

The Power of Collaboration: Cooperative Learning Strategies for Enhancing Primary Level Students' Social Skills

Qaiser Memood¹ Khatiba Akhter² Sara Abid³ Sobia Yaseen⁴ Muhammad Naeqeb Ul Khalil Shaheen⁵

ABSTRACT: This research was conducted with the intention of finding out the role of cooperative learning strategies, which foster students' collaboration, communication, and empathy, on the development of social skills in children at the primary level. The study aimed to assess students' social skills as perceived by teachers, identify cooperative learning strategies used at the primary level, and examine the relationship between these strategies and students' social skills in Kotli, AJ&K. The population of the study consisted of 79 teachers from all the government primary schools of Kotli, AJ&K. A universal sampling strategy was administered in this research. The researchers designed a five-scale questionnaire to measure the set objectives. The researchers personally gathered data from every primary school in Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir. For the purpose of data analysis, SPSS software was utilised. Students develop interpersonal skills by working in small groups; researchers analyzed data using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, and correlation. The findings revealed that most respondents concurred that teachers' effective cooperative learning strategies included group discussion, peer tutoring, and the Jigsaw technique. Additionally, teachers perceived that they were good at performing social skills in the classroom. However, respondents disagreed that teachers could use the "think pair share" activity in the classroom. Furthermore, there was a moderate and positive relationship between teachers' cooperative learning strategies and students' social skills. It is recommended that teachers focus on tone, body language, and active listening, and use empathy-building exercises to foster deeper understanding and effective connections with students.

KEYWORDS: Depression, Levels of Depression, Academic Performance

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan.

Email: chqasir175@gmail.com

² Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan.

Email: khatiba.akhter@yahoo.com

³ Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan. Email: sara.abid306@gmail.com

⁴ Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan.

Email: sobiayaseen2@gmail.com

⁵ Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan.

Email: naqeeb.shaheen@gmail.com

Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Naeqeb Ul Khalil Shaheen

✉ naqeeb.shaheen@gmail.com

Introduction

Cooperative learning strategy is a student-centred instructional approach that involves small groups of students working together to achieve shared academic goals. This strategy has gained significant attention in recent years for its dual benefits: enhancing academic performance and cultivating essential social skills, particularly in primary school students. Developing social skills, such as communication, teamwork, empathy, and conflict resolution, is crucial for students' overall growth and development. The primary school years are

a critical period for social identity formation and learning social interactions, making it an ideal time to implement cooperative learning strategies (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014).

Cooperative learning strategies encourage communication and discussion among students, involving them in sharing ideas, listening actively, and expressing themselves clearly. These interactions help develop oral communication and enhance students' ability to articulate thoughts in a structured manner (Elliott, Hwang, & Wang, 2019). Working in groups teaches students the importance of collaboration. In a cooperative learning strategy environment, students must rely on each other to achieve success, which fosters a sense of responsibility and interdependence (Stipp, 2019).

Engaging with peers in group activities allows students to better understand diverse perspectives and build empathy. Cooperative learning strategies tasks often include opportunities for students to discuss their opinions, negotiate, and find compromises, promoting emotional intelligence (Jacobs, 2023). Inevitably, conflicts arise in group settings, providing students with real-life scenarios to practice conflict resolution. Teachers can guide students on resolving disputes constructively, encouraging them to practice patience, compromise, and respectful disagreement (Burden, 2020).

A key element of cooperative learning strategies is positive interdependence, where students recognise that their success is linked to the group's success. This encourages a sense of shared responsibility while also ensuring individual accountability, which helps develop a balance between cooperation and self-reliance (Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

In today's rapidly changing world, education aims not only to equip students with academic knowledge but also to prepare them for effective social interaction and collaboration. The development of social skills has emerged as a crucial aspect of early education, particularly at the primary level, where children begin to form the foundation for their interpersonal behaviours. One effective pedagogical approach for fostering these skills is cooperative learning strategies (Danişman et al., 2023). Cooperative learning strategy is grounded in several educational and psychological theories, including Vygotsky's Social Constructivism and Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

The development of social skills in primary school students is increasingly recognised as a critical component of holistic education. Social skills, including communication, teamwork, empathy, and conflict resolution, are foundational for students' overall development and future success in both personal and professional realms (Jones et al., 2017). These skills are integral to students' ability to interact effectively with peers, teachers, and the broader community, contributing to their emotional well-being and academic achievement. In the context of primary education, the early years of schooling are particularly formative, as children begin to engage more fully with peers and develop the social competencies that will carry them through adolescence and into adulthood (Laili et al., 2023).

