

The Effects of Cooperative Learning on English Reading Skills and Attitudes of the First-Year Students at Bangkok University

S. Wichadee

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this research were: 1) to study the effects of cooperative learning on English reading skill development of 40 first-year students at BU, 2) to survey the students' attitudes towards cooperative learning method used in English classroom, and 3) to examine their cooperative learning behaviors. A Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) program was used with the subject group over an eight-week period. The instruments used were the reading comprehension test, the questionnaire of attitudes towards cooperative learning, the cooperative learning behavioral assessment form, and the interview. The researcher administered the English reading comprehension test before and after teaching. The pre-test and post-test scores of the group were compared using a t-test dependent measure. Results indicate that the students obtained higher reading comprehension scores for the post-test than the pre-test scores at the .05 level of significance. As to their attitudes towards cooperative learning, the findings indicate that most students rated cooperative learning moderately positive. Also, assessment forms show they performed good cooperative learning behaviors in their tasks.

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลของการเรียนแบบร่วมมือต่อการพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพและเพื่อสำรวจความคิดเห็น พฤติกรรมการเรียนของนักศึกษาที่เรียนโดยวิธีการเรียนแบบร่วมมือตามรูปแบบการแบ่งกลุ่มตามผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียน (STAD) กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการวิจัยครั้งนี้คือนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 มหาวิทยาลัยกรุงเทพจำนวน 40 คน ระยะเวลาในการทดลองทั้งหมด 8 คาบ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยประกอบด้วยแบบทดสอบวัดความเข้าใจในการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษ แบบสำรวจเจตคติที่มีต่อการเรียนแบบร่วมมือ แบบประเมินพฤติกรรมการเรียนแบบร่วมมือ และการสัมภาษณ์ ผู้วิจัยได้ทำการทดสอบกลุ่มตัวอย่างก่อน

และหลังการสอนด้วยแบบทดสอบวัดความเข้าใจในการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษแล้วนำคะแนนที่ได้มาวิเคราะห์หาค่าความแตกต่างของคะแนนโดยใช้สูตร t-test แบบ dependent group ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) คะแนนของนักศึกษาที่ได้จากการทดสอบหลังการสอนโดยใช้วิธีการเรียนแบบร่วมมือสูงกว่าก่อนการสอนอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .05 2) นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่มีเจตคติที่ดีต่อการเรียนแบบร่วมมือ 3) นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่มีพฤติกรรมการเรียนแบบร่วมมืออยู่ในระดับดี

BACKGROUND

Reading is necessary when students further their study, especially at the university level. They need good reading skill for acquiring knowledge and learning new information. However, we can see that most students' reading abilities are not good enough to do so. Even reading comprehension skills of students at the upper secondary level are below the 80 percent criterion. (Youngjermjantra, 1994) This idea is supported by the finding of Aumpayap (1990) that reading strategies are not taught much in the secondary level; therefore, it is rather difficult for them to apply those strategies to improve their reading abilities.

Many researchers have been interested in doing research to investigate appropriate reading strategies to help students have better understanding when they read. Many reading methods have been used in classrooms alternately. The results show that some are successful with a particular group of students but some are not. Actually, what should be taken into consideration now is the way the knowledge is presented. As we know, teacher-centred approaches taking place in traditional classrooms do not produce active recipients and result in fossilized language learning. It is not effective enough to promote language acquisition.

During the past decade, a new approach called "Cooperative Learning" seemed to attract a lot of attention and became popular. This conceptual approach is based on a theoretical framework that provides general principles on how to structure

cooperative learning activities in a teacher's specific subject area, curriculum, students, and setting. Teachers can use this approach to stimulate students to acquire the knowledge as well as create interpersonal and team skills. Traditionally, classes always consist of good students and weak students. The weak students sit in isolation as they lose confidence in their ability to learn English. Working in groups, therefore, is believed to help solve this problem. Shy students who don't like to speak in a large class are more comfortable speaking out in smaller groups. Group members can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in English. Each student has a different background and ability in English, which he or she can bring to the group. For example, one student might have a strong vocabulary that can supply to students with a solid background in grammar. Furthermore, poor students will benefit from interaction with better ones, and good students will feel proud that they play an important role in helping their weaker classmates.

