Comprehensive Chinese Course Based on Task-based Language Teaching Approach with Cooperative Learning Technique to Enhance Chinese Reading Ability of International Students in Xi'an University

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Abstract

Background and aim: This study explored the integration of the task-based language teaching approach and cooperative learning to enhance the Chinese reading ability of international students. The aims of this study were: 1) to compare international students' Chinese reading test scores before and after learning through the comprehensive Chinese course, and 2) to study the international students' satisfaction with learning through the comprehensive Chinese course.

Materials and methods: The study involved 94 international students at Xi'an University, with a sample of 26 second-year foreign students from one class of Xi'an University in China in the autumn term of 2023 through cluster random sampling. The research instruments were lesson plans, a test paper for foreign students' Chinese reading ability, and a student's learning satisfaction questionnaire. Experimental design is the one-group pretest-posttest design. Data were collected and analyzed by means, standard deviation, and t-test for the dependent sample. The data were analyzed by using mean, standard deviation, t-test for dependent samples, and t-test for one sample.

Results: After learning through the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique, foreign students' Chinese reading ability was higher than before at a 0.05 level of statistical significance (t=2.50, p<0.05). The average score of the post-test (M=11.58, SD=5.56) was higher than that of the pre-test (M=9.35, SD=4.91). Additionally, students' learning satisfaction was at a high level (M=4.19, SD=0.75).

Conclusion: The developed comprehensive Chinese courses based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning techniques have a significant effect on improving the Chinese reading ability of international students. Furthermore, students were satisfied with their learning of this course.

Keywords: Comprehensive Chinese course, Task-based Language Teaching Approach, Cooperative Learning, Chinese Reading Ability

Introduction

The development of comprehensive Chinese courses based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning techniques provides an effective way to improve the Chinese reading ability of international students at Xi'an University.

The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the State Language Commission issued "Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards for International Chinese Language Education". This standard highlights the learner-centered concept and attaches importance to verbal communicative competence and topic tasks. The Confucius Institute Headquarters issued the "International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education (Revised Edition)" (Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2017). This curriculum emphasizes the development of learners' ability to learn independently and cooperatively in the teaching process.

Some Chinese language learners have weak motivation to improve their reading skills when they study comprehensive Chinese courses. That is because: 1) The written symbol - Chinese character is an

ideographic script. For learners whose native language is an alphabetic script, Chinese characters are a major obstacle to their reading. 2) The traditional teaching method of comprehensive Chinese courses is teacher-centered. Students do not actively participate in classroom activities and are not motivated to learn.

To solve the problems, the task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique is applied to the teaching of comprehensive Chinese courses to improve Chinese reading ability.

Task-based language teaching refers to a task-based or task-oriented approach to language teaching and learning, which puts special emphasis on the design and completion of tasks as the center of teaching and learning, and allows students to learn and use language in the process of doing things (Deng & Li, 2016). It combines language teaching with learners' language application in daily life. It aims at providing opportunities for learners to experiment with and explore language through learning activities. Although task-based language teaching is more suitable for oral classes, the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrated. Teaching reading is often accompanied by communication, discussion, and question-and-answer. The task-based language teaching, which is mainly based on communicative tasks, is naturally applied to the teaching of reading (Xu, 2013). Namaziandost, Nasri, & Ahmadi (2019) explore the effectiveness of Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and Content-based language teaching (CBLT) on Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL learners' reading skills. The result showed that both groups (i.e., TBLT & CBLT) progressed considerably in their reading skill from the pretest to the posttest, with the task-based language teaching group outperforming the content-based language teaching group in the posttest. It can be deduced that both task-based language teaching and content-based language teaching methods are effective in reading comprehension instruction to Iranian Preintermediate EFL learners, with the TBLT method being more effective.

Cooperative learning is a highly creative system of effective teaching theories and strategies. Based on modern social psychology, educational sociology, and cognitive psychology, group activities as the basic teaching method, and group performance is the evaluation criterion, to improve students' learning performance, and classroom atmosphere and develop good psychological and social skills (Bu, 2017). Cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goals. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning." (Johnson et al, 1998). Lin (2018) investigated the effects of using cooperative learning to improve reading comprehension. The results are shown as follows. First, using cooperative learning can improve students' learning motivation and learning interest. Second, using cooperative learning can improve student-student classroom interaction. Third, positive teacher-student relations can be developed through group discussion. Fourth, students can learn from others through group discussions. Fifth, most students' reading comprehension can be improved by using cooperative learning. Sixth, the gap between high-level students and low-level students became smaller by using cooperative learning. Sudarwati & Manipuspika (2021) applied the group discussion model of cooperative learning strategy to the teaching of a critical reading course at the English study program, at Brawijaya University. Their study reveals that the cooperative learning strategy has successfully improved students' critical reading ability. This was achieved through several stages, namely having cooperative work organization, using appropriate media, having creativity (for teachers), monitoring teaching and learning processes closely, and giving students feedback on their work. In conclusion, cooperative learning can be beneficial for students learning critical reading as it can make students active and enjoy classroom activities.

