The Status and Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning Strategies at Haramaya University: A Case Study of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the status of cooperative learning strategies at Haramaya University, focusing on the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations for data collection. The study involved 80 participants, including students from four departments, department heads, the college dean, and the Academic Assessment and Quality Assurance director. Third-year students were specifically chosen for their relevant experience with cooperative learning. Findings indicated that the implementation of cooperative learning strategies has significantly declined and become ineffective since the COVID-19 outbreak. Key factors contributing to this decline included distancing policies, lack of commitment, instructor workload, additional administrative duties, student interest, time constraints, inadequate supervision, lack of awareness, poor classroom facilities, and insufficient support. The study emphasizes the importance of cooperative learning for enhancing student performance, suggesting that students benefit from peer learning at their own pace rather than solely from instructors. It calls for all stakeholders, including students and administrative bodies, to prioritize the effective practice and implementation of cooperative learning strategies.

Key words: Cooperative learning, status, effectiveness, strategy, practice, implementation

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning (CL) has emerged as a critical pedagogical strategy in higher education, emphasizing collaborative engagement among students to improve educational outcomes. CL, a structured group work with individual accountability, promotes academic achievement and social skill development (Trần, 2019). According to research, students who participate in cooperative learning outperform those who participate in traditional learning settings in terms of academic performance, critical thinking skills, and motivation (Aliem et al., 2019). The theoretical foundations of CL are based on constructivist learning theories, particularly those proposed by Vygotsky and Dewey, who advocate for learning as a social process in which knowledge is constructed through interaction (Lu et al., 2019).

Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of cooperative learning, there is still a significant gap in understanding its implementation and effectiveness in specific educational contexts, particularly in Ethiopian higher education institutions like Haramaya University. Previous research has identified a number of challenges associated with the practical application of CL, such as inadequate instructor training, a lack of resources, and insufficient student motivation (Awofala & Lawani, 2020). For example, Hiko (2014) found that, while cooperative learning is recognized as beneficial for academic and social development, its implementation at Haramaya University is hampered by factors such as a lack of awareness and motivation among both students and faculty. Similarly, Seyoum and Molla (2022) discovered that instructors frequently

fail to fulfill their roles as facilitators due to heavy workloads and large class sizes, complicating the successful implementation of CL strategies (Awofala & Lawani, 2020).

Furthermore, existing literature reveals that the effectiveness of cooperative learning varies across disciplines and educational settings. According to studies, while some students thrive in cooperative environments, others struggle due to anxiety, a lack of understanding of group dynamics, and unequal participation. The researchers also stated that poor attitudes and uneven contributions among group members significantly hampered participation in cooperative assignments (Leon et al., 2021). This discrepancy in results raises serious concerns about the contextual factors that influence the success of cooperative learning initiatives.

In light of these findings, the current study seeks to investigate the status and efficacy of cooperative learning strategies in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at Haramaya University. By filling gaps in the literature, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cooperative learning is practiced, the challenges faced by both students and instructors, and the overall impact on student learning outcomes. The findings will not only add to the existing body of knowledge about cooperative learning, but will also provide practical recommendations for improving its implementation in higher education settings.

The study attempted to answer the following basic research questions;

1. What is the status of cooperative learning strategy in the study area ?

2. What is the practice of cooperative learning strategy in the study area?

3. What are the major challenges of cooperative learning strategy in the defined study area?

The significance of cooperative learning for students is profound. Research (Essien, 2015) indicates that students who engage in CL often achieve higher academic performance and develop critical thinking skills compared to their peers in traditional learning settings. The collaborative nature of CL not only enhances academic outcomes but also promotes the development of essential social skills, such as communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution. These skills are crucial for personal and professional success in today's interconnected world. Furthermore, collaborative learning can boost student motivation and engagement by instilling a sense of belonging and accountability among peers. However, it is important to recognize that not all students thrive in cooperative environments; some may experience anxiety or struggle with group dynamics, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful implementation that takes into account individual differences.

