

COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY TO ENHANCE MOTIVATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Nguyen Thi Thu Ha

English for Specific Purposes Department, Hanoi University, Hanoi city, Vietnam

Corresponding author: Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, e-mail: hantt@hanu.edu.vn

Received May 12, 2024. Revised June 15, 2024. Accepted July 2, 2024.

Abstract. Cooperative learning is an essential concept for classroom implementation. It helps boost students' motivation, build stronger relationships with their teammates, and learn easily. By adopting a cooperative learning approach as a teaching method, teachers help students become more motivated by encouraging them to participate actively in the learning process. This technique is beneficial at universities as it motivates students to digest a larger amount of content in less time and prepares them to interact with people worldwide. In addition to discussing how to implement cooperative learning in the classroom, this article will explore the link between cooperative learning and motivation.

Keywords: cooperative learning, motivation, university students.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of human civilization, men have worked in society. Working in groups strengthens communities and helps to create strong bonds. Similarly, this phenomenon applies to the educational system, where teamwork has become more popular recently.

Cooperative learning was defined by different authors in the last century. The concept is generally referred to as a practice carried out to work in groups to achieve a goal (Lewis, 2020). Cooperative learning then plays a key role in the classroom. Nowadays, this technique is applied in almost all schools globally. There are different types of cooperative learning, and many studies have been conducted to prove the benefits of implementing cooperative learning. The main advantage is that students can better digest the content's information (Alice, 2007). They can socialize and build better relationships with their peers based on respect. Also, cooperative learning helps boost students' motivation, which is essential, especially at universities when students usually lack motivation due to economic worries and future employment opportunities.

Teachers can implement different activities to develop cooperative learning at school. This work describes different cooperative learning-focused exercises. They can be carried out at college to prepare students for future employment and develop self-confidence. When these exercises are applied regularly, they generate a great impact on the university students' learning process.

2. Content

2.1. Cooperative Learning

Social relationships are essential for individual development and society as a whole. That

means the more we interact with others, the more we learn and work as a team to achieve specific goals. Cooperative learning is vital in today's world, especially in university teaching.

2.1.1. Definition of cooperative learning

According to Lewis (2020), cooperative learning is an instructional strategy that enables small groups of students to work together on a typical assignment. Some other authors affirm that cooperative learning exists when students work together to achieve joint learning groups (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). In other words, in a class context, teachers assign a specific activity, and all students should work as a team to effectively achieve the goal. Since a group in a class is treated as a system, each member is responsible for doing their best to succeed. The results they obtain as a group will influence their individual results. These activities help introverted students get better results and interact more with others.

2.1.2. Origins of cooperative learning

Although many people recognize the benefits of cooperative learning, little research has been done in the last century. It was not until 1960 and 1970 that educators started to use this concept, and much more research began on using the power of cooperation to boost the learning process.

Johnson and Johnson (2015) contributed much to cooperative learning in the mid-1960s when they trained teachers at the University of Minnesota. It progressed until the early 1970s when researchers like David DeVries and Keith Edwards at Johns Hopkins University built up Teams-Games-Tournaments. Other researchers like Shlomo and Yael Sharan in Israel developed the group investigation procedure for Cooperative Learning groups (Uwameiye, 2016).

Later on, cooperative learning was used worldwide. For instance, in the United States, this method was born out of necessity because of the interracial turmoil following the desegregation of schools in Austin, Texas. After applying a cooperative learning strategy called jigsaw, they observed a change in the exacerbating stereotypes in classrooms. This strategy "forced" students to cooperate to learn the day's lesson. Students then learned to value the positive aspects of their peers, which were previously hidden by prejudice and discomfort. Once this experiment or strategy was applied, students in jigsaw classrooms mastered the material better than in traditional classrooms. They also liked school better (Aronson, 2021).

This concept not only arose in the western part of the world but also in many institutions in Asia. The advantages of this method are so vast that more and more professors have started to develop cooperative learning in their classrooms, at all levels, and even at the universities. This tendency remains today.

