

# Functions of Affective Factors in Cooperative Language Instruction –Taking Writing Curriculum as an Example

Wang Mingliang

*Heilongjiang Bayi Agricultural University, the City of Daqing, Heilongjiang, China*

**ABSTRACT.** *Affective factors are once solely regarded as a category in psychology. Currently many linguists and educators are concerned about the functions of affective factors in foreign language instruction. Cooperative learning approach is widely used by a large number of instructors worldwide. Many researchers claim that students learning effects can be effectively improved by means of cooperative learning approach, especially affective factors are given sufficient consideration in the process of language instruction. Taking writing curriculum as an example, the author drew the following suggestions: firstly, students affective state is dynamic, teachers should help students to reduce the influence of the negative affective factors to guarantee the implementation of cooperative learning; secondly, teachers should often discuss with students to adjust teaching strategy accordingly; lastly, in cooperative teaching, learners are center-oriented, teachers are facilitators; teachers should assist students to cultivate the ability to solve various problems of affective factors on their own.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Affective factors, Cooperative, Writing instruction*

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, a large number of educators believe that affective factors play a decisive role in language learning with the development of psycholinguistics. Firstly, the more the teacher pays attention to affective condition of students, the more likely the teaching is to be effective. Secondly, attention to affective factors reaches far beyond the language teaching and even beyond the traditional academic domain. In the past instructors just focused on cognitive development of human mind, they almost paid no attention to affective factors. One of the drawbacks of such practice is emotional illiteracy” which results in the poor interpersonal competence or low intelligent quotient. A remedy for this situation is “to educate the whole students, bringing together mind and heart in the classroom” .

Cooperative Language Learning has been proved to be a most creative and practical teaching and learning approach and strategy in classroom. In China, in different colleges and universities, great efforts have been taken by language instructors and the effect of cooperative learning on the educational outcomes has been noted.

## 2. Purpose of the Research

Cooperative language learning has turned out to be fruitful and effective in gaining in more academic achievement compared to various traditional learning methodologies. However, how can teachers make most use of cooperative learning approach in College English classroom so as to promote students’ classroom participation and motivation? And what kinds of affective factors will facilitate or hinder the application of cooperative language learning approach?

In theory, the research aims to find the positive and negative affective factors in College English cooperative teaching and learning. In practice, it can provide instructors with a practical teaching strategy or model to follow in college English teaching in the future.

## 3. Research of English Writing Curriculum Instruction Home and Abroad

*Product Approach* stems from the theory of behaviorism which believes that the teaching of writing is achieved in terms of the development of sets of habits through process of stimulus and responses. Product approach attaches great importance to grammatical and discourse levels, fluency, error, layout and writing quality. Learners’

writing development is mainly the result of imitation of model texts, and what learners need is linguistic knowledge.

*Process Approach* underlines that writing is a highly complicated process. Once a writing assignment is given, then the students will be allowed sufficient time and opportunity to make a plan, to brainstorm, to define a rhetorical issue, to negotiate with teacher or classmates, to put forward solutions and to evaluate. The teacher's role is to provide students with necessary and useful input, and to give feedback as students submit their final products.

*Genre Approach* emphasizes that the whole text is considered as the basic unit, rather than a sentence. This approach considers text as the basic unit of writing. The features of a similar set of texts rely on the social context of their creation and use, and these features can be described in a way that genre uses in the social context.

*Process-genre Approach* is a synthesis of the three approaches mentioned above, which is designed in terms of a view of writing and a view of the writing development. The writing is described as involving knowledge of the context and the purpose of writing works. Writing development happens when providing input to learner and then the learner gives corresponding response as in process approaches and stimulating the learners' potential in writing as in genre approaches.

*Length Approach* is popularly implemented in different universities in China. The basic strategies are listed as follows: English learners have learnt English for many years; however most of them couldn't apply what they have grasped into actual practice. So we design some learning tasks to inspire students to express real feelings in writing. We comply with foreign language learning requirements by adjusting the composition length and gradually increase the number of words to express certain ideas. We break the traditional length requirement of writing a composition, thus enhance the learners' sense of achievement and improve their self-confidence. The ultimate goal is to cultivate practical language competence. In short, "Length Approach" is to encourage students to write long compositions by fulfilling various writing assignments designed and delivered by teachers.

