The Effects of Utilizing the Cooperative Learning Method to Enhance Students' English Communicative Competence

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Abstract

The study's first objective was to investigate whether the utilization of the cooperative learning method can enhance Chinese college students' performance and motivation in English communicative competence. The second objective was to explore students' views on the cooperative learning method in learning communicative competence.This study employed a quasi-experimental design using quantitative and qualitative data. The sample was 80 first-year non-English majors from two polytechnic colleges in Guangdong, China. The Experimental Group and the Control Group, respectively, consisted of 40 students. The Experimental Group was taught using the STAD (cooperative learning) method and the Control Group was taught using the conventional method for eight weeks. Before the intervention, both groups were given a pre-test and after the intervention, they were given a post-test to gauge their performance in English communicative competence. Following that, 8 students from the Experimental Group were interviewed, using semi-structured interview questions to explore their views and experiences on the STAD method. Results from the post-test indicated that the Experimental Group significantly outperformed the Control Group in their overall score for communicative competence and motivation. Thematic analysis from the focus-group interview showed that the STAD method was a very effective teaching tool in enhancing students' English communicative competence and facilitated them to improve their fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, and listening skills.This study has crucial pedagogical implications because it suggests that the STAD method can enhance students' English communicative competence.

Keywords: *English Communicative Competence, STAD Method, Conventional Method, College Students, China, Education Policy.*

Introduction

As for China, the past few decades have seen the continual reforms and robust economic growth of the country which has rapidly expanded cooperation with other countries. Thus, the demand for internationalization in the field of education is highly urgent (Yang, 2018). The objective of English language teaching is to enable students to learn English language, as well as to enable them to use English for communicative interaction in real-life communicative situations (Woods, 2011). China attaches more importance to the role of education in the national economy and focuses more attention to improving the quality and depth of education (Li et al., 2011). The focus of English teaching is to develop students' fluency and accuracy in language use, as well as communicative appropriateness and effectiveness. It is a fact that the conventional language teaching is only concerned with language correctness (Xia, 2014). However, language's communicative appropriateness and validity should also be highlighted (Arkoudis, 2014). Zilan et al. (2022) stressed that pragmatic competence is crucial to smooth communication in the era of economic globalization. Therefore, communicative competence is not only an indispensable competence today; but also the main goal of English language teaching in the new era (Singh et al., 2024).

Unfortunately, most college English classroom teaching in China is teacher-centered which is done by employing conventional teaching approach. Teachers mainly translate texts, explain words and grammar, supplemented by teaching examination skills, and carry out a lot of exercises and training (Wang, 2016).

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The communicative function of English is not given enough attention, which often leads to students' difficulties in pronunciation and English communication (Chen, 2019). The teaching atmosphere of English classrooms in China is monotonous. In the limited classroom time, students are busy taking notes of the knowledge taught by the lecturer and have little time to understand and master them (Wang, 2016). However, this conventional method of teaching is not effective in developing students' communicative competence in English (Pica, 2000).). Some students have questions in class which have not been addressed in time, and hence seriously affect the learning efficiency and lead to unsatisfactory learning outcomes (Wang, 2016). For students, it merely reduces their learning initiative and learning interest, and even causes psychological pressure on them.

In addition, the continued rapid expansion of higher education in China has led to a rapid increase in the number of students in a short period of time (Knight et al., 2017). According to Yuan and Yuan (2017) in the era of globalization, the communicative competence of spoken English has become an important talent. Therefore, how to improve college students' oral English proficiency has become the focus of college English teaching because there is a decline in teaching efficiency and quality spoken English. According to Zhang et al. (2023) students in China seldom have the chance to practice English communication. The current situation of exam-oriented education in China is difficult to change in a short time which may ultimately lead to the discrepancy between the content of college English teaching in China and the actual needs of society. That is to say, the traditional teaching model cannot adapt to the dramatic changes in the social and linguistic environment of the land (Yang, 2018).

Besides, students in higher vocational institutions generally have low grades in high school or secondary technical schools (Wen et al., 2020). These students have relatively poor English proficiency and are not even interested in learning a foreign language (Wu, 2019). Some students cannot even pronounce words correctly, , let alone speak complete sentences. It is a challenge for teachers to offer efficient English lessons to these students. Students rarely speak English due to lack of practice or opportunities to interact with foreigners (Zheng & Huang, 2010). Gradually, some students find it difficult to speak the language. Similarly, other students are reluctant to speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes. Their vocabulary is very limited and their English is very poor, not to mention their communication skills. However, the less they speak, the worse they do, and it has become a vicious cycle.

