

# Cooperative Learning Methods and Social Skills

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of cooperative learning on the social skills of EFL learners, the study provides definition of cooperative learning strategies by different scholars, the researcher has attempted to discuss the different definitions so as to make the ideas behind cooperative learning clear, it also affords types of cooperative learning through mentioning three of them, Formal Cooperative Learning Groups, Informal Cooperative Learning Groups, and Cooperative Base Groups, moreover the study also shows the different cooperative methods such as, Student Team Learning (STL), Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD), Teams Games Tournaments (TGT), Team Assisted Instruction (TAI), and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), Furthermore the study highlights the relationship between CL Strategies and Social Skills which focused on the point that students who have never been taught the prerequisite social skills cannot be expected to work together effectively. Then some social skills have been mentioned as examples. As well as the Social Interdependence Theory, Finally the researcher concluded this study by suggesting that in order to implement cooperative learning strategies, students must have the prerequisite interpersonal and small group skills and be motivated to use them.

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning, Social skills, EFL learners.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning is defined differently by different individuals, and in this section, the researcher has attempted to discuss the different definitions so as to make the ideas behind cooperative learning clear. Johnson and Johnson (1990:69) define cooperative learning as the “instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning”. Parkay and Stanford (2007:334) also define cooperative learning as an approach to teaching in which students work in small groups, or teams, sharing the work and helping one another complete assignments. Sharan (1990) also defines it as “a group-centred and student-centred approach to classroom teaching and learning,” while Slavin (1987:8) refers to the term as a set of “instructional methods in which students are encouraged or required to work together on academic tasks in small, mixed ability learning groups”. Christison (1994) also states that cooperative learning can be defined as a strategy for the classroom that is used to increase motivation and preservation to help students develop a positive image of self and others, to provide a vehicle for critical thinking and problem solving, and to encourage collaborative social skills.

Salend (1994) also states that cooperative learning refers to a method for organizing learning, in which students are working with their peers towards a shared academic goal rather than competing or working separately from their peers. Although different people have attempted to define cooperative learning in different ways, there are some similar concepts in their definitions. What makes the different definitions almost similar is that the idea of working together and helping one another is emphasized.

Therefore, for the purpose of this research, Johnson and Johnson’s idea of cooperative learning is used. That means cooperative learning in the context of this study is considered as instructing students to learn and study together as a group, completing assignment sheet per group, all members giving their suggestions and ideas, seeking help and

clarification from each other rather than from the teacher. The five basic elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face interaction, social skills, and group processing that feature.

### **Types of Cooperative Learning Groups:**

The three types of cooperative groups identified by Johnson and Johnson (1990; 1998) seem the most widely used in cooperative learning involving a combination of ad-hoc informal cooperative learning groups, formal cooperative learning groups, and base groups. These three types of cooperative learning groups are presented as follows.

### **Formal Cooperative Learning Groups:**

Formal cooperative learning groups last from one class period to several weeks or to several class sessions to complete a specific task or assignment. Teachers can plan and structure any academic assignment or course requirement for formal cooperative learning. The heart of formal cooperative learning groups is to “ensure that students are actively involved in the intellectual work of organizing materials, explaining it, summarizing it, and integrating it into existing conceptual structures” (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998:7).

## **2. INFORMAL COOPERATIVE LEARNING GROUPS**

Informal cooperative learning groups are temporary, ad hoc groups that last only for one discussion or one class period whose purposes are to focus students’ attention on the material to be learned, set a mood to conduct learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994). They mentioned that teachers can use them during direct teaching (lectures, demonstrations, films, videos) to focus students’ attention on the material they are to learn, help set expectations as to what class will cover, ensure that students cognitively process the material the teacher is teaching and provide closure to an instructional session.

### **Cooperative Base Groups:**

Cooperative base groups are long-term heterogeneous, cooperative learning groups with a stable membership whose primary responsibility is to provide support, encouragement, and assistance in making educational progress. Base groups provide students with long term, committed relationships (Johnson et al., 1998).

Base groups meet formally to discuss academic progress of each member, and informally, members interact every day within and between classes, discussing assignments, and helping each other with homework (Johnson et al., 1998). When used in combination, these three types of cooperative learning groups provide an overall structure to classroom life. However, creating and maintaining cooperative groups are not easy. Arends (2004:373), for instance, expressed that the process of getting students into learning teams and getting them started on their work is perhaps one of the most difficult steps for the teachers using cooperative learning. There is nothing more frustrating to teachers than transitional situations in which students are moving into small groups, not sure of what they are to do and each demanding the teacher’s attention and help. The next section focuses on the different types of cooperative learning methods which can be used in the classrooms. re cooperative learning are the focus of the research. The following section.