At Bangkok University, undergraduate students in the seven faculties: Humanities, Business Administration, Accounting, Communication Arts, Fine and Applied Arts, Sciences, and Engineering, are required to take two English courses. Each course consists of four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. For the undergraduate level, the time allocated to study English is limited to only 3 periods per week. In the eyes of the instructors, fourteen weeks are not enough to improve their language competence. Also, students themselves have different level of language proficiency before class work begins. Some students' background of English knowledge is very poor, so they cannot catch up with others in class. They begin to develop negative attitudes towards studying English. Even though they recognize the importance of the English language in globalization, they prefer to spend most of their time on their major subject or on subjects they can do better. The EN 111 Course is of interest to the researcher because it is a fundamental course in which students in class are new. They have never experienced any teaching styles in university level before.

Cooperative learning is a pedagogical approach that promotes student-student interaction via working in small groups to maximize their learning and reach their shared goal. It is suitable to be used in the Thai education system due to the National Education Act (1999) which emphasizes cooperation in helping each other to acquire knowledge. (Scaglione, 1992) This type of learning approach decreases competitiveness and individualism but increases opportunities to actively construct or transform the knowledge among students. Furthermore, considerable research demonstrates that cooperative learning produces higher achievement and more positive relationships among students. With these reasons, the researcher would like to study whether the cooperative learning method is effective

in enhancing students' English reading skill of students at Bangkok University. In this study, three main research questions are addressed as follows:

1. To what extent do the students improve their English reading skill through working in cooperative groups?
2. What are their attitudes towards cooperative learning?
3. How much do they cooperate within the group?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is one strategy for group instruction which is under the learner-centred approach. Many educators give the definitions of cooperative learning:

"Cooperative learning is an instructional program in which students work in small groups to help one another master academic content." (Slavin, 1995)

"Cooperative learning involves students working together in pairs or groups, and they share information. They are a team whose players must work together in order to achieve goals successfully." (Brown, 1994)

In addition, Kessler (1992) proposes the definition of cooperative learning particularly in language learning context:

"Cooperative learning is a within-class grouping of students usually of differing levels of second language proficiency, who learn to work together on specific tasks or projects in such a way that all students in the group benefit from the interactive experience."

According to Johnson (2005), cooperation is not assigning a job to a group of students where one student does all the work and the others put their names on the paper. It is not having students sit side by side at the same table to talk with each other as they do their individual assignments as well. It is not having students do a task individually with instructions that the ones who finish first are to help the slower students. On the contrary, cooperative learning is a teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is being taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Students work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it.

Elements of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative efforts are expected to be more productive under certain conditions. The followings are the five basic elements of cooperative learning.

1. Positive Interdependence

The first requirement for an effectively structured cooperative learning environment is that students believe they “sink” or swim together. (Johnson, Johnson & Stanne, 2000) That is, cooperation occurs only when students perceive that the success of one depends on the success of the other. Whatever task students are given to perform, each group member must feel that his or her contribution is necessary for the group’s success. Students have to learn to work together in order to accomplish tasks. This is why learning task must be designed in a way that makes them believe, “they sink or swim together.” Through the assigned material, students learn to achieve the goal. Therefore, a number of ways of structuring positive interdependence are carried out such as reward, resources, or task responsibilities to supplement goal interdependence. Each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources or role or task responsibilities.

2. Face-to-Face Interaction

The second element of cooperative learning requires face-to-face interaction among students within which they promote each other’s learning and success. Johnson (2005) suggests that it is necessary to maximize the opportunities for them to help, support, encourage, and praise each other. Such promotive interaction helps to promote the following:

- orally explaining how to solve problems
- teaching one’s knowledge to other
- checking for understanding
- discussing concepts being learned
- connecting present with past learning

3. Individual and Group Accountability

The third element leads to the belief “What students can do together today, they can do alone tomorrow.” The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual. Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual student is assessed, and the results are given back to the groups. Therefore, the group knows who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in completing the job. Johnson & Johnson (1991) suggest some common ways to structure individual accountability. These include giving an individual test to each student, randomly selecting one student to represent the entire group, or having students teach what they have learned to someone else.

4. Interpersonal & Small – Group Skills

Students must be taught the social skills and be motivated to use them. Social skills which are needed for both teamwork and task work include leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills. (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993)

5. Group Processing

Group members should think about how well they have cooperated as a team and how to enhance their future cooperation. Some of the keys to successful processing are allowing sufficient time for it to take place, emphasizing positive feedback, maintaining student involvement in processing etc. To be cooperative, group members must promote each other’s learning and success face-to-face, hold each other personally and individually accountable to do a fair share of the work, use the interpersonal and small group skills needed for cooperative efforts to be successful, and process as a group how effectively members are working together.

