group member they are asking to.

In addition to the comprehensibility, input also needs to be in the zone of proximal development or developmentally appropriate. It is the difference between what the students can do alone and what they can do with supportive collaboration. The next step in language acquisition will be stimulated if it is in the zone of proximal development. Cooperative learning helps bring students to the proximal level due to its very nature of collaboration.

The redundancy of the input is met by cooperative learning since students will speak in different ways on the same topic, thus ensuring that the input is received repeatedly from various sources. It is obviously different from the teacher-centered one in which the input is only from the teacher. In short, more students will produce expressions in the target language which will be the input for the other members of the group.

Although lack of accuracy is a disadvantage in cooperative learning groups due to peer output being less accurate than teacher output, it should not be a deciding factor in choosing a traditional approach over a cooperative approach. It is more important to have frequent opportunities to produce output as this has a greater chance of producing speech acquisition than the formal accurate input provided by the teacher.

The output, which will be the input for other students, is certainly communicative and meaningful. Expressions executed in the cooperative group are functional relevant to their need of using the language. Students are using the language for a specific purpose, usually to meet certain group goals.

The cooperative learning setting also provides for frequent use of the language. The fact that students are in small group settings allows for much greater opportunities for language use than the traditional classroom. They will need to produce more expressions more frequently . since there is limited number of group members. It is a good way to practice functional language expressions compared to the traditional method which only gives opportunities to certain students Besides, more students will practice using the language since they feel more secured because making mistakes is not prohibited. Function and meaning are the most important factors in functional communication. They will not be afraid of getting the teachers' over correction that will kill their willingness to speak up. Students also find it much easier to talk to a peer in a small group than to a whole class. Therefore they have more opportunities to communicate at the level developmentally appropriate for them. Thus, there will be more students speak at the same time.

Furthermore, more functional language expressions will be produced since they need to ask and answer questions; they need to communicate to accomplish the cooperative learning projects; they need to praise, support, and encourage each other so that their group mates will achieve better. They do those tasks with the target language they are learning. In short, they practice the target language directly while finishing the projects they are assigning to.

To summarize, cooperative learning provides opportunities for students to develop and improve their second language acquisition. Because language acquisition is determined by input, output and context variables, and because cooperative learning provides for those variables, second language acquisition and cooperative learning are, as Kagan (1995) puts it, a "natural marriage".

## F. Conclusion and Implication

Considering the discussion above, it can be concluded that applying cooperative learning method is not a mistake in language learning. This is so since structuring students in cooperative group will let more students, both the lucky and unlucky ones, to get involved in the learning process. Students will neglect the fact that they are different, seen from the race, religion, economic background and the level of accomplishment. They will always work together and help one another to achieve the targeted goal.

Besides, cooperative learning also gives more opportunities to more students to produce more target language expressions than that given by traditional method, which only gives limited number of students to produce the target language. Having more opportunities in producing the target language, the students will not only give themselves proof that they master the target language but they also give input to their group mates of the language expressions.

There are, however, things to consider by the teacher with the application of cooperative learning in language classroom. One of which is the inappropriate language expressions. Since the appropriateness of the input cannot be guaranteed, the teacher should make a note of things to "correct" when the students work together in their cooperative group without disturbing the process of the group interaction. The term correction here is not exactly the same as the real correction, yet, it is more likely to be a presentation in the next or other meeting. It is needed so that there isn't going to be fossilization of inappropriate language expression.

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