Interdependence as a Prerequisite for Outcome-Based Learning: An Exploration

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Abstract

Interdependence is the most important feature of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is a 'learning together' model that can be exploited in ESL classroom; yet it remains unexplored in the Indian context due to various factors. Lack of proper understanding of the concept of cooperative learning has been a main reason for its non-implementation in English classrooms. It differs from collaborative and traditional group learning strategies as well. Conceptually, it is not clear if the whole of English can be learnt through this method or some skills and micro-skills of a macro-skill of English can alone be tried. There are some institutional and cultural constraints that might prevent this method being tried out. This paper examines the feasibility of cooperative learning as the outcome of English curriculum.

Keywords: Outcome-Based Learning (**OBL**), Cooperative Learning (**CL**), Collaborative Learning (**CL**), Positive Interdependence (**PI**), Transformative Learning (**TL**)

Background of the Study

Outcome-Based Learning (OBL) has been followed in higher educational institutions all over the world for quite some time. A key concept of the OBL is that teaching should be driven by outcomes that are both desirable and necessary for learners. Naturally, it demands greater clarity in terms of teaching and learning methods. The present English language curriculum in Indian higher educational institutions is mostly designed in terms of teachers' input from their point of view. Moreover, the classroom is neither learning-oriented nor learner-centred though there is some significant awareness about it among teachers. Objectives or intended learning

outcomes are academically outdated, undependable, and irrelevant because they are not designed in terms of learners. Secondly, learners' role is not taken into account. This leads to a classroom situation where they become rigid, passive onlookers being expected to admire teachers' performance. It only increases their dependency on teachers for ever. Instead, OBL and CL demand interdependence among learners and between learners and the teacher, and they view teachers as facilitators of learning and learners as active participants accountable for their own learning. Both share responsibilities for learning.

Literature Review

Stone (2005) find a paradigm shift in OBL with the focus being shifted from assessing the quality in terms of inputs and processes to outputs (goals and outcomes). He also frames three questions: what students learn, how they learn what they learn, and how do teachers know that they learn it. Lui and Shum (2010) also argue that educators favour OBL chiefly because it measures outputs rather than inputs. However, Spady (1994: 1) defines OBE as a process of "clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences. This means starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organizing the curriculum, instruction and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens." On the other hand, Dejager and Nieuwenhuis (2005) view OBL as a learner-centred and results-oriented approach to education. Biggs and Tang (2009: 7) stress that outcomes "specifically and explicitly to enhance teaching and assessment, always allowing for unintended but desirable outcomes." Towers (1996) succinctly argues that what ultimately matters is not what is taught, but what is learnt. Meanwhile, Kennedy (2009) recommends an alignment between what is learnt, how it is learnt, and how it is assessed on the one hand and the intended learning outcomes on the other hand. Radencich and McKay (1995) conclude that teachers should encourage flexible in grouping. Verduin (1996) provides guides for creating and helping various kinds of groups to achieve skills for inquiry and investigation. Cohen (1994) illustrates three common structures for cooperative learning: (1) assignment of individual students to specific responsibilities within a larger group task or project; (2) assignment of students to work together on a common project or task; (3) assignment of students to groups to study and be responsible for group members' learning, where the group objective is the achievement of all group members. Randall (1999) cautions against its overuse/abuse that it ignores the strategies necessary for the inclusion of critical or higher level thinking.

Research Questions

The following four questions are being addressed during the course of investigation into the cooperative learning as a means to achieve outcome-based English language learning:

1. What does Interdependence as an essential component of Cooperative Learning mean?
2. What does OBL mean?
3. How different is cooperative learning from traditional groups?
4. What are the limitations of CL?

Hypotheses

Institutional and cultural constraints are likely to prevent cooperative learning being successfully implemented in Indian classrooms.

Research Design & Results

Two methods were employed for the present study. One, an MPhil dissertation of my student on "Collaborative and Cooperative Learning for Skills Development" in April 2014 was reviewed. His subjects were General English students drawn from the various disciplines. All the four macro skills of language were taught and tested. The study claims that cooperative learning is successful in the Indian classroom and that it is going to be the future learning method in preference to all other existing methods. It also claims that it achieves two important goals: creating an action-oriented environment and demonstrating care toward learners. It synchronizes with the OBL. Two, a teacher attitude study was conducted among 25 English teachers from Madurai city colleges and 31 MPhil scholars in English. The attitude questionnaires has fifteen statements on cooperative learning and outcome-based approach and their attitude toward each was measured on a three point Likert scale from 'Agree' to 'Disagree' with 'No idea' in between. The results are presented in percentage. The main objective in eliciting the attitude of MPhil Scholars is that they are going to be in the field for the next thirty to forty years and that they can bring about desired changes in the system if they are properly oriented toward such approaches, such as outcome-based learning and cooperative learning.

