

Co-operative Instruction: Principles, Challenges and Pedagogical Strategies

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ABSTRACT: The traditional methods i.e. lecture and other methods were not much appropriate for ‘active learning’ purpose of instruction (Biggs & Tang, 2011). As a result, cooperative method of instruction emerged to address the need of active involvement of students in the process of learning (Loh & Ang, 2020). It is one of the prime teaching as well as learning strategy that stresses upon the need and essentiality of active learning based on engagement and cooperation among learners at one hand and among teachers and learners on the other hand (Loh & Teo, 2017). It is based on heterogeneous grouping, mastering collaborative skills such as verbal, non-verbal, role playing, group autonomy, and creating maximum group interaction to ensure equal participation from group or team members. To achieve optimal, enabling environment, face to face interaction, group and peer work, group evaluation and tracing outcomes, assigning each group member a specific role, designating group goals to achieve and trusting learners are the essential strategies. Key challenges include formation of groups, teachers are either unable to implement the actual techniques or they are not able to manage it properly, issues of discipline and class control, time-consuming activity, attitude of the learners, social context and previous schema and pressure handling. In spite of all the challenges, this method assists in promoting the academic skills of the learners through short task, project, sentence completion activities, and quiz, assignment and interviewing mates.

KEYWORDS: Cooperative Instruction, Principles of Cooperative Instruction, Strategies and Challenges in Cooperative Instruction

INTRODUCTION

Lecture and other methods of instruction remained relevant and dominant over the years, but there was a need for active learning on the part of learners. All the traditional methods in this regard were not much appropriate for this purpose of instruction (Biggs & Tang, 2011). For that, a new and alternate mode of instruction was the need of the hour, and it emerged as Cooperative Method of instruction that was meant to address the need of active involvement of students in the process of learning (Loh & Ang, 2020). Cooperative instruction is deemed to be one of the prime teaching as well as learning strategy that stress upon the need and essentiality of active learning based on engagement and cooperation among learners at one hand and among teachers and learners on the other hand (Loh & Teo, 2017). This method of learning assists in promoting the academic skills of the students through short task, project, sentence completion activities, and quiz, assignment and interviewing mates.

Cooperative instruction takes place when students are involved in small group activities to accomplish common goals and outcomes. In this way, it not only promotes active learning among students but also assist in enabling a productive social environment in class. In this method of instruction, support and assistance is provided to all the members of the group to obtain maximum outcomes. On the other hand, it enables teachers to create a productive and enabling learning environment and constructive interaction among learners (Slavin, 2015). Above all, cooperative instruction is a structural form of instruction in which the role of a teacher is task setter and providing the learners with extremely structured learning environ, which is known as well-organized and systemic instruction process. In this mode of instruction, teachers set a goal, plan and assign tasks to the learners to work in a group to achieve a shared objective (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATIVE INSTRUCTION

A heterogeneous grouping among learner is the foremost principle of cooperative instruction, in which students having diverse interests are involved in a group. The difference can be ethnic, religious, cultural, sex and of diligence. In this way, students who are low achievers can get benefited from those who are active and high achievers. This type of interaction and cooperation is beneficial for both types of learners (Webb et al., 2009). This type of grouping assists the learners to have multiple perspectives of the matter in view during cooperative instruction, which acted as a key to bring a more harmonious society as a result of productive learning (Aronson, 2021). The second principle of cooperative instruction is to enable the students to better learn and

master the collaborative skills such as verbal, non-verbal, and role playing. Teaching of collaborative skills assists the learners to learn better and effectively (Johnson & Holubec, 2007).

Group autonomy is the third prime principle of cooperative instruction in which students are given autonomy to work in a group and instead of seeking assistance from teachers seeks it from fellows. This principle is based on “team rather than teacher” which makes learners independent in their all walks of life. This principle leads to the fourth principle of cooperative instruction and that is creating maximum group interaction instead of looking for teachers for every pretty matter. It leads towards more active and students centred instruction (Chiang et al., 2013). The fifth principle of cooperative instruction is to ensure equal participation from group or team members by discarding the dominance of one or two members. It ensures that all members should take part and play their role so that they all can be held accountable for their performance. Last principle is to ensure positive independence to the learners to work and interact in the group for a fruitful cooperative instruction.

