RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPROVING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING: IN THE CASE OF WOLAITA SODO UNIVERSITY FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to explore the factors affect the implementation of cooperative learning and increase motivation, and interpersonal relationships in first year psychology department students' classroom. The study involved descriptive survey design. Participants of the study were Wolaita Sodo University, school of education and behavioral science and specifically at department of psychology first year students who are enrolled in the university programs in 2016/17 academic year. Since first year psychology students are 50 in number and grouped into one to five functions. Generally, ten groups were organized. Among ten groups, five groups were selected through random sampling, lottery technique. The data were collected using questionnaire method. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of descriptive statistics analysis showed that 72% of students were responded that poor communication affect the implementation of cooperative learning. Overall, after the implementation of action strategy, the research showed that cooperative learning bolstered student productivity, as well as increase motivation and interpersonal relations among students.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, students have been taught in whole groups where the teacher talks 70% of the time (Goodlad, 1984; Cuban, 1988; Sirotnick, 1983). Students have been expected to sit and listen passively, without talking or engaging with their classmates. Yet, studies have shown that students' attention decreases as lectures progress (Stuart and Rutherford, 1978). Consequently, cooperative learning has changed classrooms from being "teacher-centered," where the focus is on the teacher imparting knowledge to the pupils, to "student centered," where the students are expected to take a more active part in their own learning. In cooperative classrooms, students remain in charge of their own discoveries and can become truly excited about the learning process. When there is a shift to student-centered learning, "teacher talk" is reduced by 50%, and that time can be spent praising and aiding students in their exchange of ideas (Vermette, 1998). Cooperative learning is a group-based instructional strategy designed to supplement the lecture-based classroom. Used extensively in the elementary and secondary levels since the 1960ís and in higher education since the 1990ís, cooperative learning has a rich history of theory, research, and practice related to adult education (Gilliam, 2002).

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Gestalt School of Psychology, helped to establish the framework for group-based instruction in promoting socially interactive learning and democracy in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). Based on this foundation, the goal of cooperative learning is to transform the adult learner from a passive observer to an active participant, building higher-level thinking skills, increasing achievement, enhancing appreciation for diversity, increasing team skills and self-esteem, and promoting self-direction and student responsibility for learning. The implementation of cooperative learning may be affected by many factors; and thus mainly deals with personal, situational and other factors (Nunan, 1992). Personal factors refer a tendency or predisposition to behave in a particular manner, factors like extremely low or high self-esteem, authoritarianism (domination), anxiety, language abilities, absence of tolerance, lack of commitment, negative attitude towards cooperative learning, poor communication , unwillingness to speak in cooperative learning activities may seriously affect cooperative learning (Nunan, 1992). Human beings always resist something which contrast his/her previous beliefs and practice because it is not easy to refuse the familiar patterns of behavior implanted in him/her. Teachers' personal traits and beliefs can affect the implementation of pedagogical innovations. According to Molalign (2011), factors like teachers' belief, attitude, professional experience, motivation, training, and teachers' understanding of innovation as the factors which affect the implementation of pedagogical innovations.

Table 1. Response Scale: 1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of the skill affects cooperative group work	1	12	48.0
	2	11	44.0
	3	1	4.0
	4	1	4.0
Lack of support from the teacher affect cooperative group work	1	13	52.0
	2	12	48.0
Little time affect to prepare students to work effectively in groups.	1	13	52.0
	2	12	48.0
classroom noisy affect cooperative group work	1	13	52.0
	2	12	48.0
The physical set-up of my classroom is an obstacle to using cooperative learning.	1	12	48.0
	2	10	40.0
	4	3	12.0
Lack of commitment affect cooperative group work	1	10	40.0
	2	14	56.0
	5	1	4.0
Poor communication affect cooperative group work	1	18	72.0
	2	7	28.0