#### **4. Functions of Affective Factors in Language Instruction**

##### ***4.1 Motivation and Cooperative Learning***

Motivation can be divided into two broad categories. One is extrinsic motivation which refers to a person's desire to get a compliment or get rid of punishment, the other is called intrinsic motivation which refers to students' inborn curiosity, interest and enthusiasm during their learning. Extrinsic motivation can be beneficial for language learning, however, acquisition is most probably influenced by intrinsic motivation, especially in the long run.

In the process of cooperative learning, interaction between learners and teachers is encouraged. The learners are using the target language to negotiate, and to solve arguments. If they put the target language into full use, then their motivation will be inspired. Consequently, students will be eager to pour more enthusiasm, time, energy and interest into language learning. We can draw the conclusion that motivation, whether extrinsic or intrinsic can promote language learning.

##### ***4.2 Attitude And Cooperative Learning***

A learner's attitude toward language learning can be positive or negative, even hostile. If a learner harbors resentment against the target language, such kind of attitude will become a barrier in mastering the target language. Based on the occasion above, we can draw some implications for cooperative learning: Firstly, small group teammates and teachers should help those with negative attitude towards target language learning. Secondly, each individual has his own attitude towards an affair. No matter in class or in extra-curriculum activities, the teacher should help the student to form a positive attitude toward target language culture. Last, it is also important to offer multiple chances for a learner to taste success in a group. Sense of satisfaction and accomplishment can motivate students to form positive attitude.

### 4.3 Self-Esteem And Cooperative Learning

Self-esteem is how much you value yourself and how important you think you are. Each student is different from one another. Teachers are responsible for protecting his or her rights and feelings in order to develop the five key components of self-esteem including a sense of security, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and a sense of personal competence. Cooperative learning approach can provide the learners with a comfortable learning atmosphere where individual values, positive learning attitudes and a sense of trustworthiness and accomplishment are promoted. In cooperative learning learners can feel that they are valued in the group in the process of cooperative learning, they are not afraid of making mistakes any more, they are more eager to convey their ideas to other teammates.

### 4.4 Anxiety And Cooperative Learning

Anxiety can affect all stages of the learning process: input, processing and output. In cooperative learning process, students with excessive anxiety usually experience discomfort in group activities and tend to flee away from the task and teammates. Therefore, the higher they expect, the less they achieve, the more anxious they will become. It is a vicious circle. The result of learning anxiety depends on the degree and the learning situations. Teachers must devote more time and energy to understand the students' state of anxiety and try every means to create a light-hearted and cheerful classroom learning atmosphere in cooperative learning to ensure the students to feel at ease, and then make progress.

## 5. Research Design

All the participants in this research are the author's students placed into two classes of Grade 2018 in Hei Longjiang Ba Yi Agricultural University. Totally there are 120 students from three different colleges. They have had at least seven years of English learning experience in the secondary school and high school. Cooperative learning approach is applied to teach students writing.

The time range for my research is two semesters. For the first two periods in the first class, after I explained some requirements for my class, I assigned a topic to every student to write a composition for about 120 words without any preparation. Then according to their performance based on their written paper and the English scores in National Entrance Examination, I divided them into different small groups, and each group consisted of 6 members to play such roles as recorder, reporter, monitor, observer, facilitator, etc., each member was assigned different duties every two weeks in that there is one writing course every other week and students had to take turns to fulfill their own duties in small groups. Also, their roles are changed frequently so that all the members could have opportunities to practice new roles, to perform different duties in one group. During the first year of English learning, all my students will practice at least 15 topics, and take part in CET 4 once. All the experimental statistics were carefully and systematically recorded for further analysis.

## 6. Data Analysis

As Table 1 shows, the first group of learners who get the score ranging from 24 to 36 indicates that they learn in a highly positive way, while the second who score 37-60 means that the learners develop in a positive way. The last group of learners who can score 61-96 means that they develop in a negative way in cooperative learning.

