

## Effects of Cooperative Learning on English Achievement, Retention, and Motivation among Low-Level Students in a Rural Province of Thailand

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### ABSTRACT

*This mixed-method research aimed to examine how cooperative learning affected English achievement and motivation among low-level students in a rural province of Thailand. Using purposive sampling, the study focused on 30 seventh-grade students from an "opportunity expansion" school enrolled in English for Hospitality Industry, a university lifelong learning course, during the 2023 academic year. The research instruments included a learning activity package, achievement tests, semi-structured interviews, and a researcher's log. Data were analysed using percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and thematic analysis. Overall, the findings support the effectiveness of incorporating cooperative learning strategies into language education programmes aimed at enhancing students' English proficiency and motivation. Achievement scores showed a significant increase immediately after the course, with a p-value of 0.00 ( $p < .05$ ), and no statistically significant change two weeks after the course, with a p-value of 0.31 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating skill retention. The positive impact of cooperative learning on English proficiency underscores its potential as a pedagogic approach to fostering lifelong learning among students. Educators and curriculum developers can benefit from integrating cooperative learning strategies into language education programmes, particularly in contexts like the hospitality industry, where effective communication skills are pivotal.*

*Keywords: cooperative learning; English achievement; motivation; student's achievement; retention*

### INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is a critical skill for students worldwide, including those in Thailand, where English is a core component of the educational curriculum. However, rural students in Thailand face distinct challenges in mastering English, such as limited access to quality instruction, minimal exposure to the language outside the classroom, and socio-economic barriers that hinder their learning progress. These challenges often result in low levels of English proficiency, particularly in communication skills, which are essential for further education and employment opportunities (Suwannaprut & Siriwan, 2019).

The educational landscape in Thailand has evolved since the amendment of the National Education Act in 1999, which emphasised learner-centredness and communicative language teaching. Despite this shift, English education in rural areas continues to struggle. Many teachers in these regions interpret learner-centredness as promoting student independence with minimal

direct instruction, often leading to gaps in essential language skills (Darasawang, 2007). Traditional teaching methods that focus on rote memorisation and grammar, coupled with limited exposure to authentic language use, exacerbate these challenges.

Cooperative learning, an instructional approach that emphasises collaboration and peer interaction, has been widely recognised for its potential to enhance academic achievement and motivation. Studies have shown that interactive and participatory teaching methods significantly improve language acquisition, particularly among younger learners who thrive in engaging, activity-based environments (Pinter, 2017). However, despite its long history and widespread use, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of cooperative learning for low-level students in rural areas, where educational resources are scarce and traditional teaching methods prevail.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the effects of cooperative learning on English achievement and motivation among low-level students in a rural province of Thailand. Specifically, it seeks to explore whether this pedagogic approach can bridge the educational challenges faced by these students, who often lack the support needed to develop their language skills. By focusing on this under-researched demographic, the study hopes to contribute to the broader discourse on effective educational strategies in under-resourced settings.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to examine English achievement and motivation by implementing cooperative learning strategies with seventh-grade students in the Mathematics and English enrichment program. The research is guided by four key questions that address the development, impact, and perceptions of the cooperative learning activity package. The following research questions are designed to explore these aspects in detail:

- RQ1: What should the content of a cooperative learning activity package based on cooperative learning be for seventh-grade students in the enrichment program of Mathematics and English?
- RQ2: Do seventh-grade students in the Mathematics and English enrichment program increase their English achievement after studying through cooperative learning?
- RQ3: Do seventh-grade students in the Mathematics and English enrichment program have an increase in the retention of English achievement after studying through cooperative learning?
- RQ4: What are seventh-grade students' motivations for cooperative learning activities?

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study was conducted in a secondary school located in Uttaradit, a small rural province in northern Thailand. The region's geographical isolation presents significant challenges for English language learning, with minimal tourism and few foreign residents limiting students' exposure to English outside the classroom. This isolation reinforces the perception that English has little relevance to daily life, unlike in more urban or tourist-driven areas of Thailand.

The school primarily serves low-level, underprivileged students from smaller feeder schools with inadequate English instruction. More affluent students often attend more competitive provincial schools, leaving the school in this study to cater to students from remote and under-resourced communities. These students frequently struggle academically, particularly in English, due to a weak educational foundation.

The school faces systemic challenges, including a shortage of qualified English teachers. The few teachers employed are often non-specialists, managing large classes with limited professional development opportunities. They rely on traditional methods like rote learning and grammar drills, which do little to foster meaningful language use or communicative competence, further compounding students' difficulties.

