

# Improving Quality of Classroom Instruction: Using Cooperative Learning



In a typical Ugandan school environment crowded classrooms is the order of the day, where most teachers face challenges in attempting to involve every child in the teaching and learning process. The opportunity to interact with individual learners is limited to learners who can provide responses to the teacher's questions during the lesson. The ministry of Education and Sports is advocating for the use of participatory methods of teaching as a policy in the primary schools however most teachers find it more convenient to lecture to the children. As a partner the Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development (UPHOLD) initiated a Teacher effectiveness intervention that is rolling out across the 29 districts the training of teachers on the use of Cooperative Learning as a teaching approach. In the last two years of UPHOLD's active work in supporting improved quality of teaching and learning, teachers are increasingly using participatory and interactive methods of classroom instruction. Pupils' interaction and the quality of learning in academic and social skills are beginning to improve.



Arua hill Head teacher conducts a school-based workshop.

According to the headteacher Arua Hill Mr Raymond Obiayi, 'Teachers adopted the Cooperative Learning (CL) idea easily and are now practicing it... The pupils are very enthusiastic about it... It is very good to teach pupils to lead and be accountable at an earlier stage... With my deputy we saw that we needed to train the teachers within a short time so we consulted the School Management Committee (SMC) for support... when we started to implement CL some teachers proved very difficult and resistant to it... So we agreed to develop a supervision tool to use for peer supervision. It has worked miracles...' Arua Hill Primary school has 42 teachers and all the pupils (1,863) in the school are taught English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and now the Thematic Curriculum using the CL approach.

William Zabo Vice chairperson- SMC Arua Hill Primary School says "We are now faced with a big challenge that the pupils in other schools are being transferred to this school because in Primary Seven we were ahead in Primary Leaving Examination in the district this year according to the results of district exams ... I am confident that we are going to achieve more... The head teacher is using the knowledge from the recent trainings in Education Management which UPHOLD has done to go full blast in ensuring Cooperative Learning is done in the whole school"

Ezuku Primary School also in Arua district has 1,300 pupils and 26 teachers. The headteacher, Jovan Ogonduru asserts that CL has helped teachers in grouping the pupils despite the congestion in the classrooms. "We now use the eucalyptus trees' shades and the school hall to conduct lessons using CL. Of my teachers, 12 are now very competent in CL... Cooperative Learning is helping us a lot in grouping pupils, sharing materials; pupils have elected their subject leaders and this has helped them borrow books for their own groups and work in subject teams for two weeks then change..."



Arua hill pupils during CL lesson

Challenging as it may be viewed, there are already great attempts by teachers to adopt the Cooperative learning approach of teaching in the field that is certainly a fertile ground on which focused mentoring for the teachers would ascertain improved quality of teaching and learning.