In Chinese vocational institutions, the vast majority of English teachers are Chinese and there are very few foreign teachers. Most students have few opportunities to practice English in their daily lives. The quality of foreign language learning and the development of students' communicative competence in English are closely related to the learning conditions and environment (Rubtsova, 2019). This poor learning environment also has a significant negative impact on learners' motivation, as students in Chinese vocational institutions rarely have the opportunity to practice English or use English for communication in real life.

Therefore, cooperative learning has been adopted by some English teachers in junior high schools to enhance student's English performance. The application of cooperative learning in English teaching often aims at completing a certain task (Wei & Tang, 2015). Students work together, communicate, and be creative to present the group's work (Ummi et al, 2024). Cooperative learning not only improves students' learning enthusiasm; but also provides opportunities for students to participate in problem-solving (Wei & Tang, 2015). It can also improve language communication and interpersonal skills. However, when some teachers use cooperative learning in English teaching, they may find that some students are not serious enough and undisciplined during the group discussion. So much so, that the assignments are given almost exclusively to students with better grades and more motivation. Now the question arises as to how to implement cooperative learning effectively to improve students' English communicative competence and learning motivation at the College level.

Likewise, the main process of the STAD method is as follows: First, teachers give instruction in class. Then, the group members discuss and complete the task assigned by the teacher. Later, students answer questions individually to get the group score. Finally, the teacher will reward the groups that have made significant progress, such as issuing certificates and getting small prizes. the advantage of the STAD method is that the performance of the group is judged by the overall progress rather than by individual performance

alone (Slavin, 1994). The STAD method has individual testing sessions, which do not allow discussion among students (Slavin, 1994). Further, students are required to complete the task alone, which effectively prevents students from only relying on group members.

Research Questions

- Is there any significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group using the STAD method and the control group using the conventional teaching method for their overall performance in English communicative competence?

- Is there any significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group using the STAD method and the control group using the conventional teaching method for their motivation towards English learning?

- What are the students' views on the utilization of the STAD method and the conventional teaching method in learning English communicative competence?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which emphasizes that students can reach the zone of proximal development with help and guidance from adults or peers. The STAD method (Student Team Achievement Division), introduced by Slavin in 1987, involves groups of four or five students of varying abilities working together. Slavin (1994) suggested three main concepts of the STAD method: team rewards, individual accountability, and providing students with equal opportunities for success. During group activities, students have a chance to share and discuss their ideas with group members, the learning is more student-centered and the teacher's role is as a facilitator.

Effectiveness of STAD Method In Teaching English

The STAD method has shown to be effective in critical thinking skills and students' learning outcomes. Ghufron et al. (2023) stated that one of the goals of the curriculum is to develop students' communication, collaboration, and thinking skills. Their study explains that the STAD method emphasizes that students' learning of a task or thinking skills must be accomplished through intra-group communication and joint collaboration with group members. Compared to traditional forms of instruction, the STAD method gives students a great deal of autonomy and the student becomes the subject of learning. Each student can offer or receive help and support from other students and can also seek help from the teacher. Each student works with each other and progresses together in the group. This positive collaborative approach allows students to understand what they can do to benefit others and the team. Kim (2018); Rosfiani et al. (2021); and Rohmah et al. (2022) also stressed that cooperative learning is an active learning process because students learn more by creating and sharing knowledge in groups. Likewise, Supratiningsih et al. (2021) also found that the STAD method enhanced students' collaborative skills in solving mathematic problems.

Accordingly, a study by Wongpratoom and Sranamkam (2019) demonstrated that creating blended learning using collaborative learning and STAD method enhanced analytical thinking among grade 7 students. Students who studied in blended learning environment scored higher in analytical thinking than the students who studied in regular learning settings. Students who studied through blended learning using STAD method also had higher academic performance scores than those who took regular study programs. Similarly, Sjafei (2021) proposes that online learning design based on STAD cooperative learning will make learning fun and efficient. The online learning design based on STAD cooperative learning consists of six stages, namely clarifying goals and incentives, providing learning materials, conducting group activities, testing and summarizing, evaluating, and group rewards.

Correspondingly, Nair and Sanai (2018) tested the effectiveness of the STAD method in improving students' descriptive writing skills using an action research design. The sample was Grade 6 students aged between 11 and 12 from an international school in Selangor, Malaysia. Findings from the study suggested that the STAD method helped to improve students' descriptive writing skills and the students liked writing in collaborative groups as they could learn from each other and it boosted their confidence in writing. On the other hand, Ibrahim and Adnan (2019) critically examined the potential of the STAD method in improving the oral performance of ESL learners. The findings revealed that the STAD method improved ESL learners' oral performance and satisfaction in learning English.

