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Effect of Group Collaboration on Language Expression Skills of Third-Grade Students in Yunnan Province

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Abstract

Background and Aims: This experimental research aimed to 1) compare students' language expression skills before and after learning through Group Collaboration, 2) compare students' language expression skills after learning through Group Collaboration with the determined criterion set at 70%, and 3) assess students' satisfaction after learning through Group Collaboration.

Methodology: The research instruments were lesson plans, a Language Expression Observation Form, and a Satisfaction Questionnaire. The appropriateness of the six lesson plans overall was at a very high level (M=4.62, SD=0.46). The observation form had an IOC between 0.67 to 1.00 and a reliability of 0.74. The satisfaction questionnaire had an IOC between 0.67 to 1.00 and a reliability of 0.86. The statistics used to analyze data were mean, standard deviation, t-test for dependent samples, and t-test for one sample.

Results: 1) Students' language expression skills after learning through Group Collaboration were significantly higher than before at the .01 level of statistical significance (t_{29}=18.73, p=.000). 2) Students' language expression skills after learning through Group Collaboration were significantly higher than the determined criterion of 70% at the .01 level of statistical significance (t_{29}=11.57, p=.000). 3) Students' satisfaction after learning through Group Collaboration overall was at a very high level (M=4.59, SD=0.62).

Conclusion: The knowledge gained from this research is that a structured five-step Group Collaboration teaching process (Preparation & Group Formation, Goal Setting & Planning, Collaborative Work & Knowledge Co-construction, Synthesis & Presentation, Reflection & Evaluation) effectively enhances students' language expression skills across vocabulary and sentence skills, narrative and sequencing skills, social communication skills, and clarity of communication. This approach significantly improved students' oral proficiency and fostered high satisfaction.

Keywords: Group Collaboration; Language Expression Skills; Student Satisfaction; Cooperative Learning; Primary School Chinese Education

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Introduction

In the context of China's ongoing basic education reform, the integration of information technology and language learning has been increasingly emphasized at the policy level. The Guidelines on Promoting New Educational Infrastructure Construction and Building a High-Quality Education Support System explicitly identify information literacy as a core developmental indicator for primary and secondary students, requiring information technology to reshape classroom teaching models and enhance learners' communication, collaboration, and expression abilities (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2022). This policy direction reflects a broader shift from reducing excessive academic burden under the Double Reduction policy toward improving learning quality through pedagogical transformation.

This shift was further institutionalized in the Compulsory Education Chinese Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), which formally elevated expression and communication to one of the four core literacy competencies in Chinese language education. The standards specify that students in Grades 3–4 should be able to articulate observations, emotions, and ideas clearly and coherently, while engaging in collaborative, exploratory, and technology-supported learning activities (MOE, 2022). Compared with earlier curriculum documents, this marks a transition from policy advocacy to mandatory curricular requirements, placing clear expectations on classroom-level instructional practices.

However, existing evidence suggests a substantial gap between these policy aspirations and actual learning outcomes. Language expression ability (LEA), defined as learners' capacity to convey meaning accurately, coherently, and appropriately in authentic communicative contexts (Bachman & Palmer, 2010), remains unevenly developed among primary school students. Baseline monitoring conducted in Anning City, Kunming, indicated that approximately 42% of third-grade students scored below the expected proficiency threshold in oral communication, with an urban–rural gap reaching 1.24 standard deviations (Anning Municipal Education Bureau, 2023). Although these findings highlight structural disparities, such macro-level data do not sufficiently explain how policy requirements are enacted—or constrained—within everyday classroom practices.

