

The Effect of Cooperative Teaching Method on Development of Social Skills in Primary School Students in Zanjan City

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Received 5 June 2014

Revised 23 August 2014

Accepted 15 September 2014

Abstract: *The purpose of the present research was to study the effect of cooperative methodology on the social skill development of the primary students. The methodology was quasi-experimental, with pre-test, post-test, and control group. The population of the research was all 486 'Laleh' primary school male students in the year of 2009-2010, among whom, 61 four-grade participants were finally chosen. They were randomly assigned into two groups (30 students in the experimental and 31 in the control groups). The data were collected via researcher-made questionnaire. Having been collected, the data were analyzed via a T-Test so that the means of the two groups in the pre-test and post-test could be compared. The results illustrated that the cooperative methodology had an effect on students' social skill development including respecting others, respecting rules and regulations, and thinking critically.*

Keywords: *Cooperative Methodology, social skills.*

Introduction

Social skills are one of the main elements in socializing people in all cultures and societies. These skills were under considerations by experts to change behavior some decades ago, however, these trainings were not in correspondence with the World Health Organization programs. In the mid-1970s, the social skills training reached its peak as a technique in behavioral change. In 1991, Mangrukar introduced social skills training as the main stage for coping with the modern world and conforming to people's needs in today's chaotic world. On the other hand, for many years, the World Health Organization and UNICEF have posed social skills approach as the subcategory of life skills (Mangrukar et al., 2001, as cited in Bairami and Moradi, 2006). In recent years the main reason to notice the desired training is due to the negative consequences of the absence of individuals with appropriate social skills. This in turn leads to the lack of appropriate social and behavioral health in adulthood. Research shows that (Arjil,1978) many adults who suffer from psychological problems particularly, anxiety, reactive depressions, personality disorders also seem to be incompetent socially, and childhood disorders in terms of social relations are transferred to adulthood (ibid).

Socialization is a process in which norms, skills, motives, attitudes and behaviors of individuals are formed and in this way personal development and social change become possible. One of the fundamental components in socialization process is obtaining social skills, Elliott and Gresham (1999) state that social skills are a set of reasonable, learned behaviors that enable an individual to have effective relationships with others and refrain unreasonable social reactions (as cited in Abedi, 2005). Constituent elements of social skills are innumerable and the nature of their definition is changed in comparison to the situation in different cultures and societies. Elliott and Gresham (1999) believe that constituent elements of social behaviors are: cooperation, collaboration with others, assistance, initiating a relationship, asking for help, compliment of others and appreciation (ibid).

Some researchers mention other characteristics of constituent elements of social skills such as; change of attitude, stress management, assertiveness, self-efficacy (Ciarrochi et al.,2003, as cited in Beirami and Moradi, 2006), Filling leisure time, accountability, humanism (Levinson and Gotlib,1995,quoted by Abedi and Mirzaii 2006), Duty, observing the regulations and law, tolerance, critical thinking (as cited in Soltani, 2006). According to research findings social skills training lead to individuals' empowerment to create an effective relationship and avoid irrational social reactions.

According to the current issues, educational experts and psychologists put emphasis on training and achieving social skills and considering the role of current educational systems on comprehensive development of students, some parts of schools' formal curriculum should be allocated to the above mentioned skills (Zafarpour, 2005). Using active teaching methods are the most important tools and processes that enable schools to carry out the above mentioned activities. Despite the positive impact of these approaches on students' development, most of the teachers' teaching methods in majority of classrooms are based on traditional and inactive methods. Such methods allow students to learn in less challenging situations, for example the result of the third international study on mathematics and science in more than 40 countries shows that comparing to other countries participating in this study, the status of teaching methods, curriculum, students' performance and achievement in our country has inappropriate situation at elementary and secondary levels in different subjects. Learning methods are in a way that actually lead students to rote learning (Ahmadi 2001). Also according to research findings, the number of social skills in our students is significantly low and this reveals the necessity to revise the teaching methodologies by the educational administrators. One of the effective methods can be cooperative learning in the above context (as cited in Garmaroodi and Vahdani Nia, 2006).

Cooperative learning is in fact a kind of learning method in which the learners gather together in small groups of 4-6 and learn subjects cooperatively. The characteristics of this method are as follows:

1. Organizing small heterogeneous groups (with respect to Learning abilities, academic achievements, race...) 4-6 learners.
2. Having clear and achievable goals which all the members of the group should be aware of and make an effort to reach them.
3. Rewarding the success of the group work
4. Dependency of group members to one another
5. Teacher as a guide and source of information
6. Personal responsibility
7. Evaluation of the individuals
8. Change in working hours (Seif, 2010).

