



The Application of Cooperative Learning in English Reading in Secondary School: A Case Study in Mainland China

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Abstract

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This paper explores the role of cooperative learning approach to English reading among secondary level students in China. As English as a foreign language is a part of school curriculum, developing students' reading skills is essential to achieve the curricular goals. Since reading is challenging skill for non-native speakers, which is evident from the condition that despite teachers investing a lot of time in developing students' reading skills, the level of improvement is not satisfactory. In the changed context of teaching and learning of English, cooperative learning has gradually become one of the most popular learning strategies in recent years as it encourages teachers and students to engage in complementing each other in learning, which greatly promotes learning interest and mobility, and also can be more conducive to teachers and students to break through the bottleneck of English reading. Two major questions raised were: a) Whether the cooperative learning affect students' English reading ability? b) How does the cooperation affect students' learning motivation in English reading? To respond to these questions, in this study, the data were gathered through an experiment conducted in grade eight that involved students in cooperative learning to develop their English reading. The results of the study indicated that cooperative learning improved students' reading ability, enhanced their motivation and improved students' learning enthusiasm. This implies that English as foreign language learning contexts should prioritise students' engagement in cooperative learning.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, English Reading, learning enthusiasm

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Introduction

Reading is considered a complex communicative act in which plenty of textual, contextual, and reader-based variables interact to generate comprehension (Roe, Smith & Burns, 2005). Besides, Shaaban (2006) indicated that reading comprehension is affected by reader's schema, sensory and perceptual abilities, thinking skills, reading strategies, and emotive factors such as reading motivation. Reading in English being a challenging learning experience for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, due to which most children generally feel less motivated in reading. To overcome this problem, teachers in China need to spend a lot of time and effort in teaching reading in English and still the students' reading ability is not satisfactory

Among several methods of teaching English, cooperative learning method could be useful for developing students' motivation in learning. Cooperative learning is implemented when students work together to achieve shared learning goals to benefit each other. According to Deutsch (1962), students can only reach their learning objectives if everyone in their learning group reaches theirs as well. Over the last thirty years, cooperative learning has become

a widely adopted teaching method, used from preschool to graduate school across nearly all subjects. It is applied in various instructional and learning contexts, including both conventional and unconventional settings, and is even utilized in after-school and out-of-school educational programs. Teachers are likely to implement cooperative learning in several ways, for example, by using methods such as formation of group work, conducting common projects and development of shared learning culture. One of such frequently used methods is group work that is generally regarded as a comprehensive umbrella idea for a variety of modes in teaching, nevertheless, collaboration is more of a particular concept that may be contained in the much broader notion of cooperation (Chiriac, 2014). Group work provides the teachers with a powerful way to attract students, to increase the quality and challenge of the assignment that students had experienced, offering students opportunities for cooperative learning, and minimize valuation loads.

Even today English classrooms in mainland China are largely teacher-dominated and students in a reading class simply listen to the teacher and take notes when needed. These cases are changing rapidly due to teachers and educational institutions being aware of the need for student-engaged learning. Aiming to improve students' active engagement, the formal research on cooperative learning in China began in the 1990s. From the perspective of practical exploration, since the early 1990s, China began to introduce group activities in classroom teaching and opened many teaching experiments, which is an instance of cooperative learning. Compared with the 1980s and 1990s, cooperative learning has changed from a strange concept to a common teaching strategy in the actual classroom, but with the curriculum reform, the application of cooperative learning is still complicated and convoluted, and there is a large space for development. Hence, this study concentrated on exploration of the impact of cooperative learning on the English reading motivation of secondary level students in a secondary school in China.

Literature Review

In nearly all areas of society, teaching methods have significantly changed due to recent technological advancements. Traditional teaching approaches have seen substantial transformations, resulting in the emergence of new educational paradigms. One of such methods is cooperative learning. In cooperative learning method, students acquire social skills by the way of participating in group activities. Thus, cooperative learning methods will provide better interaction between students. As a result of this interaction, high-achieving group members can provide guidance to the weaker students in the group (Erbil, 2020). Group is where students can learn how to listen when their group mates are speaking. On top of that, they could also practice self-control during the group work. They need to understand the appropriate times to speak and avoid interrupting others. They learn to speak at a measured pace and make eye contact with those they are communicating with. They are taught to listen to others' viewpoints and show respect for them. Critiquing ideas rather than the individuals presenting them is emphasized. They also learn to consider problems from different perspectives. Additionally, they are taught to accept criticism and respect opposing views. These skills are practiced in group settings and gradually become ingrained in the individuals. (Lavasani, 2011).

