

修士学位請求論文要旨

Cooperative Learning in an English as a Foreign  
Language Course at a Japanese University

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Cooperative learning has been known to benefit students in multiple ways psychologically and socially. Past studies have proven that the benefits of cooperative learning seem to be greater than other forms of group related activities (Damon & Phelps, 1989; Sharan, 1985; Slavin, 1996; Storch, 2002). In addition to this, the call for major reform in Japanese higher education has seen an increased need for active learning. Active learning often involves cooperative learning, which is similar to group activities but more intense and structured. Due to its recognized positive impact, in the areas of psychological health, confidence, school work, reasoning ability and interpersonal relationships, and because of the social environment in Japan, cooperative learning has recently been encouraged in various school subjects, including English. As this movement is gaining attention, more and more empirical studies have been conducted on the effects of cooperative learning. However, there are few which focus on the variations of cooperative learning and discuss the effects of each on student belief in cooperation. When cooperative learning is considered, it is important to look at student beliefs because beliefs determine how one understands a certain experience and decides on one's actions (Wenden, 1986; White, 2008). According to Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1991) the three types of cooperative learning are, informal cooperative learning groups, formal cooperative learning groups and cooperative base groups. This study explored informal cooperative learning, formal cooperative learning and teacher-led instruction (the traditional educational method) and attempted to see how 1. belief in cooperation and 2. English reading and writing proficiency are affected by the different educational methods. It also attempted to see whether sequence of educational method affects belief in cooperation and English proficiency in reading and writing. An extremely simple explanation of the difference between informal and formal cooperative learning is that the former entails an ad-hoc group activity lasting for one class period or shorter and the latter concerns a semi-long

term project working with the same individuals towards a common bit goal. Table 1 is a comparison chart of informal and formal cooperative learning.

Table1

*Difference Between Informal and Formal Cooperative Learning*

	Informal	Formal
Number of individuals	2~3 per group	2~4 per group
Duration	1 class	1 ~ several classes
Purpose	to fill in any gaps in knowledge that individuals may have about class material	to achieve shared learning goals and complete jointly specific tasks & assignments, etc.
Description	once every 10~15 minutes, students are put into ad-hoc groups & are asked to go over info. they have covered in class, answer questions, etc.	students are in the same group until task completion. teacher's role is to uncover material with the students, not cover material for the students (Johnson et al., 1991).
Procedure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. introductory focused discussion</li> <li>2. turn-to your partner discussion</li> <li>3. closure focused discussion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. teacher makes pre-instructional decisions</li> <li>2. announces task and goes over cooperative learning principles</li> <li>3. monitor groups &amp; intervene when necessary</li> <li>4. evaluation and process</li> </ol>

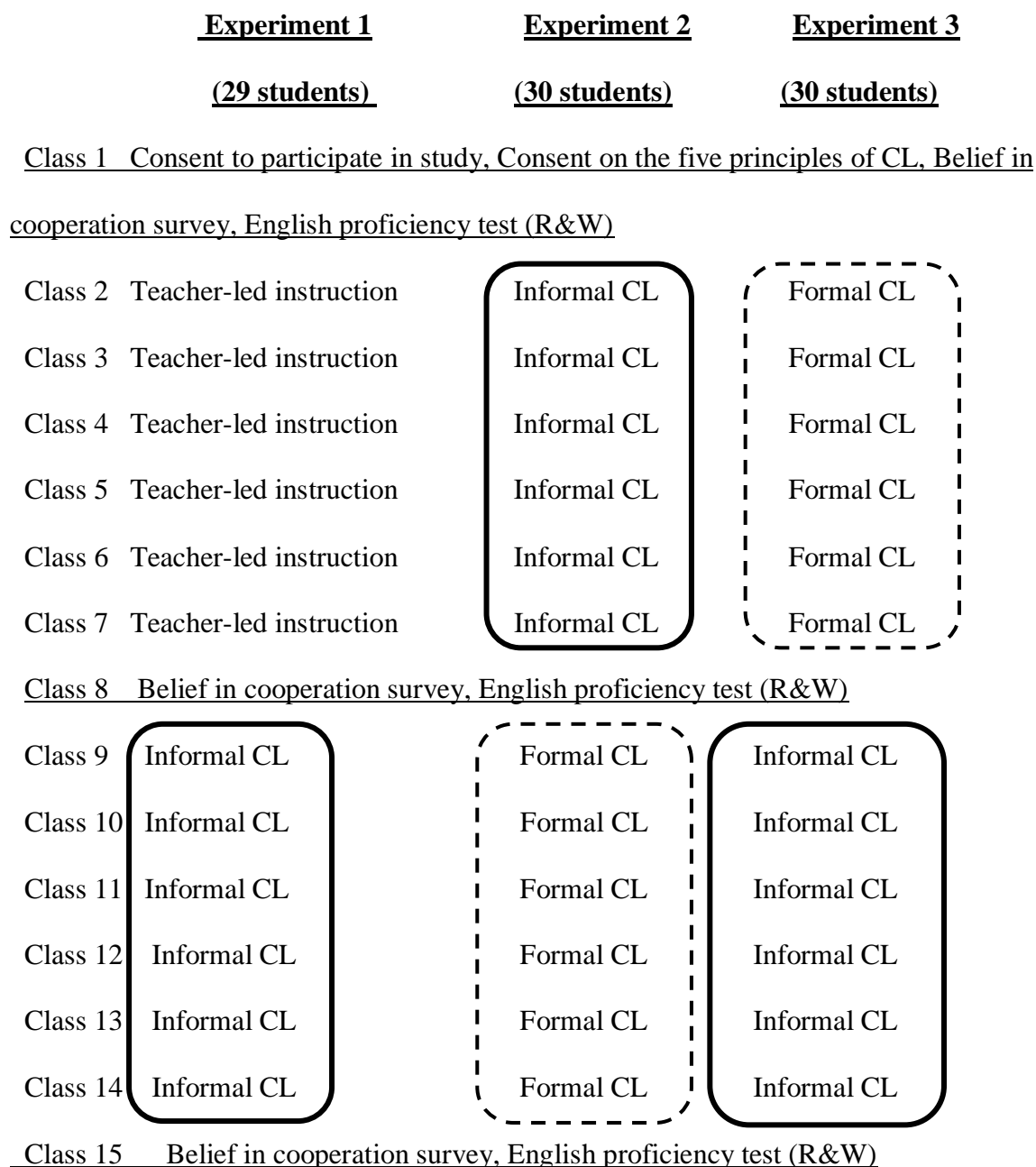
Thus, research questions for this study were as follows.