A number of schools confirmed that the physical environment (class room arrangement, furniture arrangements, classroom appearance, noisy and lay out etc.) contribute a lot to promote cooperative learning. A clean and well kept room with appropriate resource helps to establish a positive expectation towards a lesson. Cooperative learning is concerned with framing student interaction in ways that are likely to raise positive interdependence and promote interaction. Any form of peer interaction can be cooperative if it adheres to two basic principles: positive interdependence and individual accountability (Millis and Cottel, 1998; Slavin, 1996). Positive interdependence means that group members should perceive that the collective effort of the group is essential in order for the individual learners to achieve their goals (Johnson and Johnson, 2009). Individual accountability means that, in order to prevent social loafing, the students should be assessed by their individual learning outcomes. Thus, while working within a group, the student might still pursue individual goals and be assessed as an individual. Awarding individual grades to students does not conflict with cooperative learning as it enhances individual accountability. Cooperative learning has also been implemented in lectures, but results are contradictory. While Vreven and McFadden (2007) found that students did not benefit from cooperative learning activities in lectures, students in a study by Cavanagh (2011) greatly valued opportunities for engaging in lectures by means of cooperative learning activities. There are two studies that suggest that the way students in higher education perceive of 'good' teaching may conflict with cooperative learning. Kelly and Fetherston (2008) interpreted resistance towards cooperative learning as reflecting a transmission model of teaching and learning in which the teacher is considered the sole expert. Phipps et al. (2001) reported how students associated the lecture with proper teaching at the university level and perceived their own role to be passive note takers. Indeed, these findings within higher education are quite different from the findings at the primary and secondary levels of education. Although many research studies have validated the benefits of cooperative learning, there was a lack of research found on the impact of cooperative learning environments on student ratings of learning outcomes and course learning environment factors. Instructional methods and the learning environment influence student learning and student perceptions of learning. The social interaction and interdependence of students in learning environment also impact student perceptions of learning and instruction. There was a lack of understanding of how the learning environment and instructional methods, such as cooperative learning, impact student ratings of instruction, courses, and learning outcomes in the community college classroom. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors affect the implementation of cooperative learning and increase motivation, and interpersonal relationships in first year psychology department students' classroom. Even though I had implemented team learning in our classroom before, I had never been satisfied with the results. I had also struggled to get students to feel like their success was mutually tied together. However, it always appeared that one or two students in the group frequently did most of the work, or else students worked separately. Most students seemed to prefer working collaboratively; yet I often questioned whether they were actually achieving a great deal of learning in their groups. One of the key reasons I chose to study team learning was because I needed practice applying this instructional method successfully in my classroom. I know that, if executed effectively, collaborative teams could bring about a learning community in which all students felt acknowledged and accepted. At the same time it could promote the use of higher level thinking skills and active, meaningful learning.

Moreover, I know that listening to students working in groups could provide me with a greater insight into how well key concepts are being understood. Due to this, the researcher was motivated to conduct this study to investigate problems affecting the implementation of cooperative learning and increase motivation, and interpersonal relationships in first year psychology department students' classroom, because of two main reasons. First, the researcher observed that cooperative learning was not practiced in the department. Second, to the knowledge of the researcher, since cooperative learning is such a well researched area one would assume that teachers broadly implement this approach though the area was not researched well. However, there was no study that has been conducted and action to be taken on factors affecting the implementation of cooperative learning and increase motivation, and interpersonal relationships in the department. Therefore, there was a gap in this area that needs to be filled. Hence, this study was conducted to achieve the following research objectives:

- Find out the factors affect the implementation of cooperative learning
- Check working in cooperative groups increase motivation and interpersonal relations between students or not.

Table 2. Response Scale: 1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Not sure 4. Disagree 5. Strongly

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
I found working in a group very motivating	1	15	60.0
	2	5	20.0
	3	2	8.0
	4	2	8.0
	5	1	4.0
Working in a group helped me learn the topic better	1	8	32.0
	2	8	32.0
	4	3	12.0
	5	6	24.0
My group communicated well with each other	1	6	24.0
	2	12	48.0
	3	2	8.0
	4	2	8.0
	5	3	12.0
My group thought me some things I would not have learned on my own.	1	4	16.0
	2	9	36.0
	4	7	28.0
	5	5	20.0
My group is able to work together effectively	1	12	48.0
	2	9	36.0
	4	1	4.0
	5	3	12.0
Our group completed all tasks and finished on time	1	4	16.0
	2	10	40.0
	4	9	36.0
	5	2	8.0
Students took turns and respected each other's ideas	1	7	28.0
	2	10	40.0
	4	6	24.0
	5	2	8.0
My group all contributed equally	2	12	48.0
	3	2	8.0
	4	11	44.0
I would like work with this group again	1	6	24.0
	2	11	44.0
	3	1	4.0
	4	7	28.0