PURPOSES AND TYPES OF COOPERATIVE INSTRUCTION

Cooperative method of instruction is intended to enhance the process of learning by making it fruitful and productive. In addition, it is meant to furnish the personal, social, interpersonal and analytical skills of the learners. Cooperation and collaboration among learners is yet another significant purpose of Cooperative Instruction. Cooperative instruction is also aimed at to develop and acquire the life skills through emotional and mental betterment while working in a group. It is also meant to share information, skills and experiences among fellow learners to make an impactful learning. Cooperative instruction is aimed at to build a team that can work on cooperative principles to achieve a shared goal. Last but not least, it is intended as to achieve the maximum learning outcomes by developing critical, analytical and life skills among learners through cooperation and collaboration.

As far as the types or forms of cooperative instruction are concerned, these are three. The first is termed as a formal type of cooperative instruction in which a teacher assigns a task, assignment or a project to a group of students. For that, the teacher provides them a clear-cut goal in a structured plan about what to do. In order to do their task in a befitting matter, the members of the group remain connected till the time the task is executed. This type of cooperative mechanism can last up from few hours to some weeks. The second is called informal type of cooperative instruction, in which the teacher forms a team at a short notice to accomplish some short project. It is not pre-planned; hence it is not as structured as in case of formal cooperative instruction. In addition, it can last up to a few hours or a day. Third is group based instruction, which is the most common type of cooperative instruction. It involves long term project which usually lasts up to a year or so on.

STRATEGIES OF COOPERATIVE INSTRUCTION

In spite of numerous prime advantages of cooperative instruction, it is not easy to incorporate this method of instruction because it is a systemic process which requires structured techniques and strategies on the part of instructors to amply inculcate it. Enabling learning in which open discussion can take place assist a great deal to make cooperative instruction a success as students learn from each other's in a group or peers. Enabling environment by giving positive independence to students with proper check and balance can enhance the learning manifolds under cooperative method of instruction. Face to face interaction among students with eye contact too has a productive result to make cooperative instruction a success. If individual and group are made accountable for the task or project, it can enhance the chances of learning as well as sense of accountability among learners.

Group and peer work assists in developing interpersonal skills such as social, emotional and critical skills among learners, which is a testimonial of a success of incorporating cooperative instruction. Group evaluation at the end of each task and activity is yet another strategy that on one hand enables to evaluate the performance of each member and on the other hand ensures the success of cooperative method of instruction. In addition, there are certain strategies that can assist to make the process of cooperative instruction smooth and fruitful. Firstly, making rules for learners is essential to keep them on track and trace their outcomes. Secondly, it is a good strategy to assign each group member a specific role. Thirdly, it is a fruitful strategy to designate group goals to achieve. Fourthly, conducting group assessment via quizzes and survey is yet another strategy to make cooperative instruction a success. Last but not the least, trusting on students is essential and making them to comply with teachers' trust is equally significant.

ADVANTAGES OF COOPERATIVE INSTRUCTION

This method of instruction provides numerous benefits for both teachers and students to have a productive and enriched instruction in the classroom. Firstly, it enables a highly productive learning environment, which leads towards the higher accomplishment of the learners. In this mode of instruction, students' competency and performance increases manifold by working in a group with other peers through cooperation. In addition, it enables passive learners to be more active and engaged in the process of instruction. This mode of instruction assists the teachers to develop higher order skills among learners, Gillies (2016). Hunanyan & Unanyan (2020) in their study come up with the conclusion that students working in group in cooperative instruction have much higher learning outcomes as compare to conventional method of instruction. This method also enables the learners to have a strong relationship with each other when they work in a small group during instruction.

It is also seen in cooperative mode of instruction that students learn better when their peers explain to them. It has another advantages and that is enhancing the demonstrative skills of the students that lead towards leadership role in future. Hence, there is a positive, productive and impactful learning environment that is provided in cooperative instruction. Du (2015) has come up with the notion that cooperative instruction develops multiple skills such as social, connectivity skills and critical among learners in an autonomous learning mode. During interaction and group cooperation, students not only learn best but also develop confidence among them to participate in diverse instructional activities (James, 2018). It is also found that in cooperative instruction, the learners feel happy, active, interested and enthralled toward learning (Yang, Zhou & Hu, 2022).

