

## ASPECTS REGARDING THE IMPLICATIONS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN TEACHERS' PROSPECT

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**Abstract:** *Postmodern directions in university education promote the training of transversal competences such as: communication competences, social competences and teamwork competences. In this context, cooperative learning appears as a constructivist frame for the training and development of these competences. This new approach creates opportunities for students to learn together and to develop complex skills in order to manage the contemporary world's provocations. As a consequence of applying the cooperative learning specific methods, teachers develop their pedagogical creativity and surpass some possible difficulties which the starting point in applying this approach may generate. The current research regarding these issues emphasizes the positive effects of cooperative learning upon the following categories of variables: academic results, pupils'/students' efficiency, learning motivation, critical thinking, abilities for interpersonal relationships and, implicitly, teamwork abilities. The purpose of this paper is to point out the teachers' perception upon the role and efficiency of cooperative learning in the context of the educational-instructive process in the agricultural higher education. The collected data was obtained by the method of enquiry and using a questionnaire of opinion as a tool, which contained closed, pre-coded and open questions, in order to reflect the image upon the studied issues as faithfully as possible. The obtained results have underlined the teachers' mainly positive perception towards the application of cooperative learning techniques especially at the seminar and practical paper activities. Also, teachers have pointed out the decisive role of cooperative learning in the outlining and development of transversal competences of relationship and teamwork. As for the effects upon students, teachers have noticed an increase in learning motivation, in the interest towards the learning tasks and the studied discipline on the whole. The research justifies its importance through identifying the teachers' perception upon the diversification and modernization of didactic approaches based on cooperative learning in the academic context. The results obtained may be useful to the theorists and practitioners of university education who are interested in improving the quality of didactic action. The limited batch of subjects and the relatively small diversity of cooperative learning methods used by teachers appear as possible limits of research.*

**Key words:** *cooperative learning, teachers' perception, transversal competences.*

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of learning through cooperation has made the subject of numerous researches over the years. One of the justified reasons on which this research was based is the one stating the fact that the cooperative learning is one that facilitates the "learning of cooperation from school" as it is the one that will shape the "future members of the community, yet respecting their individuality, uniqueness and specificity" (FLUERAȘ, V., 2005). Also, citing the work of some specialists in the field, ROGER AND DAVID JOHNSON, the same author underlines the benefits of this type of learning, which leads to the increase of the learning process efficiency, brings improvements to the memory and creation, enhances the students' self-esteem and develops their mental health, at the same time representing an important resource for the teaching staff in the approach of designing and management of the training process. VOICULESCU, F., (2012) referring to transversal skills as the "skills for life", they assimilate in the professional environment of some "capabilities that transcend a given

professional domain", calling them "transprofessional skills" and in the school/university environment receive the title of "transdisciplinary skills" as they are the ones who "transcend" the educational disciplines. In the category of such transversal skills, we can mention the communication competence, social competence, but also the teamwork competence. In this context, the cooperative learning represents a learning situation in which the students work together through interaction in order to improve their own performance, but also to contribute to the improvement of the other members of the group performances, the evaluation being made based on the group's performance. At the same time, the cooperative learning represents a response to the challenges of the contemporary world, a category and an important application of constructivism in the education field (FLUERAȘ, 2005). J.M. MONTEIL (1997) in BOCOȘ M. (2013) highlights the results of the research in the field which showed the fact that "the learning situations structured cooperatively are far more effective than the learning situations structured competitively. They have a positive effect with regard to several dimensions of behavior: motivation, strategies of reasoning, perception of the other, etc.". The same author highlights those arguments that militate in favor of the affiliation of cooperative learning within the active teaching methods: it "promotes a learning designed as personal social process", "the student descenters his own experiences in order to collaborate on common actions", "assumes direct intellectual, verbal and socio-affective interactions between the students", uses the "collective thinking and reflection", "favors the conscious and active co-participation of the students, they do not learn one alongside others but one in relation and together with others", favors the installation of an "open, active, interactive attitude, networking and active communication" in students, as well as of a "prosocial attitude" as the student is interactively involved in the resolution of tasks and in learning, also "the student thinks by himself" within some collective debates, "they value intellectual and verbal exchanges and counts on a logic of learning which will take account of the views of the students, which make them confront between them, with contents/texts given and with the teacher", contribute both to the "cognitive progress made by the students" and to the "pedagogical discovery of one another", "ensure a high level of interactivity as it is not carried out outside the facilities offered by computers". (BOCOȘ, M., 2013). With regard to the essential principles necessary to be achieved by an educational activity which is based on cooperative learning, according to FLUERAȘU, V., (2005), these are: positive interdependence; individual responsibility; direct interaction; analysis of the group activity; teaching and development of social skills; teacher-notes and intervenes when necessary. NICU, A., AND CONȚIU, E. R. (2010), assigns to the cooperative learning the quality of "an instrument of personal and social training that offers the opportunity to the individual to learn to know himself/herself, to know his/her limits, to develop the leadership capacity towards the others, to valorize their own ideas and points of view, to be open towards the others, to listen and analyze the ideas of others," and to the teacher involved in this type of learning, the roles of: "organizer and planner of activity", "mediator", "facilitator", "counselor" and "guardian", "trainer in cooperation", "observer", "assessor", "generator of communication, reflection and interaction". Mariana Momanu and ȘTEFAN BONCU (in Chapter 22 of "School Psychosociology", coordinators BONCU ȘT. AND CEOBANU C., 2013), conclude the fact that the cooperative learning "is based on solid theories, validated by numerous empirical research and operationalized in clear procedures" that are available to the teaching staff.