Based on these studies, both the task-based language teaching approach and the cooperative learning method are conducive to improving students' reading ability in foreign languages. Developing a comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with a cooperative learning technique will be beneficial to solving the problem of weak motivation to improve reading ability when learning Chinese language for international students, and to improve international students' Chinese reading ability.

Research Question

What is the effectiveness of implementing the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning techniques to enhance international students' Chinese reading abilities?

1) Are international students' reading test scores higher than before after learning through the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with a cooperative learning technique?

2) How satisfied are international students with learning through comprehensive Chinese courses based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning techniques?

Research Objective

The objectives of this research were to determine the effectiveness of implementing the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with a cooperative learning technique.

1) To compare international students' Chinese reading test scores before and after learning through the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique.

2) To study the international students' satisfaction with learning through comprehensive Chinese courses based on a task-based language teaching approach with a cooperative learning technique.

Literature Review

Comprehensive Chinese Course

The "Chinese Language Syllabus for Foreign Students in Colleges and Universities (Long-term Refresher Course)" states that the comprehensive course "is the main course to undertake the task of systematic teaching of language proficiency, and it is the type of course for comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading and writing". Its main features are comprehensive and basic, with comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing centered on limited vocabulary, grammatical functions, and cultural items (Ni, 2012).

Its main feature is that it is comprehensive and basic, with comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing based on limited vocabulary, grammatical functions, and cultural items. The comprehensive Chinese course is comprehensive and is usually set up as a basic course or a main course, which integrates the teaching of language elements, cultural knowledge, and linguistic rules, as well as the training of verbal skills and communicative skills, to cultivate students' ability to use the language comprehensively (Zhao, 2004). The nature of a comprehensive Chinese language course determines that its content includes comprehensive training in language skills. As the backbone of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the comprehensive Chinese course is a practical Chinese language course that provides students with language knowledge and comprehensive training in various language skills (Li, 1999). On the other hand, the nature of an integrated Chinese language course also determines that its content needs to teach both linguistic and cultural knowledge. This is because a comprehensive course is a combination of language knowledge and necessary linguistic and cultural background knowledge, language skills, and communicative skills (Wang, 1999).

Comprehensive Chinese course is characterized by the following four aspects:

1) Comprehensiveness. In the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, the main feature of the intensive reading class is comprehensiveness, whose main task is to comprehensively teach language elements, cultural background knowledge, and pragmatic rules, and to comprehensively train verbal skills and verbal communication skills, and to teach these several elements comprehensively (Lü, 1996). The comprehensiveness of the comprehensive Chinese course is reflected both in the teaching content and in the way skills are trained. The teaching of language knowledge and rules can be regarded as the primary or basic task of the comprehensive course, but its core task is still the training of language skills, focusing on listening and speaking skills, including the integrated training of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The teaching of language knowledge in the comprehensive course is becoming more and more situational, functional, and communicative, and is combined with the training of skills (Zhao, 2004).

2) Fundamentality. The comprehensive Chinese course is not a simple superposition of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills training, nor is it a mixed teaching of all skills to the learners, but it should work together with other courses to achieve the overall teaching objectives of the language course. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are concrete means of communication. With

various skills courses, the comprehensive course should be a basic course to support the teaching of each sub-skill course, which is the reason why the comprehensive course is "basic". According to the "Curriculum Standards for Chinese Language Teaching to Foreigners at the Intermediate and Advanced Levels" (Chen, 1999), "Fundamentality refers to the fact that the teaching content should lay a good foundation of language and skills through the learning and training of basic vocabulary, basic grammar, and basic functional and cultural items at the intermediate level, to provide a solid foundation for the other specialized skills courses" (Chen, 1999).

3) Stage. The comprehensive course at the elementary level can be regarded as one of the more fixed types of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and it is a representative and mature type of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (Cui, 1992). At the intermediate level, the comprehensive course is both "comprehensive" and "basic". Comprehensive means that the course should provide comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing with limited vocabulary, grammar, functions, and cultural items. Basic means that it should provide the necessary and solid training for other specialized skills courses (Chen, 1999). The advanced level is an extension and development of the intermediate level, and the comprehensive course is still the main course, only the teaching content and training methods are different. The content of Chinese culture and the comparison between Chinese and foreign cultures is strengthened, and reading and writing are the key training methods at the advanced level.