Future researchers will benefit greatly from studying cooperative learning, especially in underexplored contexts such as Ethiopian higher education institutions like Haramaya University. The varying effectiveness of CL across disciplines and settings provides opportunities to investigate the contextual factors influencing its success. By identifying best practices and addressing challenges associated with CL implementation, researchers can add to the growing body of literature on effective educational strategies. This research can also help educators and institutions understand how to improve collaborative learning experiences for all students, ensuring that the benefits of CL are maximized.

Policymakers must understand the implications of cooperative learning in order to develop supportive educational policies. Recognizing the benefits of CL allows policymakers to develop frameworks that promote collaborative learning environments and allocate resources for training programs that provide educators with the skills needed for effective implementation. Furthermore, addressing instructors' challenges, such as limited resources and heavy workloads, can lead to more equitable educational opportunities for students. Policymakers play an important role in creating an educational environment that values collaboration, resulting in better learning outcomes and preparing students for success in a rapidly changing world.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of cooperative learning (CL) is grounded in constructivist learning theories, which emphasize the social nature of learning and the importance of interaction among learners. Central to this framework are the ideas posited by Vygotsky and Dewey, who argue that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and collaborative efforts among students (Chen, 2023). This perspective aligns with the assertion that cooperative learning not only enhances academic performance but also fosters critical thinking and social skills, which are essential for success in contemporary educational and professional environments

Research has consistently shown that students engaged in cooperative learning outperform their peers in traditional learning settings across various disciplines. For instance, studies indicate that cooperative learning strategies lead to improved academic achievement and greater motivation among students (Toklucu & Tay, 2016). The effectiveness of these strategies can be attributed to several key elements identified in the literature, including positive interdependence, individual accountability, and the development of social skills (Wu, 2018). These elements create a structured environment where students can collaborate effectively, thereby enhancing their learning experiences.

However, the implementation of cooperative learning is not without challenges. In the context of Ethiopian higher education, particularly at Haramaya University, several barriers hinder the effective application of CL strategies. Research highlights issues such as inadequate instructor training, insufficient resources, and a lack of motivation among students (Guo, 2014). For example, Hiko (2014) noted that both students and faculty often lack awareness of cooperative learning principles, which negatively impacts its implementation. Furthermore, Seyoum and Molla (2022) found that large class sizes and heavy workloads for instructors complicate the facilitation of cooperative learning, leading to less effective student engagement.

The literature also reveals that the effectiveness of cooperative learning can vary significantly depending on the educational context and the individual characteristics of students. Some students may thrive in cooperative settings, while others may experience anxiety or struggle with group dynamics, which can impede their participation (Korres, 2019). This variability underscores the necessity for educators to consider the diverse needs of their students when implementing cooperative learning strategies. In conclusion, the theoretical framework of cooperative learning is deeply rooted in constructivist principles that advocate for collaborative engagement as a means of enhancing educational outcomes. While the benefits of CL are well-documented, understanding its practical application within specific contexts, such as Haramaya University, is crucial for maximizing its effectiveness. Future research should focus on identifying best practices and addressing the challenges associated with CL implementation, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of cooperative learning in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employs an Explanatory Research Design. In the explanatory sequential research design, the researcher prioritizes quantitative data collection and analysis (QUAN). This is accomplished by introducing it early in the study and making it a key component of data collection. A small qualitative (qual) component is typically added in the second phase of the research. The explanatory sequential design researcher gathers quantitative data first in the sequence. This is followed by secondary qualitative data collection, which is then interpreted.

In short, quantitative data is followed by qualitative data, and strategies that use one research method to elaborate on or expand the findings of another (Creswell, 2003). To achieve the study's objectives, this study will use a mixed research design, specifically a sequential explanatory design.
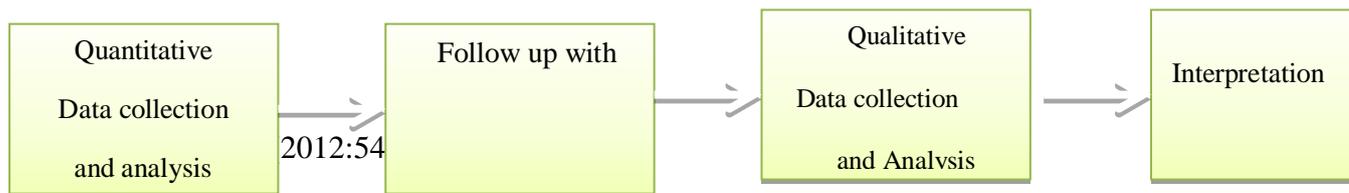
Explanatory Sequential Design

Figure 2: Explanatory Sequential Design

Thus, mixed methods research is an approach to a study that involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two types of data, and employing distinct designs that may include philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks for the study (John, 2014).

