

Breaking down online barriers: cooperative learning in health sciences

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Dear Madam Editor:

We are writing to you concerning the article "Perceptions of online cooperative learning by health science students" (DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24265/horizmed.2023.v23n2.03>), which addresses a crucial topic in contemporary medical education: cooperative learning ⁽¹⁾.

Cooperative learning promotes collaboration among students to attain common goals and leads them to solve problems and build knowledge with mutual support. This educational approach, as the article highlights, is extremely important in training future healthcare professionals ⁽²⁾.

Online cooperative learning may be a transforming tool. It is not limited only to share knowledge but it also promotes participation and collaboration among students. This approach allows developing critical skills for health science practice such as teamwork, effective communication and shared decision-making. Online cooperative learning also promotes joint building of knowledge, which allows students to be the main actors of their learning process ^(3,4).

In spite of advantages, it is crucial to accept limitations in online cooperative learning, among which certain areas stand out particularly: creation of personal relationships, development of effective non-verbal communication and teamwork skills as well as the possibility of peer-to-peer interactions that contribute to spontaneous and fluid group dynamics. These elements are more easily managed in a shared physical environment and may pose a challenge in an online environment ⁽⁵⁾.

Therefore, it is essential to research technological strategies and tools that overcome these barriers. A hybrid approach combining the best of both worlds—the flexibility of online education and advantages of in-person cooperative learning—would be beneficial. The implementation of synchronous and asynchronous activities that promote real-time interaction such as video conferencing, online debates and discussion forums can promote online collaboration.

The use of collaborative learning platforms can also facilitate online learning experience since it allows creating work groups, exchanging files and collaborating on joint projects, which contributes to strengthen the relationship among students. It is fundamental to train professors in the effective use of these tools in order to promote students' active participation.

Continuous research may contribute to develop more effective educational strategies for online cooperative learning. Permanent assessment of students' perception, analysis of academic results and follow-up of graduates' professional performance may provide valuable information about the long-term impact of this methodology in medical training and practice.

In conclusion, while online education poses challenges to cooperative learning, there are opportunities to overcome such barriers. Online cooperative learning remains a promising strategy for training health professionals with hybrid approaches and the adequate use of technological tools. If this methodology keeps improving, medical education will be more inclusive, effective and student-focused.

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