Cooperative instruction has also the ability to promote the spirit of teamwork and decision-making capabilities among learners, which are keys as far leadership qualitative, are concerned. It also enables the learners to see the problems from diverse perspectives as they see it through other peers (Johnson et al., 2013). In addition, negotiation skills among learners, how to disagree with others are also polished in cooperative instruction. It has also the ability to develop the social skills among learners as it develops authentic experiences. It develops the abilities among learners to solve problem, get confidence, self-control and crisis management (Buchs et al., 2017). Once the learners find enjoyment and pleasure, it enhances learning manifolds. It enhances motivation among learners as they get connected with peers with higher order abilities. In addition, designation of role in a group instigates sense of importance among learners, which promotes learning.

CHALLENGES OF COOPERATIVE INSTRUCTION

Studies have confirmed that cooperative instruction has far-reaching influences on learners' abilities and perception, but it is not without challenges as it is not very easy to implement cooperative method of instruction (Buchs et al., 2017). As stated above, cooperative instruction is a highly structured method which is based on certain key principles which are at time hard to follow for the teachers, which causes challenges in implementing cooperative instruction in true spirit. For example, this mode of instruction depends on forming students' groups; hence if they are not structurally formed it will lead to chaos instead of cooperation (Sharan, 2010). Another key challenge is that teachers are either unable to implement the actual techniques of cooperative instruction or they are not able to manage it properly. Moreover, a lot of trust and confidence is needed or required on the part of teachers to show towards learners for proper cooperative instruction, if it is missing one way or the other true benefits of this form of instruction are denied (Garcha & Kumar, 2015).

Another prime challenge in cooperative instruction is that sometime issues of discipline and class control emerge in classroom as this form of instruction is based on active participation among students in the class. The role of teacher is either of a mediator or facilitator rather than instructor in cooperative instruction, which at times make the students more active than it is required (Topping et al., 2017). Another prime challenge is that it is at time difficult for the teachers to carry on cooperative method of instruction due to textbooks, academic material and system of evaluation which are not based on conceptual learning and are more inclined towards conventional method of instruction. In addition, some teachers find it tough to incorporate cooperative instruction strategies in the existing academic scenario (Gillies, 2010). Covering a specified syllabus for each grade is also a major hurdle in inculcating cooperative instruction in the classroom.

Incorporating cooperative instruction is a time-consuming activity which makes it difficult for the teachers to complete syllabus timely. Apart from covering syllabus for evaluation purpose, at time teachers find difficulty in arranging other activities as it requires a systemic and structured line of action. In addition, attitude of the learners, social context and previous schema are also creating hurdle in inculcating cooperative instruction Garcha & Kumar (2015). In cooperative instruction, it is also found that some learners have dominating personalities so they manipulate the entire group cooperation in their terms and conditions that result in less participation from other peers in the group. Another major challenge is that giving and receiving feedback and criticism have adverse effects on the learners who are shy and sensitive in nature as they take it personally instead of feedback on the project being involved. At times, pressure handling is also problematic for some learners in cooperative instruction.

CONCLUSION

Interests in cooperative instruction got boom in 1980 as a replacement to conventional mode of instruction. It was meant to give students to learn in an interactive and collaborative way. It was intended to make learning more fruitful and productive. In this mode or method of instruction, groups are formed; tasks are assigned to them to work in a cooperative way to achieve their shared goals or objectives. Cooperative instruction relies on heterogeneous grouping of students, teaching of collaborative skills, group autonomy, maximum peer interaction, equal participation of the peers in a group and positive liberty to the members in a group. Cooperative instruction consisted of three type i.e. informal instruction, formal instruction and group based cooperative instruction to maximize the process and outcomes of instructional activities.

For that, there are numerous strategies such as to set rules for groups to keep them on track, to assign role to each group member, to designate group goal, build trust and to hold each member of the group accountable, to be implemented amply. Once cooperative instruction is inculcated in true spirit it leads to higher accomplishment among learners, increase motivation and enthrallment towards learning; build strong relationship and polishes interpersonal, social and collaborative skills among learners.

However, in spite of all the positive impacts, it is not easy at all to incorporate cooperative instruction. It may come across challenges such as issues of discipline, dominance of one or few members over others in a group, put hurdle in covering the syllabus and difficult to fit it into existing mode of academia. Hence, proper care, structured approach and proper supervision are the need of hour to take maximum benefits of cooperative instruction.

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