

Challenges of Cooperative Learning Scheme at Secondary Schools of Wolaita Zone

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to investigate the implementation problems of cooperative learning at secondary schools of Wolaita zone. The samples used for the research work were selected randomly from 8(eight) secondary schools found in the sample woredas. Two hundred forty eight (248) students eighty one (81) teachers and eight (8) principals were included in the study. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used. The instrument used were questionnaires, interview and document review. Triangulation design type of mixed method was used. This was due to the fact that triangulation mixed method was more appropriate to collect adequate information from various participants. The study findings show that secondary schools in the zone implemented cooperative learning, but not to the expected level. It has been recommended that for the group learning to be more likely to work in the classroom, teachers' and students should get access to long term support and learn from one another. This long-term support can be through mentors, peer coaching, sharing ideas and providing immediate feedback.*

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, Implementation problems, Learning Strategies

1. Introduction

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy in which students work together in small teams and use several activities to achieve academic objectives and improve their understanding of subject matter (Johnson, 2000). In individualistic learning situations students work alone to accomplish goals unrelated to those of classmates and are evaluated on a criterion-reference basis (Johnson, 2007). The result is to focus on self-interest and personal success and ignore as irrelevant the successes and failure of others. Students need access to activities in which they learn to depend on each other as they ask for and receive help from one another. It has been suggested that cooperative learning can increase students' achievement and it may possibly increase students' self-esteem or self-concept. This association between self-esteem/self-concept, academic achievement, and cooperative learning may be independent. Cooperative learning may increase students' academic achievement because of the effect it has on self-esteem/self-concept. (Mcgroarty, 1993).

Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups in which pupils/students work together to maximize and gain from each other. In cooperative learning, pupils are expected to help, discuss and argue with each other, assess each other's current knowledge; and fill any gaps in each other's understanding (Slavin, 1995). "The structural approach to cooperative learning is based on the creation, analysis and systematic application of structures; or content-free ways of organizing social interaction in classroom." Moreover, cooperative learning involves a small group of learners who work together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task or accomplish a common goal (Newmann, Nath & Rock, 1990).

There are many different cooperative learning techniques; however, all of them have certain elements in common as established by Johnson and Holubec (1991). These elements are ingredients necessary to ensure that when students do work in groups, they work cooperatively: first, the members of a group must perceive that they are part of a team and that they all have a common goal; second group members must

realize that the problem they are to solve is a group; third, to accomplish the group's goal, all students must talk with one another to engage in discussion of all problems: finally, it must be clear to all that each member's individual work has a direction effect on group's success (Johnson and holdback, 1991). The school principal, home room teacher and subject teachers are forming the group, giving the activities, follow-up and giving adequate feedback according to the South Nations, Nationalities and People Region, SNNRG education army Manual (2006).

2. Statement of the Problem

Teacher centered method of teaching and learning has been practiced for centuries despite its drawbacks. As it has been said, there is shift from the teacher centered method of teaching and learning to student center in which students interact with each other to maximize their own interest and potential as well as potentiate others' leaning interest (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Like this idea, Panitz (1996) mentioned cooperative learning is a teaching strategy which allows students to work together in small groups with individuals of various talents, abilities and backgrounds to accomplish a common goal. Daniel (2007) pointed out that despite the strong criticisms on the conventional teacher-based approach in education, the teaching and learning process in most schools in Ethiopia has persisted to be teacher dominated. Most classes are characterized by a situation where students are made to listen to their teachers and copy notes from the blackboard. Learning by doing, problem solving, cooperative learning and group approaches are limited. According to Jonson and Jonson (1999), cooperative learning is currently an accepted and highly recommended instructional procedure at all levels of education. Mabrouk, (2007) the proven benefits of cooperative learning with not standing, teachers who attempt it frequently encounter resistance and sometimes open hostility from the students. High achiever students complain about being held back by their slower group members; weak or unassertive students complain about being discounted or ignored in group working sessions; and resentments build when some team members fail to pull their weight. Patient teachers find ways to deal with these problems, but others

become discouraged and go back to the traditional teacher-centered teaching method, which is a loss both for teachers and for their students.

