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Research on the Application Strategies of Cooperative Learning in Chinese Language Teaching for Upper Primary Grades

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Abstract

With the continuous advancement of the new curriculum reform, cooperative learning has been recognized as an efficient teaching strategy by educators and has been widely applied in teaching practices. However, the practical effects vary. By conducting an in-depth study on the current status of cooperative learning in Chinese language teaching for upper primary grades, it has been found that there are several issues such as unreasonable class size arrangements, insufficient student motivation for cooperative learning, inadequate teacher supervision, improper instructional content design, and unclear teacher evaluations. This paper analyzes these issues and proposes corresponding improvement strategies: reasonably dividing cooperative groups and ensuring a scientifically rational group structure; properly distributing teaching resources to encourage student active participation in learning; improving teacher professional competence to enhance guidance in cooperative learning; selecting scientifically reasonable content that fits the actual school and student conditions; and establishing a diversified evaluation system to comprehensively assess cooperative learning performance.

Keywords: *Cooperative learning; Upper primary grades; Chinese language teaching; Teaching strategies*

Introduction

With the continuous deepening of the new curriculum reform, exploring more efficient teaching methods has become a key to improving educational quality. As an important stage for enhancing students' Chinese language literacy and expanding their thinking, Chinese language teaching in upper primary grades has gradually highlighted the limitations of traditional teaching models, and cooperative learning has increasingly gained attention. Cooperative learning breaks the monotony of traditional classrooms and encourages students to make progress together through interactive communication. However, the application of

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cooperative learning in Chinese language teaching for upper primary grades still faces certain problems. Therefore, conducting in-depth research on the issues related to the application of cooperative learning and providing helpful teaching strategies can optimize the teaching process and improve the quality of instruction.

1. Concept of Cooperative Learning

There are numerous definitions of cooperative learning. Slavin (R.E.) defines cooperative learning as a classroom teaching technique in which students are grouped together and rewarded based on the overall performance of the group. Johnson & Johnson define cooperative learning as learning together to achieve a common goal, employing small group teaching methods to help students learn cooperation and maximize both their own and others' learning outcomes. Wang Tan views cooperative learning as a teaching activity aimed at promoting cooperation between different types of students to achieve common learning goals, with a reward system based on the team's overall performance. Pei Dina describes cooperative learning teaching as a group teaching activity that fully utilizes dynamic factors, interacting with the overall team performance in teaching and assessment to promote student learning and achieve teaching goals. Based on the insights of scholars, this paper defines cooperative learning as a learning organization mode in which students carry out various activities in groups and are evaluated based on the group's collective performance. Implementing this model in Chinese language teaching for upper primary grades not only motivates students to form groups and develop teamwork skills but also strengthens their sense of team honor and enhances social skills.

2. Current Issues in the Application of Cooperative Learning in Chinese Language Teaching for Upper Primary Grades

This research was conducted using surveys and interviews, primarily targeting Chinese language teachers and 5th-6th grade students from Donglu Primary School, Pinggui District Experimental Primary School, and Huangtian Town Central Primary School in Hezhou City. The survey covered teachers' understanding of cooperative learning, their application of cooperative learning, and their expectations of cooperative learning. The student survey focused on students' attitudes toward cooperative learning, participation in cooperative learning, understanding of cooperative learning content, and the use of group cooperative learning. The survey results revealed the current situation of cooperative learning application in Chinese language teaching for upper primary grades.

1) Unreasonable Class Size Arrangement, Affecting Cooperative Learning Effectiveness

According to the survey and interview results, the average number of students per class in the 5th-6th grades of the surveyed primary schools ranged from 45 to 56, with each class having small groups with 2, 4, 6, or 8 students, and the number of groups in each class ranging from 10 to 23. The reasonable arrangement of class size directly affects the effectiveness of cooperative learning. Excessively large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to address the needs of each student, affecting student participation in cooperative learning. Larger groups lead to fewer interactions among students, potentially marginalizing some students, preventing full participation in the cooperative learning process. Smaller groups might lead to uneven task distribution, with only a few students engaging, which in turn affects learning outcomes. In cooperative learning, larger class sizes also increase classroom management difficulty, requiring more time and energy to maintain order, and detracting from the teacher's focus on the learning content, ultimately impacting the effectiveness of cooperative learning.

