

Harmony in Learning: The Impact of Cooperative Learning on Music Education in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores the integration of cooperative learning strategies in primary music education, aiming to enhance student engagement, musical skills, and social interaction. The study's objectives included fostering collaboration, creativity, and a deeper understanding of musical concepts among students aged 8-10. Using a qualitative action-research approach, five structured 45-minute sessions were implemented, each based on a specific cooperative learning structure such as Think-Pair-Share and Jigsaw. Evaluation methods included observation rubrics, self-assessments, and peer feedback. Results indicated increased student participation, improved group dynamics, and stronger musical outcomes. The study concludes that cooperative learning not only enriches the music learning experience but also promotes emotional and social development, making it a valuable pedagogical approach in the primary classroom.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, Music Education, Primary Education, Collaborative Learning, Active Learning

Introduction

Music education plays a vital role in the holistic development of children, fostering not only artistic expression but also cognitive, emotional, and social growth. In the context of primary education, music serves as a powerful tool for engaging students, encouraging creativity, and nurturing essential life skills. However, traditional models of music instruction often emphasize individual performance and teacher-centered approaches, which may limit opportunities for collaboration and peer learning.

Cooperative learning offers a pedagogical framework that aligns naturally with the social and interactive nature of music. Defined as an instructional strategy in which small groups of students work together to achieve shared learning goals, cooperative learning promotes positive interdependence, individual accountability, and face-to-face interaction [1]. When applied to music education, this approach encourages students to actively engage with one another in composing, performing, and

reflecting on music, thereby deepening their understanding and enjoyment of musical concepts.

This study explores the integration of cooperative learning strategies into primary music education, focusing on how collaborative activities can enhance musical understanding, social interaction, and student engagement. By implementing a five-session music unit based on structured cooperative learning techniques, the research aims to provide evidence of the benefits and practical implications of this methodology in real classroom settings.

In doing so, this article contributes to the growing body of literature that supports innovative and inclusive teaching practices in music education, highlighting the potential of cooperative learning to transform the music classroom into a dynamic space for shared exploration and meaningful learning.

Methodology

Cooperative learning is an instructional approach where students work together in small groups to achieve shared learning goals.

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Unlike competitive or individualistic learning, cooperative learning emphasizes positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, social skills development, and group processing [1]. This method enhances academic achievement, social competence, and motivation by encouraging students to support each other's learning.

Several cooperative learning structures guide how students interact within groups. These structures provide clear roles and procedures to ensure active participation and maximize learning outcomes. Below is a table summarizing some commonly used cooperative learning structures

Table 1: Learning structures

Structure	Description	Key Features
Think-Pair-Share	Students first think individually about a question, then discuss their ideas with a partner, and finally share with the larger group.	Encourages individual reflection and peer discussion.
Jigsaw	Students are divided into "expert" groups to learn one part of a topic, then re-group to teach their section to others.	Promotes responsibility and interdependence.
Round Robin	Students take turns sharing ideas or answers in their small groups in a sequential manner.	Ensures equal participation and listening skills.
Team-Pair-Solo	Tasks progress from group work, to pairs, and finally to individual practice, building independence.	Gradual transfer of responsibility to individual learner.
Numbered Heads Together	Group members discuss a question together; the teacher randomly selects one student to answer on behalf of the group.	Fosters group accountability and attentive listening.

This study employed a qualitative action-research design to explore the effectiveness of cooperative learning in enhancing music education at the primary level. The research was conducted in a third-grade classroom with 24 students aged 8 to 10 years. The intervention consisted of five 45-minute sessions designed to develop specific musical and social competencies through cooperative learning structures. Each session was carefully planned to promote collaboration, creativity, and critical musical skills aligned with educational competencies.

Session 1: Developing Rhythmic Competence (Think-Pair-Share)

Objective: To recognize and reproduce basic rhythmic patterns collaboratively.

Competency: Rhythm perception and motor coordination.

Description: Students first listen individually to a recorded rhythm. Then, they pair up to discuss and practice replicating the rhythm using body percussion. Finally, pairs share their performance with the entire class, encouraging peer feedback and collective refinement.

Session 2: Understanding Instrument Families (Jigsaw)

Objective: To identify and classify musical instruments by family (strings, winds, percussion).

Competency: Musical knowledge and categorization.

Description: Students are divided into expert groups, each researching one instrument family. After mastering their section, they form mixed groups where each expert teaches their peers. This cooperative exchange enhances both subject mastery and communication skills.

Session 3: Collaborative Soundscape Creation (Round Robin)

Objective: To compose a group soundscape that reflects a chosen theme.

Competency: Creativity, listening, and ensemble skills.

Description: Students sit in small groups, taking turns to add

sounds using classroom instruments or vocal effects to build a layered composition. This structure ensures equal participation and collective creativity.

Session 4: Melody Composition and Performance (Team-Pair-Solo)

Objective: To compose and perform a short melody on xylophones.

Competency: Melody creation, instrumental technique, and self-expression.

Description: Students begin composing as teams, then refine their melodies in pairs, and finally perform solo. This gradual shift promotes independence while maintaining collaborative support.

Session 5: Group Performance and Reflection (Numbered Heads Together)

Objective: To perform a group arrangement integrating rhythm, melody, and dynamics, and reflect on the learning process.