Similarly, a study conducted by Hariyanto et al. (2019) in East Java, Indonesia found that there was a significant correlation between learning motivation and English language achievement. Therefore they suggested that English instructors should adopt appropriate teaching methods and materials to improve students' motivation based on the ARCS model.

Accordingly, Mudofir (2017) and Yunita (2016) compared the teaching effects of the STAD method on students' English fluency learning outcomes with that of the conventional method. It was found that the STAD method was more effective than the conventional method in improving students' fluency in English speaking. In addition, they found that the STAD method was a more suitable teaching strategy in enhancing students' English-speaking pronunciation. Ilyas (2017) examined whether the STAD method was effective to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. The results showed that the STAD method was more effective in improving the vocabulary mastery of junior high school students than the conventional method.

Motivation

The foreign language learning environment is very important and has positive significance in promoting learners' motivation. Several researchers have proposed classroom teaching strategies to motivate learners from different perspectives. However, because much of the research in the last century has elaborated and discussed teaching experiences from a theoretical level; the classification of motivational strategies has often not been scientifically constructed according to the framework of motivational theory.

A study by Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) on motivational teaching strategies in second language was well-referenced in theoretical and measurement models. He pointed out that improving the quality of teaching is the best motivational intervention. Teachers must not only have a positive enthusiasm for teaching and a great deal of expertise, but also be able to speak about the knowledge and skills to be taught so that students can hear them clearly, or else they will not be able to speak clearly. Students should have an active interest and love to learn in the course they are following.

Similarly, Kurt and Kecik (2017) examined the effects of the ARCS motivational model by Keller (2009) on the motivation of college preparatory students. They found that the integration of the ARCS model into language teaching had a positive effect on students' course motivation in all categories.

Similarly, Zhang (2015) proposed that in English listening skills, learners' motivation for independent learning is mainly based on their perceptions of the value of listening actions. Adjusting intrinsic motivation and appropriately stimulating extrinsic conditions based on the ARCS model can stimulate and sustain learners' motivation toward learning English listening skills.

Hariyanto et al. (2019) investigated the correlation between learning motivation and English language learning of students who specialized in midwifery. The findings indicated a significant correlation between learning motivation and English language achievement. Therefore they suggested that English instructors should adopt appropriate teaching methods and materials to improve students' motivation based on the ARCS model. In addition, Martasari (2018) used a case study research method to find out the factors that could affect students' motivation and ways to motivate them to learn English. The findings showed that ARCS model is one of the appropriate tools that teachers can use to enhance students' motivation. Students become interested in English teaching and learning when they are motivated.

In the same manner, Tandoğan (2019) investigated the effects of the ARCS instructional materials, on students' vocabulary performance and motivation. Tandoğan's (2019) study was conducted over 6 weeks with a study sample of 67 students. The experimental group learned ESP (English for Specific Purposes) vocabulary based on ARCS instructional materials and used an AR app, while the control group learned the same words without the app. The researcher concluded that when using instructional materials developed and designed based on ARCS motivation and presented using a mobile AR app, it can have a positive effect on students' ESP vocabulary learning and students' motivation to learn English.

Methodology

The current study employed a quasi-experimental design using quantitative and qualitative data. The sample was 80 first-year non-English majors from two polytechnic colleges in Guangdong, China, ranging in age from 17 to 19 years. The Experimental Group and the Control Group, respectively, consisted of 40 students. The sample was chosen as two intact groups from two polytechnic colleges (college A and college B. Students from college A representing the Experimental Group were taught English communicative competence using the STAD (cooperative learning) method and students from college B representing the Control Group were taught using the conventional method for eight weeks. Before the intervention, both groups were given a pre-test and the pre-motivation questionnaire, and after the intervention they were given a post-test and the post-motivation questionnaire to gauge their performance in English communicative competence and their motivation to learn communicative competence. Following that, 8 students from the experimental group were interviewed, using semi-structured interview questions to explore their views and experiences on the STAD method.

