

Introduction

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy implemented in classrooms in order to prepare students for the future. It enables students to work together to accomplish common learning goals while increasing their understanding of a given topic or concept (Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, & Nelson, 1981; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Parr, 2007; Schul, 2011).

The benefits of cooperative learning are supported by multiple research studies and include increases in student intellectual performance along with behavioral improvements (Case, Stevens, & Cooper, 2007; Huss, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Johnson et al., 2007; Lin, 2006; Najafi et al., 2011; Schul, 2011; Slavin, 1991; Whicker et al., 2001; Zakaria et al., 2013). Many research studies focus on the benefits and methods of the cooperative learning process while omitting teacher perceptions and trends in its implementation at local schools.

The purpose of this research was to learn what cooperative learning methods are most prevalent in elementary and secondary schools and the frequency of their implementation in order to draw correlations and observe trends in student preparation for the future. Specific research questions guided this process:

1. As students progress through K-12 education, which cooperative learning methods are the most prevalent in elementary and secondary classrooms?
2. What is the frequency of the cooperative learning strategies being utilized in elementary and secondary classrooms?
3. Do elementary and secondary teachers identify cooperative learning as an important and beneficial teaching strategy?

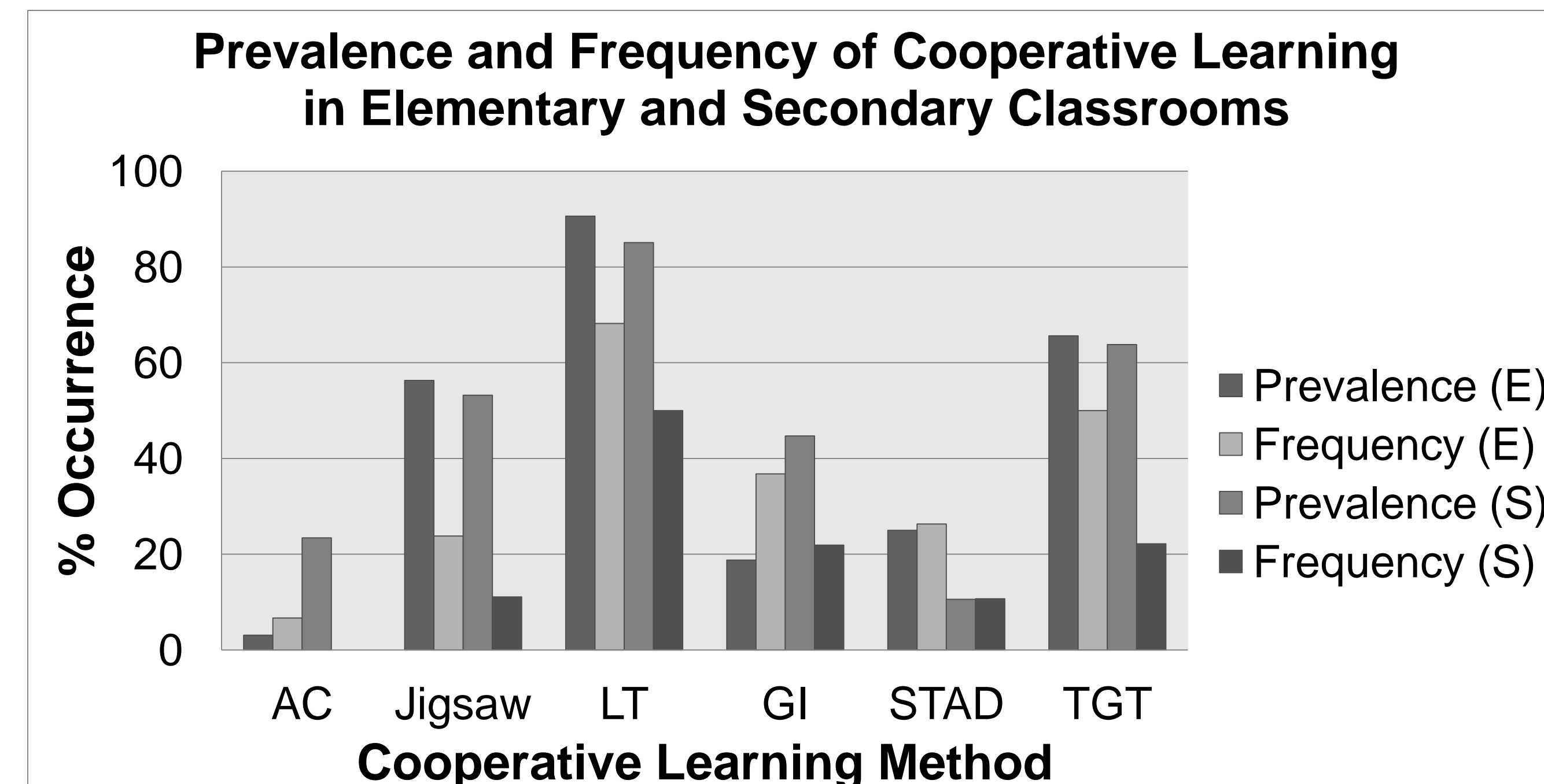
Method

The researcher used a survey instrument to gather data from a sample comprised of approximately 401 current elementary and secondary teachers within Greenview Community Schools (GCS) in order to draw correlations and observe trends in student preparation for the future. Greenview Community Schools are located in Greenview, Indiana—a predominantly urban area.

The data collected included 94 completed surveys out of approximately 401 surveys distributed to all current elementary and secondary teachers in GCS. Of the 94 completed surveys, 2 were discarded because the participants reported that they were not current teachers. An additional 8 surveys were discarded because the participants stated that they did not use cooperative learning in their classrooms. The data from 83 respondents was analyzed using descriptive statistics and central tendencies for a response rate of 20.7%. Of the 83 participants, 39.76% were elementary teachers ($n=33$) while 60.24% were secondary teachers ($n=50$). Participant years of teaching experience are outlined below:

Years of Teaching Experience	Elementary Educators			Secondary Educators		
	n	Frequency	% Occurrence	n	Frequency	% Occurrence