These challenges, including the lack of qualified teachers, minimal opportunities for authentic English use, and outdated teaching methods, contribute to students' low motivation to learn English. With few practical applications and limited interactions with native speakers, students struggle to see the value of learning the language, resulting in low engagement.

In this context, promoting lifelong learning is essential. Lifelong learning approaches, such as the cooperative learning strategies employed in this study, aim to provide practical skills and continuous learning opportunities. Despite the challenges, cooperative learning presents a promising strategy for enhancing English education and fostering a lifelong learning mindset.

The participants in this study were enrolled in the "English for Hospitality Industry" course for the academic year 2023, offered by a local university as part of its lifelong learning initiative. Lifelong learning emphasises the ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge, addressing the needs of individuals seeking to improve their competencies in a continually evolving job market.

Given the limited literature on cooperative learning's effectiveness in rural, under-resourced Thai schools, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring how cooperative learning activities can enhance English skills and support lifelong learning goals among low-level students in such settings.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The purpose of this literature review is to explore cooperative learning as a pedagogic approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, focusing on its theoretical foundations, practical applications, and its relevance to the Thai educational context.

Cooperative learning is defined as an instructional method in which students work together in small groups to achieve a common goal, emphasising structured interactions that promote higher-order thinking, social development, and mutual dependence (Tamimy et al., 2023). Unlike traditional group work, cooperative learning requires that students engage in organised roles and responsibilities, where the success of one depends on the contribution of all.

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The theoretical underpinnings of cooperative learning are deeply rooted in both Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and Piaget's cognitive constructivism. Vygotsky and Cole (1978) posits that learning occurs through social interactions, where more knowledgeable peers mediate knowledge

and facilitate cognitive development. Piaget’s theory emphasises the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through interaction with their environment and peers. Building on these foundations, Inns and Slavin (2018) argue that cooperative learning allows students to internalise knowledge through collaboration and peer feedback, facilitating both academic and social growth.

From a behavioural-social perspective, group rewards and motivation are seen as central to cooperative learning. Inns and Slavin (2018) note that students are motivated by group rewards, which foster a cooperative environment. Johnson and Johnson’s (2017) social interdependence theory further elaborates on key elements essential for effective cooperative learning, including individual accountability, promotive interaction, positive interdependence, social skills, group processing, and boundary interdependence. These components work together to create a learning environment where each student’s success is intertwined with the group’s collective effort.

#### COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THAI CLASSROOMS

In the context of Thai education, cooperative learning offers a promising alternative to the traditional teacher-centred, rote-learning approach. Ulla and Perales (2021) found that despite being relatively new to cooperative learning, Thai students responded positively to working in groups. They believed that collaborative tasks and group activities helped improve their English skills by creating opportunities for peer interaction and shared responsibility. This positive reception contrasts with the passive learning environment many Thai students are accustomed to, where memorisation and individual work dominate the classroom. By introducing cooperative learning, teachers can foster more active engagement and motivation in students, particularly in rural areas where educational resources are limited.

#### PIES FRAMEWORK IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING

The PIES framework (Positive Interdependence, Individual Accountability, Equal Participation, and Simultaneous Interaction) developed by Kagan and Kagan (2009) is central to this study. Each principle plays a critical role in promoting student engagement and ensuring the effectiveness of cooperative learning activities.

PIES: Basic Principles of Cooperative Learning					
Acronym	Principle	Critical Question	Key Words/ Phrases	Students Feel	Students Do
<b>P</b>	<b>Positive Interdependence: Outcomes positively correlated</b>	<i>Does one doing well help others?</i>	Positive Correlation Shared Goal	On the same side	<b>Encourage each other;</b> tutor; coach
	<b>Positive Interdependence: Outcomes depend on all</b>	<i>Does task completion depend on others?</i>	Interdependence	Need each other Part of a team	<b>Cooperate</b>
<b>I</b>	<b>Individual accountability</b>	<i>Is an individual performance (oral or written) required?</i>	Accountable Responsible Visible	Can't hide "On the hook"	<b>Contribute;</b> perform
<b>E</b>	<b>Equal participation</b>	<i>Is participation approximately equal?</i>	Equitable Fair No hogs or logs	Equal status Included	<b>Participate equally</b>
<b>S</b>	<b>Simultaneous interaction</b>	<i>Are at least 25% writing or talking at any one moment?</i>	Engagement	Engaged	<b>Participate maximally</b>

FIGURE 1. PIES, Basic Principles of Cooperative Learning (Kagan, 2021)

TABLE 1. Examples of Kagan cooperative learning strategies based on the PIES principles (Kagan & Kagan, 2009)

Structure or Strategy	Description
Mix Pair Share	Students move to music, pairing up when it stops to share thoughts.
Timed Pair Share	One student shares for a set time while the other listens.
Rally Coach	One student writes answers while the other coaches switch roles.
Rally Table	Students write answers in turns on a shared sheet of paper.
Rally Robin	Students share responses in a round-robin within small groups.
Round Robin	Participants present their views sequentially within a group.
Quiz Quiz Trade	Students find new partners by moving around the room.

