

An Overview of Cooperative Learning in Theory and Practice:

A reflection from students' perspective

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Abstract—Popularly known as a core of cooperative learning, group work is frequently applied in classroom. However, some researches revealed that collaborative atmosphere was hardly found in the groupwork. The available researches mainly discussed the students' perspective through questionnaires and only a few tried to picture the students' beliefs from group discussion. Therefore, the current study investigated the students' attitudes towards group work by asking them to share their experiences while working in the group. and figured out how such attitudes influenced their interaction with the other members in the group. The empirical data were obtained from questionnaires, group discussion and discourse analysis. The participants of the research were 51 sophomores who got involved in filling in a questionnaire and some of them were taken to join FGD in which they voluntarily express their opinions regarding group work. In addition, the study also managed to record student's interaction in groups. The data showed that the students' interactions in the group work did not go as cooperative learning suggested. The five elements of cooperative learning hardly found in the group. Most students in the group relied on one person to do the whole task assigned. As the result, some of them think that group work was a waste of time. This finding suggested that the group work would fail to promote cooperative learning if interdependence and individual accountability were not enforced. Therefore, acting as a facilitator, the teacher is supposed to find the way to cater the interdependent and fortify the sense of collaboration among students.

Keywords—*Cooperative Learning (CL); group work; Focus Group Discussion (FGD)*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is believed that group work is a conducive way of learning or acquiring knowledge in which the members feel free to interact, share, and help one to another as each member intends to learn and participate in learning [1,2]. In relation to cooperative learning, D. W. Johnson & Johnson state that group work can be identified as cooperative Learning group if the students work together to accomplish the shared goal: to maximize their own learning and to maximize the learning of all other group members. However, when it does not take place, group work may result in reverse. It can hinder student learning and create disharmony and dissatisfaction with classroom life [3].

Some researches regarding group work pointed out the problems which can hamper the members of group to work harmoniously the differences of background and culture [4], or other technical problems such as feeling dislike with the people in the group, other members do not show up or contribute, hard to focus during small group exercise and etc. [5]. Most of the researches rely on quantitative research design, and only a few which employed data from experience sharing. Therefore, the current study attempts to investigate group work by employing both questionnaires and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and it posted research questions as follow:

- What is students' attitude toward groupwork?
- Do the students' attitude influence the way the students interact one to another in the group?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part discusses the theoretical background of the topic examined in the study. The discussion includes the theory of cooperative learning groupwork versus traditional groupwork, and previous study related to group work.

A. Cooperative Learning

Communication is quite crucial in language learning. According to Vygotsky, a child can learn something through communication and interaction with people in his environment [6]. Vygotsky suggested that teachers utilize cooperative learning exercises where children can gather and interact so less competent children can develop with help from more skillful peers - within the zone of proximal development which in classroom can be carried out by creating learning atmosphere conducive for cooperation.

Cooperative learning, in reality, is realized through the implementation of group work. In fact, D. W. Johnson & Johnson identify two types of group works. some learning group facilitate student learning and increase the quality of life in the classroom. Other types of learning groups hinder student learning and create disharmony and dissatisfaction with classroom life [3]. D. W. Johnson & Johnson further indicate the importance of having the cognition to identify cooperative learning group from other types of group works. therefore, they propose five basic elements of Cooperation: 1) positive

interdependence; 2) Individual Accountability; 3) Face to Face promotive Interaction; 4) Social Skills; 5) Group Processing. The followings are the explanation of each element in details [3].

The first element of cooperative learning group is positive interdependence. Positive interdependence takes place when everybody in the group is responsible for maximizing the learning of all members. This means the efforts of each person benefit not only the individual but also everyone else in the group. Positive interdependence can be realized if each student develops a unique identity as an individual and at the same time, the student needs to understand the social identity of classmates and to respect them as collaborators and friends.

The second element is individual accountability. This second element will occur when the group is accountable for achieving its goals, and each member must be accountable for contributing a fair share of the work toward the group goal. Individual accountability can be achieved by conducting assessment regularly. According to Black & Wiliam assessment is an effective tool in focusing students' own learning process [7]. The type of assessments suitable for group work is formative assessment. The research held by Lotan indicates that formative assessment during group work create more advanced work [8].