Elements of Cooperative Learning

There are several elements of cooperative learning have been formulated. The first point is Positive Interdependence, which indicated that each student has their own unique role in the group, and members rely on each other to work towards a common goal. The environment makes students believe they are "in the same boat". Each member has a unique contribution to make to the outcome of the group collaboration so each group members' efforts are indispensable for the success so each member has a unique contribution to make to the outcome of the group collaboration. Next is Individual Accountability. All members are expected to contribute their efforts to the work of the group and to have access to learning materials to ensure the success of the group. Then, Face-to-face Promotive Interaction. While certain tasks within the group can be completed individually, others require interactive collaboration. Group members provide one another with feedback and, crucially, they teach, assist, support, cheer on, and motivate each other to achieve the group's objectives. The fourth aspect is Interpersonal and Small Group Skills, in which the author demonstrated that students are motivated and guided to cultivate and hone skills such as trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management. Last but not least, Group Processing. Team members establish collective goals, outline which actions by members are beneficial or detrimental, regularly evaluate their performance as a group, and pinpoint adjustments needed to enhance their effectiveness moving forward.

These five elements are essential for cooperative learning, and if a group needs to be truly cooperative, one of these elements is indispensable. Thus, cooperative learning does not merely indicate that students' study in a group, rather engage in helping each other on making the best of learning. In other words, cooperative learning that meets these

conditions will be more likely to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Cooperative learning and reading comprehension

Reading is one of the four basic skills of language learning. As one of the language skills, it contributes to ensuring that language learning is successful when it is integrated with other competencies (Mahmudah & Rasyid, 2022). It can provide learners with a comprehensible source of input and assist promote fluent communication. In addition, the capacity to read has always been seen as critical to academic success, and linked with enhanced ability in other skills. In a way, reading is a process of reception and decoding, in which the reader receives the information from the text and transforms it into something he or she can easily understand (Chastain, 1988). According to Nuttall (1996), the ultimate goal of reading is to accurately understand the message that the author intended to convey to the reader. Allen (2003) explained that the concept of reading has evolved from being seen as a passive activity to being understood as an interactive process. Reading is one of the most essential abilities required for English learning, including the development of literacy in English. Students develop their comprehension ability by engaging in input-output communication (An, 2011).

To a certain extent, students' English reading ability is a reflection of the depth and breadth of their mastery of the English language and is crucial to the learning of English. Depth and breadth of their mastery of the English language, and it has a profound effect on the improvement of students' oral communication ability in English. It also has a profound influence on the improvement of students' oral communication ability in English. However, reading in English is an essential part of language teaching. In traditional classrooms, methods like grammar translation are used to read texts and learn new vocabulary in traditional classrooms. Students face difficulties in reading new words and learning grammar skills. Students consider English as a difficult subject because it is not their mother tongue. English is not only difficult for students but also a problem for teachers (Munawar, 2022).

Cooperative Learning on English reading

Most of the early experiments on cooperative learning were in areas other than language, such as science and math, but as the effectiveness of cooperative learning has been demonstrated, more and more language scholars are turning their attention to cooperative learning (Wichadee, 2005). This section reviews some of the previous studies related to the present study.

Devi (2015) has illustrated that the data from his research still witnessed that cooperative learning appears to help students learn to think critically in reading and promotes their critical thinking dispositions. However, limitations can arise from unclear teacher tasking or poor time allocation. On top of that, Phiwpong (2016) also indicated that the average scores of the measures mirror the noticeable improvement in the reading skills of the subjects after the cooperative learning activities in the classroom. Furthermore, the researcher (Yu, 2019) also proved that cooperative learning is an effective strategy of learning English reading. It has a positive effect on students' motivation, confidence, interest due to cooperative learning creates a cozy atmosphere in order that students have more opportunities to communicate with each other. According to the above scholars' studies, cooperative learning has a positive impact on English reading to some extent as well as the learning motivation. Sittilert (1994) made research on the effects of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) on English reading comprehension and finally drew a conclusion that (CIRC) helped low achievement students improve their reading ability. Besides, Nejad (2015) conducted an eight-week control group experiment was conducted in which 70 students were equally divided into two groups, and at the end of the experiment it was shown that the students who adopted cooperative learning showed a significant improvement in their reading scores compared to the control group (those who still adopted traditional teaching).