2.1.3. Types of cooperative learning

According to Uwameiye (2016), cooperative learning aims to foster interdependence, which means that team success depends on team members' individual success.

Likewise, they state that after conducting some studies in that field, researchers Johnson and Johnson (2015) identified three main types of cooperative learning. Although there are many other opinions on this topic, this paperwork will consider the aspects determined by these two researchers since they developed the cooperative learning theory.

First, Johnson and Johnson (2015) determined that cooperative base groups were the first type of cooperative learning. This is a long-lasting, stable, and diverse team. They support each other in their academic achievement or the completion of a project. The long-term nature of these groups helps students build trust and loyalty while fostering group and individual accountability (Uwameiye, 2016). These groups remain the same throughout the course, even longer. Their members create bonds of friendship. This gives them the possibility of sharing personal information, like their address and phone number, so that they can catch up and discuss any topics, not only the ones related to the course itself but also personal information.

Secondly, Johnson and Johnson (2015) stated that when students work together in groups for

as little time as a single class period to as long as several weeks, they experience formal cooperative learning (Uwameiye, 2016). This kind of cooperative learning is more structured than the others, and usually, students are required to fulfill more complex tasks.

Finally, they also explain the essence of the last type of cooperative learning, called informal cooperative learning. Unlike formal cooperative learning, this occurs during part or all of a single class period. They are temporarily formed to achieve joint learning goals. Informal cooperative learning groups focus student's attention on the material to be learned, create an expectation set and mood conducive to learning, ensure students cognitively process the material being taught and provide closure to an instructional session (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). Summing up, three types of cooperative learning are identified: formal, informal, and cooperative-based groups.

2.2. Motivation and students' motivation

2.2.1 Motivation

Reeve (2018) states that it is the condition inside us that desires a change, either in the self or the environment. When people tap into this energy, motivation endows the person with the drive and direction needed to engage with the environment in an adaptive, open-ended, and problem-solving way.

Tohidi (2012) defines it as a force that provokes particular behaviours in people. Its primary purpose is to bring the highest benefits to the fields where it is implemented. Bastidas (2006) adds that motivation is regarded as a vital piece for success in school and at work. It provides the fuel to enhance abilities and transform them into achievements. Even people with innate skills or gifted students cannot develop their talents without adequate motivation. In other words, motivation pushes individuals to move or advance from one stage to another.

2.2.2. Student's motivation

In the learning process, student motivation is described as the student's firmness and drive to learn and work at its maximum level. Many strategies have been set up to increase students' motivation. Most academics recommend fostering a safe environment, encouraging students to do a particular assignment, praising them for their effort, or using interactive materials. However, at some points, all these strategies are based on cooperation (Birt, 2021). In other words, the techniques are best developed when applied in groups or communities. Hence, cooperative learning is essential to motivate students.

In the first chapter, some concepts of cooperative learning were defined. All authors agree that collaborative learning is a strategy that enables groups of students to do a specific assignment. Each group member has a strong sense of responsibility and commitment. This feeling of belonging to a community makes them put effort and time into their assigned tasks. They also look for a better solution and work together to find better options or paths for success. Cooperative learning is very beneficial in every grade as it allows students to engage in discussions, provide support, and acquire collaborative skills (Birt, 2021). Each member can take advantage of their peers' abilities and knowledge.

Most university students lack motivation (Markowitz, 2020). They can feel overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge content to process. Higher education requires students to develop more tasks and research that can drive them into stressful situations. Also, university students often have to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds since more and more colleges are welcoming international students, which means classes consist of students from all around the world. In this regard, cooperative learning activities help students interact with others and get to know each other. It also boosts respect among team members and allows them to discuss and share their ideas. Again, having this contact with other people is an attractive incentive for many students.

2.3. Ways to motivate university students

Johnson and Johnson (1999) created the following components of cooperation, which contain a five-element criterion that characterizes real cooperative learning groups. According to Johnson et al. (1993), systematically organizing these fundamental components into group learning scenarios promotes cooperation and provides focused learning for long-term success.