The third element is face to face promotive interaction. Students are required to promote each other's success by helping, assisting, supporting, encouraging, and praising each other's effort to learn. The fourth element is social skill. Promoting each other's success is the main goal of a cooperative learning group. Thus, every member is required to give a contribution to the success of the group. The fifth element is group processing. The purpose of group processing is to a) enable learning groups to focus on group maintenance. b) facilitate the learning of a social skill, c) ensure that members receive feedback on their participation, and d) remind students to practice collaborative skills consistently. These five characteristics from D. W. Johnson & Johnson, distinguish cooperative learning group from traditional group work. The differences between cooperative learning group and traditional group work will be discussed in section to come [3].

B. Cooperative Learning Group

The term cooperative learning and group work is oftenly assumed as synonymous. K. A. Smith, points out that there are many people who believe that they are using cooperative learning [9]. However, the fact is that most of the group works are missing its main core. With refer to characteristics and principles of cooperative learning, Smith suggests that the crucial differences lies between simply putting students in groups to learn and in structuring cooperation among students. He explains that cooperation is not merely having students sit side by side to talk with each other as they do their individual assignments. Cooperation is not simply assigning a report to a group of students where one student does all the work and the others put their names on the product as well. It is also not just nominating students who are able to do a task well and finish first to help the slower students. Cooperation does involve face to face interaction and physically together sitting in the group,

but it is much more than that. It involves discussing material, sharing material with other students, helping and promoting one to another. Those cohesiveness in the group can be attained when consequences are developed to manage group behaviors and avoid disagreement [10]. Hence the five elements of cooperative learning cannot be taken partly. They are bound one to another. In order to make it clear, the following table shows the differences between cooperative learning group and traditional group discussion.

TABLE I. THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN COOPERATIVE LEARNING GROUP AND TRADITIONAL GROUP DISCUSSION [3,11,12]

Main Characteristics	Cooperative Learning Group	Traditional Group
Interdependence Vs Dependence	The group member believes that they cannot succeed unless the other members of the group succeed (and visa versa)	Focus is on individual performance only.
Group production	CL group is expected to generate a formal product which represents a concrete manifestation of the group's collective effort (completion of a work sheet; a compendium or chart of specific ideas; an overhead transparency which can be displayed to other groups).	The Group gets together for informal discussion of some courserelated issue,
Interdependent roles for promotive interaction	A sense of individual responsibility to the group may be increased if each group member has a specific and essential role to play in achieving the group's final goal or product	There is only little commitment to each other's learning.
Individual accountability vs group accountability	As the role is specified, the individual contribution can easily be identified and assessed.	The group's members receive the same grade for group assessment and it often raises dissatisfaction
Social skill	Explicit instruction on effective skills for communicating and relating to others are given to students prior to, and in preparation for their involvement in small-group learning activities.	Group work activities generally are not necessarily planned and structured as the group gathered for informal discussion only
Group Processing	Students are given opportunities and procedure to reflect on, and evaluate the how well the learning group are functioning and the process of social interaction in the group.	students are left on their own to verbalize their ideas
Instructor and Facilitator	CL involves the instructor as a facilitator and consultant in the group-learning process	students are left on their own to verbalize their ideas and conduct their work

C. The Importance of Attitude

Fishbein and Ajzen, the experts on psychology, state that attitudes reflect a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object [13]. Since attitude is a result of learning, it means one's attitude is decided by the way he or she responds to the

process of learning: positive or negative. This statement is in line with Anderson in Gable & Wolf, who states that attitudes are feelings that can be either unfavorable or favorable in direction, and are typically directed toward some object (that is, target) [14]. When the association between feelings and a particular target is learned, the feelings are consistently experienced in the presence of the target. This argument points out that there is a relation between feeling and the presence of a particular target.

In terms of groupwork, students' attitudes are important to take into account as it may influence learning behaviours. Kouros & Abrami assert that negative attitudes toward group work may jeopardize group interactions and relationships, as well as student learning [15]. Attitudes, once formed, influence how students think, feel, and behave. The measurement of these student attitudes may yield important insights about how these attitudes enhance or hinder learning.

D. Previous Research

Previously, it has been stated that teachers sometimes employ group work without any clear structures. This situation may result in different responses from students. The researches reveal that the differences may result from different background and culture [4], or other technical problems such as feeling dislike with the people in the group, other members do not show up or contribute, hard to focus during small group exercise and etc. [5].

The different attitude of students in responding small group learning have invited many researchers to investigate types of attitudes. The research conducted by Kouros & Abrami examining student attitude using SAGE questionnaires display correlation among 4 factors: quality of product and process, peer support, student interdependence, and frustrations with group members [15]. The quality of product and process will be low because of low peer support, and frustration among students as the result of poor students' interdependence. The research also finds that 1) students' underlying need to feel a sense of control over their learning environment makes them choose their group members. It highlights students need to feel that they have a "voice" and a "choice" when it pertains to their academic learning 2) Most students think that group grade is not fair considering not all members provide fair share to the group 3) unequal contribution or unequal division of labour in group work is the frequently cited problems.

