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Perceptions and Challenges of Senior Secondary Teachers in Implementing Cooperative Learning Strategies for Life Skills Development in Economics

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Abstract

The integration of cooperative learning strategies in Economics education has gained prominence as a means of enhancing both academic understanding and essential life skills among students. Life skills such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are increasingly vital in preparing learners for real-world challenges beyond the classroom. Despite the pedagogical value of cooperative learning, its effective implementation at the senior secondary level remains inconsistent, particularly in Economics, a subject often taught through traditional, exam-oriented methods. This study investigates the perceptions and challenges experienced by senior secondary school teachers in implementing cooperative learning strategies specifically for life skills development within Economics instruction.Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study involves the collection of quantitative data through structured questionnaires administered to Economics teachers, complemented by qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews. The research explores teachers' beliefs regarding the relevance and effectiveness of cooperative learning in fostering life skills, the extent to which such strategies are utilized in Economics classrooms, and the institutional, pedagogical, and contextual challenges that hinder their application. Factors such as teacher preparedness, curriculum constraints, class sizes, availability of instructional resources, and assessment systems are examined in relation to their impact on implementation.The findings aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how Economics educators perceive cooperative learning as a tool for life skills development and what barriers impede its practice in real classroom settings. The study also seeks to identify potential enablers and practical recommendations for more effective integration of cooperative learning strategies. The outcomes are intended to inform curriculum planners, teacher educators, and policymakers to support more inclusive, skill-oriented teaching approaches in senior secondary Economics education. Ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality, are upheld throughout the research process to ensure the integrity and reliability of the study.

Keywords : *Cooperative Learning, Life Skills, Economics Education, Teacher Perceptions, Implementation Challenges, Senior Secondary Education.*

Introduction

In today's dynamic educational landscape, the development of life skills among students is recognized as a crucial goal of secondary education. Life skills—including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving—are essential for learners to navigate personal, academic, and professional challenges. Economics, as a subject in the senior secondary curriculum, holds significant potential to contribute to life skills development by encouraging analytical thinking, informed decision-making, and the ability to interpret socio-economic realities. However, traditional instructional practices in Economics often rely heavily on lecture-based teaching and individual assessments, which limit opportunities for students to actively engage, collaborate, and apply their learning in meaningful ways.Cooperative learning has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach that promotes student engagement through structured group activities. In cooperative learning settings, students work interdependently to achieve shared academic goals, while also developing interpersonal and cognitive skills. This approach aligns well with the objectives of life skills education, as it fosters peer interaction, shared responsibility, and the practical application of concepts. Despite its proven benefits, the implementation of cooperative learning in senior secondary Economics classrooms remains limited and inconsistent. Teachers' perceptions play a central role in shaping instructional practices, and their understanding,

attitudes, and experiences with cooperative learning significantly influence its adoption.Moreover, the practical application of cooperative learning strategies is often challenged by contextual and institutional barriers. These may include large class sizes, time constraints, rigid curricula, lack of professional training, limited access to teaching resources, and pressure to meet examination targets. Understanding the perceptions of senior secondary Economics teachers and the specific challenges they face is essential to bridging the gap between pedagogical theory and classroom practice.This study seeks to explore how senior secondary teachers perceive cooperative learning as a strategy for developing life skills in Economics education, and to identify the challenges that hinder its effective implementation. By focusing on the intersection of cooperative learning and life skills within the Economics curriculum, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights that can inform teacher training programs, resource planning, and policy reforms. A clearer understanding of these issues can contribute to more effective teaching approaches that not only enhance academic outcomes but also equip students with the life skills necessary for active and responsible citizenship in a complex world.