*Table 1 Accounts for The Affective Factors Evaluation Criterion*

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Highly Positive</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
<i>Score</i>	24-36	37-60	61-96

Table 2 Shows That 19.17 Percent of Learners Develop in a Negative Way .

*Table 2 Students' Affective Factors Comment*

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Criterion	Score	Number of the Students %	Evaluation
Highly Positive	24-36	42 35 %	Develop positively
Positive	37-60	55 45.83 %	Develop normally
Negative	61-96	23 19.17 %	Develop negatively

Table 3 Shows Most Learners Who Are Positive in Group Learning Reap the Benefit from the Cooperative Approach.

*Table 3 Students' Affective Development and the Cet 4*

Affect Comment	Number of the Students	Students Passing the Test of Writing %	Students Failing the Test of Writing %
Highly Positive	42	37 88.1 %	5 11.9 %
Positive	55	50 90.91 %	5 9.09 %
Negative	23	3 13.04 %	20 86.96 %

Since cooperative learning approach is used for one year to help students make improvement in writing competence. It is significant and essential to grasp students' concept towards this approach.

*Table 4 the Results Of the Questionnaire to Study students' Concept Towards Cl*

Items (Alpha= .7701)	Students' Concept Towards CL				
	never/ seldom (%)	sometimes (%)	often/ always (%)	mean	standard deviation
1. Teammates can take turns to govern group activities.	31.5	13.2	55.2	3.394	1.1750
2. By cooperative learning, I can boldly answer questions	21.1	36.8	42.1	3.184	.9258
3. In cooperative learning, I have more chances to take part in classroom activities.	7.9	44.7	47.3	3.473	.8617
4. Taking on different duties in small group, I am eager to take part in group activities	7.9	34.2	57.9	3.789	1.0438
5. Taking on different duties in small group, I can save a lot of learning time.	5.3	26.3	68.4	3.789	.8748
6. Taking on different duties in small group makes me improve my self-confidence.	18.4	21.1	60.5	3.500	1.0591
7. I take part in group debate and other activities, such as experience exchange	18.4	26.3	55.3	3.394	1.0011
8. With the help of peer-evaluation, I can learn more.	15.8	34.2	50.0	3.394	.9165

*Table 5 Statistics Of the Whole Scale of students' Concept of Cooperative Learning*

Item Means	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Max/Min	Variance
8 items	3.4901	3.1842	3.7895	.6053	1.1901	.0429

By analyzing Table 4 and Table 5, we can conclude that most students hold positive concept towards cooperative learning approach in that for all the items a majority of students tick out "often/always" and the fact that overall mean is 3.4901 with all the means above 3.000 can also confirm that a large number of learners harbor positive attitude towards this approach.

## 7. Conclusion

(1) Teachers should bear in mind that a person's affective state is of dynamic features, which means sometimes a learner may be in positive condition, whereas other times negative. So it is not so easy to totally and precisely measure or evaluate the influence of affective factors on language learning and teaching in figures.

(2) Positive affectivity is indispensable for language acquisition. This point has been proved through students' response to questionnaires and interview.

(3) A teacher should build a less anxious learning atmosphere, in which students can improve their performance in language learning more quickly

(4) The selection of teammates is not only a teacher's responsibility and obligation; sometimes students are also hosts for their group, which means the organization of a group also should not be completely teacher-fronted.

(5) Students should be given much more freedom to be in charge of their own language learning. The more the students are delegated right and freedom to learn with teammates; the more confident they will become to express or convey ideas in the presence of teacher and students. Then group learning will become more productive.

(6) A teacher is no longer the only domination of the whole class. An important role for the teacher is that of facilitator of learning.

(7) Students should be given certain time to prepare for the learning task, which means that students should go through the process of brainstorming. Once the students have some ideas or line of thought about a given topic, then they can better devote themselves to the group work.

(8) Learning should not be individual behavior. Those who get into trouble in learning or taking part in group activities should be give assistance from both teachers and teammates.

(9) Group activities can create weak affective filter for learners in writing courses, it is well-advised for teachers to try some group learning activities, so that those learners who are always insecure may regain confidence in themselves.

(10) Peer-evaluation should be kept for as long as possible. It is valuable for learners' progress in all aspects of language competence.

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