In a word, cooperative learning has been widely used in the field of education since it was proposed by Mr and Mrs Johnson in 1975, and a variety of scholars have illustrated that cooperative learning has significantly improved students' English reading in further decades of research. Nonetheless, in mainland China, cooperative learning is seldom adopted in secondary school students' English classrooms. The purpose of this research is to investigate whether cooperative learning also has a proactive impact on Chinese students' English reading in mainland China. This study fills the gap of not having adequate studies documenting how implementation of cooperative learning affects the Chinese secondary level students' reading in English.

Methodology

To investigate the impact of cooperative learning on students' English reading skills, a three-month intervention

was implemented with Grade eight students from a secondary school in Huizhou, Boluo County, China. The experimental group was exposed to cooperative learning strategies, while the control group continued with the traditional Direct Method. The intervention spanned from week four to week sixteen of the academic term and involved several structured cooperative learning activities. Students in the experimental group were divided into small, heterogeneous groups of 4-5 members to promote peer learning, which were engaged in a variety of reading tasks such as Jigsaw Reading, where each member read a different section of the text and then taught it to their group; Think-Pair-Share, which involved individual contemplation, paired discussion, and group sharing; and role assignments that ensured active participation and accountability.

Collaborative discussions followed the reading tasks, allowing groups to answer comprehension questions, analyze texts, and share interpretations. Peer teaching was also emphasized, with students taking turns to instruct their peers on reading strategies like skimming, scanning, and inferencing. The teacher facilitated these activities, providing guidance and feedback, while ensuring students remained on task. Reading materials were carefully selected to align with the curriculum and maintain student interest. To assess the intervention’s effectiveness, both groups took a pre-test and post-test to measure reading comprehension and engagement levels. Classroom observations, along with surveys and questionnaires, provided additional insights into student engagement and perceptions. The results from the pre-test and post-test were compared between the experimental and control groups, and qualitative data from observations and feedback were analyzed to understand the nuances of student engagement. This intervention aimed to create a more engaging and effective learning environment, addressing the challenges of time constraints and heavy workloads in traditional teacher-led reading classes.

Research Context and Participants

Students in mainland China are exposed to English in kindergarten and learn it systematically in primary school. The English teaching programme consists of four basic parts: listening, speaking, reading and writing, and each lesson lasts about 45 minutes. This study was conducted in grade 8 where 50 students within the age range 13-14 years were studying. The teacher adopted cooperative learning teaching strategies in the reading class and obtained students’ viewpoints on cooperative learning through questionnaires and interviews after the completion of the unit, and observed whether it had a positive feedback effect on students’ motivation to read in English. In recent years, the “Fair Class Policy” has been implemented to promote equity in education, so that there are no priority classes and students of all levels are evenly distributed in each class. The diversity of students with different levels of proficiency in a class can facilitate the implementation of cooperative learning and stimulate students’ thinking in this environment. Secondly, it helps the teacher to better analyse the results, as the diversity of ability within the class allows the teacher to be exposed to more data and to analyse the students’ reading performance in more depth. The students of the grade 8 were categorized into three levels: those having upper level, medium level and lower-level proficiency in English as shown in Table 1. In order to further explore whether co-operative learning has a positive impact on students’ English reading, we also conducted interview with three students from each level of the grade 8 (a total of nine students) and numbered their names with letters as in the table, which will be used to denote the corresponding interviewees in the data analysis.

Table 1 participants in the interview

| Levels | Grade 8 | Grade Range | Amount |
|--------|---------|---------------|--------|
| Upper | A-C | 80-100 | 3 |
| Medium | D-F | 60-79 | 3 |
| Lower | G-I | lower than 60 | 3 |

Intervention and Instruments

A three-month cooperative learning intervention was conducted with Grade 8 students to investigate its impact on English reading motivation. Prior to the intervention, a pre-test was administered, which included a questionnaire designed to assess students’ perspectives on integrating cooperative learning with English reading and to determine whether cooperative learning strategies positively correlated with their reading motivation. To gain deeper insights, interviews were conducted with nine students—three each from the upper, middle, and lower academic tiers. The interview results were used to analyze the feasibility and impact of combining cooperative learning with English reading classes. Following the intervention, a post-test was conducted, and the data obtained from the post-test questionnaire were analyzed and compared to evaluate the effectiveness of the cooperative learning intervention in enhancing students’

English reading motivation.

