

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE SPEAKING SKILLS OF SECONDARY 1  
STUDENTS USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
IN THAILAND

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the development of Chinese speaking skills of Secondary 1 students in an international school in Thailand using cooperative learning method. The examination was conducted during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The study employed cluster random sampling to select four classes, each consisting of 15 students at the secondary 1 level, forming the sample group with mixed genders and abilities in learning.

In the study, the researcher also utilized a questionnaire to collect data on students' speaking tests and satisfaction. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed the highest mean score of the pre-test ( $\bar{X} = 19$ ) and post-test ( $\bar{X} = 31.23$ ). Both pre-test and post-test data indicated the development of students' Chinese speaking skills. Additionally, quantitative data showed the highest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 3.77$ ) and lowest mean score ( $\bar{X} = 3.68$ ) for students' satisfaction. The overall mean score of students' satisfaction level items was at a high level. Content analysis of the quantitative data revealed that students were satisfied with the use of cooperative learning methods in Chinese-speaking classes.

**Keywords:** Cooperative Learning, Chinese Speaking skill, International School, Thailand.

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of China has made learning Chinese growing important in recent years, the statistics from the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation of China reported by China Daily, the end of 2021, more than 25 million people are currently learning Chinese overseas, and the cumulative number of learners and users is close to 200 million (CD, 2021).

China has a significant impact on Thailand, as the Chinese people make up about one-sixth of the entire population, which is the second largest ethnic group in Thailand. Thai schools are increasingly offering courses to learn the Chinese language, and they are also putting more emphasis on these classes. The trend is also apparent in international schools (Cui, 2014). For this study, the researcher mainly focuses on the development of Chinese speaking skills under the British curriculum, which is the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) curriculum. Because the number of Chinese language enrolments in the IGCSE is increasing, most international school students face a huge challenge during Chinese learning.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the Cooperative learning to solve the problems encountered

by international school secondary students in the Chinese speaking teaching. For international school secondary students, one of the main obstacles to improving Chinese speaking is the language environment. School communication between students and teachers is basically in English, and mandatory English communication is even written into the school regulations.

As Cui (2014) states that, students in international schools are required to primarily communicate in English and only have limited opportunities to practice their Chinese speaking skills, such as during Chinese class or when speaking with a Chinese teacher.

From researchers' teaching experience, most international school secondary students do not have Chinese speaking context. The composition of school students is mainly comprised of Thai nationals, and the majority of non-Thai students are children of homeroom teachers; for this reason, they have very limited time to practice Chinese speaking in daily life. Insufficient opportunities for students to practice become a barrier to progress in Chinese speaking skills. An old Chinese saying says that "practice makes perfect."

The improvement of speaking skills is based on substantial repetition and application. If they do not have enough chance to practice after class, they will not be able to achieve the purpose of advanced Chinese speaking learning, which is fluent and accurate use of language in communication (Hong, 2021).

In addition, student personalities are also a critical problem in improving Chinese speaking, with extroverted students being more willing to participate in class discussions, while introverted students tend to shy away (Li, 2014).

To solve these problems during the Chinese-speaking teaching mentioned above, Sun, R (2007) states that cooperative learning is a pedagogical theory, instructional strategy, and learning approach; it can effectively solve the problems of a silent class and low participation and emphasizes communication and cooperation between learners, and the development of a supportive interpersonal relationship among students. A common implementation approach of cooperative learning is Think-Pair-Share (TPS), Students will be divided into several groups, and each group member is asked to reflect on what they already know or have learned about a given topic. Then, they partner up with another member

to share their thoughts and perspectives. The teacher poses a question, providing time for individual reflection. After this, individuals have the opportunity to share their perspectives with their partners (Lyman,1981).

Generally, the cooperative learning approach involves organizing students into groups to complete tasks together rather than work as independent individuals. By working in a team, students can overcome their anxieties, decrease their stress levels, and more effectively apply their Chinese language abilities. For these shy and introverted secondary students, the cooperative learning method creates a positive atmosphere in the class, it is helpful to improve their communication ability (She, 2012). In traditional teaching, the teacher is always the main character in the class. Li (2014) also mentioned that cooperative learning has clear advantages in terms of increasing motivation and learning efficiency.