These five essential components must be present for small group learning to be truly cooperative. There needs to be an accepted common goal on which the group will be rewarded for their efforts. (Johnson & Johnson, 1991)

Student Teams–Achievement Divisions (STAD)

Cooperative learning can be structured in many different models. As Olsen & Kagan (1992) stated, all cooperative learning models share the idea that students work together to learn and are responsible for their teammates’ learning as well as their own. The general ones are Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD), Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), and Jigsaw II. Moreover, some are designed for use in particular subjects at particular grade levels such as Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) for reading and writing instruction in grade 2-8 and Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI) for mathematics in grades 3-6.

The approach used in this research is based on Student Teams–achievement Divisions (STAD). It was developed by Robert Slavin and his colleagues at the John Hopkins University. STAD has been used in such diverse subject areas as math, language arts, social studies, and science. In STAD, students are assigned to four-member learning teams that are mixed in performance level, gender, and ethnicity. STAD has five major components. These are class presentation, team study, quizzes, individual improving scores, and team recognition. (Slavin, 1995) The teaching phase begins with the presentation of material, usually in a lecture-discussion format. Students should be told what it is they are going to learn and why it is important. During team study, group members work cooperatively with provided worksheets and answer sheets. Next, each student individually takes a quiz. Using a scoring system that ranges from 0 to 30 points and reflects degree of individual improvement over previous quiz scores, the teacher scores the papers. Each team receives one of three recognition awards, depending on the average number of points earned by the team. For example, teams that average 15 to 19 improvement points receive a GOOD TEAM certificate. Teams that average 20 to 24 improvement points receive a

GREAT TEAM certificate, and teams that average 25 to 30 improvement points receive a SUPER TEAM certificate.

Related Research on Cooperative Learning

Most early studies dealt with cooperative learning in other content areas outside the field of language learning such as social studies, science, and mathematics. However, after the effectiveness of gaining in language acquisition of non-native speakers had been documented, ESL and EFL researchers turned their attention to the approach. They shared the belief that the approach may possibly have benefits in second or foreign language learning (Tang, 2000). Many studies on factors affecting the learning have been done by both Thai and foreign researchers. These studies are summarized and presented as follows:

Pinkeaw (1993) investigated students' views on interaction and learning achievement through cooperative learning method in upper-secondary English classes for 82 Mathayomsuksa 4 students. The subjects were classified into 3 groups of 30 high achievers, 24 moderate achievers, and 28 low achievers. The researcher taught all classes herself for 20 periods. The questionnaire on the students' view on interaction was given before teaching. After teaching, students were given the test and the same questionnaire on interaction including their opinion of the STAD approach. The finding indicated that all students' listening and speaking achievements were satisfactory. No difference was found between pre-teaching and post-teaching on the views of the high and low achievers, but the moderate achievers' views in general decreased significantly after teaching. Their opinions on the STAD approach were at the satisfactory level but no significant difference was found among the three groups.

Sittilert (1994) examined the effects of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) on English reading comprehension and the opinions towards classroom atmosphere of Mathayomsuksa 5 students. The subjects were 106 Mathayomsuksa 5 students taking English Reading 3 (English 033) at Yuparaj Wittayalai school, Chiangmai province during the academic year of 1994. They were divided into two groups – an experimental group and a control group. The researcher taught the experimental group by using the CIRC method and the control group was taught through the teacher's manual method for eight weeks. The researcher used a reading achievement test and a questionnaire asking students' opinion towards classroom atmosphere. The results showed that the English reading comprehension achievement of the experimental group was higher than the control group. The Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) helped low achievement students improve their ability and the opinions towards classroom atmosphere were positive.

Hampton & Grundnitski (1996) compared the progress of college business students of different

achievement levels after they had engaged in cooperative learning. A ratio of the average post-cooperative learning test scores to the average pre-cooperative learning test scores for each student showed the progress in a semester long introductory course. The result indicated that 215 achievement-diverse participants in cooperative learning did not benefit equally. Additionally, the low achieving students appeared to benefit most from cooperative learning. This result suggests that cooperative learning may be particularly valuable in helping low achievers.