Numerous researches conducted by social psychologists highlight the benefits of cooperative structuring of classes (BONCU, ȘT., in "Psychopedagogy for professional certification exams and teaching degrees," coord. CUCOȘ CONSTANTIN, 2009): thus on account of cooperation are put feelings of acceptance and sympathy on the fond of the interaction

between students; under its aegis are established the harmony, good understanding and those behaviors that facilitate the success of others are stimulated; It leads to increase of self-esteem, confidence in one's own forces and determines a decrease in anxiety that many children feel in contact with school, at the same time having a positive effect on the manifestation of a positive attitude toward the teaching staff.

Thus, in the context of those mentioned above, this research aims to highlight the perception of the teaching staff on the role and effectiveness of cooperative learning in the context of the instructive-educational process from the agricultural higher education.

The research objectives were: identifying the perception of the teaching staff over the importance of the cooperative learning in the context of the instructive - educational process in agricultural higher education, the determination of cooperative learning methods most commonly used by the teaching staff and the identification of strategies for academic evaluation used within cooperative learning.

#### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The data collected were obtained by the method of the questionnaire, using as a tool an opinion questionnaire, including closed, precodified and open questions for the purpose of the shaping an image as closely as possible with the issue studied.

The responses of the questionnaire applied were processed in a number of 35 teaching staffs who taught within BUASVM "King Michael I of Romania" from Timișoara, Faculty of Agriculture and Faculty of Horticulture and Forestry.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

On the first question of the questionnaire „*In what context do you use the cooperative learning?*”, the answers of the teachers were as follows: 43,33% in practical activities, 31,66% in seminar activities and 25,00% in lecture activities. As we can see it is more efficient as utilised in practical activities. Questioned on the frequency of the utilisation in didactic activities of the methods and techniques specific to the cooperative learning, through the question „*How frequently do you use in your didactic activities methods and techniques specific to the cooperative learning?*” the teaching staff mentioned in the category „*Very Frequently*” the „group activities”, with a rank of 20,70 % and on the second place of the category „the debate” with a rank of 18,97%. At the „*frequently*” category fall first „Think-work in pairs-communicate!” with 18,39 percent, while at „None” category 45% of respondents stated that they never use the „Mosaic” method. In the „*sometimes*” category appears on the first place „the round table” with 17,94%, followed by „academic controversy” și „pairs activities” with over 16% each.

With the question number 3 of the questionnaire is aimed to identify the perception of the teaching staff regarding the usefulness of the methods and techniques of cooperative learning from the following perspectives: learning outcomes, student motivation, interest for the discipline, competence of communication, competence of relationship, competence of teamwork and efficiency of didactic activity. In Figure 1 we can notice the "competence of team working" on first position in the category of "Very useful" with 17.02% of responses, while at "Useful" category is tied in first place "learning outcomes" with the "interest in the subject" and with the "effectiveness of didactic activity" with 17.02% each. On the second place, in the same category is the "competence of relationship" with 14.90% of answers.

On the question 4 „*Which of the following roles of the teacher do you considerate the most relevant for the success of the cooperative learning activities?*” in the category „Very relevant” is placed equally „the organizer role of the activity” and „the supporting role”, and on

the second place on the same category „the evaluation role” with 14,18 percent of the answers. In the category of "Relevant" is placed equally with 16.16% the "leading role of the activity" and the "observer role”. In the "Neutral" category on the first place is mentioned "the role of reflection" with 28.12% of responses, while at "less relevant" category is on the first place with 26.67% of answers the "intervention role” of the teaching staff.

