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FEATURE

Students' Perceptions on Cooperative Learning at a Faith-Based College in Myanmar

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Abstract. *The 21st-century comes with some unique learner characteristics that cannot be ignored to ensure an effective and productive learning environment. The seven Cs (critical thinking and problem-solving; creativity and innovation; collaboration, teamwork, and leadership; cross-cultural understanding; communications, information, and media literacy; computing and ICT literacy; and career and learning self-reliance) that define 21st-century learners include critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, and collaboration (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Thus, these Cs and more must be taken into consideration in planning an effective 21st-century curriculum. Cooperative learning provides room for all the 21st-century learner characteristics. This case study conducted at a faith-based college with 7 participants was meant to analyze the effectiveness of cooperative learning from the perspectives and experiences of the students. The findings showed that students benefited much from cooperative learning, and they found the learning environment to be fun and effective at the same time. Teachers were encouraged to engage in cooperative learning. Further research can be done in a public school or college to compare the findings.*

Keywords: cooperative learning, child-centered approach, curriculum, faith-based college, teacher-fronted method

Introduction

Myanmar education system is based on traditional learning, with lecturing as the main teaching strategy used in schools (Hayden & Martin, 2013). One of the main learning activities in schools is memorization ((Hayden & Martin, 2013; Lwin, 2000). Students need to memorize what they have learned in school, even

though they do not deeply understand the concepts. In our observations, most students believe that teachers are always right, and they respect their teachers. Teachers nurture the students to be experts in memorization, students do not get a chance to ask questions, and there is no provision for group work in the classroom (Hayden & Martin, 2013; Ministry of Education, 1992). According to Lwin (n. d.), the students are trained to memorize what they learned in schools, and the teachers do not care about the student's understanding. Thus, Myanmar students are experts in memorization but not critical thinking. Teachers nurture students to be loyal and obedient citizens (Hayden & Martin, 2013; Lwin, 2000). They believe that memorization makes students obedient citizens by just taking what they are given, without any objection. As a result, students know how to live obediently and follow the rules of their country after they graduate from college, but they are not independent thinkers. This practice is followed from pre-school to college level in Myanmar.

The quality of Myanmar education is not up to the international standard because they use mainly rote learning (Hayden & Martin, 2013; Lwin, 2007; Ministry of Education, 1992). The curriculum has, for a long time, not been reviewed, and the old system of education still prevails. All students, regardless of grade level or standard of performance, are given a pass in primary and secondary levels. University education does not properly train students to gain employable skills. Therefore, many graduates are unemployed (Lwin, 2007).

Establishing higher education in Myanmar has been a challenge because change does not happen overnight. The development of the education system should be a process that enriches individuals and supports the improvement of the community (Etherington, 2013). Addressing this important responsibility, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (as cited in British Council, 2013) recommended that

the right of education comes with a great degree of responsibility that is why empowering the people to bring about change, to think for themselves and to develop the ability to find solutions to their own problems is absolutely key. (p. 4)

Since education prepares students to value different perspectives and thoughts of other people around the world and pass on knowledge, its curriculum should be constantly reviewed at each level—the primary, secondary, college, and university. When this is done, students are well trained and able to support the country in the emerging trends of the world (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2016; White, 1952; Wilkerson, 2015). Education provides students with ways to overcome the challenges they face in life and help them attain knowledge and become successful (Etherington, 2013).

Myanmar schools typically utilize a single method described as teacher-fronted, “chalk and talk,” and memorization or repetition learning (Mayden & Martin, 2013; Sugiyama, 2013). Students are not allowed to share their opinions in

the classroom. They are trained to sit quietly, copy what teachers have written on the black/whiteboard, and listen to the teacher. Students' questions, discussion, and group work are rare in the classroom. As a result, most teachers believe that cooperative learning cannot work in Myanmar. Consequently, they have a negative attitude toward it; hence, they are not motivated to try it in their classrooms. However, Opdecam and Everaert (2018) assume that the negative attitude toward cooperative learning could be a result of improper implementation of the learning process.