Table 1 shows examples of cooperative learning structures designed to create a dynamic and interactive classroom, where students are encouraged to engage with one another and develop their English language skills through meaningful communication.

Cooperative learning, with its roots in socio-cultural and cognitive constructivist theories, has proven to be an effective instructional approach in various educational settings. In Thailand, particularly in rural schools where English proficiency remains low, the introduction of cooperative learning presents a valuable strategy for fostering both academic achievement and motivation. By applying the PIES framework, this study aims to explore how cooperative learning can support the development of English language skills in low-level students, contributing to the broader discourse on educational practices in under-resourced areas.

#### MOTIVATION

According to Gardner (1995), motivation is the drive to learn as a result of an individual's obligation to devote time to educational pursuits. Additionally, there is a correlation between motivation and the qualities of learning attitudes, learning desire, and motivational intensity. It is believed that motivation is a psychological component that first persuades individuals to accept and engage in a given activity. It may cause learners to act in a certain way in order to fulfil their obligations or reach their goals. There are two basic types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Deci and Ryan (1985) define intrinsic motivation as engaging in a particular activity because it appeals to individuals and makes them happy. A further definition of intrinsic motivation is acting "for its own sake" (Carreira, 2005). According to Lui (2002), intrinsic motivation happens when someone engages in an activity because they find it enjoyable. This indicates that people typically rely on their inherent motivation, skills, and abilities to finish a task or challenge. Deci and Ryan's (1985) Theory of Motivation and Self-Determination highlights how the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness support both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. This theory has been further developed by research on L2 motivation, which shows how these psychological needs affect the success of language learning. Ushioda (2017), for example, highlights how crucial it is to support a learner's sense of agency and self-regulation in L2 contexts in order to boost motivation and facilitate successful language acquisition. They also argue that cooperative learning meets basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, all of which are essential for fostering intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is motivated by external benefits such as rewards, certificates, or grades (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivation occurs when learners feel obligated to participate in learning activities due to external forces other than their own (Lui, 2002). Extrinsic motivation, unlike intrinsic motivation, may be less effective at fostering long-term commitment or producing a profound sense of fulfilment when it comes to promoting specific behaviours or achieving specific goals.

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

As illustrated by the figure below, the study examines English achievement, retention, and motivation using cooperative learning structures, such as Rally Robin and Quiz Quiz Trade, within the context of an English for Hospitality Industry course. These strategies are designed to promote students' English achievement, retention, and motivation by requiring the integration of all four English skills during the 45-hour course. The research employs a mixed-method approach with interpretivism as its foundational methodology, recognising the subjective experiences and multiple truths inherent in human phenomena. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how cooperative learning strategies influence English skills in a dynamic educational setting. The study captures both quantitative and qualitative data through various methods, including semi-structured interviews, tests, and a researcher's log, to deeply explore the impact of cooperative learning on students' language proficiency, retention, and motivation.