While most researches on groupwork rely on quantitative research design, the research developed by Chen & Hird collected both quantitative and qualitative data [16]. They made use tape recorder, interview, and discussions to collect the data. The recorded data were analysed using turn taking and the length of turn were also calculated. Meanwhile the data from interview and discussion were transcribed and interpreted. The results indicated that the data from qualitative method can be an alternative to those obtained from quantitative method. Looking at the number of utterances, the qualitative data revealed that all groups were less productive in their second discussions. The turn taking data show that members of the group were found to be less active in the second discussion than in the first one. However, during interview there were at

least three students out of five who believed they improved in their performances in their group. This finding pointed out that groups and individuals within groups when talking about the same topics in the same classroom behave differently. Similar to the research from Chen, this research tries to apply both qualitative and quantitative method. The upcoming section will talk about this.

III. METHODOLOGY

Several studies on group work used quantitative approach. Thus, this study tried to use both quantitative and qualitative method or mixed method [17]. Questionnaire was developed using some items from SAGE questionnaires from [15]. The questionnaire consists of 5 attitude statements 1) When I work in a group I end up doing most of the work 2) I let the other students do most of the work 3) I feel working in the group is a waste of time 4) I learn more information when I work in the group 5) When I am in the group, we teach and learn from each other. Students indicated their responses on a four-point frequency scale ranging from the option always to never option (see table 2). Each category is equally important to figure out the students' experiences working in groupwork in general. Each statement represents global situation of five elements of cooperative group; interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skill, group processing. The questionnaire was analysed by ranking the proportion of respondents answering for each category of each question.

FGD was also carried out to confirm the students' answers to questionnaire, and tape recording was conducted to depict the students' interactions during the groupwork. The participants of FGD are selected based on the result of questionnaires. 7 students owned different opinion towards groupwork shared their experiences, thought and suggestion toward group work. Their responses are then categorized and synchronized with five elements of cooperative learning.

In addition, the study held turn taking analysis. Tape recorder was used to record the flow of interaction took place in the group. The data recorded were transcribed and identified the turn taking happened in the groupwork. The result of data analysis can be found in the upcoming section.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Several weeks before the questionnaire was distributed, some students had been asked about their opinions on groupwork. The informal interview prior to the research revealed students' negative opinions regarding group work. However, the students' opinions were in contrast with the result of questionnaire which can be seen in table 2.

TABLE II. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF QUESTIONNAIRE ON GROUP WORK IN PERCENTAGE

	Very often	often	rarely	never
When I work in a group I end up doing most of the work	12	33	43	12
I let the other students do most of the work	2	14	51	33

Table 2. Cont.

I feel working in the group is a waste of time	6	22	31	41
I learn more information when I work in the group	16	49	29	6
When I am in the group, we teach and learn from each other	20	59	18	4

The table displays that although most students denied that they do most of the work in groupwork. However, the table reveals that most students have ever got through this kind of feeling. It is 88 % of them and it is only 12% who never experience this situation. Similar situation takes place when the students respond to statement saying that they let others do most of the work. There are 51% students who rarely experience the situation but in all 67% of students have ever experienced such situation. The third statement which says that group work is a waste of time is responded by 59% of students have ever experienced the situation and it is 41% of students have never got through this kind of feeling. The last two statements are responded positively by students. 94% of students agree that they get more information in group work and 96 % of students have ever experienced teaching and learning together in group work.

The result of questionnaire clearly demonstrates that most students have ever experienced group work and they agree that group work enable them to gain much information. However, in the group most students experience dissatisfaction. Most students think the group works are not fair as the members contributions within a group are unequal. Therefore, many students prefer to study by themselves and assume that group work is a waste of time. This finding is in line with the result of study conducted by Kouros & Abrami [15].

Digging more information on students' attitude towards group work, the study conducted discussion with 7 different students. The discussion was analyzed by matching the statement with the requirement of cooperative learning group proposed by D. Johnson & Johnson [3]. The result of analysis can be seen in the table 3.

