
TEACHING STYLES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS A CASE FOR COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

The study was undertaken to identify the most prevailing teaching styles among the elementary schoolteachers and to study the influence of sex, age, teaching experience, academic qualification, subject of teaching and background of the schools on teaching styles. A stratified sample of 80 teachers was selected from 20 elementary schools. The major findings of the study are: (1) the cooperative teaching style is predominantly preferred by the elementary teachers (2) age, sex, academic qualification and teaching experience have no influence on their preference for teaching styles, (3) social science teachers and the teachers of government schools have a strong tendency towards student - centered cooperative style of teaching. The study recommends cooperative teaching-learning approach as a strategy to counteract the overriding competitive and individualistic culture prevailing in the schools.

Introduction

One of the critical aspects of the teaching-learning process that decides the quality of learning is the way teachers engage learners in their classroom transaction. Every teacher selects an approach for teaching his/her students. This

approach involves an interaction between the teacher's operational behavior and students' receiving/responding behavior in a distinct manner, which is characteristic to the teacher concerned. This unique instructional behavior of the teacher is referred to as his/her teaching

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style (Ramamurthy, 2004). In other words, teaching style is concerned mainly with the fundamental knowledge about the teaching-learning process in which a teacher is actively involved.

Teaching style, according to Kozma et al (1978), is a pattern of instructional behavior of the teacher, which has been consistent over time and provides a certain flavor in his/her classes. Going through the literature of teaching style one can come across different typologies of the concept. Ryans (1960) identified three basic styles of teacher classroom behavior: (i) friendly, understanding as opposed to aloof, egocentric and restrictive, (ii) responsible, businesslike and systematic as opposed to evading, unplanned, and slipshod, (iii) stimulating and imaginative as opposed to dull and routine. Axelord (1973) reported four teaching styles that he designated as content-oriented, instructor-oriented, intellect-oriented and person-oriented styles. Dressel and Marcus (1982) identified four types of teaching styles, which are similar to the above-mentioned styles. They are discipline-centered teaching, instructor-centered teaching, student-centered cognitive teaching, and student-centered affective teaching. Other

typologies of teaching styles are: field dependent and field independent styles (Witkin, 1976), traditional and progressive (Brennet, 1975), and authoritarian and democratic by Lewin Lippit (Brennet, 1975). There are still other classifications of teaching styles such as formal and informal, direct and indirect, open and closed, student-centered and teacher-centered etc.

Johnson and Johnson (1975) related teaching style to instructional goals. According to them there are three styles used by the teachers to accomplish the instructional goals. They are cooperative, individualistic and competitive styles of teaching. The cooperative style is similar to student-centered or field-dependent styles; individualistic style resembles teacher-centered or field-independent styles; competitive style is like intellect-centered and discipline-centered styles as mentioned above (Doss and Muthiah, 2001).

The National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) has suggested a paradigm shift in the current pedagogical practices in the schools. The NCF puts greater emphasis on constructivism, critical pedagogy, child-centered strategies of teaching and reflective

practices, and also envisages new instructional roles for the teachers. Studies reveal that teaching style has strong bearing on strategies of teaching adopted by the teachers (Dressel and Marcus, 1982) and learning outcome of the students (Johnson and Johnson, 1975), while age, sex, subject of teaching, and institutional background have significant influence on the teaching styles of the teachers (Doss and Muthiah, 2001). It is based on these observations that the present study was initiated.

Objectives

The purpose of the study was to investigate the teaching styles of elementary schoolteachers with respect to their personal and school background. The specific objectives were:

- To discern the most prevalent teaching styles among the elementary teachers.
- To compare the teaching styles with respect to sex, subject and background of the schools.
- To examine the influence of age, teaching experience and academic qualification on teaching styles.

Hypotheses

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested.

- There is no significant difference in the teaching styles of elementary schoolteachers with respect to sex, subject of teaching and background of schools.
- There is no significant influence of age, teaching experience and academic qualification on the teaching styles of the teachers.

Methodology

Sample

The study was conducted on a stratified sample of 80 elementary teachers from 20 schools in the Chitradurga Taluk of Karnataka. While selecting the sample due consideration was given to factors such as age, sex, subject of teaching, academic qualification of the teachers as well as the background of the schools with respect to ownership and location.

Tools

i)Teaching Style Questionnaire

The data for the study was collected through the teaching style questionnaire developed by Johnson and Johnson and adopted by Doss and Muthiah (2001). The questionnaire was translated into Kannada language to suit the elementary teachers in Karnataka. The questionnaire measured three styles of teaching articulated by

Johnson and Johnson (1975), viz. cooperative teaching style, individualistic teaching style and competitive teaching style.

