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Intercultural Competence: Methods and Techniques of Cooperative Learning in Karakalpakstan

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Abstract: This article investigates the effects of cooperative learning on intercultural competence of students. Karakalpakstan, the area of the research is one of the ethnic diverse regions, and students whom the research conducted at Nukus State Pedagogical Institute are required to develop their intercultural competence almost to a professional level in order to connect with people from different ethnicity who live around positively. Mixed-methods in which including survey, interview, and observation was applied to measure the impact of cooperative learning on students' cultural competence, communication skills, attitudes towards diversity and collaboration. All indicators of intercultural competence were significantly better after cooperative learning activities had been held. They suggest using this method to practice it for intercultural competence, recommend its usage in practice in Karakalpakstan and that teachers should be trained to use this method and books should be made.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Cooperative Learning, Karakalpakstan, Cultural Awareness, Communication Skills, Diversity, Educational Practices

1. Introduction

In today's interconnected world, the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures, known as "intercultural competence," is increasingly essential for understanding and respect. In diverse educational settings, this ability is vital. Cooperative learning, where students work in groups to achieve shared goals, is an excellent pedagogical approach for fostering this competence. Studies show this method enhances academic performance, social skills, and cultural awareness. In Karakalpakstan, a multi-ethnic region of Uzbekistan with populations including Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Russians, and Koreans, the need for intercultural competence training is particularly salient. This article investigates the impact of cooperative learning on students' intercultural competence in this unique cultural environment.

Literature Review

Intercultural competence (IC) is crucial for education in multicultural contexts, defined as a blend of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills for sensitive interaction in diverse settings [1]. It plays a key role in minimizing biases and facilitating effective worldwide partnerships [2][3]. Cooperative learning (CL), where students work together in small groups, is effective at improving academic performance and interpersonal skills [4][5]. This methodology holds distinct benefits for IC development through diverse

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perspectives, collaboration and the promotion of empathy, making CL an ideal platform for intercultural interaction [6].

2. Methodology

This research uses a mixed-methods case study focusing on the Nukus State Pedagogical Institute (NSPI) and its branches in Karakalpakstan to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning. Participants included 5 teachers and approximately 150 first- to third-year students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Russians). Data was collected using structured pre- and post-test surveys, semi-structured interviews with teachers, auditory observations of classroom interactions, and focus group discussions with 20 students. Quantitative data analysis involved paired t-tests to compare pre- and post-test scores, while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, categorizing findings into "cultural awareness," "communication skills," "collaboration," and "attitudes toward diversity."

3. Result

This section presents the key results of the study that explores the impact of cooperative learning techniques on students' intercultural competence in Karakalpakstan. When it comes to the data collection method, the data was collected through surveys, interviews and some through auditory observations and focus group discussions. These are shown quantitatively and qualitatively, enabling a holistic view of the effectiveness of the methods.

In order to assess the effect of the cooperative learning on students' intercultural competence before and after the study, pre- and posttest survey data have been administered. The survey measured carefully students' cultural awareness, communication skills, and attitudes toward students from various races were included in the survey. **Table 1** below presents the **mean scores** for students' intercultural competence before and after the implementation of cooperative learning activities.

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Test Mean Scores of Students' Intercultural Competence.

Indicator	Pre-Test Mean Score (Out of 10)	Post-Test Mean Score (Out of 10)	Difference
Cultural Awareness	5.4	7.6	+2.2
Interpersonal Communication	6.1	8.2	+2.1
Attitudes toward Diversity	5.8	7.9	+2.1
Collaboration Skills	6.0	8.3	+2.3

The mean scores on the post-test survey demonstrated a significant increase across all indicators of intercultural competence. In particular, students who participated in cooperative learning activities showed significant improvements in cultural awareness, interpersonal communication, attitudes toward diversity, and collaboration skills.