The child-centered approach (CCA) arrived in Myanmar through the International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs) in the late 1990s and early 2000. This approach promotes the development of students' creativity, analytical skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, and contributes to the improvement of the quality of education (Braskamp et al., 2016; White, 1952). However, the government does not allow INGOs to enter public schools. Thus, INGOs introduced the CCA method to monastic and Christian schools. The CCA methods include (a) working together in a group, (b) sharing a group project with the whole class, (c) helping each other in a small group, and (d) using various teaching materials such as flashcards and pictures to arouse students' interest in learning mathematics, Myanmar language, and English (Lall, 2010; Mayden & Martin, 2013).

The CCA approach provides every child a chance to learn and share in the classroom. Children learn more through playing, singing songs, drawing pictures, using pictures to illustrate body parts, plants, or other objects, and using real objects. They have opportunities to observe things by going outdoors. CCA teachers use a form of oral assessment by asking questions more than using written tests. Teachers feel that CCA gives them a closer relationship with the students. However, most public schools use the rote method until now (Lall, 2010).

Although Johnson and Johnson (1994) mention that cooperative learning is effective for students, Myanmar faith-based educational institutions are not typically practicing it because teachers assume that it takes additional learning time. However, this study may find out teachers' and students' perceptions of cooperative learning after its proper implementation and by asking how they feel and experience it. The findings may result in motivating teachers to practice cooperative learning in their classrooms.

Review of the Literature

The effectiveness of teaching and learning is highly dependent on the consideration of the learners' characteristics. The 21st-century learners' characteristics must be taken into consideration in the development and implementation of an effective 21st-century curriculum. Cooperative learning, therefore, comes as a solution to the provision of an effective learning environment. Thus, the success of teaching and learning in the classroom depends

on the ability of the teacher to apply cooperative learning to make learning interesting and enjoyable (Acero, Javier, & Castro, 2000). Cooperative learning helps students learn more from each other. It ensures the total engagement of all the students in their learning at all times. When they are engaged in classroom activities, it becomes easier for them to recall what they have learned (Foldnes, 2016). Because of the limitless availability of information, 21st-century learners enjoy discovering on their own, being independent learners. Consequently, students prefer learning through moving around the classroom and investigating new things by themselves, and cooperative learning provides such an environment. Students hardly feel bored in the classroom if a teacher practices cooperative learning (Herrmann, 2013).

For establishing a healthy, productive learning environment, a teacher can put students with different mental abilities together in a group (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). As the students work together as a team, they learn to guide and help each other because cooperative learning promotes leadership and cooperation amongst the students. The teacher should monitor students throughout class activities to make sure that each student is doing what they should accomplish, and working in groups helps in retention of learning (Hannah, 2013).

In cooperative learning, students acquire equal opportunities in the classroom. Allowing students to think and discuss in groups makes students feel safe and confident with their answers. They are more involved in their learning processes to develop their decision making and to think critically and creatively (Herrmann, 2013).

Cooperative learning provides teaching and learning structures that make it possible for students to discuss and learn from each other. Utilizing cooperative learning is, therefore, advantageous to teachers and students. The teaching structures create a productive learning environment, motivate students to complete their work, and help students achieve their goals. A teacher can build effective rapport with students. Johnson and Johnson (1999) and Kagan (1994) point out some more benefits of cooperative learning: (a) promoting students' deep learning and findings; (b) helping students participate actively in meaningful discussion in groups; (c) encouraging students to become better students; (d) increasing the chances for students to accomplish instructional goals; (e) providing peer teaching and learning opportunity; and (f) creating a healthy, productive learning environment.