As a result, depending on the nature of the research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected using closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires, as well as semi-structured interviews with sample EPUs (John, 2014; Creswell, 2009). In short, the current study will use a mixed design in terms of paradigm, design, methods, data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis.

Description of the Study Area

The College of Education and Behavioral Sciences (CEBS) is one of the university's nine colleges, along with the Haramaya Institute of Technology and the Sports Science Academy. CEBS became a full-fledged college in 2003, and it now offers BA, MA, and PhD programs in regular and non-regular modalities (regular, CEP, and summer) across four departments: Adult Education and Community Development (AECD), Educational Planning and Management (EdPM), Psychology, and Special Needs Education (SNE).

Sources of Data

The primary data sources were students from the four departments, department heads, the college's dean, and the university's Academic Assessment and Quality Assurance (AAQA) director. Secondary data sources included a review of the literature, articles published in the area, and an AAQA expert report.

Subjects of the Study

The target study population included undergraduate college students, department heads, the college dean, and the AAQA director.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Because the study was a case study, the college of education and behavioral sciences was chosen for convenience, and because different learning approaches and strategies are the fruits of education, it is clear that CEBS was purposefully chosen to investigate the status of cooperative learning. The college has second and third-year students. There were no first or fourth-year students at the college. During the course of this study, first-year students attended a generic program known as the 'freshman program,' while fourth-year students were not admitted to college. The college's third-year students in each department were specifically chosen because they have more experience with cooperative learning than second-year students. As a result, only third-year students have had a better experience staying in college since the introduction of the four-year program. Furthermore, the heads of each department, the college's dean, and the Director of Academic Assessment and Quality Assurance (AAQA) were purposefully selected. This is because the aforementioned officers were in charge of facilitating, tracking, monitoring, and controlling cooperative learning.

The total study population was 80, which included 74 college students, four department heads, a college dean, and the university's AAQA director. Availability sampling techniques were used in every department. This was due to the small number of students in each department, which was usually around twenty. As a result, all

students were enrolled in the departments of Adult Education and Community Development (AECD = 16), Educational Planning and Management (EdPM = 19), Psychology (20), and Special Needs Education (19). As a result, the study's population and sample size were equal, with 80 participants.

Table below indicates the number of students in each department

Gender	Department				
	AECD	EdPM	Psych.	SNE	**G/Total**
M	15	11	13	14	**53**
F	1	8	7	5	**21**
Total	**16**	**19**	**20**	**19**	**74**

(Row header at left, rotated: No of students)

Table: 1- number of students in each department

Instruments of Data Collection

The researcher collected data using three methods: interviews, focus group discussions, and observations.

Interview: An interview is one method of data collection in qualitative research for investigating the case under study. Interviews were conducted with department heads, the college's dean, and the director of Academic Assessment and Quality Assurance (AAQA). Interviews are necessary to collect data from face-to-face informants (Opdenakker, 2006).Thus, an interview was conducted with a total of six participants (four department heads, a college dean, and the director of Haramaya University's AAQA directorate). After receiving verbal consent from each interviewee, data were manually recorded using a notebook. The interview lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes for each respondent, and was guided by a manually developed interview guide.

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with groups of students from each department. First, the students received an orientation on the topic from the head departments. The students were then divided into groups of four to five for the purpose of this study. Finally, the discussion topics (questions) were presented for ten minutes. The Jigsaw method was used, in which each group was given one or two different questions in the same session. However, the same question was administered to the other sessions/departments in order to gain a thorough understanding of the issue.