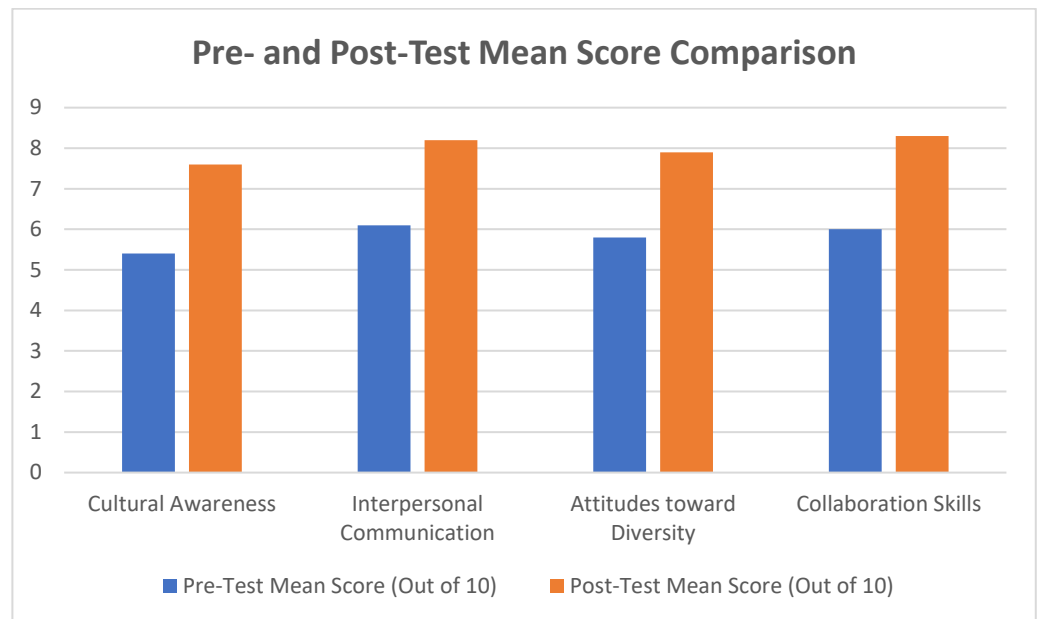


Figure 1. Pre- and post-test mean score comparisons across the four key dimensions of intercultural competence.

The qualitative data, collected through interviews, auditory observations, and focus group discussions, provide additional support for the quantitative findings (Figure 1). These additional data offer more comprehensive information about the experiences of students and teachers during the implementation of cooperative learning strategies.

Through the semi-structured interviews, teachers reported that cooperative learning significantly increased students' ability to work together and communicate across cultural boundaries. One teacher mentioned:

"Cooperative learning helps students not only achieve academic goals but also understand different perspectives. The group activities encourage them to interact with peers from various backgrounds, which builds trust and cultural understanding."

Teachers also identified several challenges, such as **limited resources**, **cultural resistance** from some students, and the need for more training on effective cooperative learning techniques. Despite these challenges, they emphasized the overall positive impact on students' intercultural skills.

The focus group discussions indicated that students experienced an increase in self-assurance when expressing themselves and engaging with other students from different ethnic backgrounds. One student shared the following observation:

"Before, I had very rarely talked to students from other ethnic groups, but during the group projects, I learned a lot about their cultures. It made me feel more comfortable working with them."

Furthermore, students noted that the cooperative learning environment helped them appreciate diversity, with many expressing a greater desire to engage in intercultural communication beyond the auditory.

During the auditory observations, it was evident that the cooperative learning activities facilitated dynamic exchanges among students. The observations revealed several behaviors that contributed to the development of intercultural competence, including active listening, group discussions on cultural differences, and joint problem-solving tasks that required students to consider various viewpoints.

The findings suggest that the cooperative learning strategies applied positively contribute to the development of intercultural competence in students of Karakalpakstan. Structured group activities and collaborative problem-solving seem to do more than build

academic skills; they also appear to build social skills such as communication, empathy, and cultural understanding.

Brief summaries of qualitative data collected from the teacher and student interviews are presented in Table 2 below. The relevant data has been coded and categorized, with attention being paid to the most essential learning outcome and obstacles concerning the impact of cooperative learning processes on the development of intercultural competence.

Table 2. Summary of Key Outcomes and Challenges in Cooperative Learning.

Category	Outcome	Challenges
Cultural Awareness	Students developed a clearer and more practical understanding of cultural differences through interaction.	Some students were initially hesitant or resistant to participating in intercultural activities.
Communication Skills	Many students became more confident when communicating with peers from different cultural backgrounds.	Language differences occasionally made communication difficult.
Collaboration	Group tasks encouraged cooperation and teamwork among students from diverse ethnic groups.	A lack of resources sometimes limited the effectiveness of group based activities.
Attitudes toward Diversity	Overall attitudes toward ethnic and cultural diversity became more positive over time.	A number of students found it challenging to actively engage with peers from unfamiliar backgrounds.

Here are the main findings of the study

Results from pre-and post-test surveys indicate that students' levels of intercultural competence increased substantially due to the implementation of cooperative learning activities.

Learners gained better communication skills, increased cultural sensitivity, and heightened perceptions of diversity.

While the teacher interviews and auditory observations showcased the effectiveness of cooperative learning in creating intercultural dialogue, there were also challenges regarding cultural resistance and resource limitations.

The results of this study showed that cooperative learning is a potential teaching technique for developing intercultural competence, and that these findings are particularly relevant for Karakalpakstan, with its headings of cultural impotence.

Data from both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study corroborate each other on the importance of many of the findings presented here, which can contribute both to research on intercultural education and also to practical recommendations for teachers wishing to implement ix cooperative learning statuses in intercultural settings.

4. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate the positive impact of cooperative learning techniques on developing students' intercultural competence in Karakalpakstan. The significant improvements observed in students' cultural awareness, communication skills, attitudes toward diversity, and collaboration skills suggest that cooperative learning offers a promising pedagogical approach for fostering intercultural understanding in a multicultural auditory setting.