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study followed descriptive survey design. Participants of the study were Wolaita Sodo University, school of education and behavioral science and specifically at department of psychology first year students who are enrolled in the university programs in 2016/17 academic year. Since first year psychology students were 50 in number and grouped into one to five functions. Generally, ten groups were organized. Among ten groups, five groups were selected through random sampling, lottery technique. The rationale behind this is it gives equal opportunities for the participants to be selected. Totally, 25 students have participated in this study. Both primary and secondary data were collected for the study. First year students of the department were the source of primary data and other written documents, the information and records of selected students were the source of secondary data. To collect the data all the questionnaire would use. The questionnaire was developed and distribute to the sample students to gather relevant data. The secondary data was collected from different documents through reviewing secondary documents. The collected data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics such frequency and percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section I - factors affect the implementation of cooperative learning, shown in Table (1). As shown in the below table, 72% of students were strongley agreed that poor communication affect cooperative group work, 56% of students

were agreed that lack of commitment affect cooperative group work, 52% of students were strongley agreed that lack of support from the teacher, classroom noisy and little time affect to prepare students to work effectively in groups.

Section II working in cooperative groups increase motivation and interpersonal relations between students shown in Table (2). The above table indicated that over time, the number of students who found group work very motivating increased. The amount of learners that strongly disagreed that group work was motivating decreased significantly;

- Students gave the impression that working in groups helped them learn more with each consecutive time. This may be because students' communication skills improved each time they worked collaboratively.
- It may also have been because the groups were arranged more successfully.
- Team communication improved over time. While observing the groups, it was clear that the focus had shifted from the teacher to the students. The students took a greater responsibility for their own learning. One student explained how her group would guide each other to correct their misunderstandings.
- When students discuss material with each other, they encourage each other to work hard, while at the same time providing each other with academic assistance.
- Groups seemed to work together more effectively over time. Most students declared that they liked working in groups.

Intervention Mechanisms (Action Plan)

Table 3. Action intervention plan

Action to be taken	Target date	Responsible body	Remark
Student related issues	01 April - 30 May, 2017	Students and teachers	
❖ Encourages each class period, day, week, or instructional unit each cooperative group sets group learning goals and members publicly commit themselves to achieve them in a learning contract.			
❖ Making students in order to clearly understand the purpose of cooperative learning			
Teachers related issues	01 April - 30 May, 2017	Teachers	
❖Giving clear instruction what the group has accomplished so far and what is yet to be done is reviewed, and the group's next steps are detailed.			
❖Giving ample time to do work in group			
❖ Giving feedback what the group has accomplished and failed to accomplish during the instructional unit			
Classroom related issues	01 April - 30 May, 2017	Students and teachers	
❖Considering and controlling classroom management and other characteristics of the cooperative work will set the frame of reference for all subsequent planning decisions in cooperative learning			

- Most students were able to complete all of the tasks in the given class period and they got better at time management over the period of the study. However, they did not always manage their time well. I noticed that students would initially waste time and then panic and work quickly to finish the assignment by the end of class.
- Most students took turns and respected each other's ideas, while a few had some difficulties.
- Students had mixed feelings about how much their team members contributed while working as a group.
- Tasks need to be designed in a way that most of team members are held accountable and agreed to work with their partner in sustainable manner. The teacher must make a concerted effort to motivate every member of the various teams and they must closely observe teams that are having problems working together.

Implementation of the Action Plan: The issues which were raised in action plan effectively implemented as they scheduled. Next, students worked in teams for one to two class sessions to ensure that all group members had mastered the material. They worked collectively to complete assignments. Then they discussed answers to questions in their workbooks and addressed each others' misunderstandings.

Reflection of Results of the Action (Action Evaluation): Students' participation in cooperative working was improved after working in groups. I saw students teaching each other learning strategies and correcting each others' misunderstandings. Overall, the research showed that cooperative learning bolstered student productivity, as well as increased self esteem and positive interpersonal relationships. Learning in groups improved students' abilities to comprehend and retain abstract information.

Conclusions

Cooperative learning enables teachers to get through to students with different learning strengths. Group learning is more student-centered and engages students in active learning. There are a number of factors affect cooperative group work, among those poor communication, lack of commitment, lack of support from the teacher, classroom noisy and little time affect to prepare students to work effectively in groups.

As a result, it prepares learners to enter the modern workforce, where people are expected to be able to solve problems effectively and work collaboratively with others. Working in cooperative groups increase motivation and interpersonal relations between students. In conclusion, cooperative learning should be put into practice across all student populations, grades, and subject areas.

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