At the curriculum level, Grade 3 represents a critical developmental transition in Chinese language learning. According to the curriculum standards, the first learning stage (Grades 1–2) emphasizes encouraging students to enjoy speaking, whereas the second stage (Grades 3–4) requires students to express ideas clearly, logically, and with increasing linguistic accuracy (MOE, 2022). This transition demands frequent opportunities for low-pressure oral interaction, supported by peer collaboration and instructional scaffolding. Nevertheless, preliminary observations in the sampled primary school for this study reveal several persistent classroom-level challenges: limited opportunities for individual oral participation due to time constraints; students' reluctance

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to speak arising from fear of making mistakes or peer evaluation; and insufficient systematic guidance on oral expression strategies. These conditions suggest a clear misalignment between curriculum expectations and instructional realities.

Group collaborative learning has been widely recognized as an instructional approach that can address such challenges by expanding participation opportunities, reducing affective barriers, and supporting higher-quality language output through peer interaction. Grounded in social constructivist theory, collaborative learning emphasizes positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, and continuous communication (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Prior research has shown that structured peer interaction can enhance learners' communicative competence and motivation, particularly in language learning contexts (Gillies, 2016). Moreover, policy documents on information literacy increasingly emphasize expression, communication, and collaboration through digital tools rather than mere technical operation (China Education Network, 2025). Despite this theoretical and policy alignment, empirical research examining the effectiveness of group collaborative learning for improving third-grade students' language expression skills—especially within technology-supported Chinese language classrooms—remains limited.

Therefore, this study addresses a clearly defined empirical problem situated within a specific instructional context: the insufficient development of language expression skills among third-grade students in a primary school implementing curriculum reform under the combined pressures of educational informatization and the Double Reduction policy. By systematically investigating the application and effects of group collaborative learning on students' language expression performance, this research aims to bridge the gap between national policy objectives and classroom-level realities and to provide evidence-based guidance for optimizing instructional practices in elementary Chinese language education.

Objectives

1. To compare students' language expression skills before and after learning through Group Collaboration.

2. To compare students' language expression skills after learning through Group Collaboration with the determined criterion set at 70%.

3. To assess students' satisfaction after learning through Group Collaboration.

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Literature Review

Group Collaboration

Group collaboration is a structured instructional approach grounded in social constructivist theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process achieved through interaction and dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than merely organizing students into groups, effective collaboration requires intentional instructional design that promotes shared responsibility, mutual accountability, and sustained peer interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Prior studies emphasize that collaborative learning environments stimulate learners to articulate ideas, negotiate meaning, and refine understanding through verbal exchange, thereby creating conditions conducive to language development (Barkley et al., 2014; Slavin, 2011).

Johnson and Johnson (2009) identify five essential elements of effective collaboration: positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, promotive interaction, interpersonal skills, and group processing. These elements are particularly relevant to language learning, as they increase opportunities for meaningful oral interaction and peer feedback. From a developmental perspective, stable group norms and clearly defined roles reduce learners' anxiety and foster a psychologically safe environment for expression, which is critical in primary education (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Structured collaborative models, such as problem-based learning cycles, further operationalize these principles by embedding dialogue and reflection into task completion (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Language Expression Skills

Language expression skills (LEA) refer to learners' integrated capacity to communicate ideas, information, and emotions accurately, coherently, and appropriately in spoken language. This construct encompasses vocabulary and sentence use, narrative sequencing, pragmatic communication, and clarity of expression (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Developmental research highlights that expressive language growth depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on social interaction and contextualized use (Hoff, 2013; Timler, 2014). Narrative competence, in particular, is strengthened through opportunities to recount experiences, explain causal relationships, and engage in audience-aware communication (Spencer & Petersen, 2020), while Wasik and Iannone-Campbell (2012) identify core components such as vocabulary, syntax, narrative ability, and phonological awareness. Together, these frameworks define language expression as a multidimensional construct involving linguistic, cognitive, and social competencies.

Collaborative learning provides a mechanism through which these sub-skills can be simultaneously activated. Repeated peer interaction supports vocabulary acquisition through contextualized use, enhances narrative organization through collective storytelling and explanation, and promotes pragmatic competence via turn-taking and feedback. Empirical studies

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in primary education report that structured collaboration can improve students' oral participation, discourse coherence, and communicative confidence (Gillies, 2016).

Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction reflects learners' affective and cognitive evaluations of their learning experiences and is closely associated with engagement and participation (Astin, 1993; Oliver, 2010). In collaborative settings, satisfaction is influenced by both emotional factors, such as enjoyment and sense of belonging, and cognitive factors, such as perceived learning gains (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004). For primary school students, reduced anxiety and increased peer support in collaborative environments can enhance willingness to speak, thereby indirectly supporting the development of language expression skills.

Previous Empirical Studies

Research supports cooperative learning's positive impact on oral language. In China, Zhang and Li (2022) found that cooperative storytelling benefited second-graders' narrative skills. Gillies (2016) emphasized structured group work in academic and social development. Recent studies in the Interdisciplinary Academic and Research Journal have explored collaborative learning's effects on student outcomes in Thai primary contexts (Boonsom & Pimdee, 2022; Chaiyasuk, 2023). However, no studies have systematically integrated a five-step model with Chinese L1 third-graders across four sub-dimensions.

Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualizes group collaboration as the independent variable and language expression ability and student satisfaction as the dependent variables. Grounded in social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), cooperative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), and the communicative competence model (Canale & Swain, 1980), the framework posits that structured peer interaction enhances language expression through scaffolded communication while simultaneously fostering student satisfaction by promoting engagement and reducing affective barriers.

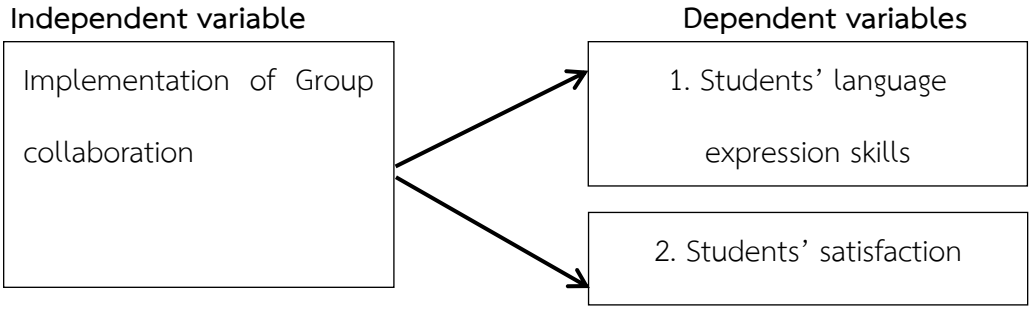


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

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Methodology

Population and Sample

1. The population of this study is 320 Third-Grade Students (8 classrooms) at Kunming Anning Middle School, Yunnan Province, the People's Republic of China.

2. The sample of this study is 30 Third-Grade Students (1 classroom) at Kunming Anning Middle School, Yunnan Province, the People's Republic of China, derived by the cluster random sampling method.

Experimental Design

This study adopts the one-group pretest-posttest design (Campbell and Stanley, 1963), which was used as a procedure to investigate the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

Group	Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
Experimental	O_1	X	O_2

O_1: was measured in the students' language expression skills before an experiment.

X: was the implementation of Group collaboration

O_2: was measured in the students' language expression skills and students' satisfaction after an experiment.

Research Instruments

1. Lesson Plans: Six two-hour lesson plans were developed, totaling twelve hours, each covering a distinct topic such as personal storytelling, observation, clear expression, questioning, narrative creation, and cultural communication. To ensure content validity, three experts evaluated the draft lesson plans using a five-point rating scale, assessing each component's appropriateness. Overall appropriateness was at a very high level (M=4.62, SD=0.46).

2. Language Expression Observation Form: The observation form was developed to assess students' language expression skills across four dimensions: vocabulary and sentence use, narrative sequencing, social communication, and clarity. After expert review and content validation, all items achieved IOC values between 0.67 and 1.00 and an inter-rater reliability of 0.74.