4) Periodicity. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the main objective of the comprehensive course was to cultivate students' grammatical awareness and systematic mastery of grammar, and pure grammar teaching was dominant. This was the traditional period in the development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. From the 1980s to the present is the modern period, when comprehensive courses aim at cultivating students' comprehensive skills, with an obvious tendency to cultivate skills (Zhao, 2004). During the decades of language teaching development of Chinese as a foreign language, the "traditional comprehensive course" and the "modern comprehensive course" have been influenced by different pedagogies and have their distinctive pedagogical imprints. Today's comprehensive Chinese course is not only responsible for teaching linguistic knowledge and cultural knowledge loaded with communicative factors but also for comprehensively cultivating and improving students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Ni, 2012).

Task-based language teaching

Task-based language teaching is a kind of language teaching approach based on tasks, the essence of which is to let students learn and use language in the process of doing things and completing tasks. It emphasizes learning by doing and learning by using. In the process of task fulfillment, learners focus on the meaning of language communication, make full use of the resources of the target language they have already acquired, acquire the required information, and complete the task in a participatory, experiential, interactive, communicative, and cooperative way of learning. Task-based language teaching can give full play to the learners' cognitive ability, mobilize their existing language resources, perceive, understand, and apply the target language in practice, and its learning process is along an open path to achieve the expected teaching goals. (Zhang, 2021)

Nunan (1999) suggests several principles of task-based language teaching:

1) The authentic principle: The authenticity principle involves two aspects: a) the materials of the language taught should be as authentic as possible; b) the tasks should be designed to provide learners with clear and authentic language information so that learners can experience the language and master the application of the language in a natural, authentic or simulated authentic situation. The tasks should be designed to be integrated with students' real life and social life.

2) The form-function principle: Learners should be aware of the relationship between language form and function. The design of the tasks focuses on the combination of language form and function, aiming at enabling learners to master the language form and at the same time develop their ability to use the language function. Based on learning language form, students can reason and deduce on their own through a series of tasks, to understand the function of the language and make real use of it in communication. Advocates of task-based language teaching believe that the form of the language and the meaning of the language are closely intertwined when task-based language teaching is carried out.

3) The task dependency principle: The tasks in the learning unit should be designed from simple to complex, from easy to difficult, and form a cycle from primary tasks to advanced tasks, and then from advanced tasks to cover the primary tasks, with several micro-tasks forming a "task chain". The tasks are like a ladder, interdependent and ascending. In terms of language skills, the input should come before the output, and students' language skills should be developed gradually through each task so that teaching and learning can progress step by step.

4) Learning by doing principle: From beginning to end, students are guided to learn language by completing specific tasks and activities, so that they can carry out meaningful language actions for predetermined learning purposes, gain and accumulate corresponding learning experiences through completing specific communicative tasks, and enjoy the joy of success, thus increasing their interest and motivation in learning. Students still need to learn grammar and memorize words, but the knowledge is not acquired solely through the teacher's explanations but is experienced and internalized by students through application.

5) Scaffolding principle: Scaffolding is a process of "setting up" the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it. Language teaching requires that students be given enough attention and support, like scaffolding when constructing a building. It is important for students to feel successful and secure when they first start learning. The process of learning a language is gradual and should be given adequate support.

6) Cooperative learning principle: In task-based language teaching, teachers allow every learner to participate through various forms of cooperation, especially in small groups. Learners give full play to their strengths, help each other, and influence each other in the process of cooperating with others to complete tasks, forming an interactive thinking network and a harmonious teaching situation. This can give full play to the overall function of the optimal combination, cultivate the spirit of group cooperation among learners, and improve learning efficiency.

Willis (1996) designed a three-step process for task-based classroom instruction: pre-task, task-cycle, and language focus.

1. Pre-task: The first stage is the pre-task stage, during which the teacher introduces and defines the topic and gives students clear instructions on what they will have to do at the task stage. The teacher might help students to recall words and phrases that will be useful during the performance of the main task or to learn new words and phrases that are essential to the task. The pre-task stage can also often include playing a recording or reading a text of people doing a similar task. This gives the students a clear model of what will be expected of them. The students can note down the useful words and phrases and spend time preparing for the task individually.

2. The task cycle: a) The task stage. The students perform the task (typically a reading or listening exercise or a problem-solving exercise) in pairs or small groups using the language resources they have. The teacher monitors from a distance, encouraging all attempts at communication, not correcting. Since this situation has a "private" feel, students feel free to experiment. Mistakes don't matter. b) The planning stage. The students prepare a short oral or written report to the whole class on how they did the task and what conclusions they reached. They then practice what they are going to say in their groups. Since the report stage is public, students will naturally want to be accurate, so the teacher is available for the students to ask for advice to clear up any language problems they may have. c) The report stage. Students present their findings to the class exchange written reports, and compare results. The teacher acts as a chairperson: chooses the order of students to present their reports and gives them some quick feedback on the content of the reports. At this stage, the teacher may also play a recording of others doing the same task or provide students with a text similar in some way to the one they have written themselves or related in topic to the task they have done for students to compare.

