Research Paper

Fostering Social Competence Through Cooperative Learning Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms

Dr. Jaspreet Kaur
Assistant Professor, Khalsa College of Education, G.T. Road, Amritsar

ABSTRACT
Cooperative learning involves the students working in small groups to accomplish a given job or project or to reach a common objective. Serving as a facilitator, the teacher makes sure that the five fundamental components of cooperative learning are incorporated into the scenario or assignment given to the students. These components include individual accountability, which gives each student a specific role or assignment while also assisting the group in achieving its objective, positive interdependence, which places the students accountable for both their own learning and the success of the group, Promotive interaction teaches students how to work constructively in groups through group talks; social skills teaches them how to operate in groups; and group processing allows them to evaluate an assignment at the end. Teachers can employ a variety of cooperative learning strategies, such as student team accomplishment divisions, reciprocal teaching, think-pair-share, jigsaw, and peer tutoring, as instructional techniques. Social Constructivism is the foundation of cooperative learning, where students actively participate in the process of creating their own knowledge. Since cooperative learning methodologies call for students to actively participate in small group activities, they guarantee experiential learning that is both long-lasting and enhances social and personal growth. Collaboratively working on intellectual assignments that require both mental and physical effort from students fosters not only cognitive but also inculcate social skills such as social competence, self-esteem and confidence. Additionally, it aligns with the tenets of equality and inclusiveness, allowing learners to feel free to express themselves in small groups with their peers and free from fear or burden. In this essay, I'll discuss the importance of cooperative learning strategies in fostering social competency among students, as it is crucial to inclusive and equitable classrooms.

Keywords:** **Cooperative learning strategies, social competence, inclusive and equitable education.

I.   Introduction:

"Cooperative Learning" describes a type of instruction where students with different ability levels collaborate in small groups to achieve a common objective. The pupils are accountable for both their own and each other's education. Consequently, when one student succeeds, it benefits other pupils as well. Students in a cooperative classroom drown or swim as a group, as opposed to an individualistic or competitive classroom. Every team member bears the responsibility of not only acquiring knowledge but also facilitating the learning of fellow team members, thereby fostering a culture of success. Students work on the task until all group members have finished and understood it. Advocates of cooperative learning typically use field studies as evidence for their contention that regular classroom instruction is much improved when the students learn and work in groups. Cooperative teaching strategy is defined as "structuring positive interdependence" and arranging students in groups and gave them a common task (Shimazoe& Aldrich, 2010).While cooperation among students has always been a prerequisite for traditional classroom instruction, cooperative learning strategies demand teamwork from students as a means of obtaining academic knowledge. This typically indicates that the learning objective is shared, that all students work together to achieve the instructional outcome, and that each student's success is correlated with the success and failure of every other student. In cooperative learning environments, students usually share resources, split up the labor needed to do the task, help out other group members, and receive rewards based on the success of the group.

The configuration of cooperative learning provides the learners a place where:
- Students are stakeholders in their own learning process.
- All learners are active participants.
- Students learn by doing.
- Students learn different cognitive, conative and affective skills.
- Projects are designed to be interesting, yet challenging in a democratic environment environment.
- Teachers sometimes learn, and students sometimes teach.
- Teachers encourage and value the expression of differing opinions and ideas.
- Teachers and students exhibit mutual respect.

➢ **Kinds of Cooperative Learning Instructions:**

STAD (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions): In this kind of cooperative learning, students with different academic backgrounds are divided into groups of four or five people to study the material that the teacher has already presented and support each individual in reaching their maximum potential. Individual tests are then provided to the students. Depending on how much each team member has improved their prior record of achievement, teams can get certificates or other forms of acknowledgment.

JIGSAW: The teacher may split up the course content into sections for this cooperative exercise, and each team member would focus on studying one of the sections. After studying the identical sections, the members of the various teams could get together to talk about and elucidate their own sections. The experts return to their own groups and share their results after meeting with other groups' specialists in the same area. They might instruct and test their colleagues in their section.

REVERSE JIGSAW: The class is divided into two groups by the teacher: the expert group and the entire class. Furthermore, unlike in the Jigsaw strategy, the expert group students stay in their group and are not tasked with sharing what they have learned with the home group. In reverse jigsaw, the expert group students instruct the entire class as an alternative (Heeden, 2003).

LISTEN-THINK-PAIR-SHARE-MODEL: Students participate in a multi-mode discussion cycle where they hear a question or presentation, have time to reflect on it alone, then converse with one another in pairs before sharing their answers with the entire class. Using cues, the teacher directs the class to move from listening to thinking, pairing, and sharing.

