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COOPERATIVE LEARNING: PERSPECTIVE AND PRACTICE OF ESL TEACHERS

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Abstract

The study's aim is to investigate the strategies the Cooperative Learning teacher's use in the English classroom. An additional aim is to investigate to what extent teachers believe Cooperative Learning contributes to interaction between students. The study focuses on the perspective of the teachers. Cooperative Learning is a pedagogical method which has roots in the multicultural perspective. It is described by Kagan and Stenlev (2006) as a method in which students work in groups and cooperate in order to achieve mutual goal.

Research has revealed that the Cooperative Learning method has increased students' awareness to be self-confident and self-esteem in socializing. This method inculcates in the students' good values such as helping the others, being sensitive, being responsible, accountable, patient, and understanding the slow learners. The teachers motivate them to think differently and independently; encouraging them that learning to understand is more important than rote learning. Cooperative Learning has immense benefits that allow students to grow academically, socially and psychologically. This study aims to find out the perception of teachers on the Cooperative Learning method and the feasibility of applying such a method in the classroom. The conclusion will inculcate a sense of empathy, concern and bonding which in turn would cultivate a spirit of acquisition of skills among learners.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, English as a Foreign Language, Interaction, Perspective, Graph descriptions.

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Introduction

Pupils learn most, when they are in a mood of comfort. Their motivation to learn is influenced by school environment, especially teachers and classmates. In the early years of schooling, both teachers and peers play an important role in the learning process. Interaction with other pupils plays a vital part in learning and in shaping children's personalities as a whole. Hence, pupils need to be

given opportunities to interact within the schooling process.

Cooperative Learning is an educational approach that helps to organize classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences. The purpose of Cooperative Learning is to make each group member a strong individual. It would help provide opportunities for learners to develop successful learning and communication strategies.

There is considerable group-to- individual transfer. Furthermore, the teacher’s role changes from simply passing on information to facilitating students’ learning. Everyone succeeds individually when the group succeeds as a whole.

1. Description and Rationale of the Tools Used

The Questionnaire comprised of 45 questions divided into three parts:

- The first part was to measure the teacher’s understanding of the primary principles of the Cooperative Learning method and comprised of simple statements that targeted the Cooperative Method’s objectives,
- The second part was aimed at understanding the mindset of the teachers to the method. Certain aspects of the method were used to assess the perspective of the teachers, and
- The third part was directed at the practice of the Cooperative Method and the applicability of it was explained to the teachers.

The questionnaire was structured to access the teachers’ level of knowledge of such a method. It was also used to assess if the teachers

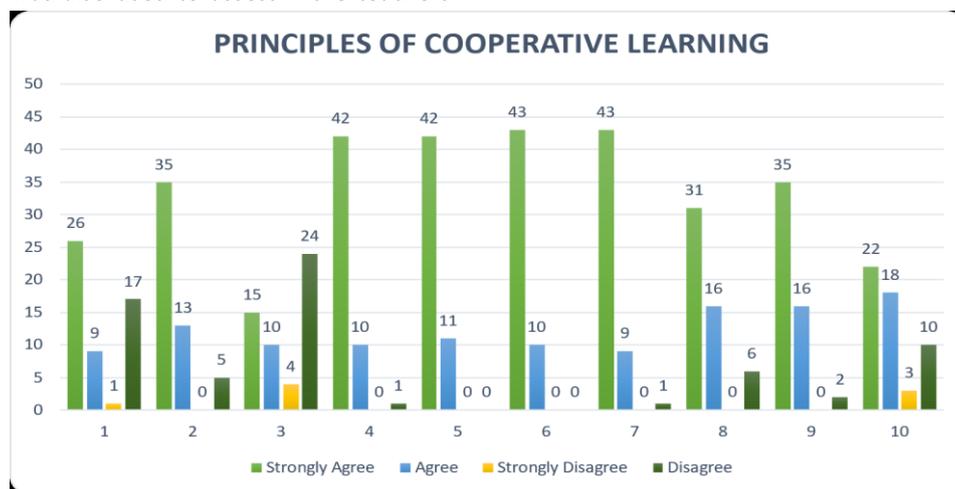
had unknowingly used any of the features of the cooperative method in their own classes.

2. Data Analysis

The uniqueness of the present study teaches several social and emotional skills. It also allows students to learn from each other. Therefore, Cooperative Learning helps to Raise the achievement level of students and build positive relationships among students, which are important for creating a learning community that values diversity.