3. Language focus: a) Analysis. The teacher highlights relevant parts from the text or tapescript of the recording for students to analyze. He may ask students to notice interesting features within it. The teacher can also highlight the language that the students used during the report phase for analysis. Students examine and then discuss the specific features and enter new words, phrases, and patterns in vocabulary books. b) Practice. The teacher selects language areas to practice based on the needs of the

students and what emerged from the task and report phase. The students then do practice activities to increase their confidence and make a note of useful language.

Cooperative learning

Despite cooperative learning has a long history and has been studied by lots of scholars, there is still not an acknowledged academic definition. In this study, cooperative learning means students of different levels of performance work together in groups to achieve a shared or common goal. Cooperative learning emphasizes active learning through interpersonal interaction, where students act as partners with the teacher and each other. In the classroom, cooperation is practiced when students pursue learning in groups of varying sizes: negotiating, initiating, planning, and evaluating together. Cooperative learning requires students' common efforts to achieve group goals that they could not achieve individually. Students must help, encourage, and support each other in a group. In the learning process, students of different levels of ability work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Each member of the group is responsible for one's learning and achieving his or her goals that ensure the group's success. Interpersonal relationships among students are developed, individual self-confidence is enhanced, and social skills are trained by cooperative learning. What's more, cooperative learning creates a safe, nurturing, and democratic environment for learners to interact and negotiate with each other to accomplish their achievements without anxiety.

A variety of methods of cooperative learning have emerged over the decades. Three typical cooperative learning techniques were selected for this study: the student's team achievement division (STAD), Teams-Games-Tourament (TGT), and the Jigsaw Classroom.

1) Student Teams - Achievement Divisions (STAD)

Student Teams - Achievement Divisions (STAD), proposed by Professor Slavin (1978), is the most common form of cooperative learning. The implementation process of STAD:

Step 1: Class teaching. The teacher imparts the main concepts to the entire class through lectures. This presentation should be carefully focused on the materials that students will then need to learn in groups.

Step 2: Team study. Students form several cooperative learning groups of 4 or 5 people according to the principle of heterogeneous grouping. Enable each team member to fully grasp the learning content through group collaboration activities.

Step 3: Individual test. Each student takes an individual test based on what they have learned.

Step 4: Individual improvement score. The teacher compares each student's score with their previous test score (basic score) and calculates their improvement score. Then, based on the average of the total individual improvement scores of each group, the final group score for each group is calculated.

Step 5: Team recognition. When the average score of the group exceeds the established standards, the group can receive certificates and other forms of rewards.

2) Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT)

Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT) was originally developed by David DeVries and Keith Edwards (1972) at Johns Hopkins University. It is one kind of cooperative learning method. The implementation process of TGT:

Step 1: Select an instructional topic and present it to the students.

Step 2: Develop a list of questions on the topic. Number them. Cut out small pieces of paper and number them so that the total matches the number of questions that you have developed for the topic to measure understanding. Give a set of questions to one student in each group who reads the questions as their corresponding numbers are drawn from the pile.

Step 3: Team Game - place students in heterogeneous groups of 4-5 by ability and have them review material during this "team" phase by selecting a number from the pile. Groups must be equal in size. Give each group a "Letter Identity" (e.g. Group A) and each student a Number Identity (e.g. Student 1). Students must answer the question that matches the number they selected from the pile. For example, if a student selects a question from the pile, that student is challenged to answer that question. If he or she cannot come up with an answer, a teammate can "steal" the question. Teams share knowledge during this phase of the lesson. (i.e. teach their teammates).

Step 4: Tournament- place students in new groups made up of individuals from each of the "Team Review" tables (step 2). All "Student 1s" go to Table 1 (these might be lower achieving students) while

all "Student 2s" (higher achieving) go to Table 2. In the "Game" phase, students are placed in homogeneous groups with students of similar ability and compete against one another. For every question a student answers correctly, he or she earns a point. One person at each "tournament table" must keep scores for every individual at the "Game" table.

Step 5: Students return to their Team Game tables and report their scores. Team scores are compared and the winning team earns a reward.

Step 6: Students take an assessment. The scores for each Team (e.g. A, B, C…) are compiled and averaged. Offer "bonus points" to the team that earns the highest average and/or "improvement points" to the team that improves its average the most over previous assessments.

3) Jigsaw classroom

The jigsaw classroom (Aronson, et al., 1978) is a research-based cooperative learning technique invented and developed in the early 1970s by Elliot Aronson and his students at the University of Texas and the University of California. Since 1971, thousands of classrooms have used jigsaw with great success. Just as in a jigsaw puzzle, each piece - each student's part - is essential for the completion and full understanding of the final product. If each student's part is essential, then each student is essential; and that is precisely what makes this strategy so effective.

Implementation process of the jigsaw method:

Step 1: Divide students into jigsaw groups of 5 or 6 people. The groups should be diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and ability.