Statement of The Problem

The development of life skills among senior secondary students is increasingly recognized as an essential outcome of education, complementing subject-specific knowledge with competencies such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Economics, as a core subject at the senior secondary level, presents unique opportunities for fostering these skills through real-world applications and interactive learning methods. Cooperative learning strategies—where students work collaboratively in structured groups to achieve common goals—have been identified as effective approaches for promoting such life skills. Despite this recognition, there remains a significant disconnect between the theoretical benefits of cooperative learning and its practical implementation in senior secondary Economics classrooms.In many educational contexts, the teaching of Economics continues to rely on teacher-centered, lecture-driven methods aimed primarily at content delivery and examination preparation. This traditional approach often limits opportunities for students to engage actively with the material, share ideas, and develop essential interpersonal and cognitive skills. While cooperative learning holds promise for addressing these limitations, its adoption by Economics teachers at the senior secondary level has been slow and uneven. Understanding the reasons behind this gap requires investigating the perceptions and experiences of teachers who are responsible for delivering the curriculum and facilitating student learning.There is limited empirical data on how senior secondary Economics teachers perceive cooperative learning strategies, particularly in relation to their potential for life skills development. It is unclear to what extent teachers value these strategies, feel competent to implement them, and recognize their relevance to student outcomes. Moreover, the specific challenges teachers face in applying cooperative learning—whether related to curriculum demands, classroom management, resource availability, professional training, or assessment pressures—have not been adequately documented. These challenges may vary depending on school context, teacher background, and systemic constraints.Without a clear understanding of teachers' perceptions and the barriers they encounter, efforts to promote cooperative learning in Economics education risk being ineffective or misdirected. This problem has practical implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and educational policy, all of which must be responsive to the realities of classroom practice. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by systematically exploring the perceptions and challenges of senior secondary Economics teachers in implementing cooperative learning strategies aimed at developing life skills. The findings will provide insights necessary for developing targeted interventions to support teachers and enhance the quality of Economics education.

Research Questions

- What are the perceptions of senior secondary Economics teachers regarding cooperative learning strategies in relation to life skills development (e.g. collaboration, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving)?
- To what extent do senior secondary Economics teachers implement cooperative learning strategies in their classrooms?
- What challenges do these teachers encounter in implementing cooperative learning for life skills development in Economics?
- How do factors such as teacher training, resource availability, class size, institutional support, and assessment systems influence their perceptions and implementation of cooperative learning?
- What recommendations do senior secondary Economics teachers suggest to overcome the identified challenges?

Research Objectives

- To assess the perceptions of senior secondary Economics teachers about the usefulness and relevance of cooperative learning strategies for developing life skills in students.
- To determine the prevalence and nature of cooperative learning implementation in senior secondary Economics classrooms.
- To identify and analyze the key challenges faced by those teachers in implementing cooperative learning for life skills development.
- To examine how institutional and contextual factors (teacher training, resources, class size, assessment practices, school leadership) affect both perception and implementation.
- To offer recommendations to teacher educators, policymakers, and school administrators for improving the adoption and effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies in the Economics curriculum.

David W. Johnson[1] & Roger T. Johnson[2], in Learning Together and Alone, assert that cooperative learning fosters essential life skills such as collaboration, accountability, and leadership. Their model emphasizes structured interdependence, which is highly relevant in teaching Economics at the senior secondary level. Teachers often perceive this structure as beneficial but difficult to implement under tight curricular schedules. The complexity of Economics concepts, such as inflation and fiscal policy, requires careful facilitation, and teachers may lack the time or confidence to implement group strategies effectively. As a result, while they value the potential benefits, challenges in execution create hesitation among educators.

Edythe Johnson Holubec, co-author of Cooperation in the Classroom, highlights the importance of intentional task design and role assignment in group work. In senior secondary Economics, where students prepare for high-stakes exams, teachers may feel pressured to prioritize syllabus coverage over cooperative activities. Holubec's emphasis on structured group roles aligns with life skills development, but teachers often perceive difficulties in balancing group interaction with academic rigor. Many find it challenging to integrate group roles like summarizer or evaluator into abstract Economics topics. This mismatch leads to resistance, despite acknowledging the potential of cooperative learning for fostering interpersonal and cognitive skills.

Robert E. Slavin[3], in Cooperative Learning: Theory and Research, underscores the academic and social benefits of cooperative learning. However, he identifies significant challenges such as unequal participation and difficulty assessing individual contributions. Senior secondary Economics teachers often echo these concerns, expressing uncertainty about grading group-based tasks when individual assessment dominates the system. Life skills like negotiation and communication are not typically evaluated in exams, so cooperative learning appears misaligned with assessment practices. Slavin's framework highlights a gap between theory and practice, where teachers appreciate cooperative learning in principle but perceive logistical and systemic barriers to its consistent use.