2.1. Principles of Cooperative Learning

10 questions were formed for Principles of Cooperative Learning with the following choices: Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree. There were 53 teachers from different schools who were asked to evaluate, and who responded to the questions. When we see their evaluation on the Principles of Cooperative Learning, it is obvious that the teachers who Strongly Agree is higher than the ones who Disagree. It means Cooperative Learning is beneficial to all the students, and more specifically to the weaker students. Hence this method can be implemented in the classes.



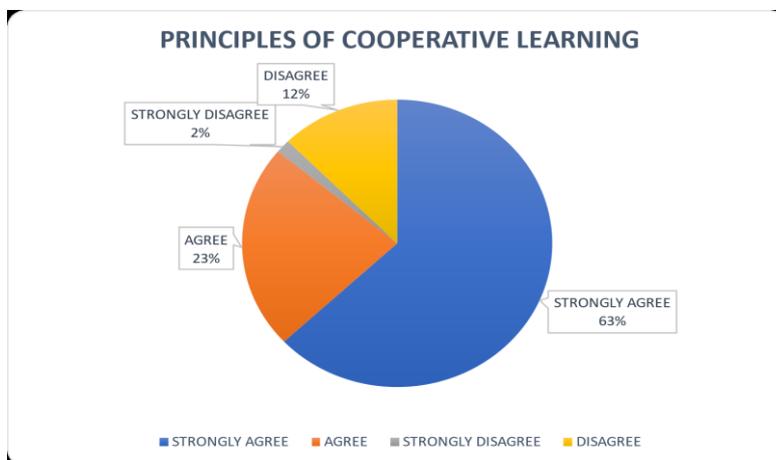
The graph describes the Principles of Cooperative Learning metric-wise. It shows that the students are given the topic they excel in by being in different small groups where they get due attention and care. This also helps them to compete with the rest confidently. It would motivate them to face, take initiative and take risk for any adventurous

step. They become confident to face the public and unexpected happenings at the personal and social level.

The same age group helps individuals to clearly understand the matter. They have a sense of accountability not only related to studies but also in every other activity that concerns them. They take

personal responsibility for themselves and others by helping out in learning. This Cooperative Learning helps them out to work in a team by accepting

others' ideas and formulating ideas for the welfare of others.



The graph presented above deals with the overall average of the key indicator, Principles of Cooperative Learning. It is evident from the graph that 63% of the teachers Strongly Agree that Cooperative Learning is relevant and useful to language acquisition. Also, the students highly benefit from classes that promote Cooperative Learning, adding the data of those who Agree, that takes the average to 83%. It is indicative of the positive opinion of teachers about Cooperative Learning.

Looking at the negative end of the continuum, the first and the tenth metrics received the maximum percentage of disagreement. Disagree and Strongly Disagree scored 18% and 13 % respectively.

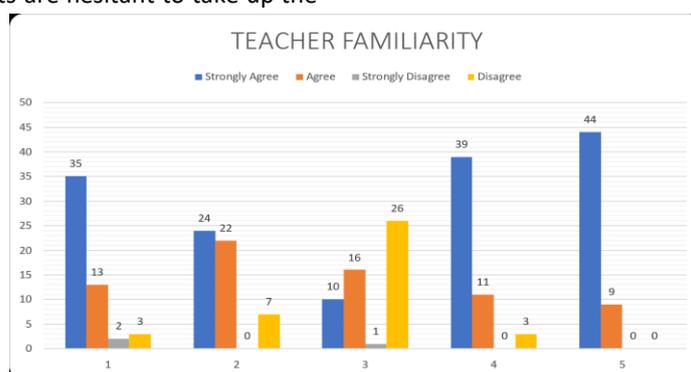
Some teachers Disagree that competition is not the only avenue which prepares the students to face the world. Some of the teachers also explained that not all the students are hesitant to take up the