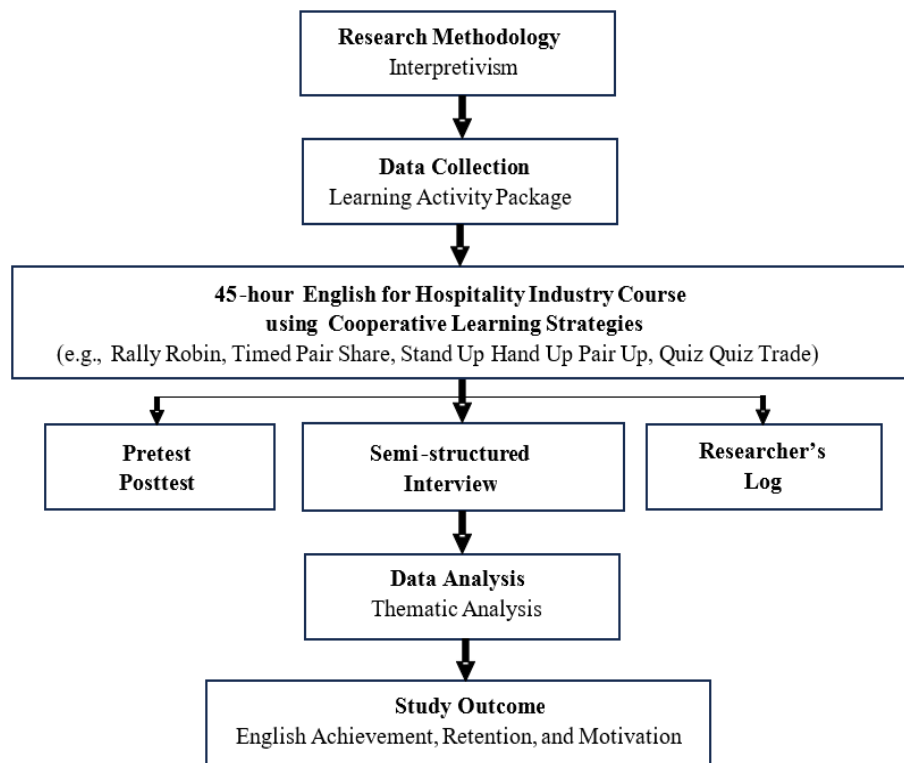


FIGURE 2. Research Design and Cooperative Learning in English for the Hospitality Industry

## CONTEXT AND SELECTION OF LIFELONG LEARNING COURSE

This study was carried out within the English for Hospitality Industry course, which was chosen because it aligned with the research focus on English achievement and motivation through cooperative learning. This course was chosen based on its relevance to the study's objectives and suitability for investigating cooperative learning strategies in a real-world setting.

The course, designed for seventh-grade students in the Mathematics and English enrichment program, lasts 12 weeks and requires three hours of learning per week. It consists of five units: English for Hotel Service, English for Food and Beverage Service, English for Travel Service, English for Recreation Service, and Giving Information in English. Each unit includes cooperative learning activities to promote engagement, motivation, and proficiency.

The course's development included creating learning activity packages, which were then reviewed by three experts to ensure reliability and validity. This approach ensured that the study was consistent with the existing curriculum and laid the foundation for valuable insights into language education and cooperative learning.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study comprised 30 seventh-grade students enrolled in the English for Hospitality Industry course for the academic year 2023. These students were selected based on their potential to provide valuable insights into the research focus. Given their participation in the Enhancement Program of Mathematics and English, it was anticipated that they would actively engage in teaching and learning activities and offer comprehensive perspectives during interviews, informal observation, and assessments.

The cohort consisted of 14 male and 16 female students aged 12 to 13 years. As students were required to study and work in groups of four with varying English proficiency levels, as suggested by the cooperative learning approach, they were given a pre-test to assess their English proficiency. First, students were divided into three groups based on their proficiency level: low, medium, and high. Following that, they were divided into groups of four with varying English abilities so that they could learn effectively together, with stronger students assisting weaker peers in various roles. Their inclusion in the English for Hospitality Industry course, which made use of cooperative learning strategies like Rally Robin, Timed Pair Share, Round Robin, Rally Coach, and Quiz Quiz Trade, was deemed suitable.

By including participants from different skill levels, this study aimed to capture a comprehensive range of experiences and perspectives related to cooperative learning and its impact on English achievement, retention, and motivation. This approach ensured that the findings would reflect a nuanced understanding of how cooperative learning strategies contribute to educational outcomes.

## DATA COLLECTION

This mixed-method study employed four distinct data collection sources to comprehensively investigate the impact of cooperative learning on seventh-grade students' English skills within the context of lifelong learning. Triangulation of methods was a fundamental strategy in this research. RQs 2 and 3 were addressed using quantitative data, while RQs 1 and 4 were addressed with qualitative data.

*Development of Learning Activity Packages.* The packages were designed based on a needs analysis. The study began with the development of five learning activity packages tailored to address RQ 1. These packages were designed for the course “English for the Hospitality Industry,” a three-credit course requiring 45 hours of study time. Each package, English for Hotel Service, English for Food and Beverage Service, English for Travel Service, English for Recreation Service, and Giving Information in English, spanned nine hours and integrated cooperative learning strategies such as Rally Robin, Timed Pair Share, Round Robin, Rally Robin, and Quiz Quiz Trade. Three experts from different universities reviewed each package to ensure relevance and appropriateness.

Additionally, the Efficiency Test with an E1/E2 standard of 75/70 was employed to assess the quality of each package. This metric ensured that at least 75% of students achieved learning objectives during instruction (E1), and at least 70% retained and demonstrated knowledge during evaluations (E2). These tests were vital in validating the efficacy and reliability of the learning activity packages.