The study found that students exhibited a marked increase in their cultural awareness and ability to interact with people. The pre- and post-test surveys demonstrated a statistically significant improvement compared with baseline, with more than 2 point

mean increases on both of the dimensions. This correlates with previous studies showing that cooperative learning both improves academic performance for students and creates a higher level of cultural understanding and empathy between students from various backgrounds [7][8]. The cooperative activities enabled students to have meaningful conversations, share ideas and learn about each other's values and customs. This also explains the increase in cultural awareness we saw in students, as they became more observant toward the subtleties of intercultural communication.

These further support the cohesive atmosphere created by the success of cooperative learning in promoting diversity attitudes and collaborative skills. The ability of the students to interact with others from different ethnic groups and the students' more favorable attitudes toward diversity indicates the success of cooperative learning in repairing the damage caused by ethnic conflict by breaking down cultural barriers and promoting positive intergroup relations. This finding reinforces what we have learned from scholars who have contributed to the positive impact of cooperative learning in establishing an environment for mutual respect and respect for cultural differences [9][10].

Implications for Teaching Practices in Karakalpakstan

The findings from this study have important implications for teaching practices in Karakalpakstan, a region characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity. The success of cooperative learning in improving students' intercultural competence suggests that it should be more widely adopted in schools across the region. Educators in Karakalpakstan can benefit from incorporating collaborative activities and group projects, and colleague discussions into their teaching strategies to foster a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment.

Still, even as kids learn in more social ways, a number of challenges must be overcome if cooperative learning is to fully take root across the region. Cultural resistance is one prominent challenge, as identified by both teachers and students in this study. At times students from more mono-ethnic groups were uneasy with mingling with other students from different ethnic group. Ultimately, such resistance reflects cultural stereotypes and beliefs that will need to be specifically addressed. Teachers may need additional training in intercultural pedagogy and conflict resolution to create a more supportive environment for all students, particularly in regions with a history of ethnic tension.

Another challenge identified in this study is the limited resources available for group-based activities. Teachers reported that insufficient auditory materials, limited access to technical resources (computers, projectors, linguistic rooms) and large group sizes of groups made it difficult to implement cooperative learning effectively. Eliminating these resource barriers through educational policy changes or external support could increase the success of cooperative learning in teaching.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study align with existing literature on cooperative learning and intercultural competence in educational settings. For instance, Smith and Johnson discovered that students who participated in cooperative learning activities experienced increase empathy and openness to cultural diversity [11]. In line with this, empirical evidence from Gurin showed that positive intergroup relations and reduced bias were stimulated through cooperative learning create situations in which diverse students work together toward shared academic and social goals [12]. Both these studies and the present one highlight cooperative learning in the common learning spaces of diverse auditoriums as vital means of fostering intercultural competence.

In addition, these results are congruent with the multiethnic auditorium surroundings of Central Asia (Krause; Rohl) and thus suggest that cooperative learning not only enrich the process of learning but also, mediation [13]. They found that students

learned cultural understanding and seem to become better at working in diverse teams with the use of cooperative learning. This study adds to this growing body of research by presenting empirical data collected from NSPI in Karakalpakstan, thus expanding the literature on cooperative learning in state education systems [14].

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the positive outcomes of this study, several limitations should be considered. First, the research size was relatively small, with only 5 teachers and 150 students participating. While the results give valuable information, a larger research size would provide a more reliable foundation for generalizing the results to other regions in Central Asia or other countries [15]. Future research could extend the study to other parts of Karakalpakstan to explore whether the observed effects of cooperative learning hold true in different cultural and educational environments.

Secondly, the study's reliability on self-reported data from surveys and interviews introduces potential biases, such as response bias. Future studies could also use a mixed-methods design, including objective measures (standardized tests of intercultural competence) or long-term follow-up of students' intercultural development [16]. Furthermore, collecting more comprehensive observational data tracking the cooperative learning in the auditory context can help unfold a detailed account of the interplay of dominant features of group interactions and student intercultural learning [17].

Finally, the study focused mainly on the short-term effects of cooperative learning. Future research could investigate the long-term effects of cooperative learning on students' intercultural competence, especially in terms of their ability to navigate intercultural interactions outside the classroom and in real-life scenarios [18].

5. Conclusion

This article confirms the significant role of cooperative learning (CL) in enhancing students' intercultural competence (IC) in Karakalpakstan, evidenced by improved cultural awareness, communication skills, and positive attitudes toward diversity. Despite cultural resistance and resource constraints, findings indicate net positives in promoting social cohesion and enhancing students' capabilities in a multicultural world. This study suggests that educational practitioners and managers in Karakalpakstan should embrace CL techniques and implement them on a larger scale to foster IC skills. Future studies should target a more prominent gap such as the implementation challenges associated with it, the sustainability of the effects of CL or its implementation in other educational contexts to ensure that CL reaches its full potential for global readiness.

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