

## **IEDC method: A new approach to promote students' communicative competence**

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**Abstract:** IEDC is an acronym from interaction of English dormitory and class teaching. It is a new, student-centered teaching approach intended for non-English majors in China. This article states that communicative competence can be developed through various means of cooperative learning.

**Key words:** cooperative learning; IEDC method; communicative competence

### **1. Introduction**

Richard and Rodgers (1986, p. 71) state that “the primary function of language is for interaction and communication.” In order to enable the learners to communicate effectively in cross-cultural communication in 21<sup>st</sup> century, Zhejiang Gongshang University carried out a teaching reform for the non-English majors in English learning, namely student-centered teaching approach that allows students to be involved fully in the whole process of teaching and learning. It is students who make full preparation as a group for the given tasks in their dorms and dominate the class activities under the guidance of teachers. They get lots of materials and information from the book, the library or other sources. In this way, the students' learning initiative is motivated greatly. The task based learning activities in groups are the nucleus of classroom teaching. This is the IEDC method. With the deepening of educational reform in language teaching, non-English majors are required to converse with others and foreigners in English fluently, especially in their career. Therefore, communicative competence has become more and more important in English language teaching. The author believes that the IEDC is an ideal approach to promote learners' communicative competence because it mainly focuses on cooperative learning and stimulates students' autonomy in learning to a great extent.

### **2. Cooperative learning**

In a broad sense, cooperative learning refers to a relationship in a group of students that requires cooperative efforts. Those conditions are including clearly perceived positive interdependence (a sense of sink or swim together), clearly perceived individual accountability and personal responsibility to achieve the group's goals (each of us has to contribute and learn), frequent use of the relevant interpersonal and small-group skills (communication, trust, leadership, decision making, and conflict resolution), considerable promotive (face-to-face) interaction and frequent and regular group processing of current functioning to improve the group's future effectiveness (reflecting on how well the team is functioning and how to function even better). Cooperative learning focuses on how students should interact with each other as they learn and the skills needed to interact

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effectively.

Cooperative learning makes sense for the non-English majors in English learning because it builds upon heterogeneity and formalizes and encourages peer support and connection. All students need to learn and work in environment where their individual strengths are recognized and individual needs are addressed. All students need to learn within a supportive community in order to feel safe enough to take risks.

### **3. The application of IEDC method for non-English majors in classroom**

#### **3.1 Group division**

By making full use of the fourth essential element of cooperative learning, which is the appropriate use of interpersonal and small-group skills; we adopt the IEDC method in classroom for non-English majors. Firstly, we divide them into small groups. Each group can be consisted of four or six members. There should be an even numbers in a group in case there should be a pair-work dialogue. On most occasions, we will put students in the same dormitory into a group so that it is convenient for them to practice oral English and finish the assigned task as much as possible. But, there can be a variety of division and an adjustment of division in the following weeks. A group can also be consisted of several male students and female ones, or some students who are good and some poor at oral English can be in the same group in order that they can take full advantage of their abilities and improve and learn from each other. While, in class, we will divide them into groups at random so that they can have opportunities to interact with each member of the class and share experience and opinions with each other as much as possible. We are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others. Students must be taught the social skills required for high quality collaboration and be motivated to use them if cooperative groups are to be productive. Therefore, in a group there will be a designated group leader, who can take the initiative to break the ice or do the given task and invite other members to participate in the activity, and also control the process of the task and activity. The group leader can be flexible; each member will have the chance to be the one. In this way, they will develop their sense of responsibility and motivation. The more socially skillful students are and the more attention teachers pay to teaching and rewarding the use of social skills, the higher the achievement that can be expected within cooperative learning groups.

#### **3.2 Group preparation**

The essential component of cooperative learning is group processing. Effective group work is influenced by whether or not groups reflect on (i.e., process) how well they are functioning. A process is an identifiable sequence of events taking place over time, and process goals refer to the sequence of events instrumental in achieving outcome goals. Group processing may be defined as reflecting on a group session to: (1) describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful; (2) make decisions about what actions to continue or change. The purpose of group processing is to clarify and improve the effectiveness of the members in contributing to the collaborative efforts to achieve the group's goals.