To ensure the validity of the experiment, students were strategically grouped into small teams of 4-6 members, comprising a mix of high-performing and low-performing students. This heterogeneous grouping aimed to explore the influence of peer interactions on reading motivation. The teacher facilitated these groups, providing guidance while ensuring that all students actively participated and stayed on task. By incorporating these methodological steps, the study aimed to rigorously assess the impact of cooperative learning on students' English reading motivation, ensuring a comprehensive and valid evaluation of the intervention's effectiveness.

Results

The one-tailed t-test for paired samples was used to examine the differences between the pre-test and post-test data obtained from the questionnaire. In doing so, the SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data. Aiming at students' views on English reading before and after testing, interview was conducted to understand their experiences.

The Effect of Cooperative Learning in Reading Motivation

The questionnaire on whether cooperative learning affects students' motivation in English reading dimensions shows that the mean score of students' pre-test dimensions is 17.20 (standard deviation is 2.30), and the mean score of students' post-test dimensions is 24.26 (standard deviation is 3.02), and according to the results of the matched-sample t-test, the t-value is 26.895 ($p < 0.01$), and the test is significant at the significance level of 0.05. This data indicates that there is a significant difference between the matched samples of the pre-test and post-tests, and that there is a cognitive difference between the pre and post-tests as to whether cooperative learning affects the motivation to learn English, and the post-tests are more inclined to agree that cooperative learning affects the students' motivation to learn English.

Table 2 Means of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Achievement Scores of the Students

| Test | N | \bar{X} | S.D. | |
|------|----|-----------|------|-------------|
| Pre | 50 | 17.20 | 2.30 | t 26.895 ** |
| Post | 50 | 24.26 | 3.02 | |

a = .05
t(.05,df=49) = 1.677

The questionnaire on how cooperative learning affects students' motivation to engage in English reading showed that students' mean scores on the pre-test dimensions were 12.68 (standard deviation 2.31), and the mean scores on the post-test dimensions were 17.54 (standard deviation 2.81), and the results of the matched samples t-test showed that the t-value was 17.83 ($p < 0.01$), and the test was significant at the 0.05 level of significance condition, indicating that there is a significant difference between the responses of the pre-test and post-test students on this question, with the post-test students scoring higher mean scores, suggesting that the post-test students are more in agreement that cooperative learning enhances motivation to read in English in different dimensions.

Table 3 Means of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of the Students

| Test | N | \bar{X} | S.D. | |
|------|----|-----------|------|------------|
| Pre | 50 | 12.68 | 2.31 | t 17.83 ** |
| Post | 50 | 17.54 | 2.81 | |

a = .05
t(.05,df=49) = 1.677

All in all, having analyzed the data in Tables 2 and 3, it was concluded that the implementation of cooperative learning in the English reading classroom was effective in improving students' interaction and motivation, which means that the top students remained at a high level, while the middle and bottom students' motivation on English reading and their reading scores improved dramatically. Besides, the students' improvement not only happened in English reading, but cooperative learning promoted students' divergent thinking and their self-confidence even more.

Students' perception of the cooperative learning and its effect on their English reading motivation

Some interesting outcomes appeared in the interview. Surprisingly, some of the high-achieving students seemed

to be against cooperative learning: “I think that co-operative learning may somehow slow down my progress because there are still weak students in the group and I often need to give them answers to their doubts when they come across incomprehensible passages or sentences in the reading “(A-1). And (C-1) “Some of the students in the group with poor self-control will always take advantage of cooperative learning to chat, which also has an impact on classroom discipline and group members’ motivation to learn” However, most of the students held a supportive attitude towards those in the middle of the spectrum. (D-1) “When I don’t know what I can ask other students in the group, and others can come to ask me if they don’t know what they can’t do, and group members cooperate with each other to make progress together”. It can be seen that cooperative learning can greatly improve students’ interaction and interest in English reading. However, when it comes to the downstream students, they seem to hold an indifferent attitude towards cooperative learning (J-1): “I have a weak foundation in English, and the students in the group can always finish the reading tasks assigned by the teacher within the specified time, I need time to learn slowly, so cooperative learning increases my learning pressure”. The results of the first interview showed that the students were still self-centered when they first adopted the teaching strategy of cooperative learning and did not really learn together as a group.