The cooperative style enables teachers to engage students work in a group, provide assistance to the group as a whole, praise and support them together for goal accomplishment, sharing ideas and materials, and utilizing others help for working alone. The teachers who adopt individualistic style want their students to work for themselves and master without paying attention to other students, and interact with each student individually, praise and support students for working alone. A teacher oriented with competitive style of teaching wants each student try to do better than the other students, and s/he will interact with group of students, praises and supports students working alone and trying to do better, faster and more work than their classmates.

The questionnaire is based on preference scale and there are nine statements with two or three alternatives. The teachers have to indicate their order of preference against the responses as I, II or III. If three preferences are given against a statement, scores will be 5,3,2 for preferences I, II, and III respectively. For giving two

preferences I and II, scores 7 and 3 are given respectively; and for only one preference score 10 is given. The scores obtained for each style is added; and the style with highest score indicates the preferred style of the teacher.

ii) *Personal Information Schedule*

This consisted seven variables -age, sex, subject of teaching, teaching experience, educational qualifications and school background regarding ownership and location. Ownership of the school means whether it is a private or government school. Location refers to whether the school is situated in rural or urban areas.

Statistical Analysis

Based on the score obtained the sample was grouped under three categories - cooperative, individualistic and competitive styles of teaching. Their Mean score, and SD were obtained; t-test and ANOVA were used for analysis and testing the hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

The distribution of the teaching style among the elementary schoolteachers considered in the study is shown in the Figure 1. The most preferred teaching style among the elementary teachers is found to be the cooperative style,

which accounts for 65% of the sample and it is followed by the individualistic style (25%) and competitive style (10%). This shows that most of the teachers want to adopt cooperative style of teaching. A similar study on college teachers also revealed similar results, where cooperative style emerged as the most preferred style of teaching by securing 60% score followed by individualistic style and competitive style with 21% and 19% respectively (Doss and Muthiah, 2001). Therefore, it is suggested that among the three types of styles the cooperative style is the most desirable style of teaching for effective learning outcome, since it facilitates better classroom climate and has a large impact upon the learning behavior of the students. In a teaching-learning situation interpersonal

process is very critical as it fosters mutual liking, trust in others, effective communication, acceptance and support, utilization of personal resources, sharing and helping. Cooperative style promotes interpersonal skills of the students and thus facilitates both cognitive and affective outcomes of learning. According to Johnson and Johnson (1975) cooperative style is more effective in promoting not only cognitive outcomes such as mastering of concepts and principles, verbal abilities, problem-solving ability, creative process like divergent and risk taking thinking but also affective outcomes such as humanness, democratic values, positive attitude towards instruction, subject and instructional activities, reduced level of anxiety and emotional capacity.

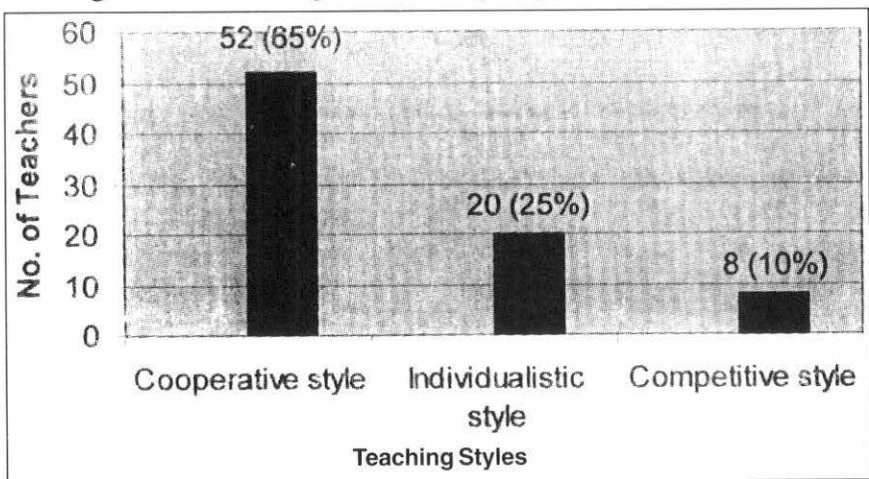


Fig.1: Style of Teaching among Teachers

Table-1: Analysis of Teaching Styles under sub-groups Sex, Subjects of Teaching and Background of Schools