The Significance of the Issue

Primary school is one of the most basic and fundamental educational periods since a large part of one's personality will be built on a foundation of this period. Therefore, designing the primary school programs should be based on a specific and comprehensive compromise. One of the most important objectives in this period is to develop social skills through which educational systems should use active teaching methods leading to students' interaction. Johnson and Johnson (1997) point to three approaches regarding students' interaction in classroom. The first approach is the one in which the students can compete with each other in order to see which one is the best. In the second approach, students can work individually in order to reach the desired goal. And in the third approach students can work cooperatively (as cited in Soltani, 2004).

By a little pondering over the desired approach we can understand that Gigs (2004) in the first and the second approach the spirit of cooperation, participation and emotional relationship among students will decrease and anyone who is seeking success can achieve it through getting higher scores. In such approaches, learning is regarded as a competition instead of a cooperation and all the students even the successful ones are not safe from negative consequences of competitive learning such as, jealousy, hatred, lack of effective and humanitarian relationship, lack of self-esteem, anxiety, depression, lack of creativity, tiredness and getting bored with learning and lack of cooperation. In the third approach or cooperative approach, learning takes place through cooperation. In this method learners take responsibility for their classmates' or the whole group learning and each member's success is considered other's success (ibid).

This method causes permanent and true learning, more creation, more mental ability, analyzing and interpreting different issues, finding out paradox in a situation, finding appropriate solutions in scientific and social problems, better cooperation and effective relationship between students. Regarding all the mentioned points, nowadays the role of training and educational organizations is not just limited to transferring science and knowledge but these institutions should prepare opportunities in order to improve the learners' progress especially social progress through their curriculum development. As Rosso (2004) states that education organizations are life-saving ships and also are tools for training humanity (Naghizadeh, 2004). Other scholars believe that they are stimulations to make life meaningful (UNESCO, 2002; as cited in Sabaian). Therefore, students will be able to find solutions to their problems in the real life. Cooperative learning can play a vital role in students' social progress and it is one

of the most remarkable theoretical, researchable, and applicable areas in education. True learning happens when all the students work together to achieve a common goal. There is more than 900 research which has proved the effectiveness of cooperative learning comparing to competitive learning and individual attempts to learn. The nature of this research is its generalizability because different researchers with different working tendencies from different countries with participants from various socio-economic backgrounds, age, and sex have done this research in various and extended ways and proved the results throughout many decades.

Research Hypotheses

1. Cooperative learning is an effective approach to improve learners' respect for others.
2. Cooperative learning is an effective approach to improve learners' respect for the rules.
3. Cooperative learning is an effective approach to improve learners' group working skills.
4. Cooperative learning is an effective approach to improve learners' tolerance.
5. Cooperative learning is an effective approach to improve learners' critical thinking.

Research Methodology

This practical and quasi-experimental research was conducted through pre-test and post-test with a control group. The population of the research was 486 students of 'Laleh' Primary School in Zanjan, Iran in the year 2009-2010. Having homogenized the students, finally 61 male students studying in their fourth grade in two classes were chosen randomly.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the questionnaire which was created by the researcher. In this research parallel tests were used to calculate reliability which proved the reliability of the Gersham and Eliot tests. The tests were conducted at the same time and their correlation was calculated, $\alpha = 0.7$. Regarding the results, it was concluded that the questionnaire had a high reliability. Content validity was used to determine the measurement validity; moreover, the viewpoints of the experts in sociology and educational sciences were asked to prove the validity of the measurement.

Data Analysis

To analyze the research results descriptive and inferential statistics were used. In descriptive statistics mean (M), standard deviation (SD), degree of freedom (Df) were calculated in Social Skills Tests. In inferential statistics, t-test was used to determine the p-value or difference between the two sets of scores.

The results of a descriptive and inferential

Table (1): Descriptive results

| SE | SD | MD | population | Statistical index | | Indicators of social skills |
|------|------|------|------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | | group | Test | |
| 0.19 | 66 | 0.89 | 31 | ctrl | Pre & post test | Tolerance skills |
| 0.07 | 42 | 0.91 | 30 | Expr | | |
| 0.19 | 0,85 | 0.73 | 31 | ctrl | Pre & post test | Rules respectability skills |
| 0.12 | 0,38 | 2.19 | 30 | Expr | | |
| 0.12 | 70 | 1.11 | 31 | ctrl | Pre & post test | Group activities skills |
| 0.03 | 39 | 3.57 | 30 | Expr | | |
| 0.16 | 69 | 0.50 | 31 | ctrl | Pre & post test | Critical thinking skills |
| 0.05 | 41 | 0.52 | 30 | Expr | | |