ROUND ROBIN BRAINSTORMING: Students work in four to six-person groups, with one individual designated as the recorder. Students are given time to consider their answers to a question that has multiple possible answers. The team shares answers in a round robin fashion following the "think time." The group members' responses are noted by the recorder. Until the time is called, the person adjacent to the recorder begins, and each member of the group responds in turn.

TEAM PAIR SOLO: Students work through challenges in three stages: in pairs, as a team, and alone. Its goal is to inspire pupils to take on and overcome challenges that are originally out of their grasp. Its foundation is mediated education. With mediation, students can do more than they could on their own. They advance to a point where they can do alone what they could initially only do with assistance.

RECIPROCAL TEACHING: Developed by Palincsar and Brown (1999), reciprocal teaching is a teaching approach in which students and teachers alternate roles as educators. The approach is for the teacher to model how to formulate a question based on a passage, summarize it, explain it, and make predictions based on the facts in it as the students read the piece aloud. When a student assumes the role of teacher, the instructor carefully guides the student in these comprehension abilities and provides guidance and feedback until the student no longer needs it, at which point the teacher's role shifts to one of being more passive.

INSIDE-OUTSIDE CIRCLE: The problem-solving exercise "inside and outside circle" encourages collaboration among students as they actively brainstorm solutions to challenges. The class is divided into two circles by the teacher (inside and outside). The pupils divide into two circular groups, express their ideas, and respond to the teacher's questions. Given that students in the inner circle face students in the outer circle, every student has the opportunity to engage. Students in the inner circle are given a different topic than those in the outer circle. As they converse and switch positions, each inside circle student shares ideas with a new partner (Pearcy & Duplass, 2011).

RALLY TABLE: The class is split up into two groups by the teacher. When the teacher poses a question, the pupils respond on paper with their ideas. Within the allotted time, each student will record a written response and deliver the paper to his peers for their addition of reflection. Following this timed exercise, the students read aloud their responses while the teacher kept a close eye on them. For student groups, this is an excellent cooperative team-building exercise (Siltala, 2010).

TGT (TEAM GAME TOURNAMENT): As they work together to create a game and study the assigned readings, small groups of students gain deeper and more lasting knowledge through an entertaining and engaging exercise. Another perk of TGT is that since it's a team game, nobody can steal the glory for a victory or hold another student accountable for the team's failure. After friendly competition activities, learning objectives are met in a respectful and trusting environment. Along with academic improvements and cross-curricular learning outcomes, learners' social and personal development is also improved (Banchonhattakit et al., 2015; Gregory).

➢ **Benefits of Cooperative Learning for school children:**
Educators from elementary school through secondary schools depend on cooperative learning to enhance their lessons and improve student education. The concept involves having the students work together in small groups on activities or projects. The goal of this type of collaboration is to teach kids the material, as well as to impart a number of life skills.

Improved Academics: Working together allows students who struggle academically to learn from those who understand the material and exposes learners to diverse populations of students they might not interact with in traditional classrooms.

Improved Social Skills: One of the important benefits of cooperative learning is social skills. Working in groups enhances student's social skills, including communication, empathy, and cooperation. They learn to express ideas clearly, listen actively, and respect diverse opinions.

Diverse Perspectives and Cultural Understanding: Collaborative learning groups often consist of diverse individuals. Interacting with peers from different backgrounds fosters cultural understanding and tolerance.

Development of Conflict Resolution Skills: Collaborative activities may sometimes lead to disagreements. Students learn to resolve conflicts respectfully, enhancing their conflict resolution skills.

Preparation for Real-World Collaboration:In the professional world, collaboration is essential. Cooperative learning prepares students for future careers, where teamwork and collaboration are fundamental skills.

Long-Lasting Friendships: Cooperative learning strategies often lead to strong friendships. Students bond over shared experiences, creating lasting connections beyond the classroom.

Personal Responsibility: Collaborative learning activities greatly increase responsibility in individual students. They know they must take part in some portion of the exercise in order for the entire team to succeed.

Self-Awareness: Working with others allows for individuals to learn about themselves. Through participation in groups, students are able to discover such things as whether they are leaders, if they listen to others' ideas and if they struggle to share their ideas for fear of ridicule or rejection. Without these types of interactions, such discoveries cannot occur.

Self-esteem and Self Confidence: These experiences also lead to improved self-esteem in students and feeling more confident in their own abilities.