1. Positive Interdependence: Every group member has a special contribution to contribute, and each person's efforts are what make the group successful. Group members have to be aware that their efforts not only benefit themselves individually but also the whole group. Doing so creates a commitment to the success of group members as well as one's own and is the heart of cooperative learning. Cooperation cannot exist in the absence of positive interdependence.

2. Face-to-face Interaction: Students must collaborate effectively to accomplish real-world tasks, sharing resources and aiding, encouraging, and supporting one another's endeavors to succeed. It is demonstrated to the students how to support one another's achievement and help one another get over obstacles.

3. Individual and Group accountability: To achieve the group's success, each member must contribute significantly. The group has to be clear about its goals and what the members have to do to achieve them. Each group member is accountable for both their learning and for assisting the learning of other group members, fostering a culture of success.

4. Interpersonal Skills: Students must learn social skills and group communication techniques directly since they will need to know how to engage with one another. One way to help them learn leadership and decision-making skills is to assign them positions like writer or reporter.

5. Group Processing: Group members discuss the progress of their project and how they are maintaining effective working relationships. It is also possible to discuss the group's workout routine and any other issues they may be having. Group members need to recognize that they all share the same fate and that what affects one member of a group affects them all.

The Group Processes

According to Tuckman (1969, cited in Argyle, 1969), a group goes through four stages once it forms. These stages have significant effects on classroom dynamics and the utilization of group activities in instruction.

Forming: Initially, there was apprehension among the group members regarding effective communication techniques. Some of the students may have never spoken to one another before. Furthermore, they are dependent on the teacher to provide them with direction in terms of the task to be performed and what is or is not acceptable behavior, this could be further cause for concern.

Storming: There is conflict between sub-groups and some rebellion against the leader. Members of the group may resist their leader and the role relations attending the function of the group can be questioned and/or challenged.

Norming: The group begins to develop some form of cohesion. Members of the group begin to support each other. At this stage, there is cooperation and an open exchange of ideas and feelings about their roles in the group and each other.

Performing: Most problems are now resolved and a great deal of interpersonal activity exists. Everyone is devoted to completing the tasks they have been assigned and there is a real sense of satisfaction within the group regarding the progression of the task or activity. Generally, almost every group goes through these four stages (sometimes more) until it reaches a state of uniformity.

Organising Learning Groups

Teachers can bring cooperative learning into the classroom and maximize the group process by using the following criteria.

First, the groups should be decided on how to be formed. To optimize student heterogeneity, some educators opt to randomly assign students to groups, combining talkative and quiet students, male and female (Fiechtner & Davis, 1992). Some teachers allow students to choose the partner they want to collaborate with, but it might risk encouraging excessive socialization and self-segregation among the students (Cooper, 1990). Some teachers, however, would rather create the groups on their own, considering the pupils' past performance as well as their preparation levels, work habits, gender, and ethnicity (Connery, 1988).

Second, group size should be conscious. Larger groups limit each member's ability to actively participate, therefore groups of four or five generally function best. Likewise, it is hard to be submissive in a small gathering. Each person in the group needs to contribute fairly.

Third, groups should be together. One of the main challenges faced in cooperative learning is group conflict. Students need to work together even though it is not something that comes naturally. When a group is not working well together, avoid breaking it up, even if the group requests it. The members of the failing group may become involved in other groups, which could disrupt their group dynamics and prevent the bailed-out group from learning how to deal with its unproductive interactions (Woolfolk, 2001).

Fourth, groups should be helped to make a plan. Ask each group to devise a plan of action. How is the task to be executed? Who will be responsible for what and when?

Fifth, groups should be regularly checked. It is critical to keep in regular contact with the groups if the activity takes several weeks to complete. This allows the groups to discuss their development and bring up any worries they may have. It also gives the teacher a chance to track the progress of each group.

Apart from the aforementioned, students must understand the operation of the groups and their roles as group members. Every group needs to have its goals spelled out, along with certain guidance about member participation. Students also need to understand how their grades will be determined. Furthermore, students need to know that they cannot allow others to complete all of the work while they take it easy because they will be graded collectively. Engaging actively in group work gives our pupils a stimulating environment, which helps them combat boredom, which is one of the reasons why students frequently lack motivation in the classroom.