S.No	Statement	A		NI		DA	
		T	S	T	S	T	S
1	Language teaching should be driven by outcomes	88	94	8	6	4	

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2	Learning outcomes should be written in learners' terms	80	84	16	13	4	3
3	The present day language classroom is teaching-dominated	72	87		3	28	10
4	Class can be divided into small groups of 2-5 for effective learning	72	74	12	16	16	10
5	How students learn is as important as what they learn	92	81	8	6		13
6	Learning fails to take place through teaching	12	35	20	23	68	50
7	Outcomes of learning are seldom tested	44	42	4	13	52	45
8	Teachers can sometimes become learners	84	97	8	3	8	
9	Learners can also teach	100	100				
10	Groups promote social skills	100	87		10		3
11	Learning together fosters interdependence among students	92	84	8	16		
12	All students in a group rarely participate	80	74	4	16	16	10
13	Students fail to enhance their communicative competence in the present day classroom	60	52	8	13	32	35
14	Teachers are revered for their knowledge and wisdom	56	55	32	10	12	35
15	Students depend on teachers for learning	44	35	12	6	44	58

A whopping majority of teachers and future teachers agree that language teaching should follow the outcome-based curriculum and they equally agree that curriculum objectives should be spelt out in terms of learner behaviour. While 28% of teachers deny that the classroom is dominated by teachers, 87% of scholars agree. 35% of scholar disagree that students fail to enhance their communicative competence because it is teachers who communicate in the class all the time leaving a very little space for learners to communicate with fellow learners or with the teacher. An average of 56% of teachers and scholars agree that

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classroom is dominated by the teacher. 68% of teachers and 50% of scholars fiercely contest that learning does not take place in teaching. They may think that learning means knowing content knowledge and not acquisition of skills and capabilities. Sadly but interestingly, 20% of teachers do not know if learning takes place through their teaching. Only about 40% of teachers and scholars think that outcomes are seldom tested. It may not be wrong if it is assumed that an average 49% of them have equated the content of the syllabus with learning outcomes because they think that outcomes are tested. If it is not so, there is no explanation for the huge mismatch between students' marks and their capabilities. Only about 55% of teachers and scholars think that teachers are revered for their knowledge and wisdom because 58% of scholars are convinced that they learn independent of teachers. This assertion may be due to rise in interactive communicative technologies that have brought about a huge change in perceptions about defining teaching and learning as processes.

What is encouraging from this attitudinal study is that both teachers and scholars are not averse to the idea of outcome-based learning and interdependence in learning (cooperative learning). Cooperative learning is a method that promotes collective learning and therefore it is ideal for language learning whereas small group is a tool for the implementation of Cooperative Learning. An average of 71% favour learning in small groups.

Discussion

Outcome-based learning emphasizes an important educational principle of what learners should be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences. In other words, the course structure and teaching delivery mode should unambiguously state the clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do. Spady (1994), therefore cautions that curriculum, instruction, and assessment must align with each other so that learning ultimately happens. When curriculum is designed or renewed, learning outcomes should be clearly stated in terms of the learner behaviour. It means what is expected from the learning after students have completed the course in terms of capabilities and skills. Care needs to be taken so that course outcomes do contribute to programme outcomes. Then, teachers can go proceed with development of instructions, delivery modes, and appropriate assessment strategies. Assessment of student growth and competency should be in relation to the learning outcomes. Outcome therefore is understood in terms of learning objectives, teaching and learning, and assessment.

Teaching in outcome-based education is possible only when it tries transformative learning and learner-centeredness. According to Mezirow (2000), transformative learning is a

cognitive theory that results in changes in meaning perspectives have developed over an individual's lifetime based upon their life experiences. It is a process where learners critically examine their beliefs, assumptions, and values when they learn new knowledge. They may reshuffle their worldviews in order to incorporate new learning into them. Mezirow (2000) has identified eight stages through which transformative learning is facilitated.

1. a disorienting dilemma
2. critical questioning and self-reflection
3. sharing of one's transformation process with others
4. exploration of new roles and actions
5. planning a course of action
6. provisional trying of new roles
7. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and
8. a reintegration into one's life directed by one's new perspective.

