

MEASURES TO EDUCATE COOPERATION SKILLS FOR 4-5 YEAR OLD CHILDREN AT PRESCHOOLS IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The article builds measures, such as: using games stimulating the need of working together of children; encouraging children to flexibly apply cooperation types into their daily activities at preschools; organizing engaging activities at preschools to help children comprehend cooperation types with 120 children at the age of 4-5 years old at two Preschools in Ha Tinh province, Vietnam. Results show that, applied measures are positive, helping children to develop their cooperation skills. These experimental results can be considered as the evidence for the widespread implementation and application of measures given in the research into a large scale in Vietnam.

Keywords: *Cooperation skills, Cooperation skill education, 4-5 year old children, preschools, groups of children.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cooperation is an important skill for people in general and preschoolers in particular. From the age of 4, children like to play with friends and want to participate in activities with them. The strongly developed visual thinking enables 4-5 year old children to anticipate steps of an activity; children start to know how to discuss, negotiate and make concessions together to maintain relationships; have disciplines consciousness and responsibilities when playing with friends. Children also know social relationships and those between themselves and others (Hierarchical relationships); assess themselves and people around them but still lack the accuracy at several times. It can be said that, the "Friendship" of 4-5 year old children develops strongly and this is the important period having advantages for us to educate cooperation skills for children.

As a result, cooperation skills are understood as the individual ability to cooperate activities effectively based on the positive interactions to attain the group's targets on the basis of understanding implementation methods thoroughly and applying available knowledge and experiences in compliance with certain conditions [6].

According to Johnson & Johnson (1989), cooperation skills might be divided into 18 skills with 4 groups: communication skills; mutual trust creating and

maintaining skills; leadership skills; skills of taking advantages of creative debates. Schmuck & Runkel (1985) approached through the interpersonal aspect with the division of cooperation skills into 6 basis skills: explanation skills; skills of understanding others' behaviors; acquisition skills; communication skills; behavioral expression skills; emotional expression skills.

These skills might be used as the foundation to assess their peers in the same group, reconsider the self-mastery and apply cooperation skills in learning. On that basis, there are two classification directions, which are: (1) basing on the formation and operation progress of the cooperation group; (2) listing necessary skills for the cooperation.

The first classification is generalized, easy to imagine stages but difficult to point out specific skills needed in each stage. The second classification allows us to list various skills, however, it is inevitable to lack children's skills or mix uncharacteristic ones. Regarding this article, the author selects a cooperation process-based classification that outlines specific and minimum cooperation skills required when children undertake a task needing the cooperation of participants and appropriate to the ability of small children, specifically as follows:

- *Task receiving skills:* These skills include the identification and understanding of common tasks of the group and children themselves, proactively accepting tasks

appropriate to children or accept, negotiate about the group assignments.

- *Coordination and support skills*: These skills are used in the process of deploying the group's work. To implement the coordination and support skills, each individual must understand his or her work and responsibility in the relation to the work of others and in the overall. Members actively exchange and coordinate with each other. Especially, for tasks with the simultaneous or consecutive participation, members must know how to adjust the operation appropriately, according to the activity process.

- *Emotional control skills*: Are the way that each subject adjusts their emotions through expressions, words, manners, gestures and actions that positively affect or do not adversely affect the task performance process.

- *Assessment skills*: Are skills requiring the objectivity when judging achieved results. The assessment includes assessing the individual's performance (in terms of meeting the task requirements, cooperation skills with others) and assessing achieved results.

In terms of coordination, it might be divided into 3 following types:

- *Individual coordination*: The individual coordination is the simplest way to work together. After receiving the common task in pairs or small groups, each member will perform his/ her own work. This type of coordination is similar to "working side by side" in which children work in the common space but do not depend on each other. Individual results will be included in the overall results but children in the group often do not coordinate to work together during the task. Nonetheless, some times, they still interact with each other but often do not participate in each other's work as everyone must try to complete his/her own mission.

- *Alternate – Consecutive coordination*: If the individual - collaborative coordination is at level 1, the alternate coordination is at level 2 since in this coordination, children "work together". This way of coordination enhances children' understanding of the meaning of discussing goals, maintaining common goals in each activity step. On the other hand, this type helps children understand how to divide the work, task performance periods, etc., develop self-planning ability of children as well as the ability to connect activities during the coordination.

The specific way of the alternate coordination is that after the group receives the task, the members will perform their own work in sequence; the result of one child's working becomes the means of work for the other. This can be considered as working in a production line. Hence, the speed and work performance of each individual will clearly

affect the group's overall results. Familiarizing themselves with this coordination type, children will be aware of the relationship and the interdependence in each member's actions.

- *Coordination through face-to-face interaction*: This type represents a higher coordination level compared to the individual and alternate ones. Children must have experience of working together, planning, self-controlling and evaluating skills for one part and the entire of results. With this type, children can take on individual tasks and participate in supporting their peers or members can break down the task into small steps in the task solving process to work together.