Thupapong (1996) studied the effects of Students Teams–Achievement Division (STAD) learning on English reading achievement and cooperation with 78 Mathayomsuksa 4 students. The subjects were divided into two groups—the experimental group taught by the STAD approach and the control group taught by the teacher's manual for six weeks. The instruments used in this study were reading achievement tests and cooperation tests. The results revealed that the gained English reading achievement scores of the students taught by the STAD approach were not significantly different from those of the students taught by the teacher's manual approach at the level of .05. The gained scores of the high, medium, and low achievers taught by the STAD teaching approach were not significantly different from one another, also at the level of .05. The last finding, the high, medium, and low achievers taught by the STAD teaching approach were not significantly different in their cooperation at the level of .05.

Another study examined a comparison of the effectiveness of cooperative learning in small groups with whole classroom instruction using the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) during reading. Subjects for the eight-week study were 53 sixth-graders from two classes in Brooklyn, New York. The stories used all came from the same basal reader. A reading comprehension test was given each child after each story was completed. Children in cooperative learning groups read stories on their own and wrote any questions or comments in their reading log. The next day, each group met to discuss the story. Students worked in groups for approximately 4 weeks. For the next 4 weeks, the students continued to read, using the DRTA strategy, and when the story was completed the children read and answered questions about the story independently. A reading comprehension test was again given after the completion of each story. Results indicated that the majority of children in the cooperative reading groups scored higher on their reading comprehension tests than when they used the DRTA. Findings suggested that cooperative learning can be used as an instructional strategy whereby students can improve their reading comprehension. (Almanza, 1997)

Siriratana (1999) compared English reading comprehension, writing ability, cooperative learning activities through instruction using Top-Level Structure

(TLS) with CIRC and the Teachers Manual. The subjects for this study consisted of 80 Mathayomsuksa 5 students in the first semester of the 1999 academic year of Debsirin School, Bangkok. They were selected by using simple random sampling and divided into the experimental and control groups, with 40 students in each. The randomized control group pretest/posttest design was used in the experiments. The experimental group was taught through the method based on the Top - Level Structure (TLS) with CIRC, whereas the control group was taught through the method in the Teachers Manual. Each group was taught with lesson of the same content for twenty 50 minute periods. The instruments used in this study were English reading comprehension test, writing ability test and cooperative test. The data were statistically analyzed by t-test for Independent Samples and t-test for dependent samples. The results of this study revealed that the English reading comprehension, between the experimental and control groups, was significantly different at the .01 level. The English writing ability, between the experimental and control groups, was significantly different at the .01 level. The cooperative learning ability, between the experimental and control groups, was significantly different at the .01 level. The English reading comprehension, the English writing ability and the cooperative learning ability of the experimental group, between the pretest and posttest, was significantly different at the .01 level. The English reading comprehension, the English writing ability and the cooperative learning ability of the control group, between the pretest and posttest, was significantly different at the .01 level.

Tang (2000) did a research on 12 ESL students from India, South Korea, Hong Kong, Croatia and Taiwan at a secondary school in Canada which used the concept mapping skill to teach ESL reading in the classroom. The observation of ESL students' cooperative learning activities in an eight-week period indicated that teaching reading by using the concept-mapping strategy could improve reading comprehension and the communication skills as they learned how to negotiate meaning with their partners and among themselves.

Metetum (2001) conducted a case study research on cooperative learning by using the jigsaw technique with nine second-year English major students at Naresuan University. The purposes of the study were to investigate students' use of linguistic features in their discourse while being involved in cooperative structures, to examine the improvement in students' grammar and competence, to investigate the quality of language input, output, and context in cooperative learning, and to study to what extent the students have positive and negative attitudes towards the cooperative learning method. The design of the study was based on a qualitative approach. Research data came from four instruments including a grammar test, a structured field observation, a semi-structured interview and a reflective journal. The

results showed that there were 39 language functions and 3 social language functions used in learning sessions. All subjects had higher academic and oral achievement test scores after engaging in this learning. Moreover, the cooperative language learning also generated functional and communicative, frequent, and redundant input. The last finding revealed that nearly all subjects had positive attitudes towards cooperative learning in terms of oral competence, academic achievement, social skills, personal development, collaborative skills, thinking skills, and learning atmosphere.