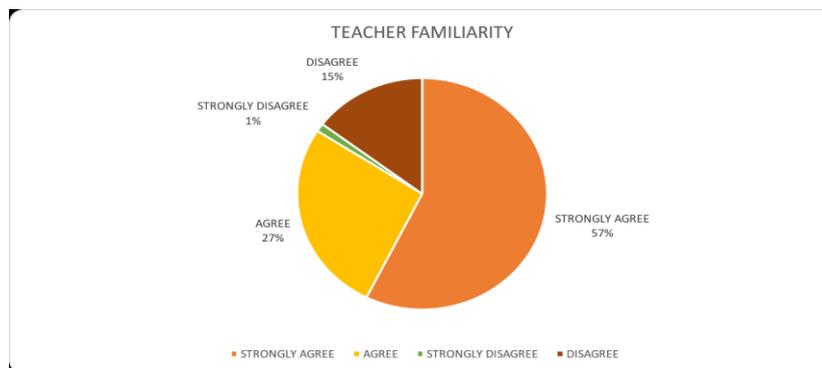
responsibility of working independently. Those who are with self-confidence are brought up with confidence to face complex situations independently work independently.

“No one can live on an island” is a well-known dictum. As social beings, the students interact with one another. It helps them to sharpen their social and emotional skills. Their interpersonal skill too is developed. The students learn to be independent. So, the teachers need to repose trust in the skills and talents of the students. Then we can see the outcome which will be of help to them as well as to the society.

2.2. Teacher Familiarity

Related to ‘Teacher Familiarity’ the same group of 53 teachers were chosen for evaluations. For this, 5 questions were administered with the choice of same Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree.





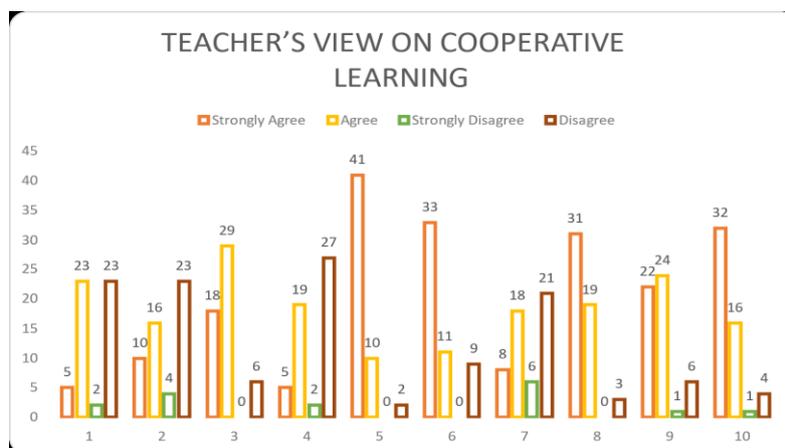
It is clear from the above table that 57 % teachers Strongly Agree and 27 % Agree. The teachers who find this way of learning useful can implement it for the betterment of the students. Some of the teachers Agree that the training they received in Cooperative Learning was inadequate. The training has not been practical enough for implementation successfully. Some others Disagree. They say that the training was practical enough to implement successfully.

The teachers show in their response that the training they got was helpful for them to handle the students. The teachers work with the students on students' communication and soft skills which will help the students. The teachers need to be creative and update themselves regularly. Thereby, they know what is happening around them. The teachers have to monitor if students interact positively during Cooperative Learning.

The teachers need to be facilitators to the students. They are not just deliverers. They should not be mechanical deliverers of information. Teachers have to go around, inspect and correct where and when necessary to help out every group. So, the teachers need to be thorough with the subject. The teacher avails him or herself to the students whenever they need assistance.

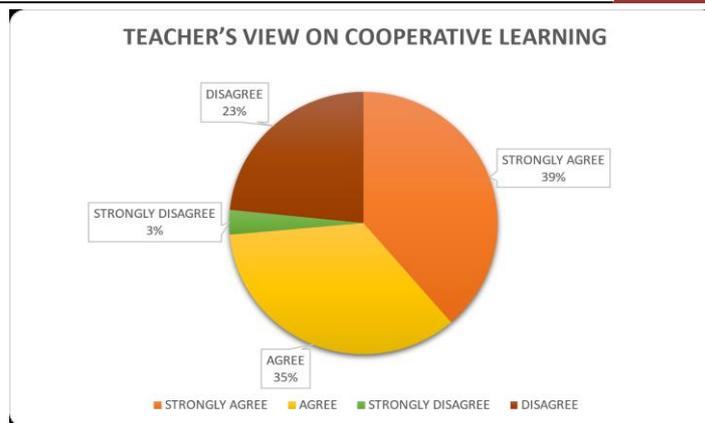
2.3. Teacher's View on Cooperative Learning

For the teacher's view on Cooperative Learning, we asked the same 53 teachers to evaluate this. The questions for this topic were 10 and with the same choice namely, Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree. The response from the teachers was that 39% of the teachers Strongly Agree and, 35% of the teachers Agree.