The importance of social skills extends beyond mere interaction; they are crucial for creating a classroom environment conducive to learning, where students feel safe, supported, and motivated to engage. This is where the role of social-emotional learning becomes paramount (Cavanagh et al. 2012). One pedagogical approach that has garnered significant attention in recent years is cooperative learning. Unlike traditional competitive or individualistic classroom structures, cooperative learning strategies emphasise collaboration among students, with the understanding that group success depends on the contribution of each member (Jones et al., 2017).

The importance of social skills in primary school students cannot be overstated, as these skills play a crucial role in their overall development and future success. Social skills encompass a wide range of abilities, including communication, collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving, all of which are essential for effective interaction in various social settings. Research has shown that cooperative learning, a pedagogical approach that involves students working together in small groups to achieve shared goals, can be a powerful tool in promoting social skills among primary school students (Laili et al., 2023).

Cooperative learning strategy has been widely recognised as an effective instructional strategy that not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters the development of social skills. This approach encourages students to engage in meaningful interactions, share ideas, and support each other in the learning process. According to Gillies (2020), cooperative learning strategies provide a structured environment in which students can practice and refine their social skills, leading to improved communication and collaboration abilities.

One of the key benefits of cooperative learning strategies is its ability to promote positive interdependence among students. When students work together towards a common goal, they are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility for each other's learning and success. This interdependence fosters a supportive learning environment where students are motivated to help their peers and work collaboratively to overcome challenges (Slavin, 2010). As a result, cooperative learning strategies not only enhance academic outcomes but also strengthen social bonds among students. Cooperative learning strategies encourage students to develop empathy and understanding towards others. By working closely with their peers, students are exposed to diverse perspectives and learn to appreciate different viewpoints. This exposure to diversity helps students to develop empathy, which is a critical component of social skills (Strahan & Poteat, 2020). Empathy allows students to connect with others on a deeper level, leading to more meaningful and positive social interactions. In addition to empathy, cooperative learning strategies also promote the development of communication skills. Effective communication is essential for successful collaboration, and cooperative learning strategies provide ample opportunities for students to practice and refine their communication abilities.

The impact of cooperative learning on social skills development is particularly significant in the context of primary education, where students are still in the early stages of socialisation. According to Vygotsky's social development theory, society plays a fundamental role in cognitive development, and cooperative learning strategies provide an ideal platform for such interactions. Through cooperative learning strategies, primary school students can develop the social skills necessary for successful interpersonal relationships both in and outside the classroom.

In conclusion, cooperative learning strategies offer a multitude of benefits for promoting social skills among primary school students by fostering positive interdependence, empathy, communication, problem-solving, and self-esteem. Cooperative learning strategies help students to develop the social skills they need to thrive in both academic and social settings.

Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study.

1. To identify cooperative learning strategies used by teachers at the primary level.

2. To find out the social skills among students as perceived by their teachers at the primary level.
3. To examine the relationship between cooperative learning strategies and social skills at the primary level.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions of the study.

1. What are the cooperative learning strategies used by teachers at the primary level?
2. What are the social skills among students as perceived by their teachers at the primary level?
3. To what extent is there a relationship between cooperative learning strategies and social skills at the primary level?