Spencer Kagan[4], in Pioneering Perspectives in Cooperative Learning, introduces practical strategies such as Think-Pair-Share and Jigsaw, which are designed to be adaptable across subjects. While these techniques promote critical thinking and social interaction—key life skills—teachers of senior secondary Economics report difficulties applying them to complex economic theories or data analysis tasks. Kagan emphasizes student engagement, yet Economics teachers perceive that content-heavy syllabi leave little room for extended group discussion. Moreover, the risk of students going off-topic or dominating conversations deters some educators. Thus, despite valuing engagement, teachers often limit cooperative learning due to fears of content loss and mismanagement.

[1] Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., &Holubec, E. J. (1998). Cooperation in the classroom (6th ed.). Interaction Book Company.
[2] Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999). Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning (5th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
[3] Slavin, R. E. (1995). Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
[4] Kagan, S. (1994). Cooperative learning. Kagan Publishing.

Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz[5] and Norman Miller, editors of Interaction in Cooperative Groups, argue that student-student interaction facilitates deeper learning and life skill acquisition. However, Economics teachers at the senior secondary level may find such interactions harder to manage when students have different levels of prior knowledge or motivation. Teachers perceive this disparity as a challenge in creating equitable group environments. While Hertz-Lazarowitz emphasizes the social dimension of learning, teachers are often concerned that weaker students may not contribute effectively or that stronger students will dominate. These concerns hinder full implementation, especially when life skill development isn't explicitly integrated into curriculum standards.

Shlomo Sharan[6] & Yael Sharan, in their collaborative works, advocate for group investigation as a strategy to foster independence, reasoning, and communication. These are key life skills relevant to Economics education. Yet, senior secondary teachers often perceive a misfit between group investigation and time constraints imposed by rigid syllabi. The requirement for extensive group coordination and topic exploration may not align with curriculum expectations. Teachers also express concern about students deviating from core content during group work. Although Sharan & Sharan present group investigation as effective, practical challenges in Economics classrooms reduce teacher confidence in applying this method regularly.

Morton Deutsch[7], in Theories of Cooperation and Competition, provides foundational insights into how cooperative goal structures foster interdependence and shared responsibility. These principles support life skills like empathy, leadership, and collective problem-solving, which are valuable in Economics education. However, senior secondary teachers often operate within competitive academic environments where individual achievement is prioritized. Deutsch's theory assumes environments supportive of cooperation, but in many school systems, exams dominate, and collaboration is viewed with skepticism. Teachers perceive a misalignment between cooperative goals and assessment formats, leading them to favor traditional teaching methods, despite understanding the benefits of life skill development.

Neil Davidson[8], in Pioneering Perspectives in Cooperative Learning, presents case studies showing varied teacher attitudes based on context and subject matter. In Economics, where abstract concepts require conceptual clarity, teachers often feel more confident delivering content through lectures. Davidson points out that successful implementation of cooperative learning depends heavily on teacher beliefs and support systems. Senior secondary teachers report that they lack peer support or administrative encouragement to experiment with group strategies. They perceive a risk in changing methods that may not yield immediate academic results. Thus, although the potential for life skill development is recognized, change is slow.

Elliot Aronson[9], creator of the Jigsaw method, in his contributions to cooperative learning literature, shows how structured interdependence can reduce prejudice and build teamwork. In Economics classrooms, the Jigsaw strategy could be used for topics like economic systems or globalization. However, senior secondary teachers often perceive this structure as time-consuming and difficult to monitor. Aronson's method requires that each student be responsible for a piece of content, which can be challenging when students vary in academic readiness. Teachers worry about content accuracy and pacing. Although the strategy supports life skill development, its practicality in exam-driven environments remains questionable.

Elizabeth G. Cohen[10], in Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom, emphasizes the importance of equal status interaction and teacher facilitation in group learning. Economics teachers at the senior secondary level often express concern about managing heterogeneous classrooms, where some students dominate while others disengage. Cohen suggests using roles and norms to balance participation, yet teachers report challenges in consistently applying these measures. Time constraints, large class sizes, and lack of training intensify the problem.