Many teachers Disagree that Cooperative Learning will create many disciplinary problems among the students. In other words, they seem to

say that the students will learn values for life, and not simply acquire information.



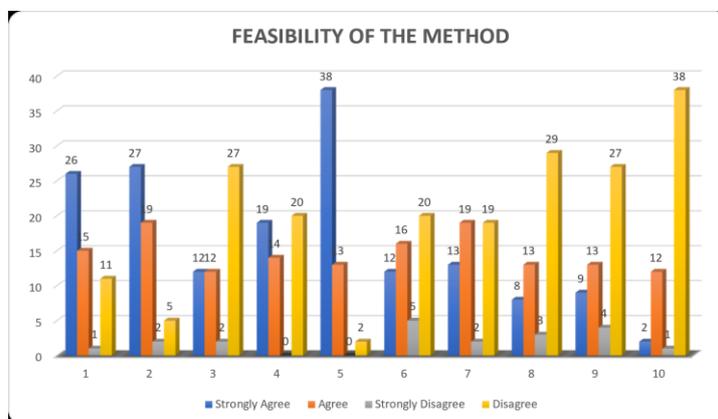
The teachers believe that the students are in their hands. It is their duty to shape the students in all aspects. So, the teachers firmly believe that they can implement with their teaching experience Cooperative Learning successfully.

Cooperative Learning [CL] is a well-documented pedagogical practice. It promotes academic achievement and socialization. But many teachers find it difficult to implement it in classes. The teachers who have implemented Cooperative Learning have written a report on their experience of their classes. Many of them had a good, enriching and positive experience. May be some of them did not. Some of the issues that were found were that the students find it difficult to socialize if they do not belong to their categories or their likeness. Hence, they do not take their group activities seriously and responsibly. The time spent on learning is not managed effectively. The teacher also needs time to prepare early enough so that the outcome is positive.

The graph shows us that the teachers find that this Cooperative Learning gives good results among the students. The students start thinking critically and understand the material clearly. In addition to this, as the students are interested in their studies there is less disruptive behaviour. Learning is a continuous progress. Once motivated the students become interested and become responsible in their studies. In this way, it is a good motivating factor for slow learners. The teachers have to encourage them and appreciate them when they show signs of thirst for knowledge. When they get appreciation, support and encouragement from the teachers, it goads them to take the risk.

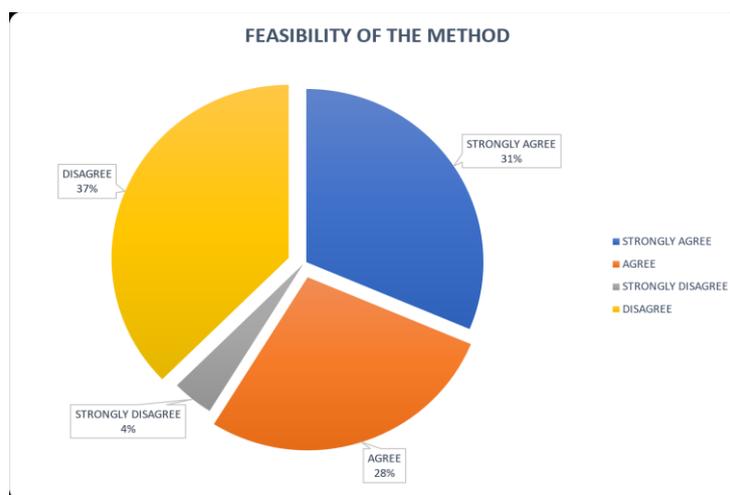
2.4. Feasibility of the Method

The fourth topic was the Feasibility of the Method. For these, the same 53 teachers were asked to go through the process and come out with comments on what they feel about it. There were 10 questions with the choice of Strongly Agree and Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree. 31% of teachers Strongly Agree and 28% of teachers Agree.



All the teachers believe that the students are just empty pots and the teachers pour into it whatever they want. They are full of abilities and skills. It is teachers who help them to draw out latent skills from them. Teachers believe that it is possible to evaluate the students fairly when using Cooperative Learning. This is because, a teacher knows a student very well as the student spends many hours in the school and the teacher is with him or her. Hence the teacher can evaluate fairly.