Aquino (2003) mentions that cooperative learning structures develop higher achievement than competitive and personal learning structures. Students are intrinsically motivated through a cooperative learning classroom. Kagan (1994) states that in a cooperative learning classroom, students value participating in group work by sharing their ideas to find achievement together in learning. Moreover, cooperative learning promotes students' physical, social, and mental

harmony through learning in small groups (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). There are five basic principles to cooperative learning:

1. **Positive interdependence.** Students perceive that their work benefits groupmates, and they must work alongside their groupmates to complete a task (Kagan, 1994). They know they have to depend on each other to achieve more. Thus, teamwork is promoted as they encourage each other to stay on task for better, effective, and quicker achievement.
2. **Individual accountability.** Every student does their own assigned part on their group project, and the contribution of each individual is made known to the group (Kagan, 1994). They each know that their contribution is a piece of the puzzle in the group project, and if one individual does not do his or her part or does not give their best, it will affect the whole group. Hence, they each do their best to avoid being accountable for group failure.
3. **Group processing.** In a group, students discuss the assigned activity together and come up with their best result (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). They value each other's contribution, and together they achieve more.
4. **Social skills.** Students learn by interacting with fellow students. Taking turns and participation in a small group discussion is a vital ingredient for student success (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). They learn to work with others and respect each other. They also learn to accept their differences and find ways of accommodating people who differ in opinions.
5. **Face-to-face interaction.** Students communicate with each other to make a decision and promote progress (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). They learn to value the importance of coming together at some point to iron out some important issues for progress purposes.

Cooperative learning is salient to help students become productive people. It is one of the best ways for students to learn, and presently it is used in schools and universities in every part of the world, in every subject area and with every age (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). It enhances significant skills such as explaining, providing feedback, understanding alternative perspectives, discovering patterns and relationships, organizing and synthesizing information, and developing teaching processes (Tileston, 2007). It helps to organize a classroom in a way that fosters interaction within group work. It also exposes students to different teaching methods that boost their learning processes (Artut & Bal, 2018; Tamah, 2014).

Teachers utilize cooperative learning for giving students opportunities to participate in class activities, and not only share their ideas but also receive different views from others to solve problems (Artut & Bal, 2018). Fernandez-Rio,

Sanz, Fernandez-Cando, and Santos, (2016) implemented cooperative learning and found out that students were intrinsically motivated to engage in learning processes. Most students enjoy discussion and sharing ideas with others.

Through cooperative learning, students do not feel anxious to answer a teacher's question because before answering the questions, they have time to discuss for one to two minutes (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Cooperative learning promotes confidence and boosts self-esteem. The benefits of CL are many, however, studies also have pointed to its disadvantages such as it needing greater class time, and more preparation and management skills by the teacher (Ghufron, & Ermawati, 2018). Experiencing the benefits of cooperative learning in our own graduated classes motivated us to apply it and explore how students feel about it in a particular faith-based college in Myanmar.

Methodology

The discussion on methodology includes a research perspective, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The research perspective is qualitative, which is designed to describe how individuals explain the meaning of their own experiences to build their worlds (Merriam, 2009). The research type is a case study that focuses on how the participants describe and explain their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). The case in this study is the process of cooperative learning, and the bounded system consists of the college, students, and documents. To obtain information about how a teacher practiced the process of cooperative learning and how students felt upon cooperative learning, a case study was suitable to help us obtain perceptions of phenomena holistically (Creswell, 2013; Mason, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Moreover, a qualitative case study starts with a detailed description of the phenomenon and explanations of real-life situations (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Research Context

This study was carried out at a faith-based college in Myanmar. The focus of the study or the case was cooperative learning. The bounded system was the college with the participants as one teacher who is using cooperative learning and six students from this class who have experienced cooperative learning. The information they provided may be useful and applicable to any school/college in Myanmar. The college has four PhD holders, 18 master degree holders, and 30 bachelor degree holders as faculty. However, only one faculty member uses cooperative learning in all her classes.