Table 3.1. Demography of Interviewees from the Experimental Group

	Gender	Age
Respondent 1(R1)	Male	17
Respondent 2(R1)	Female	18
Respondent 3(R1)	Male	17
Respondent 4(R1)	Female	19
Respondent 5(R1)	Male	19
Respondent 6(R1)	Female	18
Respondent 7(R1)	Male	18
Respondent 8(R1)	Female	18

The participants in this study (the Experimental Group and the Control Group) attended the same pre-college English courses and had the same communicative English training. The two groups of participants had different instructors and different teaching methods, (college A used the STAD method and college B used the conventional method). The samples in both groups also had similar demographic characteristics. Both colleges were located in the same district and the students had similar levels of English proficiency as shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Students' English Listening and Speaking Proficiency Prior to Instruction

Students' English listening and speaking proficiency					
Group	A	B	C	D	Total
Experimental Group	6	12	13	9	40
Control Group	7	10	12	11	40

This study used three types of instruments namely; the pre-test and post-test, questionnaire on motivation, and semi-structured interviews. The pre-test and post-test questions in this study were adapted from the IELTS Speaking Test and Listening Test. The test questions consist of 3 speaking tasks and 40 listening tasks that tested students' English communicative competence, including fluency and coherence, lexical

resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation, and listening. The questions on both the pre-test and the post-test were the same and validated by two senior experts with over twenty years of experience in teaching English and two experienced English lecturers. The questionnaire on motivation was adapted from the questionnaire on students' motivation by Keller (2009) which was based on the four dimensions of ARCS, namely Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction (consisted of 36 items). The semi-structured interview questions were designed by the researchers to obtain information about the student's views and experiences in learning English communicative competence using the STAD method. The researchers selected eight students from the Experimental Group to participate in the semi-structured interviews after the intervention. As suggested by Keeffe et. al. (2015), face-to-face interviewing is appropriate to gain insight and an in-depth understanding of the study.

However, prior to the actual study, a pilot test was conducted among 40 first-year non-English major students from a polytechnic college in Guangdong, China to obtain the reliability and validity of the instruments. Pearson Correlation Coefficients test was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire and the results indicated that the questionnaire had high reliability (r=,94, p=.000). Results from the pre-test and post-test, and the face-to-face interviews revealed that the instruments are suitable to collect sufficient data to address the research questions.

Findings

RQ1. Is there any significant difference between the mean scores of the Experimental Group using the STAD method and the Control Group using the conventional teaching method for their overall performance in English communicative competence?

Table 1: Comparison of the Mean Score of the Experimental Group And the Control Group in the Pre-Test

	Mean	N	SD
Experimental Group	68.45	40	8.180
Control Group	69.60	40	6.130

Results in Table 1 show that the mean score of the Experimental Group for their overall communicative competence (M=68.45, SD=8.18) is almost similar to the Control Group (M=69.60, SD=6.13) in the pre-test.

Table 2: Results Of the ANOVA Test Comparing the Experimental Group's and The Control Group's Performance in Communicative Competence in Pre-Test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	26.450	1	26.450	.51	.48
Within Groups	4075.500	78	52.250		
Total	4101.950	79			

Findings from the One-way ANOVA test revealed that there is no significant difference between the Experimental Group and the Control Group in their performance for communicative competence in the pre-test (F=.51, df= 1, p=0.48).

Table 3. Comparing The Mean Score of the Experimental Group and The Control Group in the Post-Test

	Mean	N	SD
Experimental Group	79.05	40	7.98
Control Group	68.30	40	6.46

The findings in Table 3 demonstrate that after being taught using the STAD method the Experimental Group performed better in communicative competence (M=79.05, SD=7.98) than the Control Group (M=68.30, SD=6.46) in the post-test.

Table 4: Results Of the ANOVA Test Comparing the Experimental Group's and The Control Group's Performance in Communicative Competence in Post-Test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12500.000	1	12500.000	68.05	.000
Within Groups	14326.750	78	183.676		
Total	26826.750	79			

Results of the One-way ANOVA test in Table 4 indicate that the Experimental Group significantly outperformed the Control Group in the post-test (F=68.05, df=1, p=.000). These findings show that the STAD method helped to improve the students' overall communicative competence (fluency and coherence, lexical, grammar, pronunciation, and listening skills) compared to students from the Control Group who were taught using the conventional teaching method. The group activities in the STAD method provided a good platform for the students to enhance their communicative learning skills. These findings answer Research Question 1.

RQ2. Is there any significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group using the STAD method and the control group using the conventional teaching method for their motivation towards English learning?

Table 5: Comparing The Mean Score of The Experimental Group and The Control Group in Their Pre-Motivation

	Mean	N	SD
Experimental Group	84.80	40	11.364
Control Group	84.95	40	12.033

Findings in Table 5 show that before the intervention, the mean score for motivation in learning English communicative competence for the Experimental Group and the Control Group were low. There was not much difference in the mean score for motivation for both groups in the pre-test.