Step 2: Appoint one student from each group as the leader. Initially, this person should be the most mature student in the group.

Step 3: Divide the day's lesson into 5-6 segments.

Step 4: Assign each student to learn one segment. Make sure students have direct access only to their segment.

Step 5: Give students time to read over their segment at least twice and become familiar with it. There is no need for them to memorize it.

Step 6: Form temporary "expert groups" by having one student from each jigsaw group join other students assigned to the same segment. Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.

Step 7: Bring the students back into their jigsaw groups.

Step 8: Ask each student to present her or his segment to the group. Encourage others in the group to ask questions for clarification.

Step 9: Float from group to group, observing the process. If any group is having trouble, make an appropriate intervention. Eventually, the group leader should handle this task. Leaders can be trained by whispering instructions on how to intervene until the leader gets the hang of it.

Step 10: At the end of the session, give a quiz on the material. Students quickly come to realize that these sessions are not just fun and games but count.

Chinese reading ability

Chinese reading ability is the ability of students to identify, process, handle, and acquire the content of the text and the author's intention of the information of the linguistic symbols visually inputted in the process of reading Chinese. This ability is not only an ability to perceive language and text but also a complex ability to guess, process, and reason.

There are three levels of Chinese reading ability: 1) understanding the literal meaning of the text and grasping the main facts and clues; 2) based on the first level, being able to have a correct understanding of the author's intentions, attitudes, viewpoints, and moral; and 3) based on a correct understanding of the text, discovering new imagery, while developing a rich imagination, and obtaining a high level of aesthetic experience.

The levels that Chinese learners of different levels can reach are not the same. According to the "International Chinese Language Education Chinese Language Proficiency Level Standards", Chinese learners at this level should have the reading ability to "accurately recognize syllables, Chinese characters, and vocabulary involved in the language quantitative indicators of level 3. Be able to understand language materials (300 words or less) related to the topics and tasks at this level, with a reading speed of not less than 120 words per minute. Be able to understand simple compound sentences,

and understand the main idea and detailed information in narrative and descriptive language materials. Be able to use dictionaries to understand the meaning of vocabulary. Initially possess reading skills such as skimming and skipping" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China & National Language and Literature Commission, 2021). The quantitative indicators for Level 3 involve a total of 608 syllables, 900 Chinese characters, 2,245 vocabulary words, and 210 grammatical points. The topics and tasks involved include traveling experience, curriculum situation, cultural and sports activities, festive customs, education, occupation, and so on.

Conceptual Framework

In this research, the independent variable is the implementation of the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach (Willis, 1996) with cooperative learning (Slavin, 1978) technique, and the dependent variables are international students' Chinese reading ability (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China & National Language and Literature Commission, 2021) and their learning satisfaction (Du, 1999) on this course.
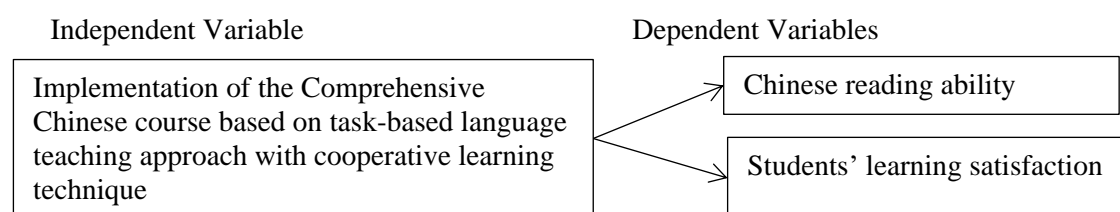

Figure 1 The Independent Variable and Dependent Variables

Research Methodology

Population and Samples: The population of this study was 94 international students learning the Chinese language at Xi'an University. The sample of this study was 26 second-year students in one class derived by cluster random sampling method.

Research Instruments: Research instruments are the tools for researching to collect data. The research instruments which were used in this study were:

1. Experimental instruments

1.1 Comprehensive Chinese course based on task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique: The comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique includes six steps: 1) introduction, 2) task completion in groups, 3) group planning, 4) group achievement display, 5) language analysis, and practice, 6) evaluate. Five experts evaluated the draft course, in 26 items of the comprehensive Chinese course evaluation form, the lowest mean score was 3.80 (SD=0.45), and the highest mean score was 5.00 (SD=0.00). It was revealed that the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique was at a high level (M=4.24, SD=0.40).

1.2. Lesson plans: Five experts evaluated the eight lesson plans, in 15 items of the eight lesson plans comprehensive evaluation form, the lowest mean score was 3.80 (SD=0.84), and the highest mean score was 4.80 (SD=0.45). It was revealed that lesson plans were at a high level (M=4.04, SD=0.34) .