Numerous studies have shown that cooperative learning methods can be very useful for teaching Chinese. In this study, the researcher will be conducting research by using the cooperative learning method to develop Chinese speaking skills of secondary 1 students under the IGCSE Curriculum, the researcher hopes through

this study to make up for the shortage of traditional speaking teaching, increase student participation in the class, promote the positive teachers-students interaction and also between students, and investigate the students' satisfaction with using cooperative learning. May this study provide details on the application of cooperative learning in Chinese-speaking classes and validate the feasibility of the method in an international school context?

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to research the development of Chinese speaking skills of secondary 1 students before and after using the Cooperative Learning Method and to investigate and collect the secondary 1 students' satisfaction after using the Cooperative Learning Method.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Development of Chinese Teaching in Thailand

Thailand is the third largest country in the center of Southeast Asia, which is influenced by a diversity of foreign cultures. Therefore, the development of Chinese education depends on Thailand's language policy. With the change of language policy, Chinese education in Thailand has gone through four periods:

the "rise" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the "decline" from 1939 to 1945, the "brief revival" after World War II, and the "revival" after the 1980s (Li, 2021). The development of Chinese education is inseparable from the Chinese education policies in Thailand, and the diplomatic relations between China and Thailand also determine the development of Chinese education.

### The problem of teaching Chinese Speaking

Liu (2016) concluded the problems of Chinese-speaking teaching in his study. First, the speaking class was mostly teacher-oriented; students also practiced but needed more initiative and could not fully stimulate their motivation. Second, students primarily practiced around the text or according to the after-class exercise in the textbook, and teachers usually divided students into groups of two or three to complete these exercises in the form of dialogues with each other. However, the exercises are not related to students' real lives.

Liu (2021) also mentioned that some things could still be improved in the current teaching of speaking. Teaching is still traditional teacher-oriented, and students follow the teacher's practice. However, this mode is practical and effective at the primary teaching stage; students

need more initiative to learn and more opportunities to practice and communicate independently. Secondly, the content of students' oral communication practice mainly revolves around the content of the text, and the form of practice is relatively single and boring, mostly dialogue practice in pairs.

### **The Relationship between Cooperative Learning and Chinese-speaking Teaching**

There are three practical learning goals of Cooperative learning classes, involving three domains, which are the cognitive learning domain of learners, the skill learning domain of learners, and the affective domain of learners, which corresponds to the goals of Chinese-speaking teaching to improve students' knowledge of Chinese and their ability to communicate, to improve students' ability to think critically and to help students recognize their self-worth in learning (Li, 2014).

Hong (2021) states that Cooperative learning focuses on learning knowledge content as well as communicative and collaborative skills, promoting learners to accumulate and consolidate their knowledge in applying practice, which is in line with cultivating intercultural communication skills of international students in teaching Chinese. She found

that cooperative learning positively impacted international students' discourse skills, alleviating language anxiety and stimulating their interest and motivation in learning Chinese. Under the guidance of the cooperative learning steps designed by the teacher, international students can accumulate language knowledge through the teacher's intensive teaching. On the other hand, they can increase their information reserve through interaction with others in group activities, learn to listen and understand others, and develop their communicative skills and cooperation ability while completing joint learning tasks. The cooperative learning model of the advanced speaking classroom provides a rich space for international students to interact with each other, which not only gives more opportunities for those students with good language ability and a strong desire to express themselves but also encourages those students with weak language ability and shyness to express themselves and make their contribution to the group's success.

Several studies related to Cooperative learning demonstrate the effectiveness of using Cooperative learning in Chinese-speaking teaching. This part concluded the studies and research using Cooperative learning in Chinese-speaking teaching.

She (2012) conducted a study titled Cooperative Learning in Thai Students' Chinese-speaking Teaching, the study selected college students as experimental subjects and aimed to examine whether Cooperative Learning can enhance the Chinese speaking skill of students or not, also to help the student increase their vocabulary and correct their pronunciation, exercise their actual communication skill. The experimental study demonstrated a significant increase in student motivation to learn and the development of cooperative skills. In the authentic context created by Cooperative Learning, students are more likely to overcome mental barriers and improve their speaking skills more rapidly.