*Achievement tests.* To address RQ2, a pre-test and a post-test were administered to gauge students’ English proficiency before and after completing the course. The tests were aligned with the content of the five learning activity packages and consisted of 40 questions. The pre-test was conducted on orientation day, and the post-test followed the completion of the 45-hour course. These assessments aimed to ascertain whether students’ English skills improved over the course duration.

*Retention test.* Two weeks after completing the course, the delayed post-test, the same test used in the pre-test and post-test phases, was re-administered to assess retention of English skills (RQ3). This stage aimed to determine whether the benefits of cooperative learning endured beyond the immediate post-course period.

*Semi-Structured Interviews.* For RQ4, semi-structured one-on-one interviews provided qualitative insights. Interviews were conducted in Thai to explore participants’ perceptions and experiences in a friendly, confidential setting. Interview questions were open-ended to encourage participants to freely express their opinions on course experiences, interactions, and learning outcomes. Follow-up questions were utilised to elicit detailed responses. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent and transcribed into Thai for analysis, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Prior to each interview, participants were briefed on their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

*Researcher’s Log.* This research tool, as an informal observation, was also used to address RQ4 and better understand how cooperative learning activities affected students’ English achievement and motivation.

In summary, the integration of multiple data sources, learning activity packages, achievement tests, retention tests, semi-structured interviews, and a researcher’s log enabled a comprehensive exploration of how cooperative learning enhances seventh-grade students’ English achievement and motivation in a lifelong learning context. This methodological approach ensured robust findings and an enriched understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.



## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical principles were rigorously upheld in this study to protect student participants in the English for Hospitality Industry lifelong learning course, following approval from the University Human Research Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential implications through an information sheet, emphasising that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time without consequences. Written consent was obtained before conducting interviews. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, identifiers were removed from transcripts and replaced with codes, and audio recordings, as well as transcripts, were kept confidential. Audio recordings were securely stored and deleted after transcription to protect participant privacy. Additionally, participants were assured that their decision to participate would not affect their relationship with the university, course enrolment, or future assessments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY PACKAGE

This section presents the findings addressing the first research question: What should the content of a cooperative learning activity package based on cooperative learning be for seventh-grade students in the enrichment program of Mathematics and English? The study focused on developing and implementing the learning activity package for the English for Hospitality Industry course, tailored to enhance students' English proficiency through cooperative learning strategies.

The content of the learning activity package was structured around the comprehensive course description, emphasising the practical use of English in various hospitality contexts such as hotels, food and beverage services, travel services, recreational activities, and information dissemination. Each unit within the course, English for Hotel Service, English for Food and Beverage Service, English for Travel Service, English for Recreation Service, and Giving Information in English, was meticulously designed to encompass essential vocabulary, expressions, speaking practices in simulated settings, and writing skills pertinent to public relations and information delivery.

TABLE 2. Learning activity package for English for the Hospitality Industry

Unit	Topic	Sub-topic	No. of hours
1	English for Hotel Service	1.1 Hotel Structure, Positions, Facilities and Services	3
		1.2 Checking In	3
		1.3 Checking Out	3
2	English for Food and Beverage Service	2.1 Necessary Vocabulary and Expressions for Food and Beverage Service 1	3
		2.2 Necessary Vocabulary and Expressions for Food and Beverage Service 2	3
		2.3 Food and Beverage Menu	3
3	English for Travel Service	3.1 Popular Places in Uttaradit	3
		3.2 Fantastic Festivals and Activities in Uttaradit	3
		3.3 Interesting Souvenirs in Uttaradit	3
4	English for Recreation Service	4.1 Indoor Recreational Activities	3
		4.2 Outdoor Recreational Activities	3
		4.3 English Camp Activities	3

5	Giving Information in English	5.1 Giving Information	3
		5.2 Asking for Information	3
		5.3 Signs	3

The course consisted of five units, each subdivided into three topics, with each topic requiring three hours of study time. For instance, Unit 1, English for Hotel Service, covered topics such as Hotel Structure, Positions, Facilities and Services, Checking In, and Checking Out. Similarly, subsequent units like English for Food and Beverage Service, English for Travel Service, English for Recreation Service, and Giving Information in English were structured to progressively build upon students' English proficiency within specific hospitality-related contexts.

Throughout the course, the researchers, who also served as course instructors, implemented various cooperative learning strategies to engage students actively. Strategies such as Rally Robin, Timed Pair Share, and Quiz Quiz Trade were employed to foster cooperative learning environments where students could interact, share knowledge, and collectively improve their English proficiency.