2. Instruments for collecting data

2.1. Chinese reading ability test paper: The test paper had a total of 20 items of multiple choice questions. The index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) value of 20 items in the test paper was 0.60 at the lowest and 1.00 at the highest. The result of analyzing the IOC index showed that all test items were appropriate and could be used in the test. Analyzed each item of the test and found out that item difficulty (p) ranged from 0.35-0.77, and item discrimination (r) ranged from 0.21-1.00 and more than 0.20. The reliability of the test was computed using the formula of Kuder and Richardson formulas 20 and the value was 0.89 more than 0.70 (Richardson & Kuder, 1939).

2.2 Students' learning satisfaction questionnaire for comprehensive Chinese course: The questionnaire is provided to 5 experts for content validity check and suggestions. The result of analyzing the IOC index showed that all test items were appropriate and could be used in the test. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the reliability of the student satisfaction questionnaire is 0.74, which is greater than 0.70. Therefore, the reliability of the student satisfaction questionnaire meets the requirements (Cronbach, 1951).

Data Collection: The procedures of data collection were as follows:

1. The samples were given the pretest for measuring Chinese reading ability with the test.

2. The samples were taught by the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique.

3. After completing the instructions, the samples received the post-test by using the same instrument as in the pre-test.

4. The samples were given the students' learning satisfaction questionnaire.

Data Analysis: In this study, data were analyzed by using statistical methods according to the research objectives.

1．Compare the Chinese reading ability test scores before and after learning through the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique by using a t-test for the dependent sample.

2．Analyze the students' learning satisfaction toward the comprehensive Chinese course using Cronbach's Alpha method (Cronbach, 1951) and determine the level of student satisfaction.

Results

According to the research objectives, the results were as follows:

1. The result of comparing the Chinese reading ability of international students before and after learning through a comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique by using a t-test for dependent samples.

Table 1 Result of Comparing the Different Scores of Chinese Reading Ability Before and After Learning Through the Comprehensive Chinese Course

Group	n	Pretest scores		Post-test scores		t	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
Experimental group	26	9.35	4.91	11.58	5.56	2.50*	0.019

*$P < .05$

As presented in Table 1, the mean score of the pretest of international students' Chinese reading ability was 9.35 (SD=4.91) and the mean score of the post-test of international students' Chinese reading ability was 11.58 (SD=5.56). The result of this table revealed that after learning through the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique, students' Chinese reading ability was higher than before at a 0.05 level of statistical significance (t=2.50, p<0.05). The average scores of the post-test developed increasingly higher than the pretest.

The result of analyzing students' learning satisfaction after implementing the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with a cooperative learning technique.

The researcher used the satisfaction questionnaire to survey the second-year foreign students of Xi'an University and randomly selected 26 students' data for analysis (The same students to pretest and post-test, the data came from the same datasheet).

Table 2 Mean Score and Satisfaction Level of Students' Learning Satisfaction About Comprehensive Chinese Course

Items of satisfaction questionnaire		M	SD	Satisfaction level
Section	Item			
Section 1: teaching objectives	1. Satisfaction with whether the teaching objectives of comprehensive Chinese course are clear and accurate	4.19	0.75	High level
	2. Satisfaction with the clarity of teaching objectives of the comprehensive Chinese course	4.69	0.55	Very high level
	3. Satisfaction with the teaching objectives of a comprehensive Chinese course meets the requirements of enhancing Chinese reading ability	4.38	0.50	High level

Items of satisfaction questionnaire		M	SD	Satisfaction level
Section	**Item**			
	Total of part 1	4.42	0.40	High level
Section 2: teaching content	4. The Satisfaction of whether the teaching content of a comprehensive Chinese course is easy to understand	4.38	0.57	High level
	5. Satisfaction with whether the teaching content of a comprehensive Chinese course is new and can stimulate learning interest	4.58	0.50	Very high level
	6. Satisfaction with whether the teaching content of a comprehensive Chinese course has practical significance	4.38	0.75	High level
	7. Satisfaction with whether the teaching content of comprehensive Chinese courses can enhance foreign students' Chinese reading ability	4.15	0.46	High level
	8. Satisfaction with whether teachers of comprehensive Chinese courses explain the teaching content clearly	4.23	0.51	High level
	Total of part 2	4.34	0.32	High level
Section 3: instructional strategy	9. Satisfaction with effective communication between teachers and students in comprehensive Chinese course class	4.69	0.62	Very high level
	10. Satisfaction with the steps of the teaching process design of the comprehensive Chinese course	4.62	0.64	Very high level
	11. Satisfaction with the teaching method (task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique) of comprehensive Chinese course to improve the classroom atmosphere	3.92	0.89	High level
	12. Satisfaction with class hour allocation of teaching methods of comprehensive Chinese course	4.42	0.81	High level
	13. Satisfaction with the teaching approach of comprehensive Chinese course to enhance foreign students' Chinese reading ability	4.15	0.92	High level
	Total of part 3	4.36	0.37	High level
Section 4: teaching resources	14. Satisfaction with the combination of teaching resources and media of practical problems	4.88	0.33	Very high level
	15. Satisfaction with teaching resources and media to enhance Chinese reading ability	4.15	0.92	High level
	16. Satisfaction with teaching resources and media used in comprehensive Chinese course	4.62	0.64	Very high level
	Total of part 4	4.55	0.42	Very high level
Section 5: teaching evaluation	17. Satisfaction with the difficulty of the assignment of the comprehensive Chinese course	4.12	0.77	High level
	18. Satisfaction with the number of assignments in the comprehensive Chinese course	3.96	0.82	High level
	19. Satisfaction with the effectiveness of the evaluation system	4.42	0.70	High level
	20. Satisfaction with the evaluation system in comprehensive Chinese courses that can distinguish students' Chinese reading ability	4.12	0.82	High level
	Total of part 5	4.15	0.42	High level
Total/Overall		4.19	0.75	High level