Table 6. Results of the ANOVA Test Comparing the Experimental Group and the Control Group in Their Pre-motivation

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.450	1	.450	.003	.96
Within Groups	11438.300	78	146.645		
Total	11438.750	79			

Results of the One-way ANOVA test in Table 6 indicate that there is no significant difference between the Experimental Group and the Control Group (F=.003, df=1, p= .96) in their motivation to learn English communicative competence before the intervention.

Table 7. Comparing The Mean Score of the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the Post-Motivation

	Mean	N	SD
Experimental Group	105.38	40	13.617
Control Group	80.38	40	13.488

Table 8. Results of the ANOVA Test Comparing the Experimental Group and the Control Group in Their Post-Motivation

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12500.000	1	12500.000	68.06	.000
Within Groups	14326.750	78	183.676		
Total	26826.750	79			

Findings from the One-way ANOVA test in Table 8 revealed that after the intervention the Experimental Group performed significantly better than the Control Group in their mean score for motivation to learn communicative competence (F=68.06, df=1, p=.000). In other words the STAD method boosted the students' motivation in learning because the collaborative activities facilitated their learning as it enhanced their motivation for this purpose.

RQ3. What are the students' views on the utilization of the STAD method in learning English communicative competence?

R1 (Male)

To be honest, there are difficulties in improving my English communicative competence... But after the lecturer used the STAD method in the English classroom, err (pause). **Learning in group helped me to improve my English** *I found it quite* **enjoyable, interesting** *and a bit exciting. I like the competitive and extra credit activities. We* **often meet after class to practice English speaking**, *read English books and watch English movies. Well (pause) my classmates and I have been much closer. I'm glad I have the opportunity to* **learn communicative competence together with my teammates**.

R2 (Female)

My English communicative competence is rather poor which I think is the same case to most peers... Thanks to STAD method in the English class, hmm (pause) I start to **communicate more** *with my teammates regarding course tasks. Sometimes the better-performing* **students offer me a lot of help and advice** *on English study. Such kind of* **collaborative learning environment** *is pretty inspiring. Well, (pause) the STAD method* **motivated** *me to work hard on improving English communicative competence. I have become much* **more concentrated** *in English class than before. Before, learning was boring. Now I* **like studying** *this course.*

R3 (Male)

Due to the integration of the STAD method into learning English communicative competence, it helps me gain more **self-confidence** *and improve my English communicative competence more effectively. The whole English classroom has become*

more relaxed doing group work, enjoyable and I don't feel as overwhelmed in class as before. Instead, I feel a great sense of accomplishment when I successfully finish the tasks assigned. What's more, I get full **recognition and encouragement from teammates** on the achievements I get. Uh (pause) It really means a lot to me. Um (pause) Before I somehow avoid practicing my spoken English. However, after the lecturer using the STAD method, I spent **more time practicing** English communicative competence.

R4 (Female)

For me, using the STAD method to learn English communicative competence has made it easier for me to acquire some language skills that I used to find difficult. Ah... (pause) For example, I somehow agree STAD method is effective err (pause) for learning English communicative competence in **an authentic learning environment**. Homework checks can be done within the group. The team leader is the person in charge. Since then, my reading tasks have been checked every time. I always get help and **share knowledge** with group members. In this way, the efficiency of checking homework is improved. I was a group leader once and I was **motivated to learn English** during that time. After using the STAD method, I look forward to taking English classes even more.

R5 (Female)

…the STAD method in the English classroom, it has provided me with more opportunities to communicate and **learn from group members**. This **helps me practice more in** English communicative competence. Additionally, everyone has an **important role within the group**. In the process of completing group tasks, everyone attaches great importance to **team spirit, fun learning** and collective honor. This is very beneficial to us both in terms of study and life. The potential of cooperative learning is greater than that of a single person. At the same time, it **also motivates me** to learn English communicative competence.

R6 (Male)

…friendships among group members became stronger. Group members will discuss in advance and develop a **practice** plan for English communicative competence for each unit. The team leader leads the implementation of the plan. The **team members often help me** and **always encourage me** when I have difficulty learning English. I did better this time than last time, and our group won a 10-point "improvement". As long as I score higher on each test than before, I will be rewarded according to the **improved score**. The team members **share knowledge** with me…a lot. em (pause) I **like the way I am learning** English communicative competence now.

R7 (Female)

.. STAD method showed me a more **effective way of learning**. This type of group cooperative learning approach allows me to **develop my English communicative competence** more comprehensively while mastering my language skills. In addition, I can **learn from the successful experiences of my peers** and avoid doing wasted effort. By discussing and studying together, I really feel **more confident** and my English communicative competence and other comprehensive abilities have been improved. My **teammates taught me new words and pronunciation.** Hmm (pause) I'm really **enjoying learning** English communicative competence right now. The STAD method has also **helped me concentrate** more in class.