3. Satisfaction Questionnaire: A 16-item, 5-point Likert scale assessing five dimensions of satisfaction (objective, content, teaching strategies, media and resources, evaluation and feedback). It had an IOC between 0.67 and 1.00 and a reliability index of 0.86.

Data Collection

1. Administer a pretest to measure initial language expression ability.

2. Implement the 6 lesson plans, 12-hour Group Collaboration intervention.

3. Administer posttest (same instrument as pretest) and satisfaction questionnaire.

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Data Analysis

1. Compare pretest/post-test scores using a dependent samples t-test.
2. Compare posttest scores with the 70% criterion using one sample t-test.
3. Analyze satisfaction data using the arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

Results

1. The results of comparing students' language expression ability before and after learning through Group Collaboration.

Table 1 Comparison of Mean Scores Before and After Group Collaboration

Group	Full scores	n	Pre-test scores		Posttest scores		*t*	*p*
			M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Experimental group	20	30	12.37	1.10	16.83	1.34	18.73**	.000

**$p<0.01$

As shown in Table 1, the mean pretest score for language expression ability was 12.37 (*SD* = 1.10), and the mean posttest score was 16.83 (*SD* = 1.34). The post-test was significantly higher than the pre-test at the .01 level of statistical significance (t_{29} = 18.73, p = .000), indicating that Group Collaboration significantly improved students' language expression ability.

2. The results comparing the mean score of students' language expression ability after Group Collaboration with the criterion set at 70%.

Table 2 Comparison with the Criterion Set at 70% of Full Scores

Group	n	Full score	criterion score	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Experimental group	30	20	14	16.83	1.34	11.57**	.000

**$p<0.01$

As shown in Table 2, the mean posttest score for language expression ability was 16.83 from a possible full score of 20, and the standard deviation was 1.34, which was statistically significantly higher than the 70% (14) at the .01 level of statistical significance (t_{29} = 11.57, p = .000).

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3. The result of students' satisfaction with the Group Collaboration Teaching Method

Table 3 Student Satisfaction Toward Group Collaboration

Dimension	*M*	*SD*	Satisfaction level
1. Content	4.53	0.55	Very high level
2. Teaching strategies	4.54	0.53	Very high level
3. Media and resources			
4. Media and resources	4.70	0.48	Very high level
5. Evaluation	4.60	0.55	Very high level
Overall	**4.59**	**0.62**	**Very high level**

As shown in Table 3, students reported very high satisfaction with the Group Collaboration approach across all dimensions. (*M*=4.59, *SD* = 0.62). The Media and Resources dimension received the highest rating (*M* = 4.70, *SD* = 0.48), indicating that students found the QR-coded language scaffolds, voice recorders, and visual materials particularly helpful. The Instructional Strategy (*M* = 4.54, *SD* = 0.53) and Learning Content (*M* = 4.53, *SD* = 0.55) dimensions were also rated very highly, suggesting that students valued both the collaborative process and the thematic topics. Evaluation and Feedback received a mean of 4.60 (*SD* = 0.55), reflecting positive perceptions of the assessment methods.

Conclusion

1. Students' language expression ability after group cooperative teaching was significantly higher than before teaching, with a statistical significance of 0.01 (t_{29} = 18.73, p =.000).

2. The post-test scores of students were significantly higher than the 70% standard score, with statistical significance at the 0.01 level (t_{29} = 11.57, p =.000).

3. The overall satisfaction of students with group cooperative teaching is very high (*M* = 4.59, *SD* = 0.62).

Therefore, group cooperative teaching is feasible and effective in the oral Chinese teaching of the third grade of primary school, which can significantly improve students' language expression ability and gain students' high recognition.

Discussion

1. The results of this study reveal that students' language expression ability significantly improved after learning through group collaboration. This outcome supports Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in promoting learning. In the context of this study,

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collaborative tasks allowed students to engage in meaningful verbal exchanges, receive immediate feedback from peers, and co-construct knowledge in a supportive environment. Such interactions provided frequent opportunities for purposeful speaking, which led to observable gains in vocabulary use, narrative organization, social communication, and clarity of expression.