The result of this table showed that the students' learning satisfaction with the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique was at a high level (M=4.19, SD=0.75). In the 20 items of the satisfaction questionnaire, the lowest mean score was 3.92 (SD=0.89), and the highest mean score was 4.88 (SD=0.33). Even the lowest item still reached a high level.

Discussion

The following points based on the research results were discussed:

1. The post-test score of international students' Chinese reading ability was higher than that of the pre-test after learning the comprehensive Chinese course based on a task-based language teaching approach with a cooperative learning technique. The mean score of the pretest of international students' Chinese reading ability was 9.35 (SD=4.91) and that of the post-test was 11.58, (SD=5.56). The post-test score of international students' Chinese reading ability was higher than the pretest scores at a 0.05 level of statistical significance (t=2.50, p<0.05). This is because the task-based language teaching method using cooperative learning techniques focuses on establishing a learner-centered classroom, designing authentic tasks, creating real-life-like situations, and providing more meaningful negotiation opportunities for students to complete tasks through a variety of cooperative learning methods. This method emphasizes the construction of knowledge through the interaction of learners in the learning process. Its procedure consists of 6 steps: 1) Introduction. The teacher introduces the topic and task to students. 2) Task completion in groups. During this stage, students are divided into heterogeneous groups, so students of different Chinese levels can work together and help each other for their group's success. 3) Group planning. Students take part in the organization of task presentations in groups. 4) Group achievement display. One or several members of each group will display publicly, or groups will exchange their works to compare results. 5) Language analysis and practice. The teacher designs language practice activities for students to help them explore the language and systematize language features based on the characteristics of the example sentences they have learned in their statements or texts. 6) Evaluation. Self-evaluation, group evaluation, and teacher evaluation help the teacher evaluate students' mastery of Chinese language knowledge and help students gain confidence and achievement. The task-based language teaching approach emphasizes learning by doing and learning by using. In the process of task fulfillment, learners focus on the meaning of language communication, make full use of the resources of the target language they have already acquired, acquire the required information, and complete the task in a participatory, experiential, interactive, communicative, and cooperative way of learning. Task-based language teaching can give full play to the learners' cognitive ability, mobilize their existing language resources, perceive, understand, and apply the target language in practice, and its learning process is along an open path to achieve the expected teaching goals (Zhang, 2021). While implementing the task-based language teaching method, the researchers also incorporated cooperative learning where learners work in small groups or pairs to do meaningful negotiation. The negotiation of meaning develops students' communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) and provides comprehensible input (Long, 1980).

2. The task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning techniques can motivate the students' satisfaction. The mean score of the students' satisfaction after learning through the comprehensive Chinese course was high level (M=4.19, SD=0.75). This is because the task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique actively engages students in the learning process. When students are actively involved in tasks and collaborate with their peers, they are more likely to feel motivated and interested in the subject matter. In addition, the tasks that students need to complete usually involve real-life or meaningful tasks related to them. When students see the relevance of what they have learned to their lives or future goals, they are more likely to be satisfied with their learning experience. Students in a group achieve a common goal through collaboration. This collaboration promotes a sense of belonging and community within the classroom, which can enhance students' satisfaction with the learning environment. In a group, students communicate effectively with their peers. Through discussions, negotiations, and sharing ideas, students develop their communication skills, which can lead to increased satisfaction as they feel more confident in expressing themselves. Completing tasks and achieving goals in a cooperative learning environment can give students a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. The result of students learning satisfaction was in line with He (2016) who applied the task-based cooperative learning approach in college English writing and found that students are in favor of this teaching approach. It can make students willing to take part in the writing tasks and do good in composing. In addition, it does have positive effects which include improving writing ability and releasing writing anxiety.

