

# Classroom Activities of Cooperative Learning in Chinese as a Foreign Language

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Received : 23 Oktober 2023

Accepted : 19 December 2023

Published : 22 March 2024

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## Abstract

Chinese language as a foreign language class, teachers often use a collaborative learning model, one of the main characteristics is interpersonal interaction, when interacting with other people, students are required to use the Chinese language as the target language to communicate. The purpose of this research is to identify suitable classroom activities for cooperative learning in Chinese language classes. This research is a qualitative descriptive research. The data source is students from the Chinese Education Program of the State University of Surabaya basic level to advanced level students, data collection was carried out in a natural setting. Data collection techniques used are complete participant observation and interviews. Four cooperative learning activities are suitable for Chinese as a foreign language class, including 1) conversation cards, 2) role-play, 3) story-telling, and 4) debate. It is not only to improve communication and cooperation or collaborative skills between students, but another purpose is to grow students' foreign language expression skills. Teachers should give students feedback by correcting pronunciation in each class activity.

## Keywords

Collaborative Learning; Chinese Language; Classroom Activities

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## INTRODUCTION

As time goes by, interaction between countries is getting easier, people are increasingly aware of the importance of cooperation and collaboration. A collaborative behaviour is integrated into various aspects of social life so that collaborative learning strategies emerge. Collaborative learning is actually not a new learning strategy, it was implemented in the United States and introduced by famous education experts, David Knoots since 1970s (盛群力, 1992). Collaborative learning (cooperative learning) is a learning

theory and learning strategy that implement collaborative behaviour and interpersonal interactions as its basic characteristics. The objectives of this learning strategy are not only to increase the study results of students, but also to develop the communicative skills and team work ability of each students.

“Collaborative ” is implemented to various level different education and customized with each learning objective. In Tiongkok, we will find that two thousand years before cooperative learning was introduced, Konfusius stated that,“三人行，必有我师焉。择其善者而从之，其不善者而改之” / sān rénxíng, bì yǒu wǒ shī yān. Zé qí shàn zhě ér cóng zhī, qí bùshàn zhě ér gǎi zhī/ which means “ three people walking together, of course there is my teacher. Choose the good one and follow them, and the bad ones, change them. ” This sentence prove that Konfusius has notice collaborative behaviour between students since first.

Collaborative learning is a learning that positions students with diverse backgrounds and skills to work together in a group to reach collective learning objectives. (Gokhale, 1995), By working together in a group, students can learn and be motivated by each other. One of characteristics of collaborative learning is the existence of *jumping tasks* in the form of questions about theoretical understanding gained by students, graded questions based on the curriculum and learning objectives (Sato, 2013). Graded questions make students feel more challenged and try to improve their skills or abilities.

The main five characteristics of cooperative learning are 1) positive independence, 2) personal responsibility, 3) face-to-face promotive interactions, 4) interpersonal and small group interactions, and 5) teamwork (Roger & Johnson, 1994). Every student is expected to have independence and responsibility to help their peers, learn the material to be discussed, interact positively with each other by providing input, helping or exchanging information, students' communication skills can develop well by doing those kinds of activities.

Using collaborative learning in the classroom can provide several benefits including improving learning achievement, providing deeper understanding, exciting learning, developing student leadership, increasing positive behaviour and student self-esteem, and increasing the sense of belonging among students (Hill, n.d., 1996), Collaborative learning is not only cognitively oriented towards students, but also has a positive impact on affective, motivational aspects and a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere for students.

Collaborative learning develops students' oral communication skills (Yager et al., 1985), because collaborative learning activities are not limited to being carried out during class, students also communicate intensely outside of class to discuss with each other to complete the tasks given. Collaborative learning encourages students to discuss within and outside groups, express ideas, and opinions and provide feedback to others, so that oral communication skills can improve.