### **Cooperative Learning Methods:**

Although a large number of cooperative learning strategies have appeared in the literature over the past two decades, research into their use in classroom has focused on four major approaches or models. These are: “Students Teams Learning” approach developed by Robert Slavin and his associates at the John Hopkins University, “Learning Together or Circles of Learning”, developed by David and Rodger Johnson at the University of Minnesota, “Jigsaw”, developed by Elliot Aronson and colleagues at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and “Group Investigation”, developed by Shlomo Sharan and Yael Sharan at the University of Tel Aviv, Israel (Slavin, 1990, 1994; Knight & Bohimeyer, 1990:1).

Every cooperative strategy has a structure which is a procedure that can be described and followed step-by-step. Whilst the learning content may change, structures remain the same. In the following sections, the four common and most extensively evaluated cooperative learning methods are described.

### **Student Team Learning:**

Student team learning methods are cooperative learning techniques developed and researched at John Hopkins University, USA. More than half of all studies of practical cooperative learning methods involve student team learning methods.

Student team learning methods emphasize the use of team goals and team success which can only be achieved if all members of the team learn the objectives being taught. That is, in students' team learning, students' task is not to do something as a team but to learn something as a team (Slavin, 1990). Moreover, Slavin expressed that three concepts are central to all student team learning methods: team rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunities for success. Team is the operative word in the student team learning approaches. It is used to bring the interdependence and motivation that occur in team sports into the classroom (Putnam, 1997:145).

There are four student team learning methods that have been extensively developed and researched. These are:

#### **Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD):**

This is a cooperative learning method whereby students are assigned to four or five member learning teams that are mixed in performance level, sex and where appropriate, ethnicity. The teacher presents a lesson, and then pupils work within 52 the lesson. Finally, all pupils take individual quizzes on the material, at which they may not help one another (Slavin, 1990, 1994; Borich, 2007). Similarly, Putnam (1997:146) mentioned that STAD is considered the simplest of the Student Team Learning Methods. It involves students in a cycle of: class presentation, team work, individual assessment, and team recognition.

#### **Teams Games Tournaments (TGT):**

This was the first of the Johns Hopkins cooperative learning methods. It uses the same teacher presentations and team work as in STAD, but replaces the quizzes with weekly tournaments in which pupils compete with members of other teams to contribute points to their team scores (Borich,2007; Slavin, 1980,1990; Putnam,1997).

#### **Team Assisted Instruction (TAI):**

This is one of the newest cooperative learning activities which combine some of the characteristics of individualized and cooperative learning (Borich,2007: 389). It shares with STAD and TGT the use of four or five member mixed ability learning teams and certificate for high-performing teams. But where STAD and TGT use a single pace of instruction for the class, TAI combines cooperative learning with individualized instruction for the class. Also, where STAD and TGT apply to most subjects and age levels, TAI is specifically designed to teach mathematics to pupils in grade 3 to 6 or older pupils not ready for a full algebra course.

#### **Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC):**

The latest of the student team learning methods is a comprehensive programme for teaching reading and writing in the upper elementary grades called Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition or CIRC. In CIRC, teachers use basal readers and reading groups as to the levels and needs of individual learners. Students work in four-member cooperative learning teams. They engage in a series of activities with one another, including reading to one another, making predictions about how narrative stories will their teams to make sure that all team members have mastered the lesson. Finally, all pupils take individual quizzes on the material, at which they may not help one another (Slavin, 1990, 1994; Borich, 2007). Similarly, Putnam (1997:146) mentioned that STAD is considered the simplest of the Student Team Learning Methods. It involves students in a cycle of: class presentation, team work, individual assessment, and team recognition.

#### **The relationship between CL Strategies and Social Skills:**

Cooperative learning strategies can be successful with students of all ages, learning styles, and ethnic backgrounds. However, students who have never been taught the prerequisite social skills cannot be expected to work together effectively. For this reason, it is crucial to link cooperative learning arrangements with social skills instruction to accelerate students' learning and improve their social relationship (Johnson & Johnson, 1990c). Social behaviours are considered important in cooperative learning because they are required in students' interaction with each other to achieve activity or task objectives. Cowie (2004) discussed that cooperative group learning is one of the most fundamental methods in peer support. For it to succeed, it is important that teachers promote cooperative values in the classroom to encourage prosocial behaviour and increase cooperative relationships based on trust; teachers should also know their students as individuals. Cooperative group learning is one method that can promote pro-social values as part of the learning in the form of working individually in a group, working individually on "jigsaw" elements for a joint outcome, or working jointly for a shared outcome. According to this writer, an essential feature of cooperative group learning is the