Research Methodology

As the aims of the study were to examine the role of cooperative learning strategies in promoting social skills among students at the primary level. Therefore, the study was descriptive in nature, and a survey method was used to collect the data from the respondents. The population of the study consisted of 79 teachers from Government Primary Schools of City Kotli, Azad Kashmir, and the Universal sampling technique was used for the selection of the sample. The researchers developed a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale to gather data from the participants. The questionnaire underwent validation by two experts. After pilot testing, the instrument's reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, with the help of SPSS, a statistical software. This was to ensure everything was clear and made sense. The reliability coefficient obtained for the instrument was 0.84, which is deemed acceptable for further research. The researchers conducted personal visits to all government primary schools in the city of Kotli to gather data from the teachers. Data were analysed utilising the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 22, focusing on frequency, percentage, mean scores, standard deviation and Pearson's correlation.

Results

Objective 1: Cooperative Learning Strategies Used by Teachers

Table 1

I Frequently Use Group Discussions to Encourage Cooperative Learning

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	63	15	1	0	0	4.78
	79	%	80%	19%	1%	0%	0%	

Table 1 depicts that 99% (80% SA+ 19%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I frequently use group discussions to encourage cooperative learning". Furthermore, the mean score (M=4.78) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 2

Peer Tutoring is an Effective Strategy in My Classroom

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	34	35	8	1	1	4.26
	79	%	43%	44%	10%	1%	1%	

Table 2 shows that 87% (43% SA+ 44%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "Peer tutoring is an effective strategy in my classroom". Furthermore, the mean score (M=4.26) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 3

I Assign Group Projects to Enhance Teamwork

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	38	33	5	2	1	4.33
	79	%	48%	42%	6%	3%	3%	

Table 3 reveals that 90% (48% SA+ 42%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I assign group projects to enhance teamwork". Furthermore, the mean score (M=4.33) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 4

I Design Collaborative Activities to Promote Critical Thinking among My Students

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	29	38	5	6	1	4.1
	79	%	36.7%	48.1%	6%	7.6%	1%	

Table 4 indicates that 84.8% (36.7% SA+ 48.1%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I design collaborative activities to promote critical thinking among my students". Furthermore, the mean score (M=4.1) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 5

I use "Think-Pair-Share" to Promote Interactive Learning

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	11	9	12	28	19	1.56
	79	%	13.9%	11.4%	15.2%	35.4%	24%	

Table 5 indicates that 59.4% (24% SDA+ 35.4%DA) of respondents disagreed with the statement, "I use "Think-Pair-Share" to promote interactive learning". Furthermore, the mean score (M=1.56) also reflects the opinion of respondents not in favor of the statement.

Table 6

I Use Group Problem-Solving Activities to Enhance Teaching Effectiveness

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	29	23	16	6	5	3.18
	79	%	36.7%	29.1%	20.2%	7.6%	6.3%	

Table 6 shows that 65.8% (36.7% SA+ 29.1%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I use group problem-solving activities to enhance teaching effectiveness". Furthermore, the mean score (M=3.18) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 7

I Incorporate "Jigsaw" Activities where Students Rely on Each Other for Learning

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	30	34	6	5	4	3.11
	79	%	38%	43%	7.6%	6.3%	5.1%	

Table 7 shows that 81% (38% SA+ 43 %A) of respondents agreed with the statement "I incorporate "jigsaw" activities where students rely on each other for learning". Furthermore, the mean score (M=3.11) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 8

I Use Individual Accountability in Group Activities

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	27	43	5	2	2	3.74
	79	%	34%	54%	6%	3%	3%	

Table 8 shows that 88% (34% SA+ 54%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I use individual accountability in group activities". Furthermore, the mean score (M=3.74) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 9

I Provide Feedback on Both Group Performances

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	30	33	10	5	1	3.79
	79	%	38%	42%	12.6%	6%	1.4%	

Table 9 reveals that 80% (38% SA+ 42%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I provide feedback on both group performance". Furthermore, the mean score (M=3.79) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 10

I Use Rotating Leadership Roles in Group Tasks to Develop Responsibility

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	30	33	6	7	2	3.94
	79	%	38%	42%	8%	9%	3%	

Table 10 shows that 80% (38% SA+ 42 %A) of respondents agreed with the statement "I understand that I use rotating leadership roles in group tasks to develop". Furthermore, the mean score (M=3.94) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 11

I Implement Cooperative Learning Techniques to Encourage Mutual Support in the Classroom