Moryadee (2001) studied the effects of cooperative learning using Student Team-Achievement Divisions (STAD) technique on self-efficacy and English learning achievement of prathomsuksa 5 students. The subjects were 78 prathomsuksa 5 students of Samsen Kindergarten School. They were randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group, comprising of 39 students in each group. The experimental group studied through STAD and the control group studied through the conventional method. This research employed the pretest/posttest control group design. All subjects were tested their self-efficacy and English learning achievement before and after the treatment. The data were analyzed by t-test. The results indicated that the students who studied through STAD have a higher self-efficacy after the treatment than before the treatment at the .01 level of significance. The students who studied through STAD have a higher English learning achievement after the treatment than before the treatment at the .01 level of significance. On the post-test, the students who studied through STAD have a higher self-efficacy and English learning achievement than those students who studied through the conventional method at the .01 level of significance.

Somapee (2002) compared critical thinking skills of students who studied Business English I at Chiangrai Commercial School using the cooperative learning method with those of students using the traditional group work method and surveyed the opinions of students toward the cooperative learning method. A pre-test was used to assign students so both had the same level of the critical thinking skills. During the eight weeks of teaching, unit pre-tests and post-tests were given to students at the beginning and at the end of each unit respectively. After the implementation, the pre-test was assigned for them to take as the post-test. Then, two sets of averaged scores taken from the pre-test and post-test were compared by T-test. A questionnaire was then given to the experimental group to assess their opinion about cooperative learning. The results of the test revealed that critical thinking skills of students in the experimental group were higher than those in the control group. The post-test scores of students who were taught through the cooperative learning method were remarkably higher than the post-test scores of students who were taught through the traditional

group work method at $p < .05$ level. Moreover, the unit post-test scores of the experimental group were higher than those of the control group as the statistical difference was significant at $p < .05$ level. The results of the questionnaire showed that students' opinions towards the cooperative learning were moderately positive.

Seetape (2003) studied the effects of cooperative learning on English reading achievement and the students' behavior towards this learning method used in the English classroom. The samples were 29 Mathayomsuksa 3 students in Kanchanaphisek Wittayalai Uthathani School selected by means of purposive sampling. Students were taught for eight periods, each of which lasted fifty minutes. The instruments were English reading achievement test, cooperative learning behavioral observation sheet, and lesson plans using cooperative learning technique. The results of the study showed that the post-test scores after learning English reading using cooperative learning were higher than the pre-test scores at the .05 level of significance. Most of the samples displayed very good behavior in cooperating in their tasks. Their cooperative behavior had increasingly developed. Some elements of poor behavior had decreased by up to 14.29 percent.

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from 40 first-year students of the School of Communication Arts at Bangkok University got from the purposive sampling technique. All of them enrolled in a required fundamental English I Course of 3 credits in the first semester of 2004 academic year. Eight weeks were used for the experiment using cooperative learning method. This research is one-group pretest-posttest design. Five types of instruments were employed in the study: 1) the pre-test and post-test test 2) the questionnaire 3) the cooperative learning behavioral assessment form 4) the individual quiz 5) the interview.

First, the subjects were given a reading comprehension test of which the total score was 40. Time allowed for the test was 100 minutes. They were then placed in high, average, and low group according to their score. Using mean, median, and mode to help group the students, the researcher got 10 groups, each of which contained 4 members. The scores of the high group ranged from 29 up to 35. The scores of the average group ranged from 19-28. The scores of low group ranged from 9 to 18. The same test was also given to them after 8 weeks of learning. All of the items had already undergone an item analysis and pilot test to establish reliability in a group not selected to participate in the study. The Kuder-Richardson coefficient of internal consistency for the instrument was .85. Therefore, it is acceptable that most selected items had good reliability and discrimination power.

Second, after each unit, subjects took the quiz. They had to work alone on these quizzes. At this point, they demonstrated what they had learned as individuals. After that, the teacher figured individual improvement scores and team scores and awarded certificates to high-scoring teams. Students earned points for their teams based on the degree to which their quiz scores (percentage correct) exceed their base scores. The purpose of base scores and improvement points is to make it possible for all students to bring maximum points to their teams, whatever their level of past performance. It is fair to compare each student with his or her own level of past performance because all students join with different level of skills and experiences.

Third, the subjects had to do a questionnaire containing 10 items which related to their opinions towards the cooperative learning approach. During the completion of the questionnaire, the researcher clarified some questions.

Fourth, in order to investigate the students' cooperative learning behaviors, the behavioral assessment form was handed out after each unit. All members in the group checked their teammates according to their behaviors of working in a group.