time and space that is given to students for regular debriefing and reflection on the events and interpersonal interactions that take place in the classroom. Kohn (1991:504) expressed the view that cooperative learning has the potential to help students feel good about themselves, feel good about each other, feel good about what they are learning and learn more effectively. In addition, Johnson and Johnson (1999) expressed the view that when efforts are structured cooperatively, there is considerable evidence that students will exert more effort to achieve, build more positive and supportive relationships, and develop in more healthy ways. This again implies that in this learning arrangement, small groups of students discuss topics and learn to take charge of their own learning. Team spirit, rather than individual competition is stressed as students work together. As positive interdependence is the goal of cooperative learning, the success of the group depends on each member attaining both the group learning goal and his or her individual learning goal (Putnam, 1997). It has also been stated that an essential component and important prerequisite for academic learning is the teaching of social skills. Social skills encompass communicating, building and maintaining trust, providing leadership, and managing conflicts (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). As a result, with effective cooperative learning, students acquire a whole range of skills while they cooperatively interact every day with their team mates and classmates to master academic content. Social skills are honed through practice and use by watching team mates, modelling appropriate behaviours, practicing their social skills, and receiving instant feedback from their peers (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Hair, Jarger, and Garrett, (2002) also observed that adolescents, who have strong social skills, particularly in the areas of conflict resolution, emotional intimacies, and the use of pro-social behaviours, are more likely to be accepted by peers, developing friendships, maintain stronger relationships with parents and peers, believed as effective problem solvers, cultivate greater interest in school, and perform better academically. Thus, the skills developed within cooperative efforts in schools are important contributors to personal employability and career success. In addition, social skills are directly related to building and maintaining positive relationships and to keeping psychological health (Johnson & Johnson, 1990). As a result, it is possible to say that adequate social skills need to be acquired while students are still enrolled in school and further supported and refined in

post secondary, community, and work settings. Regarding the role of social skills at school, Gresham, Sugai, and Horner (2001) also mentioned that when social skills are absent, educators cannot fully engage students in a variety of learning experience, especially those that are cooperative. To participate fully in cooperative learning, students should practice skills, such as giving and receiving feedback, listening, and appropriate self-disclosure (Bremer & Smith, 2004). This shows that classroom teachers can help students practice social skills needed in school settings by teaching those social skills in the context of cooperative or group-based learning settings. To summarize the discussion on cooperative learning and social skills, it seems worthwhile to see what Johnson and Johnson (1990) recommended. They suggested that if the potential of cooperative learning is to be realized, students must have the prerequisite interpersonal and small group skills and be motivated to use them. These skills should be taught just as systematically as mathematics, social studies, or any subject. Doing so requires that teachers communicate to students the need for social skills, define and model these skills, have students practice them over and over again, process how effectively students perform the skills, and ensure that students persevere until the skills are fully integrated into their behavioural repertoires. If teachers do so, they will not only increase student achievement, they will also increase students' future success, quality of relationships, and psychological health. Therefore, it seems that involving students in cooperative instead of competitive or individualistic learning exercises can greatly enhance students' social abilities, sense of belongingness and self-esteem not just in the classroom but in life. Social skills such as listening and good eye contact are key points to observe while students are talking with one another about the assigned task. Other social skills such as paraphrasing, encouraging, focusing, and speaking freely are also essential

### **Social Interdependence Theory:**

Cooperative learning began in the 1930s when researchers proposed that groups behaved as dynamic wholes in which interdependence among members can vary. According to Johnson and Johnson (1974), in the late 1940s, Deutsch's theory of cooperation and competition which evolved from Lewin's field theory has served as a major conceptual structure for the emergence of social interdependence theory. Deutsch conceptualized two types of social interdependence: cooperative and competitive. His theory of cooperation and competition identified three goal structures, including cooperative, competitive, and individualistic. Under purely cooperative conditions, an individual can obtain his goal if, and only if, the other person with whom he is linked can obtain his goal; under purely competitive conditions, an individual can obtain his goal if, and only if, the others with whom he is linked cannot obtain their goals; and in an individualistic situation, the

goals of individuals are independent of each other, and whether or not an individual accomplishes his/her goal has no bearing upon whether other individuals achieve their goals. The basic assumption of the social interdependence theory is that the type of interdependence structured in a situation determines how individuals interact with each other which, in turn, determines outcomes. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), social interdependence structure determines the way for persons to interact with each other. Moreover, outcomes are the consequence of persons' interaction. Therefore, one of the cooperative elements that have to be structured in the classroom is positive interdependence or cooperation. When this is done, cooperation results in promotive interaction as group members encourage and ease each other's efforts to learn.

### 3. CONCLUSION

To summarize the discussion on cooperative learning and social skills, This study suggested that in order to implement cooperative learning strategies, students must have the prerequisite interpersonal and small group skills and be motivated to use them. These skills should be taught just as systematically as mathematics, social studies, or any subject. Doing so requires that teachers communicate to students the need for social skills, define and model these skills, have students practice them over and over again, process how effectively students perform the skills, and ensure that students persevere until the skills are fully integrated into their behavioural repertoires. If teachers do so, they will not only increase student achievement, they will also increase students' future success, quality of relationships, and psychological health. Therefore, it seems that involving students in cooperative instead of competitive or individualistic learning exercises can greatly enhance students' social abilities, sense of belongingness and self-esteem not just in the classroom but in life.

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