Sub-Groups	Style of Teaching								
	Cooperative			Individualistic			Competitive		
	M	SD	t-test	M	SD	t-test	M	SD	t-test
Sex									
Male	34.93	8.23		28.74	7.21		24.32	5.40	
Female	35.56	8.73	0.33	27.42	6.74	0.85	24.93	5.43	0.50
Subject									
Social Sc.	38.93	8.11		26.74	6.30		24.35	6.11	
Science	34.12	8.38	2.66**	27.58	6.80	0.57	26.09	6.06	0.94
Ownership									
Govt.	37.70	8.05		25.61	6.05		24.67	6.29	
Private	33.65	7.81	2.28*	28.65	9.04	1.03	25.66	6.25	0.50
Location									
Rural	34.51	8.38		25.61	6.05		24.33	5.02	
Urban	36.47	8.11	1.06	28.65	9.04	1.77	24.67	6.29	0.26

* Significant at 0.05 levels

** Significant at 0.01 levels.

Teachers with different teaching styles were grouped into two groups, each under the categories based on sex, subject of teaching and background of the schools with respect to ownership and location. The results of the analysis with regard to these subgroups are shown in Table 1. There is no significant difference in the teaching styles with respect to sex of the teachers and location of the schools. Therefore, reading this in conjunction with the results presented in Figure 1 shows that male and female teachers give equal preference to cooperative style of teaching irrespective of the

location of their schools. Considering all the three styles together not much difference is found in the teaching styles of the teachers with regard to their subject of teaching and ownership of their schools. Hence the first hypothesis is accepted, but not fully. The analysis based on the subject of teaching reveals that cooperative style is higher among social science teachers. Doss and Muthiah (2001) had found the prevalence of cooperative style to a higher degree among the arts teachers. This shows that there is influence of the subject on the acquisition of teaching styles by the

teachers. Likewise, considering the ownership of the schools a significant difference is seen in the cooperative teaching styles of the teachers. Here the teachers in government schools are more inclined towards cooperative style of teaching.

In order to test the second hypothesis teachers with different styles of teaching under the subgroups age, academic qualification and teaching experience were grouped into

three smaller groups. The result of the analysis is given in Table 2. It shows that there is no influence of age, academic qualification and teaching experience on the teaching styles of the teachers. Hence the second hypothesis is also accepted. Considering the earlier findings that majority of teachers preferred cooperative style in their classroom transaction it can be deduced that majority of teachers, irrespective of age, academic qualification and

Table-2: Analysis of Variance between Teaching Style and Age, Educational Qualification and Teaching Experience

Sub-Groups	Style of Teaching								
	Cooperative			Individualistic			Competitive		
	M	SD	F	M	SD	F	M	SD	F
Age group									
i) Below 35 (N=31)	25.70	8.56		28.65	6.80		25.64	5.00	
ii) 36-45 (N=24)	37.90	8.02	0.0014	26.73	7.60	0.0006	25.37	5.76	0.3134
iii) Above 40 (N=25)	37.03	8.05	NS	27.64	7.93	NS	25.33	5.02	NS
Total N=80	36.05	8.30		27.64	7.45		26.31	5.53	
Qualification									
i) PUC/D.Ed.	36.23	8.43		27.04	6.49		25.73	5.74	
ii) Graduate/ B.Ed.	35.73	8.02		27.94	6.21		24.93	6.80	
iii) Post-graduate	36.39	8.43	0.6060	27.25	6.2	0.1080	25.24	6.32	0.7350
Total (N=80)	36.05	8.30	NS	27.64	7.45	NS	26.31	5.53	NS
Experience									
i) Below 10 Years	35.23	8.61		27.34	6.58		24.43	5.86	
ii) 11-20 Years	34.54	8.39	0.0015	28.52	5.89	0.0005	25.03	6.23	
iii) Above 20 Years	36.50	8.20	NS	26.94	7.06	NS	24.58	5.23	0.3045
Total (N=80)	36.05	8.30		27.64	7.45		26.31	5.33	NS

NS: Not Significant

experience, adopt cooperative style of teaching.

The major findings of the study are: (1) the predominant style of teaching preferred by the elementary teachers is cooperative style, (2) age, sex, academic qualification, teaching experience and location of school have no influence on their preference of the teaching styles, (3) social science teachers have a strong tendency towards student-centered cooperative style of teaching, and (4) the teachers of government schools are more inclined towards cooperative style.

A Case for Cooperative Learning

The above findings reveal that teachers give greater importance to cooperative teaching-learning strategy in the schools. Cooperative learning promotes interaction among the learners. According to Johnson and Johnson (2002) student-student interaction has a say not only on how well students learn and how they feel about school and the teacher but also on how they feel about others and how much self-esteem they have. Therefore, cooperative learning approach, which addresses these concerns, can form an effective strategy for developing conceptual

understanding of the subject matter as well as the democratic and pluralistic values among the children.