The use of collaborative learning in foreign language classes can be a good alternative for students, because this learning model creates a supportive environment for foreign language development. After all, students feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves using a foreign language with their peers, they also feel more comfortable and open to receiving feedback or correction from friends (Johnson&Johnson, 2003; Harfitt, 2012). In collaborative learning, one of the class activities is working in small groups, students feel comfortable practicing using a foreign language, they become more confident and don't need to be embarrassed or nervous when they come forward in front of the class. With a comfortable situation, students can practice more intensely and enthusiastically.

In Chinese classes, teachers often use a collaborative learning model, because the main characteristic is interpersonal interaction, where when interacting with other people, of course using language as a communication tool. By using collaborative learning class activities, students are required to use the target foreign language (L2) to communicate, so that they can train and improve foreign language skills, especially speaking skills. Collaborative learning is considered very suitable for Chinese classes because it encourages students to interact with other people or groups, in interacting using the target language (L2) so that learning objectives can be achieved. Collaborative learning provides a variety of class activity options that can be used, but teachers need to consider the foreign language abilities and character of the students to choose the right class activities. This article aims to identify collaborative learning classroom activities in Chinese as a foreign language.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research is qualitative descriptive research, which is based on postpositivism ideas and is used to examine natural objective conditions with the researcher as the main instrument (Sugiyono, 2018). Qualitative descriptive research will describe and reveal data practically and easily understood (Mukhtar & Pd, 2013), the data obtained will be described in

the form of words and paragraphs. The research data source is students of the Unesa Chinese Education Study Program from basic to advanced level. Data collection was carried out in a natural setting, in a Chinese class. Data collection techniques were carried out using complete participant observation techniques and interviews. In complete participant observation, the researcher observes behavior, listens to what is said and participates in any activities (Stainback & Stainback, 1988), in this research the researcher is fully involved, the atmosphere is natural, and the researcher is not seen carrying out a research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the research conducted, there are 4 (four) collaborative learning class activities that can be used in Chinese classes.

### **Conversation Cards (问题箱 / wèntí xiāng)**

This class activity is very simple and easy to do, the educator makes cards containing questions taken from the textbooks used, then distributes them to students and asks them to ask the questions on the cards to other students. The function of this activity is not only to improve communication skills in the target language (L2), but also to create a pleasant classroom situation. For students, this kind of activity is very interesting, and does not feel like they are using the vocabulary they are learning. Students also felt that some of the questions on the cards were very interesting and quite funny.

“Class activities like this are fun, oh I can't believe it, we can use the vocabulary we just learned” – one of the student

“The questions my friends wrote were funny, hahaha” – one of the student

This activity can be used at various levels of students, basic, intermediate and advanced levels, but teachers must prepare appropriate question themes. For example, in advanced classes, questions are related to Chinese culture, which can foster students' cross-cultural communication skills. Another benefit is that collaborative learning can improve social skills by asking students to ask each other questions according to the questions on their respective cards. Meanwhile, at the basic level, the questions discuss daily activities or hobbies. Teachers should carry out enrichment at the end of the activity to see whether students can master the use of new vocabulary through this activity. Enrichment is very important because teachers can also correct and provide feedback to students.

**Role Play (角色扮演 / juésè bànyǎn)**

Role play is not a new class activity, almost all foreign language or second language learning classes have used this activity (王怀贞, 1998). Role play is a class activity that simulates a foreign language situation, where students use their foreign language skills to play a specified character. This class activity is very suitable for basic level students, students are asked to use the vocabulary they learned, improve their ability to communicate in a foreign language and the ability to collaborate with other people. Teachers must design the scene or role that will be simulated, from the story setting, vocabulary and grammar according to their level of Chinese skills. For example, basic level students can play the role of greetings or repeat conversations in books, for intermediate level, teachers determine more difficult vocabulary and grammar. Based on research conducted by Zhang Wen, examining the use of role-playing in English classes at F Elementary School, it was found that around 86.7% of students got higher grades than in classes where there was no role-playing, most students also got good grades for speaking skills (章雯, 2015). This shows that role-play is quite effective in improving student learning outcomes. Role-play class activities are also liked and well received by students, because they make the class atmosphere more enjoyable, can increase students' attention or concentration on the class and the learning process. This class activity also can be used as a method of assessing students. Teachers must also provide corrections for inaccurate pronunciation. From observations and interviews conducted by researchers, the difficulties encountered by students were that some of them felt embarrassed or lacked confidence when they had to act out a role in front of the class, this made them stammer or not pronounce fluently.

