
***FLEXIBLE GROUP STRATEGIES FOR COOPERATIVE
LEARNING AND ASSESSING LANGUAGE LEARNING AND
TEACHING CONCEPTS AMONG PRE-SERVICE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS***

Abstract

Cooperative learning has been the trend in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (Jacobs & Hall, 2002). Flexible grouping patterns for cooperative learning in the EFL classroom allows learners to exchange information and use different patterns of interaction (Rico, 2008). The continual, ongoing assessment of activities within varied participation structures is an essential part of good teaching (Johnson, 1994).

This article aims to discuss the implementation of flexible grouping strategies among pre-service elementary school English teachers in terms of theoretical concepts, strategies, and feedback from teachers in Taiwan. These flexible grouping strategies were used not only for grouping learners but also for helping them review language and teaching concepts.

This is a qualitative case study. The study was conducted from February to June 2012. The participants included sixteen pre-service English teachers in a Multimedia in English Language Teaching class in a teacher education program in Taiwan. The class met for two hours each week during the period of the study. The major data in this study included (1) the class PowerPoint files, (2) teaching materials and aids, and (3) pre-service teachers' feedback on flexible grouping strategies.

This study has the following conclusions. First, eighteen flexible grouping strategies were employed under five categories: six grouping strategies were placed under the category of *general*, four under *language*, three under *linguistics*, two under *literature*, and two under *English teaching*. Second, these pre-service English teachers had a positive attitude toward these flexible grouping strategies, because these strategies made learning fun and creative. Moreover, they thought these strategies helped them review their English and their background knowledge about language learning and teaching. Two challenges occurred in terms of "design the contents of flexible grouping strategies" and "review and reinforce these language skills and background knowledge for flexible grouping strategies."

The pre-service English teachers were in their junior year. A future study should focus on the classroom practice of these flexible grouping strategies in their English classrooms during the practicum or first year of teaching. A future study can also focus on how they transform their knowledge and skills of flexible grouping strategies into their classroom practice.

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