2) Insufficient Student Motivation for Cooperative Learning, Leading to Poor Learning Outcomes

In current Chinese language teaching for upper primary grades, students may have adapted to traditional lecture-based teaching, making it difficult for them to adjust to the classroom model that requires independent inquiry and cooperative task completion. The survey found that 31.32% of students occasionally participated in cooperative learning, and 12.64% of students never participated in cooperative learning. This suggests that some students lack interest in cooperative learning and are unwilling to actively engage in group discussions and activities. In such cases, students tend to view cooperative learning as a burden rather than an effective means of improving learning outcomes. These students may lack the necessary communication, coordination, and problem-solving skills or may not have a clear understanding of the learning content or high expectations for learning results, leading to poor communication and motivation in group activities, and ultimately affecting the overall effectiveness of cooperative learning.

3) Inadequate Teacher Supervision, Leading to Disorder in the Classroom

The survey found that inadequate teacher supervision often leads to disorder. Although the core of cooperative learning lies in student interaction and collaboration, it still relies on the teacher's role in guiding the process. In cooperative learning, teachers should play the roles of guides, assistants, and evaluators. However, some teachers either intervene excessively or neglect the students completely, leading to ineffective collaboration. For instance, some teachers fail to provide clear task instructions and guidance before starting cooperative learning, leading to unclear objectives during the process, hindering effective collaboration. Some teachers might focus too much on certain students while ignoring others, causing some students to feel neglected. Additionally, teachers often fail to provide timely feedback during the cooperative learning process, which hinders problem-solving and affects the overall effectiveness of cooperative learning.

4) Inadequate Instructional Content Design, Affecting Cooperative Learning Effectiveness

The survey found that some teachers did not fully consider the differences between urban and rural schools in terms of facilities, faculty, and students' cognitive levels and interests, leading to instructional content that does not meet the needs of all students. When designing cooperative learning content, some teachers focus too much on textbook-based problems or knowledge points, without expanding tasks sufficiently. For example, when learning narrative texts, cooperative tasks might only focus on analyzing characters in the text, without sufficient guidance for comparing and discussing with students' real-life experiences or other literary works, limiting students' thinking and innovative abilities. Furthermore, content design is not always appropriately differentiated based on student learning levels, which causes difficulties for both struggling and advanced students to achieve their individual learning goals, weakening the effectiveness of cooperative learning.

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5) Unclear Teacher Evaluation, Affecting Student Motivation

Unclear teacher evaluation is a significant issue affecting student motivation. Some teachers fail to establish clear and specific evaluation criteria, which results in unclear goals for cooperative learning and weak fairness and effectiveness in evaluations. The survey found that some teachers focus only on students' knowledge mastery, neglecting other aspects of evaluation. Teachers' ability to evaluate cooperative learning in Chinese language teaching needs improvement, as traditional evaluation methods like final exams or classroom performance are heavily relied upon, while self-evaluation and peer evaluation are rarely used. When students do not understand how to assess their own performance, they may feel confused and unsure of where to focus their efforts. The lack of specific evaluation decreases student motivation and fails to fully reflect students' actual performance during the cooperative learning process.

3. Teaching Strategies for the Application of Cooperative Learning in Chinese Language Teaching for Upper Primary Grades

1) Reasonably Divide Cooperative Groups, Focus on Scientific and Rational Group Structure

A scientifically reasonable group structure can facilitate sufficient communication and interaction among students within the group, improving the effectiveness of cooperative learning. Teachers can determine the number of students per group based on the class size and teaching objectives, with 4-5 students per group being ideal. Grouping standards can be based on various factors such as gender, personality, academic performance, and interests. In cooperative learning, teachers should adjust groupings in real time according to student learning progress and performance. For instance, if some groups are not cooperating effectively, they can be restructured to optimize the learning experience. Additionally, teachers need to guide and train students on how to work effectively in groups.