“Sometimes I feel embarrassed speaking Chinese in front of the class, I'm really nervous, so I speak haltingly, even though I can and have prepared well.”

**Story-Telling (讲故事 / jiǎng gùshi)**

Story-telling activities are quite simple, teachers ask students to tell stories according to the specified topic. Teachers can prepare the vocabulary or grammar that should be used in the story. Storytelling activities involve several components, such as pragmatics, semantics and communication. This activity also develops students' cultural skills (Hendrickson, 1992). Story-telling can help students develop language skills, increase concentration in class, increase the amount of vocabulary mastered, and encour-

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age students to use the target language (L2) to express themselves (Cooper, 1989). Usually, after students tell a story, the educator provides feedback and corrects errors in pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar. If we look at the classroom atmosphere, storytelling activities are useful because they create a relaxed classroom atmosphere (Scott, 1985). For researchers, this class activity is not suitable for basic level students, because the amount of vocabulary and grammar they mastered is still too small. Meanwhile, for intermediate and advanced levels, story-telling activities are very good for improving speaking skills, especially expressing ideas in the target language (L2). Teachers can also hold story-telling competitions in class, then choose the first, second and third best. This activity can increase their motivation, and give students a sense of achievement, and teachers can use this activity as an assessment of students.

### **Debate (评论 / pínglùn)**

This collaborative learning activity is different from the three activities above, the debate activity is more complex and can only be implemented at the advanced level. This activity requires higher language skills, and students must have the ability to express language skills, because this activity does not only use simple everyday vocabulary, students are expected to express their opinions or ideas, because this is the main goal of the debate activity. This activity is also in line with 《大纲 /dà gāng/》 or 'Outline' of Chinese Education for intermediate level objective learning is “able discuss and express opinion in paragraph”, the objective learning for advanced level one is “able to reveal right ideas and feelings systematically”. Debate activities in collaborative classes can also attract students' interest in learning Chinese because the class atmosphere is relaxed and lively.

Apart from improving communication skills and the ability to speak Mandarin, debate activities in the classroom can improve critical thinking skills and one of the High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) compared to conventional learning processes (Yang & Rusli, 2012). Students use logic and systematic arguments to convince other parties of their opinions or defend their previously chosen opinions, so good critical thinking skills are needed. This is different from conventional learning where students are less involved and tend to be passive.

Liu Rong and Liu Yali conducted research on the use of debate activities among intermediate-level students and found that students preferred this activity to conventional classes. Students feel that debate activities can

improve their expressive abilities (刘荣 & 刘娅莉, 2009). Most intermediate and advanced-level speaking classes tend to be monotonous, usually the activities in the class are only learning new vocabulary – text/conversation – Practice, and there is a lack of interaction between students (于芳芳, 2006).

“Debate makes me enthusiastic and feels challenged, I feel like my ability to speak in Chinese to communicate is still lacking, I have to learn more”

From this research, it can be seen that debate activities can also motivate students to improve their speaking skills. Teachers can use topics from books or determine their own topics, which are interesting to students. Teachers need to pay attention to time management so that it can be implemented efficiently.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are various class activities for collaborative learning, there are four types of cooperative learning activities that are suitable for Mandarin as a foreign language classes, including 1) conversation cards, 2) role-play, 3) story-telling and 4) debate. They not only want to develop communication and cooperation/collaborative skills between students, but another aim is to develop students' expressive abilities. When preparing and designing these activities, teachers should pay attention to which activities suit the students' Chinese language skills, otherwise the goal of the activities will not be achieved. Beginner, intermediate and advanced cooperative learning activities are certainly different. After class activities, the teacher is expected to provide some feedback or evaluation to the students. Teachers can reflect on whether this activity was effective for learning and whether it worked. Teachers should pay attention to whether the Chinese language textbooks they use enable and support collaborative learning activities.

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