R8 (Male)

…English communicative competence in the past, it was always difficult for me to stick to it. Since the lecturer used the STAD method, I am **learning English from group members**... Listening to recording in group is very useful, **authentic learning**. From this, I can know the whole process of my English learning and whether there is any progress compared to the past. I am **motivated** when I saw the bonus points I got because of the improved scores that were filled in the form, I was very proud and felt that my efforts were worth it. I have **more confidence** now and initiative to reflect on the learning process, summarize my **successful experience, and more practice** in learning **new vocabulary and pronunciation**. I think the STAD method **is enjoyable** and improves English communicative competence.

In this connection, the researchers identified the key words of the students' views (in bold letters) before finding the emerging themes. After using STAD method, the respondents in the experimental group (R1, R2, R4, R5 R6 and R8) opined that the STAD method provided a platform for them to share knowledge with their group members which enhanced their communicative competence. R1, said that he was able to learn communicative competence with his teammates. R2, R4 and R5, R6 and R8 stressed that the group members. share the knowledge and offer a lot of help and advice to them. For example, good students are more than happy to share language learning experiences with students with English learning difficulties.

According to R2, R3, R4, R5, R6 and R8, the STAD method motivated them to learn English communicative competence. R3 thinks that he gets more recognition and encouragement from his teammates and it means a lot to him. R6 stressed that team members always encouraged him to learn when he faced difficulty in learning English. R8 opined that he was motivated to learn when he saw the bonus point he obtained during group work.

Equally, R1, R2, R6, R7, and R8 viewed that the STAD method provided more practice for them in English communicative competence because they communicate more with their teammates. R3, and R5 said that they spent more time practicing English communicative competence. On the other hand, R6 and R7 opined that the STAD method helped to develop a practice plan for them to improve their English communicative competence. While R8 said that the STAD method gave him a successful experience and more practice in learning communicative competence.

In like manner, R1, R2, R3, R5, R6 R7 and R8 find that learning English communicative competence using the STAD method is enjoyable. R1 said that the STAD method is enjoyable, interesting and exciting because he likes the group competitive and extra credit activities. R2 opined that before the teacher used the STAD method, learning was boring but after using the STAD method he likes to learn English communicative competence. R3 said that learning English is more enjoyable using the STAD method because he has become more relaxed doing group work, and he does not feel as overwhelmed in class as before. R5 opined that there is fun learning in STAD method because in the process of completing group tasks, everyone attaches great importance to team spirit and collective honor. R6 also likes the STAD method because it provides him the opportunity to share knowledge. R7 and R8 also stated that they enjoyed learning using the STAD method.

Also, the STAD method enhanced students' self-confidence (R3, R7, R8). R3 said that the use of STAD method in English communicative competence, helped him gain more self-confidence and improve his English communicative competence. R7 stressed that by discussing and studying together, she developed her self-confidence, and her English communicative competence and other comprehensive abilities also improved. R8 said that after using the STAD method he has more confidence and initiative to reflect on the learning process, summarize his successful experience, as he had more practice in learning communicative competence.

Similarly, R1, R2, R3, R5, R6, R7 and R8 said that collaborative learning in the STAD method facilitated them to improve their communicative competence. Accordingly, R1 said that learning in the group helped him to improve his English. R2 affirmed that collaborative learning environment is pretty inspiring for her. R3 viewed that he was more relaxed while doing group work. On the same footing, R5 opined that while doing group work everyone has an important role within the group. In addition, when completing group tasks, everyone attaches great importance to team spirit, fun learning, and collective pride. On the other hand, R6 felt that the friendship among group members became stronger and, they often discussed and developed a practice plan to improve their English communicative competence for each unit. Likewise, R7 and R8 said that collaborative learning helped them to learn new vocabulary and pronunciation from their group members.