Table (2): Inferential results

| p | df | T | Group | test |
|-------|----|------|-------|----------|
| 0.400 | 44 | 0.96 | ctrl | Pre-test |

| | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|----------|--------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 0.411 | 43 | 0.81 | Expr | Post test | Tolerance |
| 0.061 | 42 | 0.66 | ctrl | | |
| 0.101 | 45 | 1.35 | Expr | | |
| p | df | T | Group | test | Rule Respectability |
| 0.081 | 44 | 1.56 | ctrl | Pre-test | |
| 0.045 | 46 | 1.08 | Expr | | |
| 0.071 | 45 | 1.31 | ctrl | Post test | Group activities |
| 0.004 | 80 | 5.12 | Expr | | |
| p | df | T | Group | test | |
| 0.421 | 51 | 2.01 | ctrl | Pre-test | Critical thinking |
| 0.315 | 53 | 3.00 | Expr | | |
| 0.129 | 55 | 2.29 | ctrl | Post test | |
| 0.003 | 87 | 5.58 | Expr | | Critical thinking |
| p | df | T | Group | test | |
| 0.210 | 40 | 1.7 | ctrl | Pre-test | |
| 0.115 | 43 | 1.9 | Expr | | Critical thinking |
| 0.132 | 51 | 1.7 | ctrl | Post test | |
| 0.312 | 51 | 2.5 | Expr | | |

Discussion and Conclusions

One of human Socialization element in all cultures and communities is achieving and strengthening social skills. Recently, psychologists start to research on nature of behavioral skills seriously. Krasman et al. commonly design the similarity of interaction between man- machine and Man-Man. So, the first base line of study started in this field. In 1967, in discussing technical skills, Fitz and Posner laid emphasis on the importance of social skills, especially those which man should learn in order to communicate with others and obtained complex social patterns from her/his group. In that year, Arjil and Kandon published papers on social skills in which they directly related motor skills to social skills. So long after the publications, there came a large amount of literature of social skills into existence. In an overview, social skills are considered as skills employed by people while they are interacting. And a person who has social skills can choose appropriate behavior in certain time and situation (Harji e al, translated by Beigi and Firuz Bakht, 2003). In other words, one can correctly identify symptoms expressing other's status and mood. This ability help people choose right behavior in according to current status and benefit from behavioral and social health. In accordance with the current role of education systems in all-round development of individuals including social development, authorities should dedicate some part of formal programs in schools to this education (Estefan et al., 1980, as cited in Zafarpur, 2005).

It should be noted that social skill training came into vogue in mid 1970s as a behavior change techniques and in 1991, Rakez introduced social skill training as a main step for coping with the modern world and in accordance with people's needs in today's chaotic environment (Mankrokar et al 2001, as cited in Birami and Moradi, 2006). The reason why the main focus of education has been on social skill training as the major factor in socialization process is that individuals lack proper social skills. Minberg and Kebr, in social skill training book, assert that social skill training is followed because improper social behavior results from inadequate repertoire of behavior, which in turn, result from inadequate interactive opportunities (Keramati, 2007).

Appropriate training in relation to social skills may result in the improvement of social performances and more positive social outcomes. Following family, schools are the second institute play an important role in social skill training. As school environment should be one sample of real life of learners, it is highly emphasized that opportunities should be provided for the learners in order to develop the skills and practice them. We should note that current role of Education exceeds the typical role of transferring knowledge to the learners. In addition to strengthening the learners' cognitive abilities, education system should also pay specific attention to the enhancement and development of emotional and social capabilities in its educational programs. Because character development of the learners, being exemplary citizens, preventing violence, friends finding, respecting others , empathy, managing stress and conflict, cooperating , complying with regulations, being responsible, thinking critically, and, in General, having social skills for living in the current world are of great necessity.

Thus, teachers should undertake a main role in this field. This enterprise can be done by applying active and effective learning methods as important executive tools employed by teachers to provide positive and desirable learning atmosphere. Nowadays, learning seems an exploratory event that is done through active participation of teachers and students. In new learning techniques, transferring of knowledge is less efficient than creating knowledge and achieving skills. This process of creating knowledge and achieving skills provides better solutions,

choosing better approaches, detailed analysis of the subject matters, and finally, discovery of the truth for the learners. Hence, learners should see themselves in the center of learning process and realize their roles in discovering concepts, science, and skills. In such a way, learners find themselves involved in the created science and achieved skills and support them. In this process, learning is shaped in all aspects of mental, physical, cognitive, and social skills. The roles of teachers are facilitator of learning and instruction. Most of activities are done in groups, and individual's activity makes sense in groups, while both students and teachers are responsible for learning. Skills such as thinking, problem solving, and creativity are most important. Students' intrinsic motivation sounds more because they plan activities themselves. That is, active participation of learners are prerequisite to high levels of learning.

By virtue of the mentioned points, an important element in learning is social behavior. Providing a natural atmosphere in which learners are actively involved in acquiring, practicing, and re-checking skills and activate them when necessary is of utmost significance. This could be done through utilizing active teaching methods such as cooperative teaching approach.

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