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	30	32	8	5	4	4.02
	79	%	38%	41%	9%	8%	5%	

Table 11 shows that 79% (38% SA+ 41%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I implement cooperative learning techniques to encourage mutual support in the classroom". Furthermore, mean score (M=4.02) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 12

I Facilitate Student-Led Learning Through Cooperative Strategies

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	30	35	6	5	3	3.95
	79	%	38%	44.3%	7.6%	7%	4%	

Table 12 shows that 81.5% (38% SA+ 44.3%) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I facilitate student-led learning through cooperative strategies". Furthermore, mean score (M=3.95) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 13

I Manage to Think of Solutions When Faced with a Challenge

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	31	32	6	8	2	3.94
	79	%	39%	41%	7%	10%	3%	

Table 13 shows that 80% (39% SA+ 41%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I manage to think of solutions when faced with a challenge". Furthermore, mean score (M=3.94) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 14

I Open to Listening to Others' Ideas During Group Activities

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	28	37	5	7	2	4.10
	79	%	35%	47%	6%	9%	3%	

Table 14 reveals that 82% (35% SA+ 47%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, "I open to listening to others' ideas during group activities". Furthermore, mean score (M=4.10) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 15
I Try to Solve Problems with Words Rather than Actions

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	16	12	4	28	19	1.72
	79	%	20%	15%	5%	35%	24%	

Table 15 indicates that 59% (24% SDA+ 35%DA) of respondents disagreed with the statement, “I try to solve problems with words rather than actions”. Furthermore, mean score (M=1.72) also reflects the opinion of respondents partially in favor of the statement.

Objective 2: Social Skills among Students at Primary Level

Table 16
I Am Able to End Conversations Appropriately

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	31	35	6	5	2	4.08
	79	%	39%	44%	7%	6%	4%	

Table 16 shows that 83% (39% SA+ 44%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, “I am able to end conversations appropriately”. Furthermore, mean score (M=4.08) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 17
I Accept Making Mistakes Without Becoming Upset/Angry

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	30	39	6	4	0	4.17
	79	%	38%	49%	7.5%	5.5%	0%	

Table 17 shows that 87% (38% SA+ 49%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, “I accept making mistakes without becoming upset/ angry”. Furthermore, mean score (M=4.17) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 18
My Students Demonstrate Effective Social Communication with their Peers

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	10	9	8	28	24	1.83
	79	%	13%	12%	10%	35%	30%	

Table 18 shows that 65% (30% SDA+ 35%DA) of respondents disagreed with the statement, “My students demonstrate effective social communication with their peers”. Furthermore, mean score (M=1.83) also reflects the opinion of respondents not in favor of the statement.

Table 19

My Students use Different Communication Skill to Convey Message

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	28	36	7	5	2	4.03
	79	%	35%	46%	9%	6%	4%	

Table 19 reveals that 81% (35% SA+ 46%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, “My students use different communication skill to convey message”. Furthermore, mean score (M=4.03) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 20

My Students Demonstrate an Understanding of Empathy

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	29	35	6	6	3	4.06
	79	%	37%	44%	7.5%	7.5%	4%	

Table 20 reveals that 81% (37% SA+ 44%A) of respondents agreed with the statement “My students demonstrate an understanding of empathy”. Furthermore, mean score (M=4.06) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 21

My students provide support to their peers when they are upset

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	37	29	7	7	1	3.19
	79	%	45.5%	37.5%	8%	8%	1%	

Table 21 indicates that 83% (45.5% SA+ 37.5%A) of respondents agreed with the statement “My students provide support to their peers when they are upset”. Furthermore, mean score (M=3.19) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 22

My students cooperate well in group activities

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	28	42	4	4	1	4.13
	79	%	34%	53.5%	5%	5%	1.5%	

Table 22 shows that 87.5% (34% SA+ 53.5%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, “My students cooperate well in group activities”. Furthermore, mean score (M=4.13) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 23

My Students Regulate Social Skills When their Energy Level is High

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	30	42	2	2	3	4.45
	79	%	38%	53%	2.5%	2.5%	4%	

Table 23 indicates that 91% (38% SA+ 53%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, “My students regulate social skills when their energy level is high”. Furthermore, mean score (M=4.45) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 24

My Students Can Express ‘No’ in an Acceptable Manner

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	11	10	8	27	23	1.48
	79	%	14%	13%	10%	34%	29%	

Table 24 shows that 63% (29% SDA+ 34%DA) of respondents disagreed with the statement, “My students can express ‘no’ in an acceptable manner”. Furthermore, mean score (M=1.48) also reflects the opinion of respondents not in favor of the statement.