TABLE III. DATA FROM DISCUSSION

Element of CL	Students' responses
Interdependence	<p># 3 : since there is no role distribution, so often the members rely someone to do the whole task</p> <p># 4 : My case is different. Every one in my group has the responsibility but it is often that some of the members do not do their job so in the end I am the one who take over the responsibility. For example in the last meeting, I reminded one of my friend about his responsibility. He said that he would do his part. But till the last minute he never shared his job so in the end I was the one who did his part.</p> <p># 5 : Yes Mam, so I think group work is only a name. Instead of working together, it is only an individual who does the whole job.</p>
Individual accountability	<p># 2 : Most lectures provide both individual and group score. But most students do not care about the score. They will realize the score when it is already in the form of final score.</p> <p># 4 : when the peer is given authority to do peer assessment. The group may not like him/ her when he/ she provides low score</p>

Table 3. Cont.

Interdependence roles for promotive interaction	<p># 1 : we work together when the task is challenging, so we decide to take parts, but still each of us just did his/ her own part individually</p> <p># 4 : actually in the group there is no term learning each other. Most of my friends just rely on me. They let me think hard, and study hard about a particular thing then my friend will ask me to teach about the thing.</p>
Social skill	<p># 4 : There is usually no captain in the group and when there is a captain so He/ she is the one who does the whole job consequently no one wants to be the leader of the group</p> <p># 5 : in the beginning, the members of the group say that they are ready to follow the rules but then, when it comes to the job and responsibilities most of them seem to be laid-back</p>
Group Processing	<p># 3 : when we ask about our friends' job as it is already last minute. Mostly they will feel uneasy instead they will ask for favor</p> <p># 4 : I am waiting for my friend's share but he never showed up with his work, so in the end I do his part</p>

With refer to table 3, it can be seen clearly that so far students seem to experience traditional group work instead of cooperative learning group. The students did not experience interdependence as there was no role distribution among members of the group.

S: Since there is no role distribution, so often the members rely on someone to do the whole task.

It is clear here that role division is essential in group work. With role division, each member may share unique information to his/ her group so that each member may have the feeling of interdependence which is critical in group work.

In addition to interdependence, the individual contribution should be considered. Traditional group works in contrast mostly consider the completion of the task as the main purpose of the task. Individual share is frequently neglected. Consequently, those who have low sense of responsibility may not feel obliged to do their job. Instead, they let others do their task. It may happen as the ignorant member found no consequences even when they do not do their parts. The following statement highlights the situation when there is a member in the group who ignored the his/her responsibility.

S: My case is different. Everyone in my group has the responsibility but it is often that some of the members do not do their job so in the end I am the one who take over the responsibility.

For example, in the last meeting, I reminded one of my friends about his responsibility. He said that he would do his part. But till the last minute he never shared his job so in the end I was the one who did his part.

The statement expresses the importance of consequence in keeping the cohesiveness of group work [10]. In classroom, consequence generally comes in form of score or grade. However, evaluating students' performance is not easy. Here are some students' comment regarding evaluation.

S: Most lectures provide both individual and group score. But most students do not care about the score. They will realize the score when it is already in the form of final score.

S: When the peer is given authority to do peer assessment. The group may not like him/ her when he/ she provides low score.

The responses from students in relation to assessment exhibit that students mostly seem not really care about the score. They come to realize it when it has been in form of final score. For that reason, the teachers should regularly remind the students about the score and their achievement. Hence, employing cooperative learning, the teachers are supposed to use formative instead of summative assessment. This finding supports Lotan’s opinion who asserts formative assessment during group work create more advanced work (Lotan, 2008). Besides, when collaborative assessment is applied, students should be equipped with rubric which provides criteria in detail therefore the peer assessors will be able to argue about the score they provide.

Traditional group work also does not support promotive interaction. It can be seen in the following expression.

S: We work together when the task is challenging, so we decide to take parts, but still each of us just did his/ her own part individually.

S: Actually, in the group there is no term teaching each other. Most of my friends just rely on me.

They let me think hard, and study hard about a particular thing then my friend will ask me to teach about the thing.

The statements clearly show that promotive interaction does not exist in group work. There is no commitment among the members to help one to another. This finding display that the group work does not belong to the cooperative learning group (see requirement of cooperative learning group from Johnson & Johnson [3]).

In terms of social skill, in this case no planning is made preceding the formation of group work. It can be seen in the students’ responses below.

S: There is usually no captain in the group and when there is a captain so he/ she is the one who does the whole job consequently no one wants to be the leader of the group.

S: At the beginning, the members of the group say that they are ready to follow the rules but then, when it comes to the job and responsibilities most of them seem to be laid-back.

The excerpt explicitly reveals that there is no planning preceding the group formation. No structure of the groupwork, no job division, and no consequence are available in the group work.