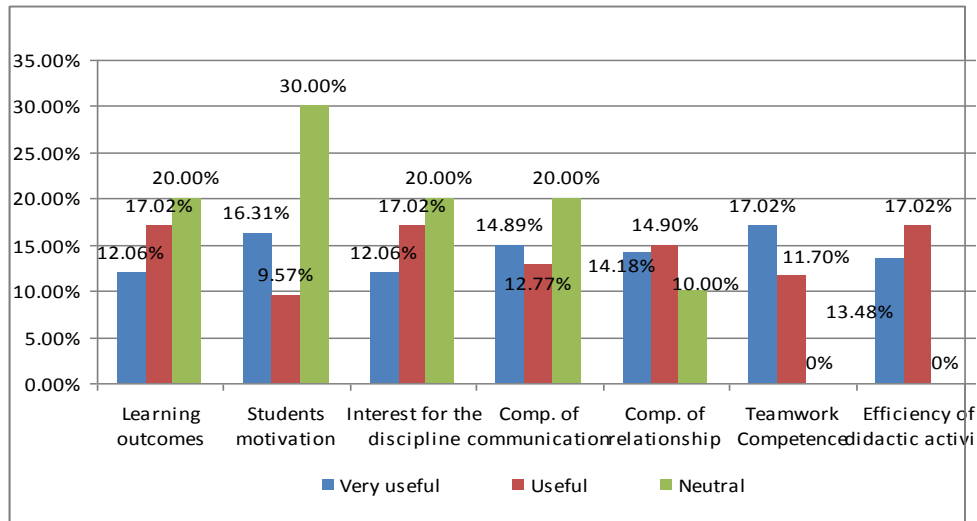


Figure 1 The perception of the teaching staff regarding the usefulness of methods and techniques of cooperative learning

Questioned on the advantages that it manifest the cooperative learning and being requested to point such advantages first of all from the teaching staff' point of view, the respondents mentioned the top positions: "developing communication skills to students", "Stimulating attention", "Activization of students", favouring teamwork ", " improving the student-teaching staff relationship ", " development of some relations of solidarity, care, colleague relationships ", " favours the social and group inclusion", interactive teaching", "individual feedback", "effective use of the time allocated to the study of discipline", "development of the students ' critical thinking".

Other advantages mentioned made reference to "adaptation means and levels of communication depending on the feedback received", "development of capacity for argumentation/contra-argumentation, fair play", "identification of students' interests / needs of learning", "formation of some capabilities and acquiring complementary knowledge of teaching", "knowledge of the availability of students ' cooperation," „enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching staff activity „, performed in class.

Pointing to the advantages of this method from the students' perspective this time around, the respondents mentioned: "the development of competence of relationship", "mutual and self-assessment evaluation", "identification of gaps in knowledge and remedy of it," "learning faster", "presentation of knowledge in a manner less stiff and formal," "increase self-confidence/self-esteem", "supporting the development of transversal skills/competencies", "stimulating creativity", "assuming responsibilities in the team" and "stimulating the capacity to organize the team's activity and mutual help"; leads to the "improvement of the ability to

make decisions", "replace competition with cooperation" and contribute to the "potentiation of individual and collective success".

Another aspect researched requested from the same respondents to identify the difficulties encountered by them in using cooperative learning in the teaching process. There were mentioned: "the lack of courage to the students in expressing their own opinions or willingness to assume their responsibilities," "lack of motivation of some students", "fear of errors", "existence of some problems/barriers of communication between students," reluctance / refusal of the students to work in a team", "do not to quantify exactly the contribution of each student", "differing levels of students' training".

At the end, thus pointing also the last goal of the research, the perception of the teaching staff regarding the evaluation of the academic results obtained following cooperative learning was analyzed. Thus, on the first place, there is the "analysis of the activity products" and the "observing of the students' behavior", totalling a percentage of 21.35% of replies, on the second place is the "continuous evaluation based on feed back" with a percentage of 20.22% of replies received. The last question of the questionnaire requested from the academic teaching staff to tell their opinion on the organisation of a course for professors on the subject of cooperative learning in higher education. Thus, 60 % of the replies received, perceive as "very timely" this initiative and 31.43% of respondents consider it "desirable".

### CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights once again the efficiency of using this method as part of the interactive - educational process, through a positive perception of the teaching staff of BUASVM Timișoara concerning the use of methods of cooperative learning, they correctly perceiving the benefits and contribution of cooperative learning to the formation of transversal competences in the agricultural higher education. Among the methods most commonly used by teaching staff, we mention: activities in pairs, activities practised on groups, academic controversy, debate, brainsorming or sometimes the round table.

Within the cooperative learning, in terms of evaluating the academic results, some of the most frequently used methods of the teaching staff are mentioned to be: analysis of the activity products, observing the behavior of students, group experiments, continuous evaluation on the basis of feedback. The least used is mentioned the monitoring sheet of the students' activity.

The academic teaching staff have expressed a high interest in respect of organizing some courses intended for the teaching staff in the direction of improving the methods of teaching-learning-evaluation through cooperation, this making them an implicit diversification of the methodological instrument as well as a modernization of the didactic approach achieved.

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