Observations were made to see how cooperative learning was practiced. Observation is an essential component of qualitative research in the social sciences, including education (Tjora, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2010).Observations were conducted in the classroom to see how cooperative learning was actually practiced. Cooperative learning was not limited to the classroom. Students could use it outside the classroom, such as in shelters, dormitories, or libraries. However, the researcher discovered that classroom observation was more suitable for this study. Observation was guided by a checklist. As a result, each subject's observation sessions lasted three periods. Observation and interview responses establish validity across data sources.

Ethical Issues

Ethical literacy encourages researchers to understand and address ethical issues that arise during the research process (Dooly et al., 2017). Qualitative research, particularly studies in educational contexts, frequently raises ethical concerns because the study design involves human subjects, some of whom are children (for example, data collected in primary education classrooms). It is not always easy for young researchers to predict where ethical issues may arise while developing their research project (Wiles, 2012).

During the interview process in qualitative research, the findings show that anonymity, voluntary participation, privacy, confidentiality, the option to opt out, and avoiding the misuse of findings are ethical considerations that the researcher must adhere to. The findings also indicate that deontology and utilitarianism, rights, and virtue are the primary theories that underpin ethical considerations in research (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023).

In terms of ethical considerations, each study participant was asked for their consent to participate in the study. First, the interviewer introduced himself, explained the purpose of the study, and stated that the expected time was short. Second, the interviewer assured the informants that their data would be kept confidential and anonymous, and he informed them of the expected duration of their interview. Finally, each interview session concluded with an expression of gratitude.

Data Discussion and Presentation Method

The data was analyzed qualitatively using the following procedures. First, the moderator (researcher) obtained consent from the heads of each department. Second, he organized students into groups of five. However, because the number of students may not always be a factor of five, there was the possibility of (members in each department). That is, as shown in the table below, the number of students in a group is five less one (4 students) and five plus one (6 students). Finally, discussion questions were distributed to each group, as shown in the following table.

Table 2: number of students in a group and number of groups

Description	Department				
	AECD	EdPM	Psych.	SNIE	**G/Total**
No of students	16	19	20	19	74
No of members	2x5,1x6	3x5,1x4	4x5	3x5,1x4	
No of groups	3	4	4	4	15

The above table shows the representation of group numbers in each department

Table 3: representation of departments and number of FGDs

S/No.	Department	FGD representation	FGD1	FGD2	FGD3	FGD4
1	AECD	X	X1	X2	X3	X4
2	EdPM	Y	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4
3	EdPM	Z	Z1	Z2	Z3	Z4
4	EdPM	S	S1	S2	S3	S4

Following this, the researcher moved on to the discussion. The two basic questions were then discussed in parallel across 15 groups from all four departments. Accordingly, the discussion of each question is presented as follows:

Discussions Regarding the Practice of Cooperative Learning Strategy

Discussion Point #1. Questions Regarding Students' Practice of Cooperative Learning Strategy

When we looked at this question, we found seven (7) closed-ended and two (2) open-ended discussion points. Following the discussion, "YES/NO" responses were generated for the closed-ended questions. The first question investigates whether students had a formal group for the cooperative learning strategy. In this regard, all of the FGD groups responded with "No". This means that the students had no formal group for the cooperative learning strategy. Because the answer to this question was negative, the five discussion points that followed, numbered from 1.1 to 1.5, were excluded. As a result, it is unnecessary to consider the discussion outputs within the specified sections.

When we look at the negatively generated discussion points under discussion items 2.1 and 2.2, 11 out of 15 FGDs responded "YES" to discussion point 2.1. That means they had no cooperative learning strategy at all. However, a total of four FGD groups (one from the AECD department, one from EdPM, and two from SNIE) responded "NO," indicating that they practiced CLS. However, the FGD groups were given the opportunity to express their ideas when their discussion response was "NO," indicating that they "practiced CLS." Then, the FGD groups write down their answers to how they practiced the CLS as follows:

"They practice CLS in group assignments, group works, group activities, class activities."