3. Conclusions

Cooperative learning is a strategy that fosters interdependence among a group's members. Cooperation requires all members' participation to achieve a specific goal, which means team success depends on team members' success.

Johnson and Johnson (2015) contributed vastly to cooperative learning in teacher training last century, and this concept progressed until today when it is applied in almost all educational systems globally. Cooperative learning strategies enable students to socialize and accept different opinions. It is proven that it helps diminish social prejudices. The main types of cooperative learning are cooperative-based groups and formal and informal cooperative learning.

Motivation is the force that allows change and cooperative learning fosters students' motivation in a great sense. That is why cooperative learning has gained popularity at colleges. University students often lack motivation because of economic burdens and worries about future employment. Cooperation then plays a vital role and helps them digest the content easily and share opinions with international students. This helps them develop a growth mindset over a fixed mindset.

When applying cooperative learning strategies professors must be well-prepared on the topic. Also, they must provide an inclusive and safe environment, so students do not feel afraid of sharing their opinions. The instructors must encourage them to actively participate and interact with others, showing them that the burdens of tasks are lesser when you divide them. Teachers

must be passionate about the content, share personal experiences, and give some autonomy to students. When all this is taken into account each group member has a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to the group. This feeling of belonging to a community makes them put effort and time into their assigned tasks. They also look for a better solution and work together to find better options or paths for success. Based on the aforementioned it can be concluded that university students become more proactive when they are trained with cooperative learning strategies. This motivates them, helps them accept different opinions, and develops critical thinking.

REFERENCES

- [1] Lewis B, (2020). *What Is Cooperative Learning?* Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-cooperative-learning-2081641>
- [2] Alice M, (2007). *Cooperative Learning Group Activities for College Courses. A Guide for Instructors*. Kwantlen University College.
- [3] Johnson DW, Johnson RT, (2015). Theoretical approaches to cooperative learning. In R. Gillies (Ed.), *Collaborative Learning: Developments in Research and Practice* (17- 46). New York: Nova
- [4] Uwameiye BE, (2016). Cooperative learning strategy and students' academic achievement in Home Economics. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 5 (2),120-127.
- [5] Aronson E, (2021). Pioneering. In *Pioneering perspectives in cooperative learning*. Routledge.
- [6] Reeve J, (2018). *Understanding motivation and emotion*. Wiley Custom.
- [7] Tohidi H, (2012). The effects of motivation in education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 31, 820–824.
- [8] Bastidas JA, (2006). A Framework to Understanding Motivation in the TESOL Field. *Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 7, 147-160.
- [9] Birt J, (2021). *Cooperative learning strategies: definition, benefits and tips*. Retrieved from: <https://www.indeed.com>
- [10] Markowitz E, (2020). *Data shows college students struggling to stay motivated*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.148>
- [11] Johnson DW, and Johnson RT, (1999). *Cooperation and Competition: Theory and Research*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
- [12] Johnson D, Johnson R, & Holubec E, (1993). *Cooperation in the Classroom*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- [13] Argyle M, (1969). *Social Interaction*. London: Tavistock Press.
- [14] Fiechtner SB, and Davis EA, (1992). *Why Some Groups Fail: A Survey of Student's Experiences with Learning Groups*. In A Goodsell, M Maher, V Tinto & Associates (eds.), *Collaborative Learning: A Sourcebook for Higher Education*. University Park: National Centre on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Pennsylvania State University.
- [15] Cooper J, (1990). Cooperative Learning and College Teaching: Tips from the Trenches. *Teaching Professor*, 4 (5), 1–2.
- [16] Connery BA, (1988). Group Work and Collaborative Writing. *Teaching at Davis*. 14 (1), 2–4. (Publication of the Teaching Resources Center, University of California at Davis.)
- [17] Woolfolk A, (2001). *Educational Psychology*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.