In relation to group processing, the group members seem not to be supportive one to another. Some members are lacking of sense of responsibility and they let others do the whole task. In this case, the one responsible for the group to complete the task is the leader so nobody in group wants to be the leader. Even, when the rules have been made, the members still feel

reluctant to keep the rules as there is no consequences for them in return.

In order to have clearer description about group work, the study also employs turn taking and tape recording. The following is turn taking data.

TABLE IV. GROUP 1

Students	Turn taking
S1 Female	7
S2 Female	6
S3 Female	2
S4 Female	3
S5 Female	2

TABLE V. GROUP 2

Students	Turn taking
S1 Male (leader)	7
S2 Male	6
S3 Male	7
S4 Female	4
S5 Female	5

The turn taking data show that in group 1 the turn taking do not distributed evenly. It is different from group 2 in which the turn taking among members are distributed properly. In group 1 some students speak more than other students in the group. It may happen because the other members are either acting as a good listener or in reverse, they do not pay attention to the discussion.

Clear description of situation in each group can be found in the following description.

TABLE VI. THE DISCUSSION IN GROUP 1

Groupwork stages	Groupwork Condition
Activity delivered	The groupwork consisted of females members the activities went in non – cooperative situation. Some students dealt with the task. Some others had their own affair. The students who really wanted to do the task discuss the material in the middle of noise created by some other students who had their own chat. When the members got into the groupwork, some students acted as speakers or information teller and others acted as listeners. The speakers told the information they found in the textbook. While the listeners listened and often gave comment to the information given. The response from listener was mostly based on their common knowledge so that brainstorming was hardly to found.
Groupwork talks	There is no leader in the group who controlled the groupwork activity so the members show their responses to the groupwork activity differently. Some really pay attention to the topic being discussed, some others just display minimal involvement by giving unnecessary comments.
Language Use	The groupwork used mostly L1.

The table shows the situation of group 1. The noise becomes the background of the discussion. The noise makes

the situation uncomfortable for learning. Because of the noise, some students discussing the topic are forced to keep on repeating their utterances. It seems that they feel reluctant to ask their friend to be silent, so the students keep on discussing under such situation. Sometimes, during the discussion, the students invite their friends to get involved. The noisy members then stop their chit-chat and share their idea in brainstorming. Although the ideas sound to be too ordinary and shallow, all members can involve in the discussion for some minutes. The serious discussion takes place in about 20 minutes. The group' members begin to distract again when facing a difficult problem. In the end, they stop discussion when the problem seems to be too challenging to solve.

TABLE VII. THE DISCUSSION IN GROUP 2

Groupwork stages	Groupwork Condition
Activity delivered	The groupwork consisted of females and males members. the activities went in non – cooperative situation. Some students acted as speaker who give information or retell story aome others acted as listeners who just listened and asked questions about the information or story shared.
Groupwork talks	There is a leader in the group who opened, closed the discussion and made sure that all members understand the story/ information. All stidents in group seemed to pay attentions as all of listeners often ask questions and gave comment to the story shared so that the turn taking can be distributed evenly. However the group is still non – cooperative learning group as it can be found inter dependence among the members iin the group.
Language Use	The groupwork activity was opened in L2, but the speakers decided to alter into L1. Maybe just to ensure that everybody in the group got the message

Group 2 is likely to be more structured. There is a leader who opens and ends the discussion. All members sound to get involve in the discussion. Yet, since the leader does not manage to lead the discussion, the members do not take turn when they talk. Some students talk at the same time and some others ask questions at the very same moment. This then results in noise, still manageable though. The member of the group holds no role so in the groupwork there are only some students who act as sources and others who act as listeners and questioner. all in all, comparing to group 1, group 2 is much better and the group also manages to end the discussion well.

V. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that the students still practice traditional groupwork as the group work does not meet the requirement of cooperative learning groupwork. The students' attitude towards the group work may result from the experiences they have got through from it. They find that in the group work they are the ones who will do the whole task on their own or vice versa, they can rely on somebody else in the group. By completing the task, it is true that they will get knowledge and share their knowledge with others in the group. However, when they become the only source in the group they

may get only little benefit of groupwork and they start thinking that groupwork is a waste of time.

This kind of attitude may take place as they find no interdependence, a small portion of individual accountability, no promotive interaction, no social skill needed to carry out group work, little group processing as the members get only little amount of feedback from their peer during discussion and no consequence enforced when they provide little or no contribution to their group work. For that reasons, it is high time that students are given adequate knowledge of about group work and the teachers also should try to find out how to conduct cooperative learning group.

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