Cooperative learning has been practiced in Ethiopian education system at different levels from primary school to higher institution since 1994 to enhance students' learning in order to improve students' achievement. However, the implementation was not successful as desired in improving students' achievement though ideally the strategy is contemplated. There are also local studies that focus on challenges of cooperative learning. According Belilew (2015) lack of teachers training on cooperative learning, lack of accountability and motivation of students and lack of feedback from school were found to be the major challenges for implementing cooperative learning. Berhanu(2013) revealed that teachers lack necessary skills or procedures including lacking heterogeneous group, sharing group tasks equally, making group proportional in terms of size and making all students equally active. In addition to that selected classroom were not supportive for cooperative teaching implementation. Their findings show that practicing cooperative learning in teaching and learning process help students to improve their performance. Derebssa (2006) also depicts, "educators broadly agree that teacher dominated pedagogy that places students in a passive role is undesirable". Government policies and implementation strategies also encourage learner centered approach, active pedagogy, cooperative learning and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills of students. Yet, there is ample evidence that teacher-dominated pedagogy is the norm in most Ethiopian schools. Therefore, from the above research findings, it is possible to understand that in most schools in Ethiopia cooperative learning is neglected at schools. This study tried to find answers for the following research questions:

- To what extent does cooperative learning implemented in secondary schools of Wolaita zone?
- What are the major challenges faced in implementing cooperative learning in secondary schools of Wolaita zone?

3. Research Methodology

In this study a triangulation mixed research design was employed with the intention to get the general picture of the implementation problems of cooperative learning in secondary schools of Wolaita Zone. The data was collected from principals, teachers and students of selected secondary schools of Wolaita Zone. Written documents and student records were analyzed. The study was conducted in government secondary schools of Wolaita Zone. According to 2009 E.C statistical data of Wolaita zone education department, there were 12 Woredas, 3 administrative towns. From these woredas and administrative towns, 4 woredas and one administrative town were selected as a sample. There are 16 secondary schools found in selected woredas, and among these, eight secondary schools (50%) were selected. Similarly, from these sample schools, 30% teachers, 30% students, and all school principals were included in the study. In this research, data were collected by using questionnaire, interview and document analysis.

The data collected through closed ended questions were tallied, tabulated and filled in to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 20 and interpretation was made with the help of percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Independent sample t-test was also employed to check whether there is a significant difference in the distribution of preferences between groups of respondents in terms of a given items.

4. Discussion and Results

Two major concerns were discussed under this part. The first one is the status of implementation of cooperative learning at secondary schools of sample woredas and the second issue is the challenges schools encountered in implementing cooperative learning scheme at the schools.

Table 1: Status of Implementation of Cooperative Learning

No	Items	Teachers and Students Responses						
		Respondents	X	Av/ X	SD	T-value	DF	P. Value
1	The cooperative learning activities in the school are planned	Teachers	1.75	2.29	.55	-10.29	298	.000
		Students	2.84		1.31			
2	Students' cooperative learning grouping is based on their interest.	Teachers	2.00	2.48	.57	-9.23	288	.000
		Students	2.96		1.27			
3	Teachers have enough awareness for implementing cooperative learning	Teachers	1.84	2.04	.57	-4.39	242	.000
		Students	2.25		1.04			
4	Conducive environment is created to implement students cooperative learning.	Teachers	2.27	2.54	.50	-5.84	289	.000
		Students	2.81		1.12			
5	Students grouping for cooperative learning is based on their level of achievement.	Teachers	2.01	2.26	.56	-5.34	257	.000
		Students	2.51		1.08			
6	Cooperative learning group is led by high achiever student.	Teachers	2.15	2.32	.64	-3.49	211	.001
		Students	2.49		1.01			
7	The number of students in classrooms are as per to the standard	Teachers	1.84	2.15	.76	-5.14	224	.000
		Students	2.46		1.28			
8	Classroom set up and materials are suitable for 1to5 cooperative learning implementation.	Teachers	2.06	2.15	.46	-2.33	254	.020
		Students	2.24		.87			
9	Cooperative learning makes significant improvement on students' achievement.	Teachers	2.35	2.19	.71	3.85	286	.000
		Students	2.03		.28			
10	The school has cooperative learning guidelines	Teachers	2.27	2.41	.59	-3.13	257	.002
		Students	2.59		1.14			

As depicted on table 1, the average responses of teachers and students on the status of cooperative learning implementation is below average on all the items(X value from 2.04 to 2.54). That is, the scheme exists in the sample schools but the implementation on the eyes of teachers and students seems inadequate. It was founded that the awareness of students, teachers commitment, class room facilities and students number in a class room- all need due attention for the proper implementation of the scheme at the schools.