Hu (2012), in her research titled The Research of the Cooperative Learning Model in the Oral Chinese Class, reviews relevant research and analyzes various aspects of the cooperative learning model, including group division, different cooperative learning styles, and cooperative learning design principles and considerations, summarizes the factors that influence the effectiveness of cooperative learning through teaching practice, including teacher factors, student factors, content factors,

and external factors. The results show that collaboration develops students' comprehensive ability and facilitates students' improvement of their knowledge structure in many practices.

Zhang (2018) carried out a study titled A Study of Task-based Cooperative Teaching Approach in Teaching Spoken Chinese as a Foreign Language Take CMVC of Thailand as an example. In the early stage of the study, a questionnaire was used to understand students' motivation, needs, and study habits, to investigate the current teaching mode of spoken Chinese classes through the interview and observation method, and to analyze the problems of the current spoken Chinese classes. Finally, the study result shows that the completion of tasks increases students' motivation to learn; students learn by completing tasks, gaining knowledge by doing, and remembering more solidly, and group work reduces language anxiety and creates competition within and between groups, which improves the quality of the class and enhances student learning. This will improve the quality of the class and the efficiency of student learning.

Cooperative learning has emerged as a popular teaching method over the past five decades and has been applied across a wide range of subjects, including Chinese language learning. The studies above indicate the growing interest in applying the cooperative learning model to teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

### HYPOTHESIS

In this study, the development of Chinese speaking skills of the secondary 1

student were improved after using cooperative learning, and the satisfaction of the student was at a high level after using cooperative learning.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study has two variables, Cooperative learning as the independent variable and students' Chinese speaking skill and their satisfaction as the dependent variable. (Shown below in Figure 1).

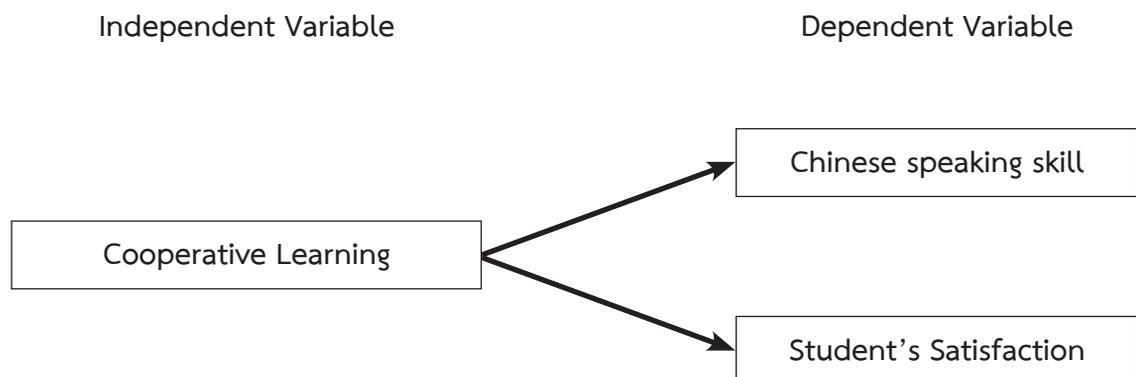


Figure 1 Independent and Dependent Variable

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, researchers collected quantitative data through an achievement test and a satisfaction questionnaire. The achievement test included a pre-test and a post-test. The purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the Cooperative Learning Method in developing students' Chinese-speaking skills, the questionnaire aims to investigate the satisfaction of students by using the Cooperative Learning Method to improve their Chinese-speaking skills. The target population comprises 73 students from four secondary 1 classes. The student's age is around 11 to 13 years old with mixed genders and mixed abilities in learning.

Due to the school arrangement, the researcher is only in charge of one of the Secondary 1 classes, the researcher chooses a cluster random sampling class as the sample group (15 students), the students are mixed genders and mixed abilities in learning, and there are 5 boys and 10 girls. The study was carried out in an international school in Samut Prakran, which is one of the central provinces of Thailand, it was founded in 2007. The school includes 16 grades from nursery

to high school, and Chinese language courses have been offered from nursery to secondary 4. The school offers 4 hours per week of Chinese language classes for the secondary level. The following three instruments were used to collect quantitative data for this study: lesson plans, Chinese-speaking tests (pre-test and post-test), and a student satisfaction questionnaire.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1 below presents the Pre-test & Posttest scores of the sample group. The highest score on the pre-test was 31.5 (out of a total of 45), and the lowest score was 12. The post-test scores increased significantly, with one participant receiving the highest score of 42 out of 45, an improvement of 19.5 points compared to the pre-test scores, and two participants receiving the lowest score of 24 out of 45. In addition, two participants made the greatest improvement; the percentage difference between the pre-test and post-test was 43.33%.