5 or fewer	33	9	27.3	50	6	12.0
6-10	33	8	24.2	50	13	26.0
11-15	33	6	18.2	50	10	20.0
15-20	33	3	9.1	50	9	18.0
20 or more	33	7	21.2	50	12	24.0

Results



Cooperative Learning Method Key
Academic controversy (AC)
Jigsaw
Learning Together (LT)
Group Investigation (GI)
Student Team-Achievement Divisions (STAD)
Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT)

Statement	Elementary Educators			Secondary Educators		
	n	Mean Likert Score	SD	n	Mean Likert Score	SD
Cooperative learning is an effective teaching strategy.	24	3.417	0.493	45	3.267	0.490
My students benefit from cooperative learning.	24	3.292	0.455	45	3.244	0.479
Student achievement improves with the use of cooperative learning.	24	3.292	0.455	45	3.178	0.437
Student social behaviors improve with the use of cooperative learning.	24	3.000	0.500	45	2.889	0.767
Student motivation improves with the use of cooperative learning.	23	3.217	0.507	45	3.067	0.442
Cooperative learning is important to prepare students for success in the future.	24	3.417	0.493	45	3.156	0.514

Discussion

According to Johnson and Johnson (2002) the cooperative learning methods of Learning Together, Academic Controversy, Teams-Games-Tournaments, and Group Investigation resulted in the highest level of student achievement. In this study, Learning Together (LT) was the most commonly reported cooperative learning method utilized in elementary and secondary classrooms followed by Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT). This data aligned with the outcomes of previous research. This was further supported by both of these cooperative learning strategies being ranked the highest in frequency of use by all participants in this research study.

Educators use LT and TGT as cooperative learning strategies because they result in higher levels of student achievement and improvements in student behavior. This was supported by a level of agreement that cooperative learning is an effective teaching strategy that improves student achievement, student motivation, and that students benefit from its use in all classrooms.

A discrepancy occurred when both elementary and secondary participants reported Jigsaw as the third most prevalent cooperative learning strategy yet employed it less frequently than Group Investigation. This dissimilarity could be explained by a decrease in the number (n) of respondents who chose to answer specific questions.

Secondary educators also reported a level of disagreement that cooperative learning improves the social behaviors of students. This could be explained by cognitive and behavioral differences among elementary and secondary student populations, but would also be a topic for further research.

Limitations: This study was conducted on a single school corporation with a small number of participants who self-reported the data. Additionally data analysis omitted responses from teachers who did not use cooperative learning in their classrooms.