Recommendations

1. Recommendation for implication

1.1 In the task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique, teachers play multiple, dynamic roles to ensure that students are engaged, learning effectively, and collaborating well.

The key roles of teachers in the task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning techniques are:

1) Designer of learning tasks: Teachers create authentic and meaningful tasks that are relevant to students' lives and aligned with the learning objectives. To ensure that the tasks are appropriately challenging, engaging, and feasible within the allotted time, teachers must plan them carefully. Teachers also provide students with the necessary materials and resources, such as vocabulary lists, templates, and samples, to help them complete the tasks successfully.

2) Facilitator of learning: Teachers provide clear instructions and guidelines for tasks to ensure that students understand the objectives and procedures. As students work through the task, teachers provide scaffolding and assistance as needed to help students overcome challenges without taking over the task. During instruction, teachers circulate the classroom, observe group interactions, provide feedback, and ensure that all students are engaged in completing the task.

3) Role model: Teachers are expected to serve as demonstrators of effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills to students. In addition, teachers serve as encouragers, fostering a positive and inclusive classroom environment where students are encouraged to take risks and support each other.

4) Organizer: Teachers divide students into groups according to their language proficiency, personality, and skills. Once the groups have been established, the teachers will also facilitate the distribution of roles within the groups to promote accountability and ensure balanced participation.

5) Assessor: Teachers monitor student progress, participation, and group dynamics through formative assessments, evaluate the process (collaborative skills, participation) and outcomes (task completion, language use) of group work, and provide timely, constructive feedback to groups and individuals to guide students' learning and improvement.

By fulfilling these roles, teachers can effectively facilitate a task-based and cooperative learning environment that promotes active language use, collaboration, and cultural understanding.

1.2 The Design of authentic and meaningful instructional tasks in a comprehensive Chinese course involves creating activities that reflect real-world language use, are relevant to student's lives, and promote active participation and practical application of the language. Before the design of tasks, teachers need to identify the teaching objectives, such as what specific language knowledge, skills, and cultural knowledge they want students to acquire. Subsequently, design student-centered activities. To create tasks that are both motivating and appropriately challenging, teachers must first gain an understanding of their student's interests, backgrounds, and language proficiency. Teachers are expected to design authentic situations, which entail the creation of scenarios that closely resemble real-life situations. For instance, students might be asked to role-play a visit to a Chinese restaurant, plan a trip to a Chinese city, or conduct a job interview. Ensure that the tasks are aligned with real-life applications of the language. Cultural elements that are meaningful and interesting to students, such as festivals, foods, and traditions, can be integrated into the tasks. Teachers can incorporate various task types, including information gap tasks, role-plays and simulations, problem-solving tasks, projects, and so forth. By carefully designing tasks that are authentic, meaningful, and aligned with learning objectives, teachers can create a stimulating and effective Chinese language learning environment that enhances students' pragmatic language skills and cultural understanding.

1.3 Once the task has been created, teachers are also supposed to make adjustments based on the student's progress and feedback. Teachers can adapt tasks and differentiate instruction by employing a variety of strategies that cater to the diverse needs, backgrounds, and proficiency levels of their students. Tasks can be modified by varying the difficulty of the text, providing additional examples in the form of articles or videos, and so forth. Products can be adjusted by allowing students to demonstrate their understanding through different formats such as oral presentations, written assignments, or multimedia projects. Teachers can integrate language learning applications and online language learning platforms with varying levels of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities to enable students to personalize their practice. Design tasks with varying difficulty or provide a range of activity options for students to choose from, depending on their interests and strengths. By utilizing these strategies, teachers can establish a supportive and effective learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of learners and facilitates their attainment of language learning objectives.

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2. Recommendation for further research

The task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique has positive influences on foreign students' Chinese reading ability. However, research in this area needs to be improved. There are some suggestions for further study of task-based language teaching approaches with cooperative learning techniques in the future.

2.1 Further studies on task-based language teaching approaches with cooperative learning techniques could be conducted in different areas and aspects of Chinese language teaching.

The results of this study indicate that the task-based language teaching approach with cooperative learning technique is effective in enhancing foreign students' reading ability, so maybe it is also important and effective for students at other grade levels in other aspects of Chinese language learning, such as listening, speaking and writing, not just reading. Consequently, further research is required in the future.

2.2 Investigate the use of digital tools, online resources, and multimedia platforms to improve task design, collaboration, and language learning achievement.

With the continuous development of science and technology, more and more technologies are being applied to language teaching and learning. Rich and colorful content and novel learning methods can increase students' interest in learning and help improve their language proficiency.

In summary, this study provides a new teaching method for Chinese reading, though it has some limitations. In China, research on task-based language teaching approaches with cooperative learning techniques is still in the developmental stage, and there is still much room for researchers and teachers to make exploration to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of task-based language teaching approaches with cooperative learning techniques in Chinese teaching.

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