Data Collection

Observations, interviews, and document reviews (student class journals) were the main methods to explore the participants' experiences in this study. Six students were chosen purposefully to provide the most relevant information. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants because "purposeful sampling

is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Students who first experienced cooperative learning were interviewed to find out their perceptions of cooperative learning. To learn more about cooperative learning from these students, three research questions were developed to guide the research:

1. How does cooperative learning look or sound like?
2. How do students respond to cooperative learning?
3. What steps were included in cooperative learning?

As researchers, we prepared a semi-structured interview. This means we wrote some preliminary questions for our participants to help us understand the phenomenon. As we discussed the questions, we had the flexibility to ask clarifying questions, which provided us with an in-depth perspective of our participants' perceptions. We provided the informed consent form to each of the participants before the interviews and observations. The interviews were 20 to 25 minutes long each. We audiotaped the interviews to make sure we capture all the details. The class observations took 20-30 minutes each, and we did 24 observations over two months. We also got permission from students to read their journal writings. The aforementioned data collection procedures provided us with adequate information for a sound triangulation of data in the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data is “the process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). Dutton (2015) agrees that data analysis is “to make sense out of the multiple pieces of collected evidence” (p. 56). Bringing together all collected data helped to easily retrieve the information that was necessary to address the research questions and come up with sound conclusions. Merriam (2009) states, “Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (p. 171). Managing and organizing the data by coding them to establish categories and themes prevented us from becoming overwhelmed with the process of analyzing the data.

Thus, after collecting the data, we analyzed it by using Taba inductive strategy developed by Taba (1962) and suggested by Green & Henriquez-Green (2014) to systematically interpret it since the process of qualitative data analysis is inductive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Taba (1962) identifies a three-phase inductive thinking model of teaching: (a) concept formation—listening, grouping, and labeling; (b) interpretation of data—exploring critical relationship, making references; and (c) application of principles—explaining and supporting the predictions (consequences). The Taba inductive strategy assisted this study in conducting a systematic interpretation of the collected data and establishing the construction of categories and themes.

The first step in analyzing the data was to read all the collected data and highlight the text, which answered the research questions concerning cooperative learning. Highlighting and writing the relevant text on pieces of paper ensure to group the repeating concepts or ideas to labeled groups based on the same attributes. This step is called the coding process (Saldana, 2011). The second step of the data analysis process included identifying critical relationships, exploring relationships, and making inferences (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2014). Thinking and asking oneself what this idea means and where to add it assisted me in gathering the same ideas together or categorize the same ideas (Saldana, 2011). The final step is the application of themes (Saldana, 2011) or explaining how the ideas were linked together (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2014). We followed these steps to analyze the collected data.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were followed in this study. Along with the informed consent form, all research participants received a clear explanation regarding the purpose of research, data collection procedures, and the purpose of the research findings. The participants understood where and how raw data will be stored to protect their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Their participation was voluntary, and pseudonym names (participant A, B, or C) were used to protect their identity. The perspectives of the participants were respected by using only our computers to carefully store the data and seeking only data that were for the study. The students' journals used as documents were returned after recording the relevant information for data analysis.

Results and Discussions

The students were excited about participating in the cooperative learning process. According to our observations in classes, students attentively listened to the teacher before proceeding to group work. Four main themes emerged from the interviews, observations, and field notes: (a) the steps of cooperative learning, (b) the perceptions on cooperative learning, (c) the advantages of cooperative learning, and (d) teacher's commitment.

The Steps of Cooperative Learning

Students became nervous at the beginning of the cooperative learning process because they had not experienced cooperative learning before. However, they complied with the instructions from their teacher. Some students expressed excitement to explore a new teaching style with a new teacher. Students in this study were completely engaged in the initial process of cooperative learning and activities in group work.