A teacher who is inspiring and duty conscious can handle any class, irrespective of its strength, with care and effectively. The teachers responded that their students are welcoming or open to the creative way of teaching like Cooperative Learning. They also find that the physical set-up of the classroom scenario is not an obstacle to using Cooperative Learning.



The feasibility of the method is a practical assessment for a proposed plan, project management tool, or new execution method. As there is no individual performance, it is difficult to evaluate a project individually. The gifted child and the slow learner will be on the same level in the evaluation. The slow learner will learn something, whereas the gifted child may not do so.

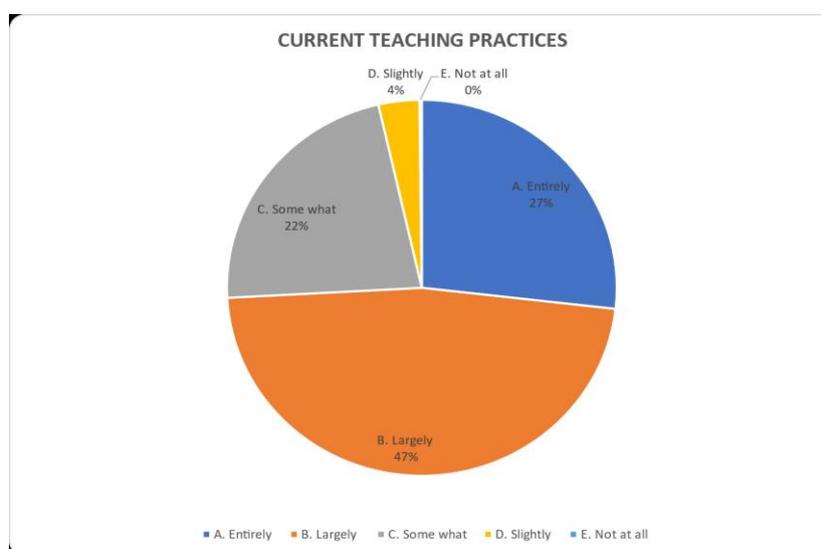
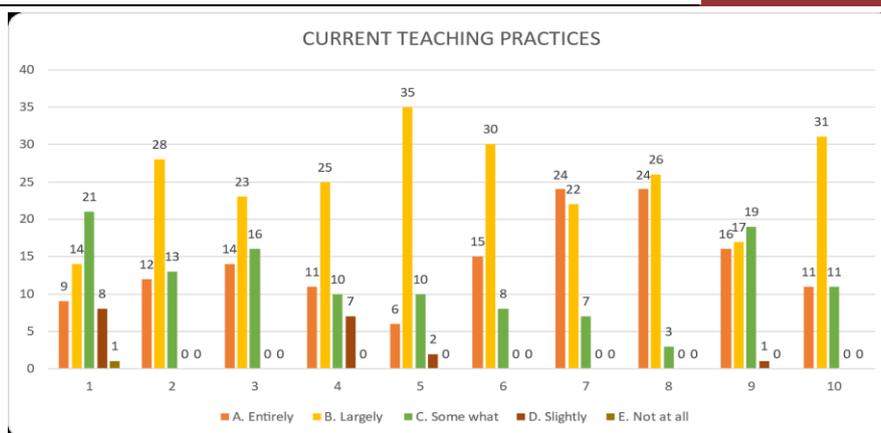
This helps them in their learning experience by encouraging them to teach other students. In addition, they collaborate with other students. They take the trouble to revise and consolidate some aspects to their best. They also get better insight into the subject by doing it themselves. The students are given opportunities to teach fellow students what they have learned from the process.

The slow learners, consciously or unconsciously, profit a lot from Cooperative Learning when their friends, who understand them and their abilities teach. They can communicate at ease with their peers more than they do so with a teacher. The students are overjoyed when they realize that they are capable of teaching other students.

3.1. Current Teaching Practices

The topic Current Teaching Practices was given to the same 53 teachers with the 10 questions. The choice of answering was Entirely, Largely, Somewhat, Slightly and Not at All. The response from these 53 teachers was 27% of the teachers were for Entirely and 47% of the teachers said Largely.

Learning by teaching is a teaching-learning approach, where students take the role of a teacher.



Cooperative Learning is an educational approach where the students learn by teaching one another. Though the teachers are present during this Cooperative Learning the students have the option of choosing their lessons. When the teachers finds that a specific group is not up to the mark, the teacher has to take the group aside and explain to them more in simple terms.