*Validation through Efficiency Testing.* To ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning activity packages, an Efficiency Test was conducted using the E1/E2 set standard of 75/70. The 75/70 benchmark aligns with standards typically set for courses focusing on psychomotor and affective domains, such as communication skills, where mastery is more challenging due to the hands-on, interactive nature of learning. According to Brahmawong (2013), for the cognitive domain, higher E1/E2 criteria like 90/90 or 85/85 are common. However, for psychomotor skills and affective domain content, especially when the material is difficult or highly specialised, such as professional communication skills at the university level, lower benchmarks like 75/70 are more appropriate. Results indicated an E1/E2 value of 80.13/70.92, surpassing the set benchmarks. This signifies that 80.13% of students achieved learning objectives during the instructional phase (E1), while 70.92% retained and applied knowledge during the evaluation phase (E2). These outcomes underscore the efficacy of the learning activity packages in not only delivering content effectively but also in ensuring sustained comprehension and application of learned material over time.

TABLE 3. Efficiency of Learning Activity Package for English for the Hospitality Industry

N	During Instructional Phase			After Instruction			Efficiency E1/E2
	A	ΣX	E1	B	ΣY	E2	
30	106	84.93	80.13	40	28.37	70.92	80.13/70.92

The results demonstrate significant improvements in students' English proficiency following their participation in the course. These findings align with the course's comprehensive design, which integrates vocabulary and expressions crucial to various facets of the hospitality industry. The emphasis on practical speaking practice, both simulated and authentic, underscores the course's relevance and effectiveness in preparing students for real-world communication scenarios within their professional context.

The course focuses on equipping students with essential listening, speaking, and vocabulary skills tailored to the demands of the hospitality sector, addressing a recognised challenge among Thai students, who often require additional support to enhance their proficiency in these areas. This challenge is consistent with studies, such as those by Lertchalermtipakoon et al., (2021), where listening and speaking were identified as significant barriers to effective communication.

The structured approach of the course, with each learning activity package requiring nine hours and a total duration of 45 hours, ensures a thorough exploration of vocabulary and expressions specific to hotel operations, food and beverage services, travel arrangements, recreation amenities, and customer communication. This structured time allocation allows students to delve deeply into each thematic area, fostering understanding and practical application of English within their professional domain.

The integration of cooperative learning methods not only enhances students' motivation and engagement but also cultivates collaborative skills essential for effective teamwork in the hospitality industry. By participating in group discussions, collaborative projects, and role-playing exercises, students not only improve their language skills but also gain confidence in using English in practical, workplace-related contexts.

#### ENGLISH ACHIEVEMENT ENHANCEMENT THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING

This section presents the quantitative analysis addressing the second research question: Do seventh-grade students in the Mathematics and English enrichment program increase their English achievement after studying through cooperative learning?

TABLE 4. Achievement of students' English skills through cooperative learning

Factors	n	Mean	S.D.	Percentage	t-value	Sig
Pre-test (40 questions)	30	14.67	3.04	36.68	9.73	0.00
Post-test (40 questions)	30	28.37	7.62	70.93		

\*Statistical significance level at .05 level

The pre-test yielded a mean score of 14.67 (SD = 3.04). After the course with cooperative learning strategies, the post-test mean score significantly improved to 28.37 (SD = 7.62). Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ( $t = 9.73$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). The marked increase underscores the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing students' English proficiency. The t-value and p-value confirm that this improvement is statistically significant, attributable to the cooperative learning approach employed in the course.

These findings support the hypothesis that cooperative learning enhances students' English skills. This outcome is consistent with research highlighting cooperative learning's role in facilitating language acquisition through active engagement, collaborative tasks, and peer interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Cooperative learning environments provide students with opportunities to work together, exposing them to diverse perspectives and constructive feedback from peers, which significantly contributes to language learning.

Moreover, the observed improvements suggest broader implications for promoting lifelong learning. Cooperative learning aligns with educational practices aimed at cultivating holistic development and lifelong learning outcomes (Kagan, 1994). By engaging in cooperative activities, students enhance their language proficiency and develop essential competencies such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication skills, which are crucial for academic and professional success (Slavin, 2014).

The positive impact of cooperative learning on English achievement underscores its potential as a pedagogic approach to fostering lifelong learning. By promoting active participation and collaboration, cooperative learning strategies not only enhance immediate learning outcomes but also equip students with transferable skills for an interconnected, globalised world.

### RETENTION OF ENGLISH SKILLS THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING

This section presents the quantitative analysis addressing the third research question: Do seventh-grade students in the Mathematics and English enrichment program have an increase in the retention of English skills after studying through cooperative learning?