Among others, students and teachers view on the importance of the scheme and its effect on students achievement was rated below average. This urged school leaders and other concerned stakeholders involve on the awareness creation activities.

Hence, from the responses of teachers and students, it is possible to see the implementation of cooperative learning was not adequate in the sample secondary schools of wolaita zone.

Table 2: The Major Challenges in Implementing Cooperative Learning

No	Items	Respondents	X	Av/ X	SD	T-value	DF	P. Value
1	Lack of awareness about cooperative learning.	Teachers	3.43	3.61	.69	-3.80	181	.000
		Students	3.80		.95			
2	Unequal sharing of task among group members.	Teachers	3.87	3.77	.53	2.43	207	.016
		Students	3.67		.83			
3	Lack of interest	Teachers	3.91	3.78	.78	2.28	152	.024
		Students	3.66		.92			
4	Lack of clear guide line to implement Cooperative learning.	Teachers	4.00	3.89	.66	2.17	170	.031
		Students	3.79		.85			
5	Problem of group organization	Teachers	3.45	3.59	1.02	-2.22	128	.028
		Students	3.74		.90			
6	Lake of motivation of students.	Teachers	3.63	3.76	1.75	-2.67	321	.008
		Students	3.92		.87			
7	Unwillingness of teachers and students to implement the CL	Teachers	4.22	3.99	.63	4.91	195	.000
		Students	3.76		.94			
8	The physical set-up of classroom	Teachers	4.18	4.06	.76	2.09	321	.037
		Students	3.95		.89			
9	Teachers inability to provide clear procedures on the activity.	Teachers	3.98	3.93	.11	4.00	319	.000
		Students	3.88		.32			

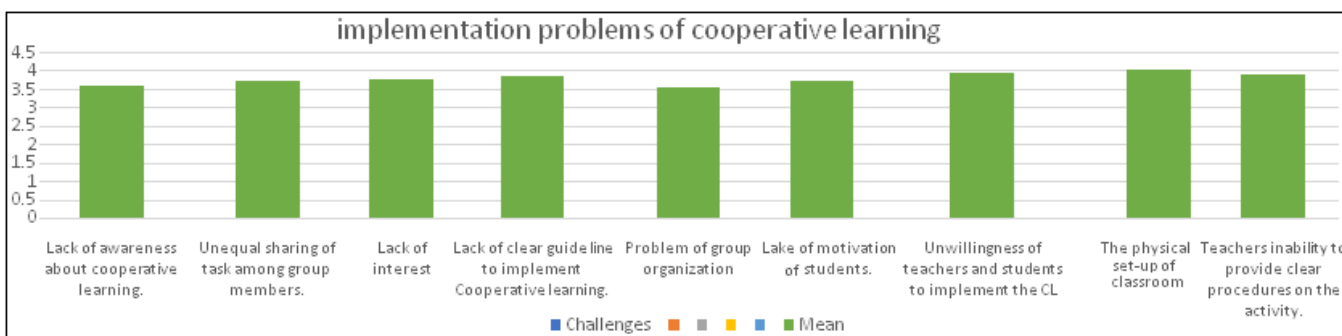


Figure 1: Implementation problems of cooperative learning

Table 2 and fig.1., show the major challenges secondary schools faced in implementing cooperative learning strategy. As the data shows, physical setup of classrooms, unwillingness of teachers and students to implement the scheme, teachers inability to provide clear guide to students, lack of clear guideline in the school for implementing collaborative learning, are among the major challenges identified by the respondents.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that the extent of implementation of cooperative learning in secondary schools of wolaita zone is low. That is, teachers and student employ cooperative learning for formality, by ignoring academic benefits of the scheme. The major problems identified by the study in this regard include: lack of awareness about cooperative learning; unequal sharing of task among group members; lack of interest in cooperative learning; lack of

motivation; inability of teachers to share responsibility for each group members; and teachers inability to provide clear procedures on how to perform the activity. So, it is possible to conclude that implementation of cooperative learning was not employed as expected and is not in the position to contribute its share in the attainment of students academic achievement in the secondary schools of wolaita zone.

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