Lastly, the interview was designed to find out the subjects' attitudes towards cooperative learning. The six subjects whose scores improved the most and the least were chosen to share their opinions about the instruction.

RESULTS

The data obtained from the pre-test/post-test, questionnaires, and behavioral assessment forms were analyzed and interpreted using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were used to answer the research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent do the students improve their English reading skill through working in cooperative groups?

Table 1 Means of the Pre-Test and Post-Test of the Students

Test	N	\bar{X}	S.D.
Before	40	23.87	7.93
After	40	31.00	6.46

t 8.06*

$\alpha = .05$

$t(.05, df = 39) = 1.684$

The results shown in Table 1 indicate that the mean of the pre-test is higher than that of the post-test. The result from the t-test showed that there was

significant difference in pre-test and post-test. The finding supported the effectiveness of cooperative learning when dealing with reading comprehension.

Research Question 2: What are the students' attitudes towards cooperative learning?

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Students' Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning

Question Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	3.88	0.97
2	4.13	0.82
3	3.85	0.80
4	3.87	0.88
5	4.08	0.83
6	3.48	0.99
7	3.75	0.84
8	3.73	0.72
9	3.65	0.92
10	3.33	0.89
Average	3.77	0.86

Mean levels: 1.00-1.80 = minimally agree
 1.81-2.60 = basically agree,
 2.61-3.40 = neutral
 3.41-4.20 = moderately agree
 4.21-5.00 = highly agree

Table 2 shows attitudes of the first-year students towards cooperative learning. The third statements students agree with the most are no. 2, no. 5 and no. 1 while statement no. 10 is agreed with the least. The

average mean of attitude score for students in the cooperative learning group was 3.77 which can be interpreted as having a moderate agreement with this learning approach.

Table 3 Percentage of Students Shown in Five Rating Scales

Statements	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. This approach helps me to learn new thing easily.	35.00	22.50	37.50	5.00	0
2. This approach helps me to acquire know- ledge through working in a team.	37.50	40.00	20.00	2.50	0
3. This approach makes me understand the working process.	22.50	42.50	32.50	2.50	0
4. This approach enables me to partici- pate in sharing information, making de- cisions, and solving problems.	30.00	30.00	37.50	2.50	0
5. This approach helps everyone reach the goal equally.	35.00	40.00	22.50	2.50	0
6. This approach trains me how to be a good leader and a good follower.	15.00	35.00	35.00	12.50	2.50
7. This approach creates a good relation- ship among group members.	22.50	32.50	42.50	2.50	0
8. The lessons become more interesting with this approach.	15.00	42.50	42.50	0	0
9. I feel actively involved in all activities through this approach.	20.00	35.00	35.00	10.00	0
10. I feel intellectually challenged through this approach.	10.00	30.00	42.50	17.50	0

From Table 3, the percentage of students marking on each statement is shown in five rating scales. For example, 37.50 percent of them rated neutral while 35.00 percent strongly agreed for no. 1 (this approach helps me learn new thing easily) Only

2.50 percent of all students strongly disagreed with no. 6 (this approach trains me how to be a good leader and a good follower). It was clear that only one statement was checked “strongly disagree.” (no. 6.)

Research Question 3: How much do they cooperate in the group?

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Students’ Cooperative Learning Behaviors

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	3.73	0.28
2	3.70	0.34
3	3.65	0.16
4	3.77	0.37
5	3.92	0.25
6	3.47	0.47
7	3.63	0.32
8	3.68	0.23
9	3.33	0.22
10	3.69	0.38
Average	3.66	0.33

Mean levels: 1.00-1.80 = minimally cooperate
 1.81-2.60 = basically cooperate
 2.61-3.40 = neutral
 3.41-4.20 = moderately cooperate
 4.21-5.00 = highly cooperate

In order to investigate the students’ cooperative learning behaviors, the behavioral assessment form was administered at the end of the unit of instruction. They were asked to evaluate their friends’ cooperative learning behaviors on the form containing 10 items. Five rating scales were used to examine how much these behaviors occurred. Their responses were collected and the data were interpreted through mean levels as specified above.

Table 4 shows the result achieved from the assessment forms. The average mean (3.66) can be interpreted as the students in all groups having moderate cooperation. The highest mean (3.92) focused on group no. 5, and the lowest mean (3.33) belonged to group no. 9.