The initial process of cooperative learning. This theme—the initial process of cooperative learning—answers the first research question, which is, “How does cooperative learning look or sound like?” Based on observations and interviews, the beginning process of cooperative learning included grouping, filling random call cards, choosing a group name, making sitting arrangement for each group, explaining class roles, and setting up class rules. When the teacher grouped students, she did not deliberately select students with the same abilities. She randomly selected them so students with different abilities can be together in each group. Although she randomly selected them, students in some groups were more engaging in every group activity. However, each group was organized with four students to cooperate and collaborate within groups. Johnson and Johnson (1975) explained that a small group with two or four students is perfect for collaborative learning.

Using cooperative learning motivates students to be punctual and willing to take their responsibilities. Students realized that examination was not the only criterion for the final grade, but a variety of class activities has its points. They, therefore, practiced listening attentively, discussing enthusiastically, and sharing confidently. Hovhannisyan et al. (2005) indicate that group members in cooperative learning work for the same purposes, which are to be responsible, to accept others' viewpoints, and to achieve learning goals together. Cooperative learning has to do with collaboration and teamwork because the accountability of each student is paramount to reach a goal (Deutsch, 1949). Peer-teaching in groups is also needed for feedback and encouragement to improve their group work (Johnson and Johnson 1998; Schmuck 1998). In cooperative learning, a teacher can control students effectively because of systematic activities in group work and roles.

When we observed the class, we found that the teacher repeated the group member roles at first to help students be familiar with their roles. Practicing each role and reminding them to think of their roles encouraged students to accomplish them. Group member roles could effectively control the class in different activities. Each student had a role in all group activities.

Activities in group work. Teaching structures and methods were the keys to a healthy and productive cooperative learning environment because they draw students' attention, persuade them to think, and motivate them to discuss. Working alongside group members prepared students to be ready for the answers to share with the whole class. They stood firm on their opinions with reasonable information that came from their group.

The teacher encouraged students to accept different opinions from other groups. As a result, students were willing to accept different ideas to obtain more knowledge for their improvement. In each activity, after the teacher posted a question, students got a chance to think first before the discussion. In this way, students' critical and creative thinking skills were increased to analyze the

information. Critical thinking and learning are connected to cooperative learning by embracing learning actively and participating in group activities (Schipke, 2018). Students worked cooperatively on the given assignments. Each student in each group received a chance to share ideas with his or her group. No one was left behind in this cooperative learning. It supports group efforts rather than competition and individualistic learning (Schipke, 2018).

Students were not sitting and listening to the lecture all the time as in the traditional way of learning. Instead, in cooperative learning, lecturing was less, and the focus was on more discussion and sharing of group results with the whole class. Because of group work, even a slow student could comprehend the lesson with the help of his or her group mates. As the students work together, they make use of their multiple intelligences, and they all learn effectively at the same. The percentage of missing the lesson is minimal. Discussing and sharing their points of view improve not only academic performance but also social skills, for example, communication with each other.

The Perceptions on Cooperative Learning

Most of the students enjoyed participating in group work. They were involved in all group activities. Each student acquired chances to share their ideas with the whole class. They mentioned how they felt upon group activities. Two sub-themes that emerged under the perceptions of cooperative learning were: feelings about group work and building skills. These two themes answer the second research question, which is, “How do students respond to cooperative learning?”

Feelings upon group work. Cooperative learning increases students’ intrinsic motivation (Fernandez-Rio et al., 2016). According to participant A, “I love learning with groups. It helps me get more ideas to do my assignments. And I don’t want to miss any class activity. I have a feeling that I have never before. That is, I enjoy learning” (Vol. 1, p. 1). Participant C said, “We get many ideas so I feel comfortable in learning. We don’t need to memorize but we remember what we did in class” (Vol. 3, p. 1). Participant D agreed with participant A by mentioning, “Group work is effective for me because we share our ideas so we obtain more knowledge” (Vol. 4, p. 2). Participant F said, “We aren’t left with questions about our lesson” (Vol. 6, p. 1). Participant G pointed out, “We discuss in our group before the reporter responds to a teacher’s question. We freely share our ideas” (Vol. 7, p. 1).