Lastly, the STAD method provided an authentic learning environment for the students (R4, R8). R4 said that the STAD method is effective for learning English communicative competence in an authentic learning environment. While R8 stressed that listening to recordings in groups was very useful; because it exposed students to authentic learning.
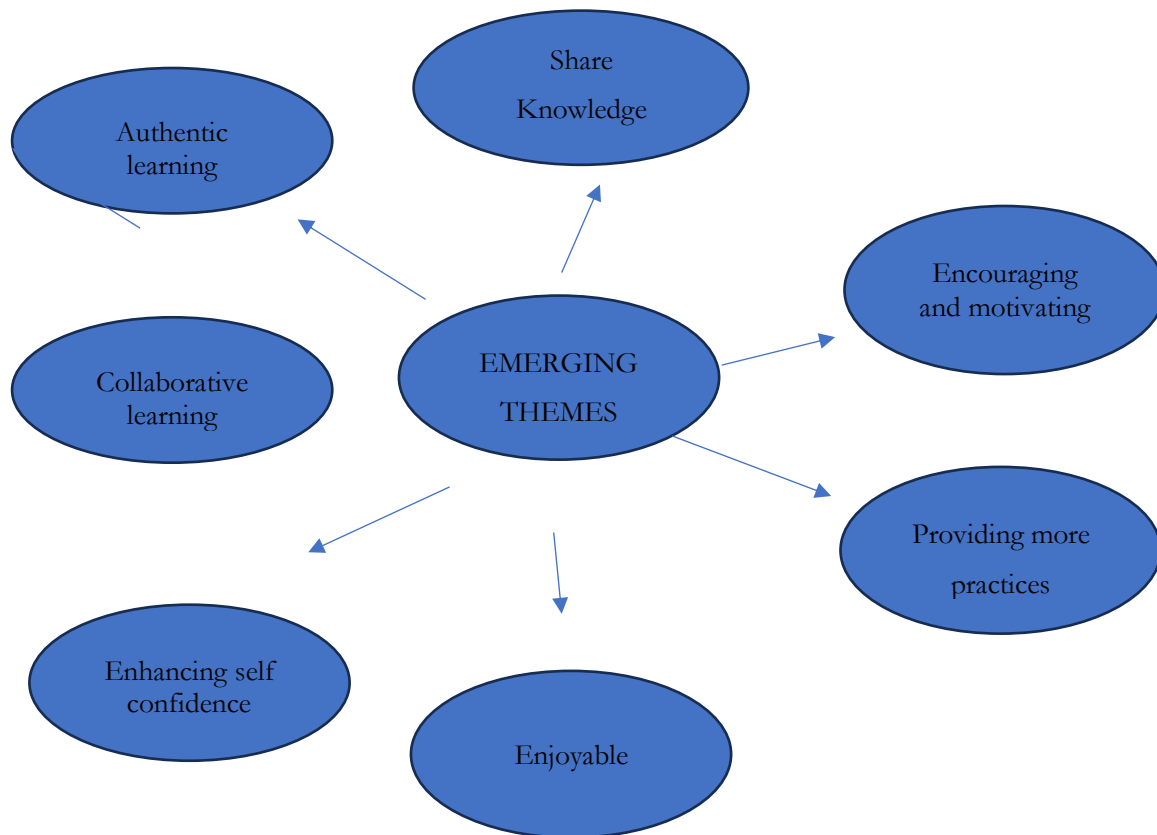
Figure 1. Emerging Themes of Students from Experimental Group (Interview Question)

Based on the analysis of students' semi-structured interviews, seven themes emerged from students' views on the utilization of the STAD method in teaching English communicative competence. These themes were as follows: (i) share knowledge, (ii) encouraging and motivating, (iii) providing more practices, (iv) enjoyable, (v) enhancing self-confidence, (vi) collaborative learning, and (vii) authentic learning. Based on the codes in the transcript, these themes have been generated inductively. Results disclosed that the STAD method is an essential tool that help to enhance students' English communicative competence.

Discussion

This study revealed that the Experimental Group who were taught communicative competence using the STAD method performed significantly better in fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range, accuracy, pronunciation, and listening skills than their counterparts who were taught using the conventional method. These findings support the findings by Mudofir (2017) and Yunita (2016) which indicated that the STAD method effectively improves students' English fluency learning outcomes and vocabulary mastery than the conventional method. As stressed by Nair and Sanai (2018), STAD method engaged the students actively in collaborative learning and they could learn from each other which boosted their confidence and interest in learning. In addition, Ibrahim and Adnan (2019) also affirmed the potential of the STAD method in improving the oral performance of ESL learners and their learning satisfaction. The current findings also parallel with those of Ghufron et al. (2023) which showed that the STAD method emphasizes the accomplishment of student's tasks through intra-group communication and collaboration with group members. As such, this method provides space for students to practice and improve their communication skills.