However, in the prevailing educational scenario the dominant form of interaction among the students is competitive or individualistic. The student-student interaction is a much-ignored concern in the classroom transaction. NCF 2005 states, "Schools begin ranking children as early as their pre-primary years as a way of inculcating in them a competitive spirit. Such a competitive drive has several negative side-effects on learning; often superficial learning is sufficient to create and maintain impressions, and over time students lose their ability to take initiative or do things for the fulfillment of one's own interest; hence, areas that cannot be 'marked' are neglected. This has unhealthy consequences for classroom culture, making children individualistic and unsuited to teamwork" (NCER, 2005: 75). The findings of the present study also reveal that science teachers and the teachers working in private schools are less inclined towards cooperative teaching. A good number of teachers persuade students to compete in all areas of

school activities to see who is 'best' working individually towards a goal without paying attention to other students. This trend, which is widespread across disciplines and educational institutions, has turned the schools into competitive enterprises where one student tries to outsmart the other.

The spirit of competition, reproduced by what we call the phenomenon of globalization, has led to the erosion of essential human values. Pushed by the parents and the social climate set by the prevailing examination system, students enter the school with high competitive expectation and this spirit of competition grows stronger as they progress through the school. Cooperation among children, who celebrate each other's success wholeheartedly, encourage each other to complete their school tasks, and learn to work together regardless of their individual identities of caste, class or religion, is not given due attention. In the ever-growing individualistic cultural climate accentuated by globalization, it is an imperative for the school to promote constructive relationships and a pluralistic attitude among the young children. The competitive, individualistic and traditional teaching-learning

strategies need to give way to the cooperative learning experiences.

This is very significant in the contemporary national and world scenario, where fundamentalism and intolerance is posing great threat to the peaceful coexistence of the people. The school has to accept differences arising from diversity as a reality and work for promoting constructive relationships among the students as well as different sections of the society at large. By providing opportunities for students to collaborate in their studies, the school can develop in them considerable commitment and caring for each other. When students from different religious or ethnic groups or castes are accepted and chosen as friends that will certainly have a positive influence on their lives. Teaching-learning experiences that do not provide opportunities for positive interaction among the students are not only incomplete but also antithetical to the pluralistic ethos reflected in the Constitution as well as the educational policies pursued so far in the post-Independent India. Constructive peer-relationships are necessary for students' maximal achievement, healthy social and cognitive advancement as well as their

pluralistic development and socialization (Johnson and Johnson, 2002).

Cooperative learning experience, particularly in a diverse classroom, can result in students' increased productivity, creative problem-solving abilities, growth in cognitive and moral reasoning, increased perspective taking ability, improved relationships and general sophistication in interacting and working with peers from different ethnic, cultural backgrounds. In competitive learning situations students tend to work against each other to achieve goals that only one or a few can achieve. They seek an outcome that is personally beneficial or detrimental to all others who take part in the situation. Similarly, in an individualistically planned learning situation there won't be any correlation among students' goal attainment. Each student perceives that s/he can reach his/her goal regardless of others' success or failure. Here the outcome sought by a student will be personally beneficial, but would not have any concern for the outcome of the other students.

On the other hand, by involving in cooperative learning activities students seek outcomes that are beneficial not only to

themselves but also to all other group members. Each student perceives that achievement of goal is dependent on collective efforts of all members of the group. Hence they develop a commitment to the common good, find ways to promote, facilitate, and encourage the efforts of other students, and value self and others unconditionally. Every member works for all and all members work for each. They also develop a willingness to recognize differences and engage actively with diversity. The diverse contributions made by students in a cooperative learning situation also result in the realization that everyone is valuable to the group and hence equally deserving, regardless of their religious, ethnic, cultural, caste, class, gender identities.

Conclusion

Though the study reveals that majority of the teachers has the inclination to adopt cooperative teaching-learning approach in their classroom, how far this preference is put into action needs further investigation. However, the trend provides a positive note on their readiness to take up responsibilities to move ahead in the desired direction. Even while the entire system of education works on a competitive mode, teachers keep a

penchant for creating a cooperative learning climate in the classroom. In order to turn this predilection into actions, teachers need training in cooperative teaching-learning strategies through in-service programmes. As envisaged in the NCF 2005, the very educational process itself has to undergo a paradigm shift by moving away from the examination-centric practices to experience-based learning. Agencies like Central Board of Secondary Education, Kendriya Vidhyalaya Sanghathan, Navodaya Vidhyalaya Sanghathan and other agencies in the states have the responsibility to shift away from the marks or grade-oriented learning, promote cooperative teaching-learning experiences in schools and thus write a new chapter in the history of school education in the country.

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