Dimabuyo and Portia (2011) stated that in cooperative learning, students attentively communicate with each other to answer the questions that are given to them. Cavanagh (2011) promoted that cooperative learning activities encourage students’ active participation among groups. Working alongside each other in class results in learning without stress because students assist each in answering the teacher’s questions.

Learning appears to be fun with cooperative learning. Teachers and students' relationship in cooperative learning is stronger than traditional learning. The reason is that a teacher also gets engaged in learning by sharing his or her opinions with students, and as a result, students feel comfortable to communicate with their teacher (Gradel & Edson, 2009). Participant D mentioned, "In my class, I am not afraid of asking questions or sharing my ideas with others because whenever I ask questions to my teacher, she always gives positive feedback. We love her" (Vol. 4, p. 2). Participant G also mentioned, "We work together as a family. We see our teachers as our parents who guide us on how to build a better future life. We are happy in her class" (Vol. 7, p. 2). Gagne (2013) indicated that responding to students positively is a way to motivate students for learning. A teacher, therefore, is the main person in designing cooperative learning with activities to ensure students' engagement.

There are some negative perspectives on cooperative learning. Students who experienced cooperative learning for the first time were afraid of sharing their ideas. They thought other students would laugh at them if they make mistakes. They also thought that their ideas might be irrelevant to the questions. Such students did not want to take the responsibilities of a reporter in their groups. Participant A said, "I had to share my concepts with the whole class. I was afraid of being a reporter because my concepts will go different directions from the context. Other students will make fun of me" (Vol. 1, p. 3). However, students eventually realized that group activities and class roles in cooperative learning improved their skills.

Building skills. Most of the students accepted that cooperative learning built their skills: social (communication), mental (thinking), writing, and leadership (Schipke, 2018). For social skills, students perfectly communicated with each other within the group. Cooperative learning increases the aptitudes of students to communicate and collaborate in group works (Johnson et al., 1981; Kohn, 1986; Schipke, 2018). They do not want to miss an opportunity of sharing. Some groups were eager to be the first to share their perspectives with the whole class. When their perspectives were different from others, they were able to justify them with the use of good reasons or examples. They were intrinsically taking their roles, which are reporter, recorder, material person, and social person. Individual accountability is one of the cooperative learning goals, which encourages students to help each other, value achieving goals as a group, and ensure that all group members have learned the lesson (Casey & Fernandez-Rio, 2019; Slavin, 1996).

For mental (thinking) skill, getting a chance to think before they proceed with the discussion in groups enhances their thinking skill. Each student brings his or her ideas to discuss within groups. However, at the beginning stage of cooperative learning, thinking and sharing perspectives seemed difficult for them. The aphorism 'practice makes perfect' does work in group activities. The more they are engaged in group discussions, the more they improve their thinking skill. After

some time of practicing cooperative learning in class, students were completely engaged in the learning process by presenting their answers and perspectives to the whole class.

Students improved their writing skills. A teacher applied writing activities in her cooperative learning class. For example, writing pairs and journal writing assist students to come up with some good answers and enhance their writing skills as well as participation skill (Fry, Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2015). In writing pairs, each student writes a paragraph on lesson summary or reflection and check in pairs using a rubric for writing. They are instructed to respond to their partners positively.

Participant B explained, “My leadership skill is improved because in my group, I was the one pushing my group members to participate in group work. I always lead them” (Vol. 2, p. 3). In some groups, the same member is always leading and provoking discussion. Some did not notice that their leadership skill had improved by working together. In the study of Healy, Doran, and McCutcheon (2018), they discovered that students who got higher achievement in academics tend to lead their groups, so their communication and leadership skills are improved. Students were also united in their groups because of group activities. In group work, every student is accountable for problem-solving. In this study, although students were experiencing cooperative learning for the first time, they were acquainted with it in no time. They observed that if they participate in group work, they learn more.