[5] Hertz-Lazarowitz, R., & Miller, N. (Eds.). (1992). Interaction in cooperative groups: The theoretical anatomy of group learning. Cambridge University Press.
[6] Sharan, S., & Sharan, Y. (1992). Expanding cooperative learning through group investigation. Teachers College Press.
[7] Deutsch, M. (1973). The resolution of conflict: Constructive and destructive processes. Yale University Press.
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[9] Aronson, E. (2002). The jigsaw classroom. Sage Publications.
[10] Cohen, E. G. (1994). Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.

While Cohen's principles are aligned with life skill development, many teachers perceive cooperative learning as demanding too much classroom management effort for consistent implementation.

Robert M. Jones[11], in studies related to science education, identifies resource availability as a critical factor influencing teachers' willingness to adopt cooperative methods. Applying this to Economics, senior secondary teachers often report lacking access to case studies, simulations, or group-based learning materials tailored to economic concepts. Jones's findings suggest that without adequate instructional tools, cooperative learning is perceived as burdensome. Teachers also struggle to find tasks that build both economic understanding and life skills such as decision-making or critical analysis. This resource gap contributes to limited use of cooperative strategies, even among teachers who believe in their potential effectiveness.

Keramati & Gillies[12], in Advantages and Challenges of Cooperative Learning in Two Different Cultures, explore cultural and systemic barriers to cooperative learning. Their research reveals that teacher perceptions are shaped by broader educational policies and cultural expectations. In contexts where memorization and individual performance are emphasized, such as senior secondary Economics education, cooperative learning is often seen as supplementary rather than essential. Teachers express concern about deviating from exam-oriented teaching. Despite recognizing the benefits for life skills, they perceive that systemic constraints and cultural norms limit their autonomy to implement student-centered approaches like cooperative learning consistently.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the perceptions and challenges experienced by senior secondary school teachers in implementing cooperative learning strategies for life skills development in Economics. The qualitative approach is appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' views, instructional practices, and the contextual factors that shape their experiences. Within this framework, a descriptive phenomenological method will be employed to capture the lived experiences of Economics teachers who actively engage in or attempt cooperative learning techniques in their classrooms. This approach allows for detailed exploration of both the subjective perceptions and the practical realities that teachers face.

2. Population and Sampling

The study will target Economics teachers at the senior secondary school level, specifically those teaching in schools that follow a prescribed curriculum integrating life skills objectives. The population includes teachers from both public and private institutions. To ensure relevance and depth of information, a purposive sampling technique will be used. The inclusion criteria require that participants have a minimum of three years of teaching experience and demonstrable exposure to or involvement in the use of cooperative learning strategies in Economics instruction. This criterion ensures that participants possess both pedagogical experience and familiarity with the subject of study. A sample size of 10 to 15 teachers will be selected to provide a range of perspectives while maintaining manageable data volume for qualitative analysis. The sample will include teachers from different school types and geographic locations (urban, semi-urban, and rural) to capture variation in implementation contexts.

3. Data Collection Methods

Data collection will involve semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis:

- Semi-structured interviews will serve as the primary data collection tool, enabling participants to share their perceptions, experiences, and challenges in a flexible yet focused manner. The interview guide will include open-ended questions related to their understanding of cooperative learning, how they integrate it into Economics instruction, and its perceived effectiveness in promoting life skills such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving.

[11] Jones, R. M. (2007). Cooperative learning in science education: Issues and strategies. National Science Teachers Association Press.
[12] Gillies, R. M., &Keramati, M. (2013). Advantages and challenges of cooperative learning in two different cultures. Improving Schools, 16(3), 221–232.

- Classroom observations will complement the interviews by providing first-hand insight into how cooperative learning strategies are applied in actual teaching settings. Observations will focus on teacher facilitation methods, student participation, and the presence of life skills indicators during cooperative tasks.
- Document analysis will involve the review of lesson plans, teaching aids, and assessment tools used by participating teachers. This will help to evaluate the extent to which cooperative learning principles and life skills development are embedded in instructional design.

Variables and Measures

Independent variables include teacher qualifications, years of teaching experience, school type, class size, availability of resources, and assessment-related pressures.