Several mechanisms contributed to this improvement. The interactive nature of group work required students to articulate their thoughts, negotiate meaning, and justify opinions, enhancing cognitive-linguistic processing (Webb, 2009). Furthermore, the low-stress atmosphere encouraged students to take linguistic risks without fear of judgment, increasing their willingness to communicate (Gillies, 2016). Peer modeling also played a key role, as students observed and internalized various language structures through natural dialogue. Overall, group collaboration proved to be a powerful pedagogical strategy for improving students' expressive language skills in an authentic and learner-centered manner.

2. The posttest mean score of 15.33, significantly exceeding the 70% benchmark, highlights the practical effectiveness of Group Collaboration in developing students' language expression ability. This result supports Cooperative Learning Theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), which posits that structured group activities with positive interdependence and individual accountability lead to enhanced academic performance. In this study, students benefited from frequent opportunities to articulate ideas, receive peer feedback, and engage in joint meaning-making—all of which contributed to meaningful language use and skill improvement.

Several mechanisms explain this outcome. Peer support enabled real-time clarification and scaffolding, especially for lower-achieving students, while active participation ensured that all learners had sustained practice in speaking. Additionally, built-in formative assessment through peer interaction allowed students to monitor and refine their language before the final evaluation. This is consistent with prior research: Johnson & Johnson (1989) found that cooperative learning yields achievement gains beyond traditional methods; Kagan & High (2002) reported expressive language improvement in ELL students using structured group techniques; and Slavin (2014) demonstrated that group accountability strategies effectively elevate test performance. Together, these findings affirm that group collaboration is not only theoretically sound but also pedagogically impactful in helping students surpass minimum competency standards.

3. Students reported very high satisfaction, particularly with learning content, instructional strategy, and the collaborative process. This reflects the supportive and engaging environment of Group Collaboration, which aligns with Keller's ARCS model and Self-Determination Theory, highlighting autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of motivation and satisfaction. Through peer scaffolding, shared goals, and meaningful choices, students felt more confident, connected, and invested in learning.

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These findings are supported by prior research. Ryan & Deci (2000) emphasize that environments fulfilling basic psychological needs enhance satisfaction and performance. Similarly, Prince (2004) and Gillies & Boyle (2010) found that cooperative learning promotes enjoyment, reduces anxiety, and creates a more positive classroom climate. Group Collaboration thus not only improved learning but also made the experience more rewarding and fulfilling for students.

This study provides empirical evidence that group collaborative teaching is an effective instructional approach for improving third-grade students' oral Chinese language expression ability. Students demonstrated significantly higher post-instruction performance compared to both pretest results and the 70% benchmark, alongside very high levels of learning satisfaction. These findings confirm that a structured five-step group collaboration teaching process effectively supports vocabulary use, narrative organization, social communication, and clarity of expression through sustained, scaffolded peer interaction. Overall, the results indicate that well-designed group collaboration not only enhances students' language expression skills but also fosters positive learning experiences in primary Chinese language classrooms.

Recommendation

1. Recommendations for Implementation

1. The group cooperation system is integrated into the primary school Chinese curriculum, and the cooperation tasks are designed according to the curriculum standards.

2. Strengthen the professional training of teachers in the design and guidance of cooperative learning.

3. Develop multimedia resources and assessment tools to support cooperative learning.

4. Establishing a Professional Learning Community for Teachers to Share Practical Experience of Cooperative Teaching

2. Recommendations for Further Research

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of group collaboration on students' language proficiency.

2. The effect of cooperative teaching in different subjects and grades was compared.

3. Explore the role of digital tools (such as voice recording and online collaboration platforms) in collaborative learning.

4. Study on the Performance and Adaptability of Students with Different Language Proficiency in Cooperative Learning.

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