Table 5 summarises the assessment of students' retention of English skills before and after participating in the English for Hospitality Industry course using cooperative learning methods.

TABLE 5. Retention of Students' English Skills

Factors	n	Mean	S.D.	Percentage	t-value	Sig
Post-test (40 questions)	30	28.37	7.62	36.68	1.03	0.31
Delayed Post-test (40 questions)	30	29.73	5.85	74.33		

The post-test, administered immediately after completing the cooperative learning-based English for Hospitality Industry course, yielded a mean score of 28.37 (SD = 7.62). Two weeks later, the delayed post-test showed a mean score of 29.73 (SD = 5.85).

A two-tailed paired T-test on the delayed post-test results indicated a t-value of 1.03 and a p-value of 0.31, which is above the significance threshold of 0.05. This suggests no significant decline in students' scores after a two-week period, a notable result given that scores in such contexts often drop significantly with the passage of time. The stability of student scores over this period suggests that cooperative learning had a positive and stabilising effect on retention. While cooperative learning may not have produced a significant increase in retention, the absence of a decline itself is a meaningful outcome. This lack of decline can be interpreted as a positive impact, indicating that the cooperative learning activities helped students retain what they had learned more effectively compared to traditional methods, where retention tends to diminish more rapidly, aligning with successful strategies in specialised language instruction, such as English for community-based tourism in Thailand (Phaiboonnugulkit, 2023).

Cooperative learning, as applied in the English for Hospitality Industry course, reinforced students' English communication skills through collaborative activities and interactions. This approach allowed active engagement with course material, practice in authentic contexts, and peer feedback, contributing to enhanced retention (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

These practical improvements suggest that cooperative learning strategies effectively prepare students for real-world applications, which are essential for academic and career success in the hospitality industry. The ability to retain and apply language skills in professional settings underscores the practical relevance of cooperative learning in educational curricula.

### STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONS FOR COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY

The qualitative data analysis in this section addresses the fourth research question: What are seventh-grade students' motivations for the cooperative learning activity?

Table 6 below illustrates the four themes and eleven sub-themes that were identified from the thematic analysis.

TABLE 6. Themes and sub-themes of students' motivations for cooperative learning activity

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Benefits and Motivation	1.1 Enjoyment and Engagement 1.2 Growth-Oriented Motivation 1.3 Inspirational Goals and Motivation
Theme 2: Learning Environment and Activities	2.1 Motivational Group Learning Dynamics 2.2 Interactive Motivation-Driven Learning 2.3 Diverse Motivational Learning Experiences
Theme 3: Language Skills Development	3.1 Motivational Communication Mastery 3.2 Motivational Lexical Development 3.3 Motivational Language Mastery
Theme 4: Feedback and Reflection	4.1 Motivational Feedback Loop 4.2 Awareness and Motivational Growth

**Theme 1: Benefits and Motivation.** Benefits and motivation are closely intertwined in cooperative learning environments. By leveraging the social dynamics inherent in group work and fostering a supportive, engaging atmosphere, cooperative learning enhances students' motivation and contributes to overall academic success. Participants expressed enjoyment and satisfaction with cooperative learning activities. One student shared, *"I feel fun and think that the learning activities are very beneficial."* Others highlighted a desire to improve conversational skills, such as one participant who said, *"I want to be taught more conversational skills so that we can use them to talk to foreigners."*

Participants also identified motivation and enjoyment from future opportunities. One participant remarked, *"We can use it in the future or practice speaking."* Additionally, students demonstrated interest in learning specific topics, such as culinary terms. One participant noted, *"I want to learn about restaurant vocabulary and expressions because there are many more words the teacher hasn't taught yet."*

These findings underscore the profound impact of cooperative learning on motivation and engagement, as demonstrated through three interconnected sub-themes: Enjoyment and Engagement, Desire for Improvement and Growth, and Motivation and Aspirations. Students' enthusiasm and sense of community in collaborative learning fostered a positive classroom environment. This supports research linking enjoyable learning with higher engagement and academic success (Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2021; Yamo et al., 2022). Furthermore, the students' desire for improvement demonstrates a growth mindset fostered by peer collaboration (Hwang et al., 2020). Lastly, students' intrinsic motivation to achieve academic goals and apply learned skills in real-life contexts reflects long-term aspirations (Deci & Ryan, 2020). However, informal observations suggested that some participants engaged mainly due to extrinsic motivation, such as course completion or achieving good grades (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

