

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Significance of the Problem

English is one of the most important languages for commercial school students furthering their study or applying for a good job. For the higher vocational level, they have to study 2 English courses in the second year. Business English I is a course for the first semester of the second- year higher vocational certificate students in Chiangrai Commercial School, Chiangrai Province. This course consists of 4 skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Business English I was of interest to the researcher because it is a fundamental course that the students have to study in furthering their study. Students have to take this course in order to strengthen their business English knowledge and to enhance their future job prospects. Now in business workplaces, office workers, of the right caliber and interpersonal skills, are wanted to work as a team. Cooperative learning is one method that teachers can use to stimulate students to acquire the

knowledge and interpersonal and team skills.

Scaglione (1992) states that cooperative learning strategies provide the method for integrating technical and workplace literacy skills. Student-Teams-Achievement-Divisions (STAD), Think-Pair-Share and Jigsaw are the most popular methods in cooperative learning which stimulate students to master academic and team skills. STAD and Jigsaw methods also have a clear process in identifying the learning progress of students through the use of quizzes. Think-Pair-Share, in particular, according to the different learning styles of students, is an interesting method which emphasizes individual, pair and whole class work. Moreover, critical thinking skills are also very necessary for students, not only in higher education but also in their daily life. There is a high demand on today's workers to have critical thinking skills for analyzing, problem solving and team-working (Schlick,1992). According to the National Education Act (1999), the cooperative learning method and critical thinking, are encouraged to be used in Thai education because they enhance students' higher level of thinking and encourage cooperation in helping each other to learn English. With these reasons, the researcher would like to study whether the cooperative learning method is effective in enhancing students' critical thinking. The results of this

study will help not only teachers to find appropriate ways to enhance students' critical thinking skills through Business English I, but also the curriculum planners, to plan the proper curriculum to promote students' critical thinking skills.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare the critical thinking skills of students learning Business English I at Chiangrai Commercial School using the cooperative learning method and the traditional group work method.
2. To survey opinions of students in the experimental group towards the cooperative learning method.

Hypothesis

The critical thinking skills of students using the cooperative learning method is higher than those of students using the traditional group work method.

Scope of the Study

Scope of the study is as follows:

1. The samples in this study are second-year students in higher vocational level, who study Business English I at Chiangrai

Commercial School in Chiangrai province in the first semester of the academic year 2001.

2. The study will not include the age, ethnics and gender of the students.
3. The aim of the study is to compare the critical thinking skills of students who are taught by the cooperative learning method with those taught by the traditional group work method.
4. The cooperative learning method in this study focuses on Student-Teams-Achievement-Divisions (STAD), Jigsaw and Think-Pair-Share.
5. The critical thinking skills in this study emphasize on the analysis, synthesis and evaluation level as mentioned in Blooms' taxonomy.
6. In the lesson plan, the materials used in learning for eight weeks in both groups were the same, while the method used was different in each group.
7. The opinions of students in the cooperative learning method cover 6 components, namely, (1) positive interdependence, (2) face to face interaction, (3) social skills, (4) individual accountability, (5) group processing, and (6) self-evaluation of

their learning and thinking ability after being taught through cooperative learning.

8. The pre-test and post-test used are the same to check students' critical thinking skills.

9. The unit pre-tests and unit post-tests are designed to check improvement in the students' critical thinking skills.

Limitation of the Study

The course is offered 3 periods per week. Two periods are used for the reading and writing skills. One period is used for listening and speaking skills in a Sound Lab room, which is not suitable for assigning group work tasks due to the space limitations. Moreover, the course description of Business English I focuses more on reading and writing skills. Therefore, the study will focus only on the period for reading and writing skills.

Definition of Terms

Effectiveness: The competency of using the cooperative learning method in developing critical thinking skills of students who take Business English I.

Cooperative learning : Cooperative learning exists when students work together to accomplish shared learning

goals. (Johnson & Johnson,1999)

Higher Vocational level: The two-year program of Vocational Education system which is a continuation of the Vocational Certificate level.