In the second interview, some students’ attitudes towards cooperative learning also altered: “When the teacher implemented cooperative learning several times in the English reading class, I realized that we are a whole, and at the same time it is our duty to help our weak classmates, which enables us to make progress together (A-2). “ Team work require every member in group take charge, which may lead to failure to the group while someone doesn’t work hard (Situmorang, 2021). Another student added, “I am very happy to offer help to other students in the group under the premise of ensuring that my own assignment can be successfully completed, and I can further improve my own reading level while helping my classmates, so I am more inclined that the teacher to be able to adopt more cooperative learning as a teaching method in the reading class” (B-2). Moreover, “before the teacher adopted cooperative learning, I could not be interested in reading, and I always gave up halfway through the reading, but since the teacher adopted cooperative learning, the members of the group worked together to complete the task seriously, which made me participate in it very well” (H-2), which confirms Ibnian’s (2012) research result that group cooperation skills have an impact on the development of positive attitudes among students. Besides, according to student (E-2),”Since teacher adopted cooperative learning in our reading class, I have found that my reading efficiency is higher and my accuracy rate has improved, it benefits from the mutual discussions between the top achievers in my group and us”.

Conclusions based on two interviews indicated that high-achieving students showed neutrality or resistance to the teacher’s use of cooperative learning in the English reading class at the beginning because they did not see the group as a whole and focused more on independent learning. Even though they were able to complete the reading task well, progress on the group task was very slow. After the implementation of cooperative learning for a period of time, students began to realize that they should take the group as a whole, and the top students began to help their group members understand the text after completing their own learning tasks, increasing the efficiency of the group’s work, and the learning atmosphere became better, and the middle and lower class students gradually aroused their interest in reading, what’s more, their achievement in reading also witness a significant betterment.

After analyzing the students’ pre-test and post-interviews and combining them with the data, it was concluded that students’ interest in reading English had been effectively improved through cooperative learning, and that cooperative learning was also influencing students’ learning ability in a subtle way, and that it was easier for students to find their own deficiencies and consciously strengthen their knowledge in this area in the course of mutual communication and sharing. In addition, cooperative learning also promotes the overall development of students. In terms of communication, they are given the opportunity to speak and communicate boldly and confidently with their peers; in terms of learning, they develop good learning habits and improve their learning ability.

Discussion

The results from the quantitative data analysis showed that cooperative learning does enhance secondary level school students’ motivation to read in English, by increasing their motivation to read as well as mutual sharing of learning among them at different levels. Based on the data generated, it was found that the high achievers had a neutral view on cooperative learning as they felt that the weaker students in the group might affect their learning progress. However, the middle- and lower-performing students were generally supportive of cooperative learning in reading classes. Midstream students believe that they can seek help from their high-achieving classmates when they encounter difficulties, and at the same time, they will try to help others when other students come to them for help when they encounter difficulties, and

at the same time, they can further consolidate their own knowledge. Furthermore, for students with a weak achievement base, they recognize at the beginning that they can't keep up with the pace of their reading with their group members, which leads to a great deal of stress in their own learning. However, after a period of cooperative learning, they began to seek help from their group members and gradually improved their self-confidence. Students gain more confidence because they learn and work with their peers. Learning with peers can make them feel less stressed. When students learn in a group, they feel like they are doing some sort of task that they have to be successful (Suwantharathip, 2015). In addition, students who were not interested in reading gradually began to be active under the impetus of their group members, and completed the reading tasks assigned by the teacher seriously, which accords with Pan's (2013) viewpoint that in group discussions, students receive support and encouragement from their peers so as to they are more willing to invest more time in learning. This conclusion is consistent with which reached by Reid (1989), through this method of learning, students are given the opportunity to converse, present and express their ideas. According to the results of the interviews, the bottom tier of students showed a particularly marked improvement in their performance, both in terms of motivation and reading achievement, and they demonstrated satisfaction with the results of cooperative learning as they have learnt reading skills and strategies. Furthermore, a number of scholars in the early years also came to the same conclusion that week students obtain a more dramatic improvement by learning reading strategy through their research (Armbrister, 2010; Bolukbas, 2011). Even though in mainland China, where teachers are accustomed to direct teaching methods, cooperative learning can be a useful tool for Chinese students, Flowerdew (1998) noted, for two reasons: either because it makes use of the Confucian value of cooperation, which seems to help develop a style that is conducive to learning; or because it can be used to counteract the Confucian concepts of "face" and self-devaluation, which can undermine the learning process and self-depreciation, which can undermine the learning process.

Overall, the results indicate that cooperative learning has a positive influence on improving students' English reading skills, stimulating motivation, facilitating linguistic communication and expression, and fostering cooperation and teamwork. The strengths of this study include its rigorous experimental design, which involved pre-tests and post-tests to measure the impact of the intervention, as well as the strategic grouping of students to ensure a mix of different academic levels. Additionally, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, such as questionnaires and interviews, provided a comprehensive understanding of the students' perspectives and the effectiveness of the cooperative learning strategies.