Table 25

My Students Listen Attentively When Others are Speaking

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	36	29	8	3	3	3.96
	79	%	45%	37%	10%	4%	4%	

Table 25 indicates that 82% (45% SA+ 37%A) of respondents agreed with the statement, “My students listen attentively when others are speaking”. Furthermore, mean score (M=3.96) also reflects the opinion of respondents in favor of the statement.

Table 26

My Students Resolve Conflicts among Themselves Peaceful

Sample Group			SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean
Teachers	N	F	20	10	2	30	17	1.82
	79	%	25%	12%	2.5%	38%	21.5%	

Table 26 indicates that 59% (38% DA+ 21.5%DA) of respondents disagreed with the statement “My students resolve conflicts among themselves peaceful”. Furthermore, mean score (M=1.82) also reflects the opinion of respondents partially in favor of the statement.

Table 27

Correlation between Cooperative Learning Strategies and Social Skills

Variables	Mean	SD	p	r
Cooperative Learning Strategies	3.66	1.2	0.02	.548
Social Skills	3.95	1.4		

Table 27 indicates the relationship between Cooperative Learning Strategies and Students' Social Skills. Table 27 further shows that there was a significant correlation found between Cooperative Learning Strategies (Mean= 3.33, SD=1.2) and Students' Social Skills (Mean=3.95, SD=1.4) as $p=0.02<0.05$. The value of person correlation $r=.548$ indicates a moderate and positive relationship between Cooperative Learning Strategies and Students' Social Skills.

Discussions and Conclusions

The research highlights that teachers frequently use cooperative learning strategies like group discussions, peer tutoring, and group projects to promote critical thinking and teamwork. However, the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy is underutilized, possibly due to class size, lack of training, or student reluctance. It is seen that teachers effectively use various cooperative learning strategies, including group problem-solving and "jigsaw" activities, to foster a supportive and collaborative classroom environment that promotes academic achievement and social skills development. It is also observed that responsibility and mutual support in the classroom by implementing strategies like rotating leadership roles, cooperative learning techniques, and student-led learning are being promoted. However, they tend to disagree that they solve problems verbally, and most teachers believe their students need improvement in social communication with peers. It is clear from the findings that students are proficient in essential social skills like effective communication, empathy, and cooperation in group settings, indicating a supportive and collaborative learning environment. However, there are mixed results regarding students' social skills regulation, including conflict resolution and expressing refusal in an acceptable manner, highlighting areas for improvement. In terms of the relationship between variables, there was a significant, moderate and positive relationship between Cooperative Learning Strategies and Students' Social Skills.

Recommendations

Interactive learning may be boosted by incorporating Think-Pair-Share into lesson plans, fostering a collaborative classroom environment, and seeking student feedback. Arranging professional development workshops by the school administration may also help teachers to gain confidence and effective implementation strategies, and active participation and critical thinking among students may be encouraged through these workshops.

Teachers may help students resolve conflicts peacefully by using structured strategies like role-playing, peer mediation, and guided discussions. By modelling effective communication and creating designated discussion spaces and collaboration with parents and teachers, a positive classroom environment may be fostered. Communication skills of students may be enhanced by incorporating structured peer interactions like pair work, group discussions, and role-playing exercises. Encouraging active listening, turn-taking, and respectful dialogue through guided activities may help students engage more effectively with peers. Encouraging students to use "I" statements and practising non-verbal communication can make refusals more respectful. Group discussions and peer modeling may also reinforce positive ways to decline requests while maintaining good relationships.

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