RQ1. When conducting teacher-led instruction followed by informal cooperative learning, what are the differences in belief in cooperation and English reading and writing proficiency? (Experiment 1)

RQ2. When conducting informal cooperative learning followed by formal cooperative learning, what are the differences in belief in cooperation and English reading and writing proficiency? (Experiment 2)

RQ3. When conducting formal cooperative learning followed by informal cooperative learning, what are the differences in belief in cooperation and English reading and writing proficiency? (Experiment 3)

Figure 1 provides an outline of the study.



*Figure 1.* Outline of Experiments 1, 2 and 3. CL= Cooperative learning, R&W = reading and writing.

As can be seen from this (Figure 1), three experiments were conducted, each measuring belief in cooperation and English reading and writing proficiency. The study was conducted on first-year university students whose English levels which were presumed to be CEFR A1~A2 level in reading, writing, listening and speaking from in-class tests and

interaction with students. The study lasted for one semester. Analysis was conducted using one-way repeated measure ANOVAs. Summary of the results appear on Table 2.

Table 2

*Table Summarizing Results from Experiment 1 to 3*

<b>(Experiment 1)</b>		
	First educational method	Second educational method
	Teacher-led instruction	Informal Cooperative learning
Usefulness of Cooperation	n.s.	↑
Individual orientation	↑	↓
Inequity	↑	↓
English reading and writing proficiency	↑	↑
<b>(Experiment 2)</b>		
	First educational method	Second educational method
	Informal cooperative learning	Formal cooperative learning
Usefulness of Cooperation	n.s.	n.s.
Individual orientation	n.s.	↓
Inequity	n.s.	↓
English reading and writing proficiency	n.s.	n.s.
<b>(Experiment 3)</b>		
	First educational method	Second educational method
	Formal cooperative learning	Informal cooperative learning
Usefulness of Cooperation	n.s.	n.s.
Individual orientation	n.s.	n.s.
Inequity	n.s.	n.s.

English reading and writing proficiency	n.s.	n.s.
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*Note.* n.s. = not significant

Experiment 1 showed that teacher-led instruction increased individual orientation and inequity but had no effect on perceived usefulness of cooperation. When informal cooperative learning followed this, perceived usefulness of cooperation rose, while individual orientation and inequity fell. It seemed that in terms of belief in cooperation, informal cooperative learning affected it in a positive way. English reading and writing proficiency were not affected by differences in educational method. From these findings, it can be inferred that informal cooperative learning seems to have had a positive effect on belief in cooperation of students.

On the other hand, informal cooperative learning did not affect Experiment 2 in any of the three factors in the belief in cooperation scale. However, when conducted after informal cooperative learning, formal cooperative learning helped decrease individual orientation and inequity. English reading and writing proficiency showed no significance in either cooperative learning type.

Experiment 3, in which informal cooperative learning was the subsequent educational method to formal cooperative learning, revealed no significant difference in belief in cooperation nor English proficiency test scores.

Thus, Experiments 1, 2 and 3 propose that when implementing cooperative learning in an English as a foreign language (EFL) college course, it may be advisable to start out with teacher led instruction, then conduct informal cooperative learning, and lastly, formal cooperative learning if the purpose is to increase belief in cooperation among college students. This sequence of execution seems to be essential for them to receive the full

benefits of cooperative learning in the context of belief in cooperation. English reading and writing proficiency were not significantly affected by different educational methods.

Results suggested that when students are given opportunities to work together from the beginning, they may not appreciate working in groups. Attention needs to be paid to what kind of cooperative learning is conducted and in which order. Up until now, very little attention has been paid to the different types of cooperative learning as well as to the sequence in which these ought to be conducted in. This study uncovered the necessity to tune into these factors for students to receive full benefits of cooperative learning when conducting this in an EFL course at a Japanese university.