Dependent variables are teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning, frequency and quality of its use in classrooms, and its perceived effectiveness in promoting life skills among students.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) to summarize overall patterns. Inferential techniques such as correlation and regression analysis will be applied to examine relationships between contextual factors and cooperative learning practices or perceptions.

Qualitative data from interviews will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Coding will proceed in stages: open coding to identify initial categories, axial coding to connect related ideas, and selective coding to refine overarching themes.

Integration of Data

Findings from both data sources will be compared to identify points of convergence and divergence. This integration will help validate results, offering a richer and more complete understanding of the factors influencing cooperative learning implementation in senior secondary Economics classrooms.

Expected Outcomes

- A clearer understanding of how senior secondary Economics teachers perceive cooperative learning and its role in life skills development.
- Data on how frequently cooperative learning strategies are actually used, and in what forms.
- Identification of major contextual, institutional, and practical barriers to implementation (e.g., resource constraints, training, assessment pressures).
- Insights into which factors (teacher training, school type, class size) are significantly associated with more positive perceptions / higher implementation.
- Suggestions / recommendations that can inform teacher professional development, school policy, and curriculum design to better integrate cooperative learning approaches.

Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent :** All participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, what participation involves, that participation is voluntary, and that they may withdraw at any time without penalty.
- **Confidentiality & Anonymity :** Identities of teachers and schools will be kept confidential; data will be reported in aggregate form or with pseudonyms.
- **Permission :** Obtain necessary permissions from school authorities, educational boards, or relevant institutional review boards (IRBs).
- **Minimization of Harm :** Ensuring that participation does not place unfair burden on teachers; interview times will be scheduled to respect their professional time.
- **Data Security :** Secure storage of data (electronic files with password; physical documents locked) and proper destruction after study duration per policy.

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Data Tables

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	60	60
	Female	40	40
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	30	30
	5 to 10 years	45	45
	More than 10 years	25	25
School Type	Public	70	70
	Private	30	30

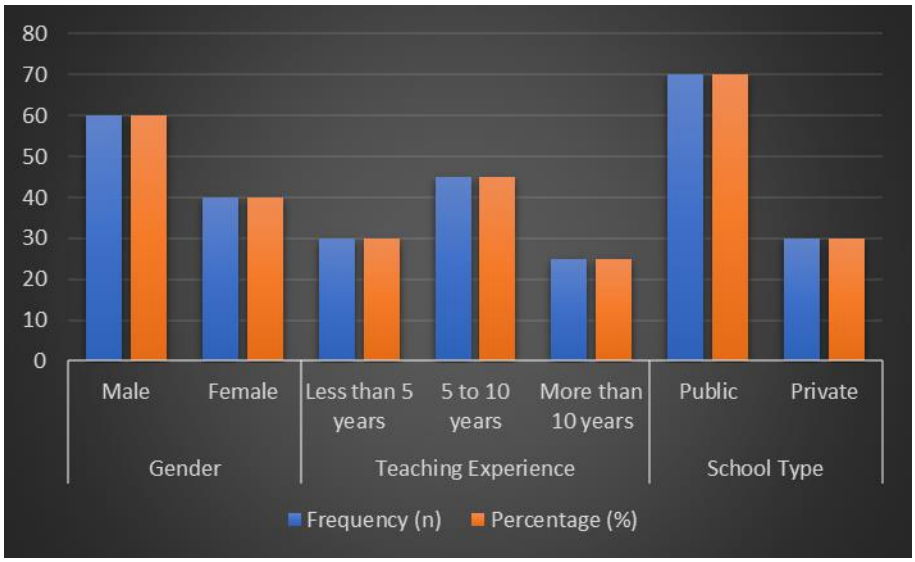

Figure 1 : Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Cooperative Learning

Perception Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Cooperative learning helps students develop communication skills	2	3	10	50	35
Cooperative learning fits well within the Economics curriculum	5	10	20	40	25
Cooperative learning requires more time than available in class	15	20	30	25	10
Cooperative learning improves students' critical thinking skills	3	5	15	45	32