The Advantages of Cooperative Learning

Through cooperative learning, students are actively motivated to learn and have good behavior and take responsibilities (Gagne, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Students can focus on the learning processes or activities; they help each other, work together, and value individual accountability and responsibility (Brody & Davidson, 1998; Sharan, 2010). Two advantages of cooperative learning emanated from this study: the benefits of group work, effective and systematic learning.

Benefits of group work. Cooperative learning brings benefits to teaching and learning processes. Students fathom the joy of sharing and supporting one another to reach learning goals. Participant D mentioned, “Learning together brings joy and happiness because if I don’t know, my friends are there to help me. I don’t need to worry. We learn together and get ‘A’ grades together. Learning is fun for me with groups” (Vol. 4, p. 4). Participant A also stated, “Group work benefits me because, in group work, we can easily get the answer or solve the problem” (Vol. 1, p. 4). Most students accepted that working together is more effective than solving problems individually. Healy et al. (2018) indicated that active cooperative learning facilitates deeper learning to find solutions as teamwork rather than individual work.

Some groups believed that higher achievements happened when four people in a group did their tasks. Students prefer group learning in class, such as teaching each other, sharing their opinions, and explaining them. They improve their learning skills, such as accepting different ideas, tolerance to their members, and building positive relationships (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Ravenscroft, Buckless, & Hassall, 1999). Participant F explained, "Cooperative learning prepares us to be ready for our future job. It helps us to build good relationships and to have the concepts of teamwork" (Vol. 6, p. 4). Healy et al. (2018) described that cooperative learning prepares students to be ready to work with diverse people with different abilities.

Effective and systematic learning. This section answered the third research question, which is, "What steps were included in cooperative learning?" Most students in this study agree that cooperative learning is both effective and systematic. Students can develop positive peer interaction, work on the assignments cooperatively, and respect others' viewpoints (Artut & Bal, 2018; Pistorio, 2010). Cooperative learning becomes effective learning for students by working in a small group with peer teachers to elucidate conflicts or challenges (Pistorio, 2010).

Cooperative learning cannot be effective if teachers do not apply it systematically. It does not mean just grouping students and allowing them to work as a team; it has a systematic process that needs to be observed for it to be effective for students. For this study, which was done in Myanmar at a faith-based college, a teacher organized groups with four students each and assigned them roles. She explained the roles to them, which are reporter, recorder, material person, and social person. The responsibilities of each role are as follows:

1. A reporter reports a group answer to the whole class.
2. A recorder records whatever the group discusses.
3. A material person collects teaching materials from the teacher and the group.
4. A social person checks who is absent in a group and encourages cooperation.

Students in cooperative learning take turns over their roles. They have their numbers: 1, 2, 3, and 4. According to participant B, "We have own responsibilities like reporter, recorder, material person, and social skills person. One student is not always a reporter because our teacher changes roles in every class meeting. So we experienced each role" (Vol. 2, p. 5). Participant G indicated, "In my class, my teacher is using cooperative learning systematically by arranging groups and assigning us responsibilities. I want to say that cooperative learning should be a systematic learning process to be effective for students" (Vol. 7, p. 5).

Teachers' Commitment

According to the participants of this study, teachers have to fulfill their responsibilities in cooperative learning. They should not participate in group work as guides but as facilitators. They must instruct clearly before proceeding with any group activity. There are two main commitments for teachers: teachers' responsibilities in cooperative learning and training for teachers.

Teachers' responsibilities in cooperative learning. This theme *teacher's responsibilities in cooperative learning* answers the last research question, which is, 'what steps were included in the cooperative learning?' The responsibilities that a teacher has to prepare before going to class are preparing activities, arranging the classroom, and making a lesson plan for each class. They should expect that some challenges may occur during the teaching and learning process in class and prepare how to overcome those challenges. Participant D indicated that teachers who apply cooperative learning should explain the use of cooperative learning to students. In this way, students will understand and get involved in group work. Teachers need to have specific learning objectives, tasks for students, and class activities (Clapper, 2015). In the study of Healy et al. (2018), they found that teachers need to encourage students for peer learning, supportive social interactions, and dysfunctional behaviors.