All 15 students showed significant or slight improvement on the posttest, with score gaps ranging from 1.5 to 19.5 points.

**Table 1** Student Pre-test and Post-test score

Student	Pre-test Scores (Full score = 45)	Posttest Scores (Full score = 45)	Increase in test score	Difference %
1	31.5	33.0	1.5	3.33%
2	24.0	26.0	2.0	4.44%
3	21.0	37.5	16.5	36.67%
4	19.5	36.0	16.5	36.67%
5	18.0	24.0	6.0	13.33%
6	19.5	34.5	15.0	33.33%
7	16.5	28.5	12.0	26.67%
8	21.0	31.5	10.5	23.33%
9	18.0	31.5	13.5	30.00%
10	16.5	24.0	7.5	16.67%
11	22.5	42.0	19.5	43.33%
12	18.0	37.5	19.5	43.33%
13	13.5	25.5	12.0	26.67%
14	13.5	27.0	13.5	30.00%
15	12.0	30.0	18.0	40.00%
<b>Mean Scores</b>	<b>19.00</b>	<b>31.23</b>	<b>12.23</b>	<b>27.19%</b>

**Table 2** Paired Samples T-Test

Group	Pre-test		Posttest		Mean difference	T	P-value
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD			
Sample Group	19.00	4.83	31.23	5.49	12.23	-8.17	0.000

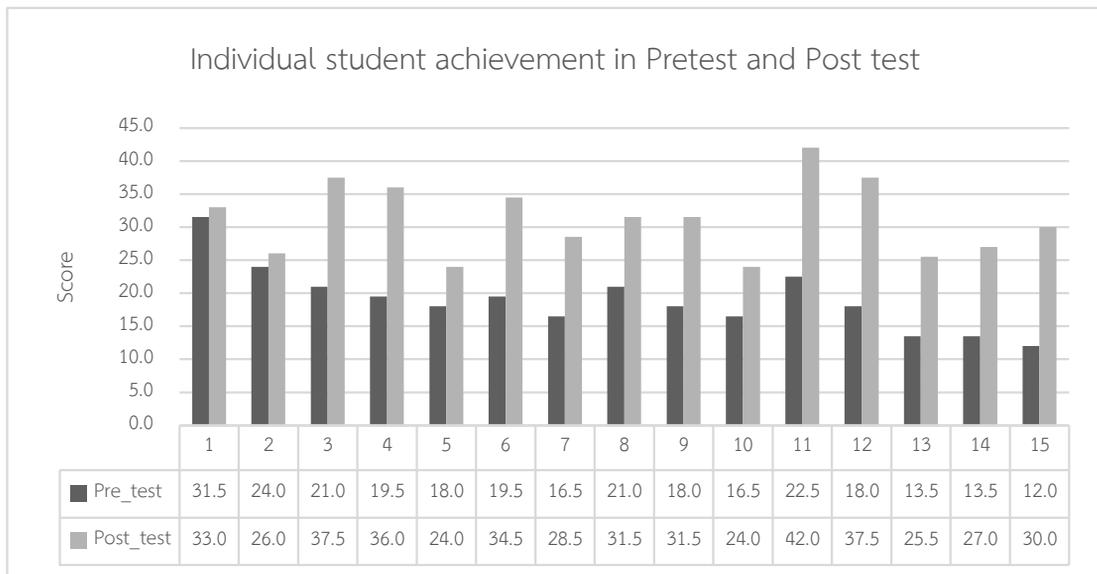
\*  $p < 0.05$

From Table 2, a difference of 12.23 was observed between the pre-test and post-test means; this increased from the post-test mean. The significant value (P) obtained was 0.000, which was lower than 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ). There was a statistically significant increase in the post-test scores as compared to the pre-test scores for the sample group.