After grouping, teachers should guide students in building a sound cooperative mechanism within the group, including defining member responsibilities, establishing cooperation rules, and setting up an evaluation system. Each group should assign roles such as group leader, recorder, and reporter, with every member taking responsibility. Group members must follow rules like completing tasks on time, participating actively in discussions, and respecting others' opinions. Members should participate in self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation to provide a comprehensive and objective reflection of their learning outcomes.

2) Properly Distribute Teaching Resources to Encourage Active Student Participation

Textbooks, as the basic teaching resource, should be adjusted according to the teaching goals and student needs. Teachers can incorporate real-life examples and multimedia resources such as videos, audios, and images to enrich teaching content and spark students' interest.

With the development of modern technology, emerging educational software and tools can help teachers access the latest educational information, providing students with more diverse learning resources and easier access to learning materials. Teachers can use online platforms for resource sharing, enabling students to participate in cooperative learning anytime, anywhere. Parents and teachers are important resources as well, and their cooperation can further support students' participation in cooperative learning.

3) Enhance Teacher Professional Competence to Strengthen Guidance in Cooperative Learning

Teachers should update their educational philosophies and deeply understand the essence and value of cooperative learning. This requires teachers to continually study new educational theories, such as constructivism and multiple intelligences theory, and integrate them into Chinese language teaching to form suitable cooperative learning models for students. Additionally, excellent teaching design skills are essential, as teachers need to design cooperative learning activities that are engaging and educational, tailored to students' cognitive levels, interests, and ages.

Before starting cooperative learning, teachers should clarify the rules of cooperation to students, such as respecting others' opinions and participating actively in discussions. Teachers should intervene as needed during the cooperative learning process, providing guidance and support, and adjusting the learning content and pace based on students' progress. Schools should also organize professional development activities to provide teachers with more opportunities to engage with the latest educational concepts and methods.

4) Select Scientifically Reasonable Content That Fits Actual School and Student Conditions

Teachers should conduct a comprehensive analysis of their school's conditions and students' learning situations, such as understanding school resources, teacher qualifications, teaching facilities, and students' interests. The cooperative learning content should align with the actual capabilities of students and relate closely to their real-life experiences. In rural schools where students' learning foundations may be weaker, teachers should incorporate local life examples into teaching. In urban schools, where students may have a stronger academic foundation, teachers can design more challenging activities, such as social surveys or environmental protection tasks, to stimulate cooperation and learning.

During Chinese language cooperative learning, teachers should use questioning, group discussions, and other methods to monitor student feedback and learning progress, adjusting content to ensure it meets student needs.

5) Build a Diversified Evaluation Mechanism to Comprehensively Assess Cooperative Learning Performance

A diversified evaluation mechanism focuses on multiple standards. Traditional evaluations often focus on knowledge mastery but overlook the development of cooperation-related behaviors, attitudes, and skills. For example, in classical Chinese recitation tests, evaluations often focus on the accuracy of words and characters but ignore collaboration during group translation tasks. Teachers should emphasize both process and result evaluations. Process evaluations should focus on teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills, while result evaluations assess knowledge mastery and skill improvement after cooperative learning.

Evaluation methods should combine both quantitative and qualitative assessments. Quantitative evaluations can measure student performance through test scores and assignment completion rates, while qualitative evaluations use descriptive

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language to assess student performance, such as through observation records or peer evaluations. Introducing self-assessment and peer evaluation through reflective tools like "Cooperative Learning Reflection Cards" helps students assess their learning process and outcomes, enhancing self-monitoring and adjustment. Through diversified evaluation, teachers can provide a comprehensive assessment of students' cooperative learning achievements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, cooperative learning is an important method for Chinese language teaching in upper primary grades. It has significant application value. By collaborating among schools, teachers, and students, reasonably distributing teaching resources, setting up scientific cooperative groups, improving teachers' professional competence, selecting scientifically reasonable content, and establishing a diversified evaluation mechanism, the effectiveness of cooperative learning can be enhanced. This ultimately contributes to the development of students' Chinese language literacy and comprehensive abilities.

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