Jolliffe (2014) declared that teachers who use cooperative learning need to understand the theoretical foundation for cooperative learning. Some researchers agreed that cooperative learning is based on social interdependence theory (Deutsch 1949; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998; Schmuck & Schmuck 2001). Teachers, therefore, should demonstrate what social interdependence is in their teaching process. Participant A said, "Our teacher is kind and always helping us whenever we need her. She is participating in group work" (Vol. 1, p. 5). According to Johnson and Johnson (1975), a teacher must put himself or herself as a student to be able to observe the group conversation and student contributions. A teacher needs to prepare the following (Lotan, 2003; Sharan & Sharan, 1992): state group goal, formulate a question that has more than one answer, direct positive interdependence, provide tasks for group work, and give clear instructions.

Participant F commented,

Almost all students are learning happily in this class because of helping each other. But in other classes, we are afraid of our teachers so we don't learn much. If we are afraid of our teachers, we learn only 30% and after examinations, we remember nothing. I wish all teachers in this college used cooperative learning. We have only one teacher who is using cooperative learning. (Vol. 6, p. 5)

Two out of seven participants recommended that there must be a balance in the grouping of the students for cooperative learning. For example, talented students must be assigned to different groups. They also suggested changing group members twice in a semester to allow each student to work with different group

members to increase their social skills. Changing groups may help students develop a tolerance for different characters. Hence students can socialize with diverse people in the workplace after graduating from college.

Training for teachers. Most of the teachers in this faith-based college do not use cooperative learning. They follow the traditional way of learning. For instance, they use rote learning and lecturing. Many are times when lecturing is considered teacher-centered. Whatever the teacher shares, students take notes and memorize. This learning style does not promote students' thinking skills. Four out of seven participants mentioned that some students are experts in memorizing, but most of the students were displeased with memorization. The students who prefer writing in their own words developed their writing skills. However, some teachers do not encourage students to write answers in their own words in examinations. Three out of seven participants said that they were overwhelmed because they had so many lessons to memorize for examinations. They could not memorize, and they prefer to write in their own words. After the examinations, they hardly remember anything. They accepted that memorization or rote learning is not of much use to them.

According to our observations, most teachers at faith-based schools and colleges from Myanmar receive little training in cooperative learning and have little knowledge about it. Even the administrators do not plan to invite educators for teacher training. As a result, the traditional way of learning is still practiced in Myanmar schools. Participant E explained her desire, "I like group work. If it is possible, all teachers must attend cooperative learning training and apply it in their teaching processes. If they do that, students will enjoy learning" (Vol. 5, p. 6). Participant G agreed with her and continued, "I think other teachers do not have group work ideas or no training at all" (Vol. 7, p. 5). Clinton and Kohlmeyer (2005) indicated that many lecturers in education are not trained in cooperative learning. Training is needed to help teachers adopt cooperative learning in their classrooms (Baines, Blatchford, & Kutnick, 2003; Gillies, 2008).

Conclusion

Cooperative learning is known as group work. However, cooperative learning is not only group work but also valuing individual accountability to accomplish the given tasks with a small group of two to six learners. Through this study, we found that cooperative learning helps students to be intrinsically motivated toward obtaining more knowledge in the context of Myanmar. The participants of this study enthusiastically discussed and shared their learning with others. They came to class with excitement to learn. Strangely, no negative responses to cooperative learning were reported by the participants. This study suggests that when implemented in the Myanmar context, cooperative learning develops students' skills: social (communication), mental (thinking), writing, and leadership.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made from the study:

1. Teachers should be trained in cooperative learning.
2. Another study on cooperative learning can be done in a public school or college to compare the findings.
3. A quantitative study on perceptions of students on cooperative learning can be done. A wider range of perceptions may broaden the findings of this study.

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