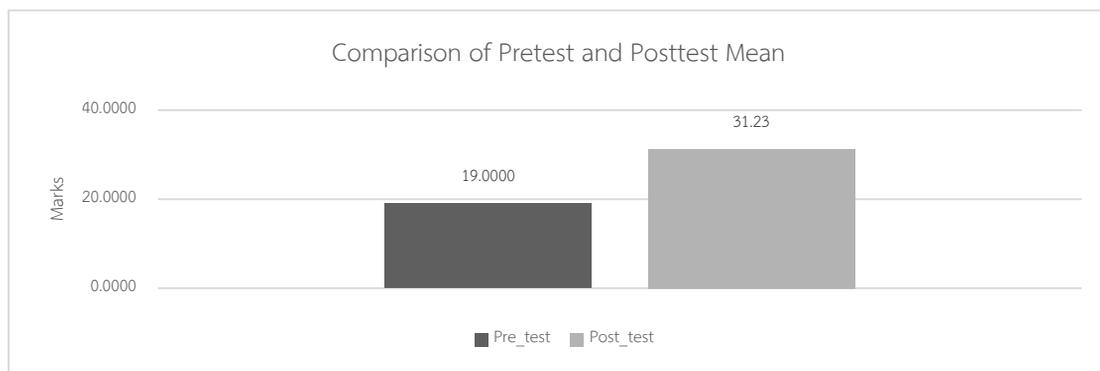
Figure 2 below represents participants' pre-test and post-test scores. As shown in the figure, It can be seen that all students' scores in the post-test have increased, indicating that the Cooperative

Learning method helped improve students' Chinese Speaking scores.

In addition, Figure 2 shows the mean scores for the pre-test and posttest, which were 19.00 and 31.23. The mean score for the post-test was higher than the mean score for the pre-test. The post-test scores represented by the orange bar confirmed an increase of 12.23 points compared to the pre-test scores represented by the blue bar. So, it can be said that each person made progress in the posttest and got a better score.



**Figure 2** Graphical representation of students' pre-test and post-test scores



**Figure 3** Comparison of pre-test and post-test mean

In addition, Figure 3 shows the mean scores for the pre-test and posttest, which were 19.00 and 31.23. The mean score for the posttest was higher than the mean score for the pre-test. The post-test scores represented by the orange bar confirmed an increase of 12.23 points compared to the pre-test scores represented by the blue bar. So, it can be said that each person made progress in the posttest and got a better score.

In order to collect quantitative data and study students' satisfaction with using the Cooperative Learning method in Chinese-speaking classes, a five-point Likert scale was adopted: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire consists of 12 items, which are divided into three parts: Interest and motivation, Engagement, and the effectiveness of the Cooperative

learning method. All 15 (N=15) study participants were given questionnaires. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to analyze the survey results. The average score was highest at 4.01 ~ 5.00, high at 3.01 ~ 4.00, medium at 2.01 ~ 3.00, low at 1.01 ~ 2.00, and lowest at 1.00 ~ 0.00. Figure 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of each questionnaire item of students' satisfaction with using Cooperative Learning in Chinese-speaking classes.

## RESULTS CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### Results Conclusion

The first objective of this study was to compare the Chinese speaking skills of secondary 1 student after the use of the Cooperative learning method. and then, the paired sample T-test was conducted on the pre-test and post-

test results to compare the differences in learning performance between the sample groups.

1) The statistical analysis of the paired sample T-Test of academic performance showed that the average score of the post-test (31.23) was higher than that of the pre-test (19), with an average difference of (12.23). The standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test were (4.83) and (5.49), respectively. The average score of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test, which indicates that the Cooperative learning method has a positive effect on improving students' academic achievement of Chinese speaking skills.

2) The highest score (31.5) and the lowest score (12) in the pre-test. The highest score (42) and the lowest score (24) were obtained in the post-test. These differences between pre-test and post-test scores result in the highest score on the post-test being (19.5) points higher than the score on the pre-test. The lowest score in the post-test is (12) points higher than the lowest score in the pre-test.

3) All 15 participants scored higher in the post-test than in the pre-test. The improvement ranged from 1.5 to 19.5 points.

The quantitative data analysis above revealed the significant improvement in students' post-test results. Thus, the results of this study clearly indicated that using cooperative learning method could effectively improve the Chinese speaking skill of secondary 1 student in international school in Samut Prakran, Thailand.