A teacher who establishes a good rapport with the students is successful in his or her teaching career. The teacher needs to know the strengths and weaknesses of the student. In short, the teacher must be sure of the pulse of every student. He or she needs to be alert and active in every single activity. He/she needs to be clear in her communication. The students need to be encouraged and appreciated. Otherwise, they will be bored and will not be interested. This in turn will result in poor performance.

The teachers need to keep in mind that the span of students’ concentration is short. Therefore, the teachers need to be creative, dynamic and interesting. They must be aware that not all students have equal grasping power. Each one is different and unique, and some are slow and some are quick in picking up. So, the teachers should not ignore the slow learners and concentrate on the clever ones. The teachers must be patient by spending extra time in teaching the slow learners. She has to pay due attention to all the students equally.

When the students do well, the teachers have to appreciate them by a few words of appreciation. This will motivate the students to do better. When a student’s work is recognized in public, he or she will excel in studies. Try to applaud them even for the small thing that they do. The best way to gain the students’ trust and confidence is to love them sincerely. Genuine interest in their growth and welfare is a must. Once they realize this, they will do

their best learning to the acquisition of required skills.

4. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Cooperative Learning is otherwise called small group learning. This is because, the small groups of students work together on a common task. They learn in a compact group using the different levels of ability and by carrying out different activities to understand a subject. Every student in the group is responsible not only for his studies but also for motivating every member of their group to learn. In this way, they achieve great things as a group. Learning depends heavily on the involvement of the students. They do not simply learn from their classmates or companions. They grow with a positive attitude, learn the values of cooperation, tolerance, hard work, helping, sharing, etc. They learn to express or convey ideas, but more than that, they learn to be confident.

4.1. Findings of the Study

- **Achieving Excellence:** When we work in a group with others, we are in a position to assess strengths and weaknesses.
- **Building Team Work:** Every student has something unique to contribute. We can identify the same and make use of this to accomplish the objectives and goals.
- **Effective Communication:** The more we work with one another the better the communication skills become. This helps us to open up, share ideas and receive others' opinions which will be of immense benefit.
- **Time Management:** Cooperative Learning is given a timeframe with a task assigned. By this, the students learn to be positive and interdependent. The students learn to manage their time and avoid undue delay in their given task.
- **Higher Self-esteem:** The students acquire good self-esteem, in accepting their abilities and skills. They end with self-confidence that they can do.
- **Better Attitudes toward Teachers:** When the students start teaching others in Cooperative Learning, they have a better understanding of their teachers.

- **Better Attitude toward School:** The students come to know the real nature of the school and all difficulties that the school go through on a day- to-day basis and in the long run. Through their teaching, a better understanding of the school is created.
- **Retention Increase:** The students remember better when they learn by doing. They understand, remember and retain information better.

4.2. Suggestions

- Be clear about the goal by defining the objectives to the students.
- Limit the size of the group, so that all members can participate.
- Give enough time to interact with every member of the group.
- Create an atmosphere to build mutual trust and open communication.
- Establish group interactions by working together.
- Give every day's task to work and solve by critical thinking.
- Have mixed aptitude groups so that they develop confidence and learn more from one another.
- The teacher has to be just a facilitator by allowing the students to grow in responsibility.
- Encourage the students to creative thinking.
- Shuffle the group from time to time so that they learn from members of the other groups too.
- Promote among the students the tendency to respect and appreciate one another's viewpoints.
- Encourage independent thinking among the students.
- Encourage them to formulate new ideas and acquire new information.
- Teach the students the value of multiplicity in thought.
- Allow the students to grow in responsibility.
- Have a diversity of groups that will include a variety of talents, learning styles, ideas, experiences, etc.

4.3 Conclusion

In Cooperative Learning, the students are motivated to help one another. They can teach the students what the teacher teaches. When the students share knowledge with others, their learning is strengthened. When they have to share their thoughts with others, their understanding is enhanced. They can learn to help others by paying due attention and care towards others. They can prepare for the exam in a better way or master the subject more easily when having a part in regular and constructive groups. Learners are given a chance to acquire creativity, independence, self-confidence, etc. They can work in teams, communicate, develop creative thinking, find information, explore and present topics in a more effective manner.

“Teaching is a very valuable and effective way of learning.”

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