Students: The Higher Vocational Certificate level students who study Business English I course at Chiangrai Commercial School in Chiangrai Province in the first semester of the academic year 2001.

Critical thinking : An ability to give reason or purpose to solve some problems or answer questions by analysis, synthesis and evaluation of information based on Bloom's taxonomy.(Bloom,1984)

Business English I: The first required Business English course for the second-year students in Higher Vocational Certificate Level.

Student-Teams-Achievement-Divisions (STAD):

A model of cooperative learning is that allows heterogeneous groups (in terms of competence) of four or five members to study some materials together, usually in the form of worksheets. Group members must make sure that everybody reaches a sufficient level of mastery because, after a team practice, they will take individual tests, then the

scores are aggregated into team scores by the teacher. Students receive recognitions based on these team scores only.

Jigsaw: A model of cooperative learning is that students are assigned to four or five member heterogeneous study teams. Academic materials are presented to students in text form, and each student has the responsibility to learn a portion of the material. Members from different teams with the same topic, (sometimes called the expert group), meet to study and help one another learn their topic. Then students return to their home team and teach the other members what they have learned. Following home team meetings and discussions, students take quizzes individually on the learning materials. (Adapted from Arends, 1991)

Think–Pair-Share : A model of cooperative learning is that course members form pairs to work on a task. Students work alone to think about ideas relating to the task. Then they discuss their ideas with their partner. Course members share some of their pair's ideas with the class. (Jacobs, George M., Lee, G. S. & Ball, J., 1996)

Positive interdependence: One of the basic elements of the cooperative learning method is that students must feel they are responsible for their own cooperative learning and that of the other members of the group as well. This skill can be attained through structuring the goals, rewards, roles and materials. (Johnson & Johnson, 1994)

Face to face interaction: One of the basic elements of the cooperative learning method is that students must have the opportunity to explain what they are learning to each other. (Johnson & Johnson, 1994)

Individual accountability: One of the basic elements of the cooperative learning method is that each student must be responsible for the mastery of the assigned work. (Johnson & Johnson, 1994)

Social skills: One of the basic elements of the cooperative learning method is that each student must communicate effectively and maintain respect among group members

also work together to resolve conflicts. (Johnson & Johnson,1994)

Group processing: One of the basic elements of the cooperative learning method is that group members must give feedback to each other to see how well they are working together and how they can improve. (Johnson & Johnson,1994)

Traditional group work method: A teaching technique is that students work together in a group of four or five and the activities used in class are not of the cooperative learning method.

Analysis: One element of the critical thinking skills consists of identifying issues, identifying relationships between elements and reasoning deductively and inductively. (adapted from Burden & Byrd, 1999; Orlich,1998)

Synthesis: One element of the critical thinking skills consists of integrating learning from different areas into a plan for solving a problem, formulating a new scheme for classifying classifying objects or events, or ideas and combining independent elements to create new patterns of thought.

(adapted from Burden & Byrd, 1999; Orlich,1998)

Evaluation: One element of the critical thinking skills consists of Judging the adequacy with which conclusions are supported by data, judging the value of work in terms of internal evidence or logical consistency. Also judging the value of a work in terms of external evidence or consistency with facts develop elsewhere. (adapted from Burden & Byrd, 1999; Orlich,1998)

Opinions : The students' ideas towards the cooperative learning method.

Significance of the Study

The researcher expects the following benefits from this research:

1. The teachers will be informed of the effectiveness of using cooperative learning to enhance the students' critical thinking. Then the teachers will be able to adapt the results of the research to enhance the students' critical thinking ability in their own class.
2. The teachers of commercial English can apply the results of the research to improve their teaching.

3. The outcomes of the research will be useful for curriculum planners in planning the curriculum in order to strengthen the students' critical thinking and learning abilities.

Abbreviation

CL = Cooperative learning

ESL = English as a second language

EFL = English as a foreign language

STAD = Student -Teams- Achievement -Divisions

PAYAP UNIVERSITY