However, the study also has some limitations that need to be addressed in future research. Firstly, the sample size was limited to a single secondary school in Huizhou, Boluo County, China, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other contexts or regions. Secondly, the intervention period of three months, while significant, may not be sufficient to observe long-term effects of cooperative learning on English reading proficiency. Thirdly, the study relied on self-reported data for some measures, which could be subject to bias. Finally, while the study controlled for some external factors, there may still be unaccounted variables that could influence the outcomes.

Further research and practice are required to explore how to maximize the potential of cooperative learning in English reading instruction and to address these corresponding challenges and limitations. Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples, longer intervention periods, and additional methods to minimize biases and control for external variables. These steps will help to validate and extend the findings of this study, providing more robust insights into the efficacy of cooperative learning in English education.

Conclusion and Implications

This study concluded that there is a positive relationship between teaching through cooperative learning and students' English reading. While reading in English is usually difficult for EFL students, the use of cooperative learning strategies contributed to the enhancement of students' motivation to read. The time constraints and heavy workload in English reading classes have led teachers to adopt the traditional teaching method, i.e., the teacher-dominated lecture-type teaching. However, it is to be understood that cooperative learning methods can reduce teachers' workload as students are engaged in self exploration and mutually beneficial learning with their peer. As a result, improving reading scores is an enormous challenge for students as well as for teachers on account of that reading is a activity which includes mastering, deciding and collaboration, requiring plenty of time to cultivate. Cooperative learning, which is recognized worldwide as a teaching strategy that improves learning outcomes, is also being widely adopted in mainland China. Furthermore, as is known universally that one of the most extensive features of cooperative learning is promoting communication, which is just what is needed for reading, working together to read and promote understanding. Students

in the exchange of a process of expression of their own views, and jointly discover the key information and the main idea of the article, so as to deepen the understanding of the text. After three months of teaching cooperative learning in English reading class, students' performance and interest in reading were significantly improved, and students' performance in class was more active compared to the previous reading class. According to previous research (Devi, 2015; Phiwpong, 2016; Yu, 2019; Sittilert, 1994; Nejad, 2015), cooperative learning has a positive feedback effect on students' English reading. Therefore, the theory of cooperative learning is also applicable to students in mainland China.

Nevertheless, the application of cooperative learning in English reading does not merely improve students' reading interest and academic performance, but also have positive influence in students' thought. Compared to communicating with teachers, students tend to feel less pressure to communicate with their peers and are less afraid of making mistakes, which encourages them to share their ideas boldly. From past experience, the impact of cooperative learning on students is only at the learning level. When approached from a re-cognitive perspective, cooperative learning fosters the development of well-rounded students, which can be understood as advancing the student's sense of personal responsibility.

However, the limitations of cooperative learning were also revealed during the research. At the beginning of adopting cooperative learning in English reading, the "disunity" shown by the group made it difficult to complete the learning task. Upstream students completed the task well, while students with a weak foundation did not receive effective help in the group and were under more pressure to learn, leading to a more serious polarization of reading scores and completion of tasks within group members. At the same time, the benefits of cooperative learning do not automatically manifest themselves, and cooperative learning can be counterproductive when the teacher's guidance is not clear or the tasks are not distributed properly. Cooperative learning is no longer dominated by the teacher, but by the students, and the correct guidance of the teacher and the active cooperation of the students is the key to the successful operation of cooperative learning. Dysfunctional teams or students' boycott of group work can make cooperative learning a struggle (Felder, 2007). Furthermore, there is the issue of discipline, which, if not properly managed during the discussion session, may affect the quality of the group's learning as a whole, which in turn may affect the final grade. These are the things that teachers need to guard against, and teachers need to do the right guidance as well as feedback, so as to better improve the effectiveness of group work. Last but not least, for the policy makers, it is vital to recognize the significant benefits of cooperative learning strategies in enhancing students' English reading skills, particularly for EFL learners (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Traditional lecture-based methods may not effectively address the challenges posed by time constraints and heavy workloads in English reading classes.

Given the global recognition and adoption of cooperative learning, including its increasing implementation in mainland China, it is crucial for educational policymakers to support and encourage these strategies. This could involve providing training for teachers, revising curriculum guidelines to include cooperative learning principles (Dillenbourg, 1999), and allocating resources to facilitate this shift. Ultimately, embracing cooperative learning can lead to improved educational outcomes and better prepare students for future academic and professional challenges.

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