Therefore, after the teacher gives the task or topics related to passages to the groups, he or she should make sure that they really make preparation outside class in their dorms. So the groups should organize the activity and make a written or verbal report about their performance at that time. The report can include the process, time and quality of the discussion, some troubles and the progress they have made. For example, if they find some opinions are hard to express, they can put them down to ask the teacher for help.

#### **3.3 Group presentation**

In class, almost 30 minutes will be given to the groups to present what they have prepared, group discussion or role play, interviews or other forms of oral English. And the teacher will evaluate them by giving the scores in the following aspects, time, voice, fluency, accuracy, cooperation. Accordingly, the teacher will make some comments on their advantages and disadvantages in many ways for their improvement. In this way, the teacher systematically observes the cooperative learning groups, he or she attains a “window” into what students do and do not understand as they explain to each other how to complete the assignment. Listening to the students' explanations provides valuable information about how well the students understand the instructions, the major concepts and strategies being learned, and the basic elements of cooperative learning.

There are two levels of processing—small group and whole class. In order to ensure that small-group processing takes place, teachers allocate some time at the end of each class session for each cooperative group to process how effectively members worked together. Such processing: (1) enables learning groups to focus on maintaining good working relationships among members; (2) facilitates the learning of cooperative skills; (3) ensures that members receive feedback on their participation; (4) ensures that students think on the metacognitive as well as the cognitive level; (5) provides the means to celebrate the success of the group and reinforce the positive behaviors of group members. Some times group work can be done in class, or a combination of prepared and unprepared activities can be made so that students' awareness of doing activity, motivation and potentials can be fully explored. In addition to small-group processing, the teacher should periodically engage in whole-class processing. When cooperative learning groups are used, the teacher observes the groups, analyzes the problems they have working together, and gives feedback to each group on how well they are working together. The teacher systematically moves from group to group and observes them at work.

#### **4. The significance of IEDC method in language learning**

##### **4.1 It can stimulate students' creativity**

IEDC method promotes creative thinking by increasing the number of ideas, quality of ideas, feelings of stimulation and enjoyment, and originality of expression in creative problem solving. It is not surprising that students are “triggered” by the ideas of others and that different perspectives cause group members to consider a larger number of alternatives. The cooperative relationship also provides a context to consider and appreciate other group members' ideas instead of ignoring (individualistic) or trying to.

##### **4.2 It can strengthen students' self-confidence**

Within competitive situations, winners attribute their success to superior ability and attribute the failure of others to lack of ability, both of which contribute to self-aggrandizement. Losers, who are the vast majority, defensively tend to be self-disparaging, apprehensive about evaluation, and tend to withdraw psychologically and physically. Within individualistic situations, students are isolated from one another, receive little direct comparison with or feedback from peers, and perceive evaluations as inaccurate and unrealistic. Within cooperative situations, individuals tend to interact, promote each other's success, form multidimensional and realistic impressions of each other's competencies, and give accurate feedback. Such interaction tends to promote a basic acceptance of oneself as a competent person.

##### **4.3 It can develop students' awareness of self-responsibility and interdependence**

IEDC simultaneously models interdependence and provides students with the experiences they need to

understand the nature of cooperation. They need to choose topics of their own interests, or other forms of activities. Also, they need to set the time, the organization and progress of each activity as well as the presenters in class each time. In this way, they will take great pride in themselves by strengthening a sense of responsibility. While in their group work, they also realize the importance of cooperation. They need to have a better knowledge of other members, their hobbies, their life experience, their advantages and disadvantages and so on. The more time they spend with each other, the better they understand each other, the smoother their activity would be.

**Reference:**

Richard & Rodgers. (1986). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 71.

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