**Theme 2: Learning Environment and Activities.** The learning environment and activities play a vital role in shaping group dynamics and enhancing collaborative skills. The physical setup of the classroom, such as clustered or circular desk arrangements, was crucial in promoting communication and teamwork. One participant stated, *"We like to work in groups and help each other."* Participants also preferred activities that fostered speaking and conversational skills, with one participant noting, *"While writing is acknowledged as beneficial, the focus is on activities that foster speaking and conversation skills."*

The diverse learning opportunities offered by the activity package were appreciated, with some participants expressing a desire for real-life communication scenarios and cultural

understanding. One participant mentioned, “*I want more learning opportunities to understand Thailand’s tourism better.*”

The findings from Theme 2 highlight the role of the classroom setup and activity structure in promoting positive group interactions and collaborative learning. Research shows that creating a supportive environment, fostering teamwork, and facilitating open communication are critical for successful cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Structured activities that require all members to participate help develop problem-solving and critical-thinking skills (Slavin, 2014). This type of environment enhances communication skills and strengthens peer collaboration, contributing to meaningful educational outcomes.

**Theme 3: Language Skills Development.** Cooperative learning creates a dynamic environment conducive to language skills development, encouraging peer interaction, diverse perspectives, collaborative problem-solving, and integrated language practice. Participants recognised improvements in listening, speaking, and vocabulary skills through engagement in cooperative language activities. One participant affirmed, “*Engaging in language activities has led to an improvement in both listening and speaking skills.*” Another noted, “*We learned many new vocabulary words.*”

The cooperative activities facilitated vocabulary acquisition and improved English proficiency as students applied learned language skills in practical contexts. One participant expressed, “*I enjoy it more because each word introduces new vocabulary.*”

The findings support the notion that cooperative learning enhances language skills through interactive and peer-supported activities. Sub-themes such as Communication Skills Enhancement, Vocabulary Acquisition, and Language Proficiency Improvement emerged, reflecting the broad benefits of this pedagogic approach. The activities enhanced students' communication skills, including verbal and non-verbal skills, while vocabulary acquisition was driven by engaging games and discussions. This aligns with existing research showing that explicit vocabulary lessons integrated into cooperative learning boost word retention (Tahir et al., 2020). Overall, cooperative learning promotes the comprehensive development of language skills across speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 2014).

**Theme 4: Feedback and Reflection.** Feedback and reflection are crucial elements of cooperative learning, facilitating continuous growth and learning. Participants valued the peer feedback they received during group activities. One participant described, “*It was a Q&A session because we got to hear questions from our friends before speaking ourselves.*” Additionally, participants engaged in self-reflection regarding their language development and identified areas for improvement. One participant reflected, “*Cooperative learning activities facilitate listening and speaking skills development.*”

These findings underscore the role of feedback and reflection in fostering personal and academic development. Peer feedback sharpens critical thinking and enhances conceptual understanding (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Self-reflection empowers students to take ownership of their learning, set goals, and evaluate their progress, cultivating autonomy and accountability (Tanner, 2012). Dialogue and collaboration within cooperative learning environments not only nurture communication skills but also build confidence and promote deeper engagement (Roseth, 2021). This theme highlights the multifaceted benefits of integrating feedback and reflection into cooperative learning practices, promoting enriched learning experiences and long-term academic growth.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the efficacy of cooperative learning in enhancing seventh-grade students' English achievement and motivation, specifically focusing on the English for Hospitality Industry course. Conducted in a rural province of Thailand, the research aimed to address the unique challenges faced by low-level, underprivileged students with limited exposure to English.

The findings reveal that cooperative learning significantly enhances students' English proficiency and motivation. Through structured cooperative activities, students not only improved their language proficiency but also demonstrated increased retention and motivation of learned material. The importance of a conducive learning environment and well-structured activities was highlighted, emphasising their role in promoting positive group dynamics, active participation, and collaborative skills development.

Moreover, cooperative learning proved effective in fostering language skills development, including enhanced communication abilities, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language proficiency. This study's context underscores the significant impact cooperative learning can have on underprivileged students, providing them with opportunities to engage actively in their learning process and improve their academic outcomes despite limited resources and exposure.

By leveraging the benefits of cooperative learning, educators can create inclusive and dynamic learning environments that empower underprivileged students to thrive academically. The findings suggest that implementing cooperative learning strategies can bridge educational gaps, offering these students valuable skills and knowledge that prepare them for future challenges in the globalised world. This study contributes to the broader discourse on effective educational strategies in under-resourced settings, highlighting the potential of cooperative learning to transform educational experiences for underprivileged students.

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