In particular, in this coordination, the connection level and interdependence of members are closer than individual and alternate coordinations as members work and coordinate together simultaneously. In the individual cooperation, children also work simultaneously but each individual only takes care of his/her part; in the alternate coordination, members work under the sequence, whereas, in the interactive coordination, individuals both do their part and coordinate as well as support their peers.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

a) *Three measures to educate cooperation skills for 4-5 year old children*

Measure 1: Using games stimulating the need of working together of children.

For 4-5 year old children, teachers need to organize games in small groups because they have various opportunities for children to interact with each other and it will be easier for teachers to observe and guide them. Games with selected rules need to ensure a close connection between members' playing actions. No child stand outside, the difficulty level is equivalent to requirements of performing individual tasks so that every child has to try. Especially, it is necessary to prioritize to select games that require members to have mutual assistance. Only with one child not playing positively or not complying with techniques or game requirements will the entire group be affected significantly. Apart from requirements of inter-child support, teachers must pay attention to the game difficulty to be suitable for 4-5 year old children so that they can play it. When a game has a certain difficulty, it will stimulate members to always try, follow the task closely, pay attention to actions to promptly coordinate with others in the best way. The interaction at such playing times will create an urgent, exciting and dramatic playing atmosphere which creates opportunities for children to fully develop their abilities and helps teachers clearly realize the development level of children' cooperation skills. Selected games must be diverse in terms of cooperation

methods: games with tasks divided into several independent parts for each individual to take care of, games with tasks designed into specific and done by one sequential activities or game tasks requiring children to perform their tasks with the coordination and support from other members.

Measure 2: Organizing engaging activities at preschools to help children comprehend cooperation types.

To implement this measure, it should be noted that:

(1) identifying cooperation types in accordance with the cognitive and practical abilities of 4-5 year old children; (2) choosing activities for preschoolers in accordance with cooperation types; (3) setting up the environment in accordance with cooperation types and children' activities (4) organizing activities to help children comprehend cooperation types through the practical experience process; (5) determining conditions that help children comprehend effective types of cooperation.

Measure 3: Encouraging children to flexibly apply cooperation types into their daily activities at preschools.

In daily activities, there are several arising problems that teachers cannot always help children solve. Children need to actively address problems they encounter in life. 4-5 year old children have gradually become more aware during their activities and they want to affirm themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage them to actively seek activities to work together and apply experiences gained from different types of cooperation, which will help their cooperation skills to develop better.

To implement this measure, teachers need to: (1) train cooperative skills for children at anytime and anywhere; (2) assign tasks and encourage them to select cooperation types in accordance with activity contents; (3) encourage children to select their tasks in accordance with their interests and abilities and cooperation types.

b) Description of experimental research methods

To achieve research purposes, the author uses three measures above and conducts the experimental research with 120 children at the age of 4-5 years old at two city-inner and suburban Preschools in Ha Tinh province, Vietnam. The research implementation duration is from 10/2016 to 06/2017.

Criteria for the assessment and measurement of cooperative skills in 4-5 year old children include:

1) *Criteria 1: Task receiving skills* (3 points), in which:

-Knowing how to communicate with each other to assign tasks (1point);

-Accept the group assignments (1point);

-Understanding the common and personal tasks (1point).

2) *Criteria 2: Coordination and support skills*(3 points), in which:

- Self-attempting to complete personal tasks(1point);

-Knowing to cooperate with peers to complete common tasks(1point);

-Supporting and helping their peers to quickly complete tasks (1point).

3) *Criteria 3: Emotional control skills* (3 points), in which:

-Being happy during the activity(1point);

-Encouraging and motivating their peers so that group members are excited to work(1point);

-Not blaming on their peers when they are in trouble or their peers/group disagrees/do not complete tasks (1point).

- *Criteria 4: Assessment skills* (3 points), in which:

-Knowing how to comment on performance results of their work and the group's work (1point);

-Identifying the cause of work results that they/the group achieved(1point);

-Sharing ideas and experiences to complete the work (1point).

With above activities, there are 4 groups of children (each group including 3-4 children) selected for each survey in the research

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Results before and after the experiment are as follows:

1) *Before the experiment:*

Cooperative skills of experimental and control groups before the experiment at each criterion and total criteria are basically equal; evenly, the control group has a better level of cooperative skills than the experimental one. This will show the effectiveness of applied measures if, after the experiment, the experimental group has component skills and the total skills significantly higher than the controlled one.