In addition to the quantitative data, some students were asked to share additional opinions. The interview was added to find further attitudes towards cooperative learning of six subjects whose scores improved the most and the least. Each subject was interviewed individually for about half an hour. Here were their responses to the following questions:

- “How do you really feel about this approach?”
- “In your opinion, what are advantages or disadvantages of this approach?”

Three subjects whose scores improved the most

For the first subject, Juleeyot, cooperative learning is a good way of acquiring knowledge and discussing ideas. It prepares working skill for a future job. She cannot find a disadvantage. The second subject, Sarun, likes this approach as he can learn more from peers and his opinions. He also can feel the differences in learning style. He prefers this learning style to the traditional one, which he experienced in secondary school. The third subject, Yuranun, finds all activities enjoyable. The lessons become more interesting with this approach. He learns best when it is something he is interested in. The only disadvantage is that all assignments must be guided carefully; otherwise, a lot of time is wasted discussing its purpose and goal.

Three subjects whose scores improved the least

For the fourth subject, Tanadej, the reading texts are rather easy for him because of his high competence in English. He used to stay in the US for two years. He likes cooperative learning, but thinks that it doesn’t help him improve his reading skill much. However, what he considers useful is that it teaches how to work as a team and increases good relationships among members. Furthermore, he likes to

explain difficult things to someone else. The fifth subject, Pariwat, thinks this approach is interesting as it provides the pleasant atmosphere in the classroom. In his opinion, it would be better if there are a variety of activities to keep his motivation and interest alive. The last subject, Narumon, feels negative about cooperative learning. For her, it wastes time a lot. All of the activities take a lot of time. She hates especially when she has to wait for someone who has no ideas what he/she is doing or has poor discussion. Although this approach doesn't help improve her reading skill, she believes it can help poor students reach the goal and makes her understand more about the working process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

1. The results of the study reveal that cooperative learning has increased students' English reading skill. Therefore, a replication of the study could be conducted with other groups at the graduate or undergraduate levels in other skills such as writing, speaking, or listening. It would be worthwhile to investigate how effective is cooperative learning on other skills so that instructors can use findings for improving and developing their teaching process.

2. As this research is mainly based on STAD model, future research should focus on comparisons between different models of cooperative learning in order to determine if other cooperative learning models are equally effective in producing desired students.

3. For examining students' cooperative learning behaviors, an observation technique with a particular checklist can be employed by the instructor in stead of using an assessment form checked by students themselves.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From my experience of doing this research, I find some benefits of cooperative learning and would like to share ideas as follows:

1. Although some students are not concerned about grades, or interested in participating in class, if a group's performance depends on individual contributions, they have to come. They don't want to miss a class in which all assignments are handed out, and they didn't want to disappoint teammates. They do care about their peers. They know that members cannot work without them. Moreover, they don't want to miss the points from the quiz. I dare to say that cooperative learning can dramatically improve attendance.

2. Cooperative learning can maximize the students' interaction in English, and it can take away the big burden of running large classes. Therefore, the teacher has to change his or her role to be a motivator or problem solver.

3. That the group members have the responsibility of updating the students who were absent

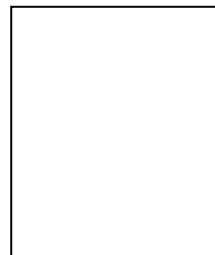
on what they missed makes they feel they are not alone. Isolation and alienation are the predictors of failure. Two major reasons for dropping out of university are failure to establish a social network of friends and classmates and failure to become academically involved in classes. (Tinto, 1994)

Needless to say, cooperative learning can be an effective way to deal with the problems faced by Thai teachers in EFL classes. It creates a comfortable non-stressful environment for learning and practicing English. It helps students to learn more, have more fun, and develop many other skills such as learning how to work with one another.

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Asst. Prof. Saovapa Wichadee received her M.Ed. Degree in English from Srinakharinwirot University, Prasarnmitr in 1994 and B.A. in English from Kasetsart University in 1985. She is currently working at the Language Institute, Bangkok University. Her particular field of interest lies in teaching business writing and reading. She has experienced in writing many textbooks and instructional materials, such as *Writing for Business Purposes*, *English for Art and Design*, *Business Conversation*, and *Fundamental English I*. She also wrote two articles entitled "Using the Communicative Approach to Develop Students' Communicative Competence in Speaking" published in *BU Academic Review* 1 (1) 2002 and "Awareness of English Teaching through Classroom Observation and Teacher Development" published in *BU Academic Review* 2(2) 2003.