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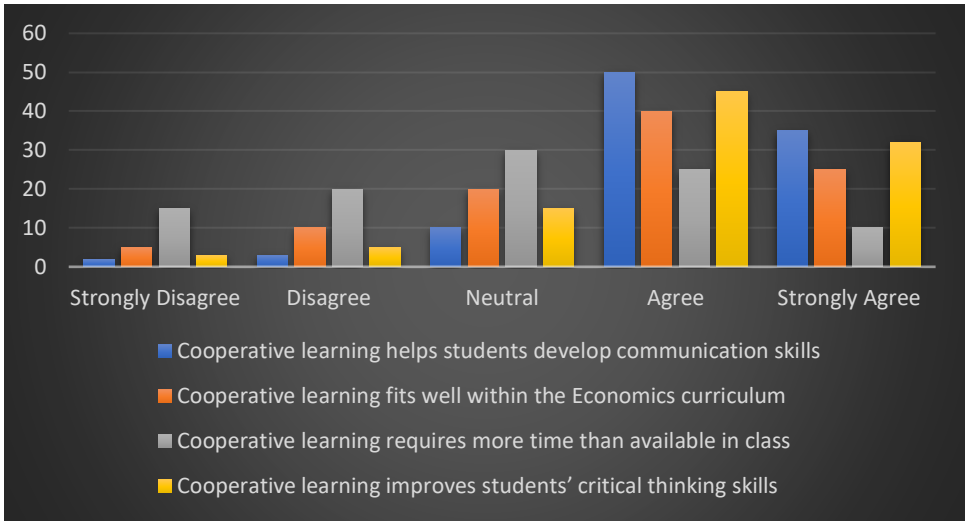

Figure 2 : Teachers' Perceptions of Cooperative Learning

Table 3: Frequency of Implementation of Cooperative Learning Strategies

Cooperative Learning Strategy	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Group Discussion	5	10	30	40	15
Jigsaw Technique	20	30	25	15	10
Peer Teaching	15	20	35	25	5
Role-play	30	25	25	15	5

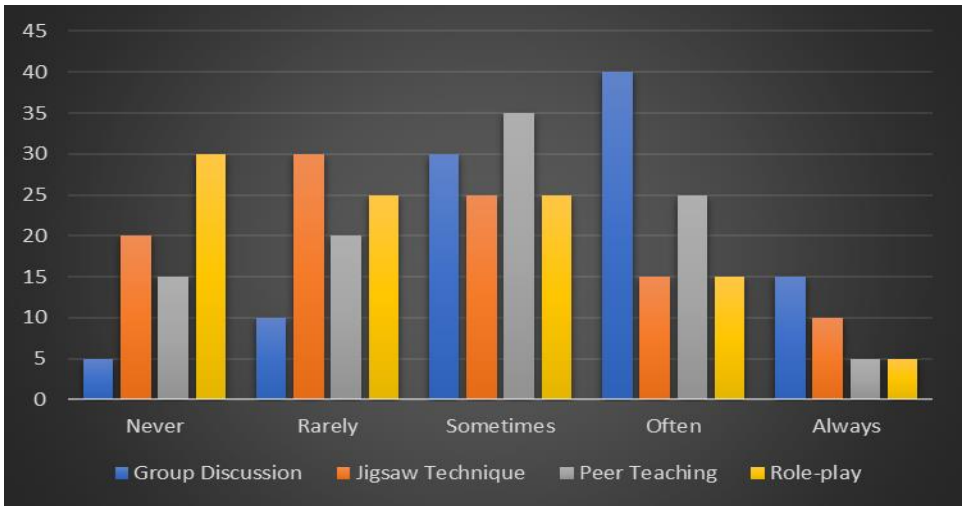

Figure 3 : Frequency of Implementation of Cooperative Learning Strategies

Table 4: Challenges Faced in Implementing Cooperative Learning

Challenge	Mean Score (1-5)	Rank
Large class size	4.5	1
Lack of training in cooperative learning	4.2	2
Time constraints due to syllabus coverage	4.0	3

Insufficient teaching resources	3.8	4
Pressure to prepare students for exams	3.6	5

Mean scores are from teacher ratings where 1 = Not a challenge and 5 = Major challenge.

Figure 4 : Challenges Faced in Implementing Cooperative Learning

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