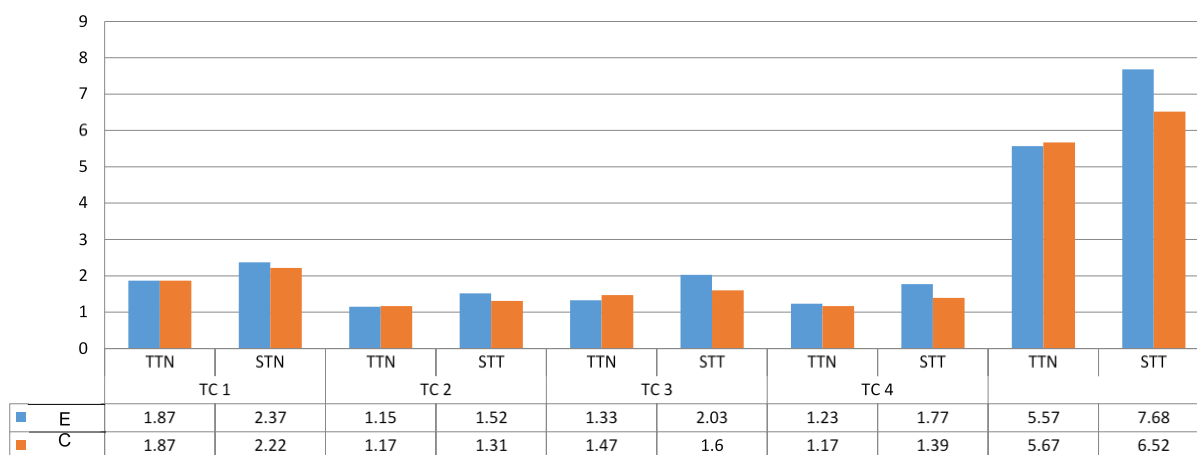


Figure1. Cooperation skills of children in experimental and control groups

Notes: TTN: Before the experiment; STN: After the experiment; TC: Criteria;

E: Experimental; C: Control

(Source: Research results of the author)

2) *After the experiment:* Assessment results on cooperation skills of children in experimental group are significantly higher than those of the controlled one in both component skills and total skills (cooperation skills), specifically:

- For Criteria 1 “Task receiving skills”, there are 19 children with significant development. Before the experiment, during the group activity organization, manifestations of these children are: disagreeing with their peers but following their own interests, still being confused to identify specific tasks among members, etc. After the experiment, various children know how to divide work for each other; sometimes they pay attention to their peers' strengths to actively suggest them: "If you draw quickly, then draw it and I will make this bow" (Making postcards for mothers).

- For Criteria 2 “Coordination and support skills”, there are 11 children with significant changes (from about 1 point to 2.5 to 3.0 points). After the experiment, some children already know how to coordinate with their peers in different ways: self-completing their part to contribute the group's overall results, or knowing which stage that they are involved in, or mutually supporting in each action to gain the best results. In the process of impacting measures, in the first time, a number of children are confused at their coordination skills, especially in the alternate - consecutive and face-to-face interaction cooperation in the entire group, etc. However, after a period of practice, some children know how to coordinate more positively, not fight but wait for their turn in the consecutive cooperation, know to monitor, give suggestions to their peers when observing their performance, etc. With the "Birthday gift package” activity, some groups of children have tremendous focus and attempt because members need to be skillful in action like: keeping

boxes, bowing, gluing tape, etc. when coordinating with each other.

- Criteria 3 “Emotional control skills”, there are 28 children having clear change in these skills. In particular, before the experiment, children often seem to be indifferent to the group task, showing little joyful attitude towards their peers when participating in activities; nonetheless, after the experiment, they are more sociable and try to complete the common work with their group. In addition, there are some children who still have not made progress. These children easily get annoyed with their peers when they are not dissatisfied, scramble for what they like, easily become discouraged when they meet difficulties, etc.

- Criteria 4 “Assessment skills”, there are 24 children getting high points for these skills. After the experiment, various children are brave and they know more about assessing the participation of themselves as well as other members, meanwhile, before the experiment, when asked: Has the group completed the task yet? Who has done a good job ?, they often comment incorrectly or do not know which parts are still incompleting or not in accordance with teachers' requirements. This is because children often do not focus on memorizing assigned tasks and they are less trained in assessment skills. At this age, when they comment on their peers, they often compliment their favorite ones.

Cooperation skills of children after the experiment increases significantly in the experimental group (before the experiment, they gain 5.57 points while after the experiment, they gain 7.68 points, which increased for 2.11 points); regarding the control group, although after the experimental period (3 months), cooperative skills also increased but compared to the experimental group, it was much lower (before the experiment, they gain 5.67 points

while after the experiment, they gain 6.52 points, increasing for 0.85 points, which is lower than the increase level of experimental group for 1.26 points). This shows that the measures applied by the author to educate cooperation skills for 4-5 year old children in preschools have positive impacts.

4. CONCLUSION

Cooperation skills are important and meaningful skills for the development of children in social relationships. They not only promote the cognitive process but also help children be proactive and confident in resolving difficulties in life. At the age of 4-5 years, children have the basic signs of cooperation. This is the foundation for educators to aim to educate cooperation skills for 4-5 year old children to build content and methods from the demand and interest stimulation to the provision of basic cooperation types appropriate to the age and flexible application into diverse activities at preschools.

Research results show that, all 3 measures (Using games stimulating the need of working together of children, encouraging children to flexibly apply cooperation types into their daily activities at preschools and organizing engaging activities at preschools to help children comprehend cooperation types) give positive results, helping children improve their cooperative skills. Therefore, the author consider that it is possible to widely apply these measures in preschools in Vietnam.

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