In the same vein, the current study also showed that the students from the Experimental Group were significantly more motivated to learn English communicative competence compared to the students from the Control Group. In other words, the STAD method encourages the students to work with their teammates in a more relaxed learning environment which is more encouraging and motivating. Moreover, weak students get the opportunity to learn from good students in their group which gives them confidence in learning. In addition, while doing the group task students get more practice to enhance their communicative competence. Findings from the qualitative data also indicated that students learn new vocabulary and improve their pronunciation from their group members. These findings support the study by Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) which revealed that when the quality of teaching improves students' motivation can be enhanced because they will have an active interest and love to learn the subject. Similarly, Zhang (2015) stressed that effective teaching methods can sustain learners' motivation towards English listening skills. Rubtsova (2019) also opined that a poor learning environment has a significant negative impact on learners' motivation. Accordingly, the study by Hariyanto et al. (2019) and Martasari (2018) also suggested there is a significant correlation between learning motivation and English language achievement because, students become interested in English learning when they are motivated.

Analogously, findings from the qualitative data also showed that the STAD method enables students to share knowledge during group work. These findings are consistent with Rosfiani et al. (2021), Rohmah et al. (2022), and Kim (2018), which indicated that collaborative learning provides students with the opportunity to share knowledge in groups. In addition, students from the experimental group stated that the STAD method is very encouraging and motivating because students are actively involved in group tasks and the learning environment is positive (Zhang, 2019; Hariyanto et al., 2019; Martasari, 2018). The STAD method also provides more oral practice for students. Likewise, a study by Ibrahim and Adnan (2020) found that the STAD method can enhance speaking performance among students because they are encouraged to speak English during group activities. Students from the Experimental Group claimed that they like the STAD method because it is fun or enjoyable.

In addition, findings from the qualitative data also showed that the students like the STAD method because it enables students to share knowledge during group work. These findings are parallel with those of Rosfiani et al. (2021); Rohmah et al. (2022) and Ghufron (2023) which indicated that collaborative learning provides students the opportunity to share knowledge in groups. Furthermore, students from the Experimental Group said that the STAD method is very encouraging and motivating because students were actively involved in group tasks and the learning environment was positive (Zhang, 2015; Hariyanto et al., 2019; Martasari, 2018). The STAD method also provides more oral practices for students. A study by Ibrahim and Adnan (2020) also found that the STAD method can enhance speaking performance among students because they are encouraged to speak English during group activities. Students from the Experimental Group claimed that they liked the STAD method because it is fun and enjoyable to work with group members (Nair & Sanai, 2018). Further, the STAD method also enhances students' self-confidence because when they work with team members they get help and encouragement from their peers (Kim, 2018; Rosfiani et al., 2021). The STAD method also creates a platform for students' collaboration during group task learning,

Accordingly, findings from the qualitative data also showed that the STAD method enables students to share knowledge during group work. These findings are in line with Rosfiani et al. (2021), Rohmah et al. (2022), and Kim (2018), which indicated that collaborative learning provides students with the opportunity to share knowledge in groups. In addition, students from the experimental group asserted that the STAD method is very encouraging and motivating because students are actively involved in group tasks, and the learning environment is positive (Zhang, 2019; Hariyanto et al., 2019; Martasari, 2018). The STAD method also provides more oral practice for students. Correspondingly, a study by Ibrahim and Adnan (2020) found that the STAD method can enhance speaking performance among students because they are encouraged to speak English during group activities. Students from the Experimental Group claimed that they like the STAD method because it is enjoyable to work with group members as claimed by Nair and Sanai (2018). Furthermore, the STAD method also enhances students' self-confidence because when they work with team members, they receive help and encouragement from them (Kim, 2018; Rosfiani et al., 2021). The

STAD method also creates a platform for students' collaboration during group tasks. These findings are consistent with findings by Supratiningsih et al.(2021) which indicated that the implementation of STAD-based learning improved the collaborative abilities of elementary school students in solving problems. Lastly, this study revealed that the STAD method helped the students to authentic learning experience whereby they improved their communicative competence in a natural setting.

Conclusion

This study indicated some crucial findings which have pedagogical, practical, and theoretical implications. In terms of pedagogical implications, this study showed that the implementation of STAD method can enhance students English communicative competence and boost their motivation in learning English. As such, polytechnic colleges in China can use the STAD method as an alternative method to improve students' English communicative competence and to enhance their motivation in learning English. In terms of practical implications, the results indicate that Ministry of Education should provide courses and workshops to English lecturers in polytechnic colleges on how to implement the STAD method effectively in teaching communicative competence. In addition, this study also has theoretical implications, because the findings support social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1978) and the ARCS learning motivation by Keller. (2009). This study has also some limitations. Firstly, this study only focused on students' English communicative competence. Secondly, the semi-structured interviews were only carried out among eight students from the experimental group. In order to get a deeper insight future researchers can interview the students from the control group and the lecturers from both the groups. Lastly, the sample size is only 80 students from two polytechnic colleges. It is hoped that future studies will involve a larger sample from more colleges across different districts in China.

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