The second objective of this study was to investigate the secondary 1 students' satisfaction with the Cooperative Learning approach. Quantitative data concerning this objective was collected through a questionnaire containing 12 items, which were further divided into three parts: Part A: Interest and Motivation, Part B: Engagement, Part C: The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning

The data from Part A of the questionnaire showed that students had the high level of interest and motivation with the use of Cooperative Learning ( $\bar{X} = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ).

The data from Part B of the questionnaire showed that students had the high level of satisfaction in terms of engagement when using Cooperative Learning in Chinese speaking lesson ( $\bar{X} = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ), the result indicating that Cooperative Learning could engage most students in Chinese speaking learning.

The data from Part C of the questionnaire showed that students consented to the idea that Cooperative Learning had a positive impact on the effectiveness of their Chinese Speaking learning and gave it the high level of satisfaction ( $\bar{X} = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), implying that students affirmed the method could help improve their Chinese Speaking skill.

### Discussion

The results of the test showed that using the Cooperative learning method in Chinese speaking class improved Secondary 1 students' Chinese speaking skills. All 15 participants showed a certain improvement in comparison to their pre-test and post-test scores. The Mean of the post-test (31.23) was higher than the pre-test (19). In addition, students No.11 and No.12 made the most impressive improvement of 19.5 points, from 22.5 to 42 and 18 to 37.5, respectively. While student No.1 got the lowest improvement of 1.5 points, we found that he got the highest score on the pre-test, and his post-test result was above average, so we can assume that he has a better foundation in Chinese speaking. Thus, the use of cooperative learning methods positively affects the Chinese speaking skills of students,

and all findings from the pre-test and post-test were reliable answers to the first research question. It also proved in the previous studies; she (2012) conducted an experimental study in intermediate Chinese-speaking teaching by using Cooperative learning, the test results of the experimental group showed significant improvement, and the research has testified that Cooperative learning can improve student participation, and cultivate a sense of cooperation, which also helps to reduce student mental barriers. Shi (2016), through her analysis of the research result, found that all students in the sample group improved their Chinese achievement after using the Cooperative Learning method; compared to the traditional teacher-center methods, Cooperative Learning fosters student-centered learning, where by students are encouraged to engage with the learning material, overcome their inhibitions, develop their autonomy and self-efficacy in learning, and participate actively in the educational process. As Zhang (2018) indicated by comparing the pre-test score and post-test scores of the experimental group students, the majority of them who used the Cooperative learning method, their Chinese speaking test scores greatly

improved. Based on the above analysis, the findings in this study reflected a positive effect of using the Cooperative learning method. The following recommendations are listed:

(1) The Cooperative learning method improved student's Chinese speaking skills in a very practical way and had a positive effect on the Secondary 1 student. Thus, this form of learning method can be implemented throughout the whole academic year teaching, even in other grades.

(2) It is successful for Secondary 1 students to use Cooperative learning in Chinese-speaking classes, by the positive response from students, it is recommended that other language teachers use Cooperative learning in their teaching, it may engage more students in language learning.

(3) Cooperative learning also can be used to other subjects; Cooperation is an essential competence in modern society, and the multifaceted implementation of the cooperative learning method serves to nurture students' aptitude for teamwork and collective problem-solving.

The following is for future researchers who may be interested in carrying out any similar studies on this topic; considering the limitation of this research, the suggestions are proposed:

(1) The study population was less than 30 students; which is one of the limitations of this study. Therefore, similar study might be conducting with larger samples of different grades, namely primary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges, or from different regions in Thailand will help to ensure and verify the credibility of the conclusion of this study.

(2) Due to the limited time, the study was conducted within only 4 weeks. If studies are conducted over a longer period in the future, they may get different results.

(3) Using Cooperative learning in other aspects of Chinese learning, such as reading and writing, might have positive consequences and benefits. Also, a possible way to strengthen the validity of the findings is to conduct similar studies in various international schools, especially those that follow Western curricula, which would increase the consistency of the results across different educational frameworks.

All the details of the study have been elaborated. By the end of this part, it can be said that the application of the cooperative learning method has a significant positive impact on students' Chinese speaking ability. As a new teaching method applied to oral language teaching, the cooperative learning method can improve teachers'

classroom teaching efficiency and students' participation. As a result, students' interest and confidence in Chinese lessons and their ability to use Chinese can be significantly improved. Thus, using Cooperative learning may lead to more effective teaching in Chinese speaking and any other elaborate aspects.

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