Competency: Ensemble performance, critical thinking, and self-assessment.

Description: Groups rehearse and perform their compositions. Afterwards, a randomly selected student from each group explains the structure and creative choices made. This encourages accountability and metacognitive awareness.

Assessment

The study was conducted with 25 third-grade students engaged in a music unit incorporating cooperative learning structures such as Jigsaw and Think-Pair-Share. Data collection involved classroom observations, video recordings, student self-assessments, and peer evaluations over five sessions. The evaluation rubric was applied by teachers and students to ensure reliability and validity.

Table 2: Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4 Points)	Good (3 Points)	Satisfactory (2 Points)	Needs Improvement (1 Point)
Musical Accuracy	Performs musical tasks accurately and confidently.	Minor errors but maintains overall accuracy.	Several errors, but basic concepts understood.	Frequent errors; difficulty performing basic tasks.
Rhythm and Timing	Maintains steady rhythm; excellent timing with group.	Generally steady rhythm; minor timing inconsistencies.	Rhythm or timing occasionally inconsistent.	Rhythm and timing are poor or unsteady.
Participation	Actively participates and contributes in all group tasks.	Participates regularly; sometimes needs prompting.	Participates inconsistently; limited engagement.	Rarely participates or disrupts group work.
Cooperation & Teamwork	Demonstrates excellent cooperation and supports peers.	Generally cooperative; works well with others.	Cooperation inconsistent; occasionally hinders group progress.	Does not cooperate; negatively affects group dynamic.
Communication Skills	Communicates ideas clearly and respectfully.	Usually clear communication; respectful to others.	Sometimes unclear or unengaged communication.	Poor communication; disrespectful or disengaged.
Self and Peer Assessment	Provides insightful reflections and constructive feedback.	Provides relevant reflections and feedback.	Provides basic reflections or feedback.	Does not participate in reflection or feedback process.

Results

The study analyzed the impact of cooperative learning on primary students' musical skills and social interaction over five sessions. Data were collected through teacher observations, student self-assessments, peer evaluations, and performance recordings. The evaluation focused on musical accuracy, rhythm and timing, participation, cooperation, and communication skills.

Musical accuracy showed consistent improvement throughout the sessions. Students started with an average level indicating basic understanding and ended the intervention demonstrating good to excellent performance accuracy. This suggests that cooperative learning structures positively influenced students' ability to perform musical tasks accurately.

Rhythm and timing stability also improved as the sessions progressed. While initial variability was observed, by the fourth session the majority of students maintained steady rhythms within their groups. This progress highlights the effectiveness of cooperative practice in developing synchronization and ensemble skills.

Student participation and engagement increased steadily during the study. At the beginning, participation rates were moderate, but by the final session, most students actively engaged in collaborative music activities. This trend reflects growing motivation and confidence as students became more comfortable working together.

Finally, social and communication skills exhibited marked growth. Cooperation among peers and clear, respectful communication were increasingly observed and reported. Students expressed enjoyment in peer interactions and valued learning through group dialogue, supporting the idea that cooperative learning nurtures essential social competencies alongside musical development.

Overall, the findings indicate that cooperative learning significantly enhances both musical proficiency and social skills in primary music education. The steady improvements across sessions demonstrate the effectiveness of structured group activities in fostering active engagement, collaborative problem-solving, and shared musical understanding.

Conclusions

Integrating cooperative learning into primary school music education offers multifaceted benefits, encompassing cognitive, social, and emotional development. This approach not only enhances musical skills but also fosters essential life competencies such as teamwork, communication, and empathy. Research underscores the efficacy of cooperative learning in creating an engaging and inclusive learning environment.

Enhancement of Musical Skills

Cooperative learning facilitates active engagement in music education, leading to improved musical abilities. In group settings, students collaborate on tasks like composing, performing, and analyzing music, which deepens their understanding and appreciation of musical concepts. For instance, group music training has been shown to enhance children's prosocial skills, including empathy and cooperation, indicating that collaborative musical activities can lead to broader developmental benefits.

Development of Social and Emotional Competencies

Beyond musical proficiency, cooperative learning in music education plays a crucial role in the development of social and emotional skills. Working in groups encourages students to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and support one another, thereby fostering a sense of community and belonging. This collaborative environment contributes to increased self-esteem and emotional resilience among students.

Increased Motivation and Engagement

The interactive nature of cooperative learning makes music

education more engaging and enjoyable for primary school students. When students work together towards common goals, they often exhibit higher levels of motivation and enthusiasm. This heightened engagement not only makes learning more enjoyable but also leads to better retention and application of musical concepts.

Promotion of Inclusivity and Equity

Cooperative learning strategies in music education promote inclusivity by ensuring that all students, regardless of their individual abilities, have the opportunity to contribute and succeed. By assigning roles and responsibilities within groups, every student becomes an integral part of the learning process, which helps in bridging gaps and fostering a more equitable learning environment.

Long-Term Educational Benefits

The skills acquired through cooperative learning in music education extend beyond the classroom. Students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills that are valuable in various aspects of life. Moreover, the positive experiences gained from working in groups can instill a lifelong appreciation for music and the arts.

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