➢ **In addition to the above benefits Co-operative learning enhance Social competence among learners and the same is mandatory to ensure Inclusion in classrooms**:
Social competence involves the ability to evaluate social situations and determine what is expected or required; to recognize the feelings and intentions of others; and to select social behaviors that are most appropriate for that given context.

➢ **Elements of Social Competence:**
These are the skills and characteristics we hope that children develop when they work in groups to achieve a common goal and are given below.

Social Values: Caring, Helpfulness, Honesty, Responsibility, Flexibility, Healthy Lifestyles, Respect.

Positive Self-Identity: Self-Awareness, Competence, Self-Worth, Self-Efficacy, Purpose, High Self-Esteem, Positive Future View

Interpersonal Skills: Communication Skills, Friendships, Contextual Awareness, Conflict Resolution Skills, Perspective, Talking, Assertiveness.

Self-regulation: impulse control, delay, gratification, resist temptations, resist peer pressure, pro-social skills, monitors own behaviors.

Planning and decision making: make choices, solves problems, develops plans, plans ahead, career output plans.

Emotional intelligence: recognizes emotions in self and others, labels emotions empathetic, gives emotional support, and manages emotions.

➢ **Steps to implement Cooperative Learning for inclusive classrooms:**

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that involves students working together in small groups to achieve a common goal. It can enhance both cognitive and social skills. However, balancing these two aspects of cooperative learning can be challenging for teachers and learners. Here are some tips and examples of cooperative learning models that can help you achieve this balance.

1. **Define clear objectives and roles**: Having precise and well-defined goals for group activities, both in terms of content and methodology, is a fundamental component of cooperative learning. Ensure these goals align with curriculum requirements and are clearly understood by your students. Additionally, assign distinct roles to each group member, such as facilitator, recorder, checker, or leader. Encouraging students to take on these tasks helps them stay organized, collaborate effectively, track their progress, and provide feedback to one another. Periodically rotating these roles can also enhance their learning experience and ensure that each student gains a variety of skills.

2. **Choose relevant and engaging tasks**: The kind and complexity of the tasks you assign to your cooperative learning groups can also have an impact on the degree of balance between the social and cognitive domains. Select tasks that take into account your students' goals and prior knowledge in addition to real-world problems and situations. Choose challenging, engaging, and adaptable assignments that need creativity and higher-order thinking skills in addition to having several solutions. These activities can boost cognitive engagement and enhance group members' social interactions. Examples of this kind of work include conversations, games, experiments, and case studies.

3. **Provide structure and support**: Provide your cooperative learning groups with enough structure and support to ensure efficient operation. Set uniform guidelines and expectations for group work, covering aspects such as collaboration, communication, conflict resolution, and performance assessment. Offer students questions, rubrics, or prompts to help them complete the tasks and track their progress. Monitor the groups and intervene when necessary, but avoid excessive control or micromanagement to preserve students' sense of agency and responsibility for their education.

4. **Incorporate individual and group accountability**: One of the challenges of cooperative learning is ensuring that each student contributes completely to the group endeavor and does not solely rely on others. This is where individual and group accountability come in. Individual accountability means that every student must take responsibility for their learning and performance and be able to demonstrate that they have mastered the relevant knowledge and abilities. Group accountability indicates that the group as a whole is accountable for achieving the common goal and producing the shared outcome. Combining the two methodologies can be done in a number of ways, including individual exams or assignments, group grades, peer assessments, or self-evaluations.

5. **Promote positive interdependence and social skills**: The main objective of cooperative learning is to foster a sense of positive interdependence, or the knowledge that members of the group depend on one another to succeed. Constructive interdependence can encourage mutual support and trust among group members. It can also enhance their social abilities. To promote positive interdependence and social skills, use a range of strategies, such as goal, resource, or reward interdependence. Additionally, you have the ability to teach and set an example for the social skills required for effective cooperative learning. Remember to allow them time to consider what they learned from their group efforts.

II. Conclusion:

Cooperative learning methodologies offer extensive benefits to student learning. These methodologies positively impact students' understanding of material, attitudes toward their education, professors, and peers, and self-esteem and confidence levels. Additionally, cooperative learning enhances students' achievement levels, reduces classroom management issues, and decreases student disengagement. Moreover, students develop essential skills such as leadership, critical thinking, patience, time management, and social skills, which are crucial for inclusive classrooms.In these democratic learning environments, free from intimidation or hardship, students feel comfortable and fully express themselves in groups with their peers. They acquire vital higher-order thinking abilities essential for their intellectual progression and develop social skills that help them adapt to society.

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