Monk (2011) asserts that there are four pillars of transformative learning and they are learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

Cooperative learning is understood as a 'learning together' model proposed by Johnson et al. (1988). They highlight its benefits: higher achievement & greater productivity; b) more caring, supportive, & committed relationships; c) greater psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem. Several models of learning exist, but cooperative learning is just one form of classroom learning. Sadly, it is the least explored method in teaching English in Indian classroom. Criterion-based grading system (students working alone/individualized) and norm-based grading system (students working against each other/competitive) are the other two forms. The term 'cooperation' here means working together to achieve shared goals. A small group of 2 to 6 students work together with the aim of maximizing their own and each other partner's learning. Shared learning goals or outcomes can be the desired future state in which students as a group demonstrate their individual communicative competence. As a necessary condition, goal structure should be clearly set. In other words, the ways in which students would interact with each other and with the teacher during the instructional session should be stated.

Cooperative learning group is different from the traditional group. In the latter, there is a possibility of one member sitting quietly and feeling shy to participate. Conversely, one member may do the task while other members talk about pastime activities. Or no one works because the one who normally works does not want to be exploited any longer. The other

possibility is that a more talented member may come up with the response/solution/answer and may dictate it to the other members or may work separately ignoring other members of the group. Cooperative learning group therefore does not happen by chance. A lot of effort goes into the making of it. Moreover, effective cooperation cannot be based on the assumption that all members of the group possess necessary social and learning skills. Each activity requires certain essential components on the part of the members.

The basic, essential components of learning together are positive interdependence, individual accountability, group processing, social skills, and face-to-face interaction. Positive interdependence expects each student to have a dual responsibility: learning the assigned material and ensuring that all the members of the group learn the material. By making unique contribution, each learner should see that their contribution is essential for group success. Interdependence occurs only when all members succeed collectively. Interdependence is also well-structured in the sense that there is a common goal, joint rewards, divided resources, and complementary roles. Individual accountability refers to the effort each member is contributing to the group. Teacher has an essential role to play in maintaining the individual accountability by providing feedback to the individuals and to the group, by helping the group avoid redundant efforts by members, and by ensuring that every member is responsible for the final outcome.

In group processing, members identify their helpful and harmful actions and make decisions to continue, or change, or delete actions. Such processing permits groups to focus on maintaining good working relationships, to learn and improve cooperative skills, to provide feedback on member participation, to think at cognitive and metacognitive levels, and to celebrate success as a group. Social skills enable learners to get to know and trust one another, to communicate accurately and unambiguously, to accept and support each other, and to resolve conflicts constructively. Successful face-to-face interaction occurs as a result of positive interdependence.

Small groups define the role of participants and make them accountable. Learners can actively participate and it leads to the formation of a lasting bonding among members of the group. Teachers at times become learners and learners at times can teach. Each member learns to respect each other. Learners do not stay idle but constantly challenged. Since every member's contribution is valued, homogeneity has no place in cooperative learning. Each member acquires problem solving and conflict resolving skills since problems and conflicts are

bound to arise. They combine past experiences with present knowledge. They realize clearly their goals and keep them as destination. Above all, they become owners of their own learning.

There is no space for competition among learners in cooperative learning. Instead, they work together. Still, it is different from collaborative learning where students can help other any time like helping each other with homework, whereas cooperative learning happens when they work together in the same place on a well-prepared project in small groups. It enhances their social skills. In other words, each member is like a team-player working for the success as a team. Cooperative learning is bound to be successful only with enquiry and constructivist approaches. It promotes social development, assists classroom discipline, and provides for more than one 'teacher.' It also advances higher level conceptual learning. Members learn to work with different types of learners. They get plenty of time for deep reflections and variety of responses.

Limitations

Researchers express their apprehension and concern about the exploitation of cooperative learning. Some of them appear to be reasonable. They are

1. High achievers are held back when they are grouped with low achievers.
2. Group by ability does not ensure the overall achievement and it may lead to inequalities.
3. Groups with three or four members alone produces achievement and such a group may be practically impossible in a class of 60 and above.
4. Grouping may pose many challenges to the teacher.
5. Teachers are likely to abdicate their responsibilities.
6. It places too much of burden on students for learning.
7. Stronger students are likely to teach the weaker ones by doing all by themselves in a mixed group.
8. Lower order thinking skills can alone be targeted and thus it becomes a spoilsport to high achievers who could otherwise enhance their higher order thinking skills.

Conclusions

Outcome-Based Learning motivates students to clearly focus on learning through active participation of each learner since they are clear about what they are going to achieve at the end of the course. It makes the course more learning-oriented rather than teacher-dependent

and learner-centred. Alignment between how someone learns what is intended and intended learning outcomes is imperative. The hypothesis stands invalidated in the light of positive and favourable attitude of teachers and scholars toward cooperative and outcome-based learning.

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