This indicates that CLS practice was very low; it was not deliberate or formal in nature. However, students practice it not as a learning mechanism, but rather to complete a specific activity for a short period of time. Moreover, if there were no activities like assignment, group work, class activities, group activities and other activities that do not invite students for group work, there is no way to practice cooperative learning mechanism. And cooperative learning practice was idle, ineffective and poor. Therefore, here one can understand that CLS is poorly practiced, ineffective, and it was not formally established. Moreover, it was not used as students' learning strategy.

Discussion Point #2. Questions Regarding Teachers' use of CLS or not

Students were asked to discuss whether or not teachers use CLS. In all departments, there were 15 FGD groups. Out of 15 FGDs. Nine FGD groups responded "NO," with the remaining six responding "YES." That is, two FGD groups from AECD (X1 and X3), two FGD groups from EdPM (Y2 and Y3), three FGD groups from Psychology (Z1, Z3, and Z4), and two FGD groups from SNIE (S2 and S4) yielded the discussion output "NO." Again, the six FGD groups, one from AECD (X2), two from EdPM (Y1 and Y4), one from Psychology (Z2), and two from SNIE (S1 and S3), yielded the discussion output "YES."

Discussion point	Response	No of FGD in AECD replied	No of FGD in EdPM replied	No of FGD in Psychology replied	No of FGD in SNIE replied
Do teachers use cooperative learning strategy?	YES	X2	Y1&Y4	Z2	S1& S3
	NO	X1 & X3	Y2 & Y3	Z, Z3 & Z4	S2 & S4

As can be seen from the FGD discussion results, the 6:9 "YES to NO" response indicates that teachers use CLS to some extent. However, the majority do not use it. As a result, this can also be used to determine whether or not CLS is effective.(Neuman and Wright, 1999).

In response to this question, students were also asked to write down their ideas if their answer was "YES," which indicates that teachers use the cooperative learning strategy "how?" Regarding this question, six FGD groups responded "YES" and wrote down their ideas. All six FGD groups wrote down their ideas, and teachers

used CLS when assigning group projects and holding group discussions. Furthermore, two focus group discussions revealed that teachers use CLS during class activities.

From this discussion, we can conclude that teachers use CLS during assignments, group work, and class activities. Group assignments are frequently written by all six "YES" FGD respondents. This means that teachers mostly practice CLS through group assignments. As a result, this suggests that CLS is being practiced at a minimal level.

Discussions Regarding the Challenges of Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS)

Students were asked to discuss and write down the CLS challenges as part of this discussion. As a result, the FGD groups were given a discussion point on the challenges of CLS. The majority of the 15 FGD groups then shared their discussion points in a similar manner. As a result, the researcher presented all of the points in summary format. The majority of FGD groups that discussed the challenges of CLS stated that "some students do not like group learning." According to (Riener & Willingham, 2010), students have varying learning styles. Individuals have different learning styles, which are their 'natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills'. (Reid 1995:viii), cited in Hatami (2013).

Another point raised by some FGD groups as a CLS challenge was that "students have differing motives and desires in group learning." Other issues raised by students during the FGD included "it can create conflict between students." The most significant issue raised by the FGD was that "fast learner students are discouraged or dissatisfied in the CLS." Furthermore, another point raised by FGD participants was that "students have no equal pace in understanding the subject matter." This idea is supported by (Riener & Willingham, 2010), and students use their abilities in various ways (Sternberg, 1999). In class, students are divided into three learning ability groups: slow learner, medium learner, and fast learner. Thus, students have varying abilities. Finally, one FGD group raised as a challenge to CLS that "CLS has political implication." It is possible that the CLS was imposed by hierarchical administrative structures rather than based on individual interests.

Interview Data Discussion and Presentation

The interview guideline included two general questions designed to elicit information about the effectiveness and challenges of cooperative learning strategies. As a result, the first oral question investigated the effectiveness of cooperative learning practice, which was supported by three questions, two of which were closed-ended with a yes/no response and one with the mention of determinant factors. The second oral question focused on the factors to be mentioned as major challenges.

The interview questions were distributed to the college dean, four department heads, and the director of the Academic Assessment and Quality Assurance (AAQA) directorate office. This was because the department heads were in charge of implementing, supervising, and monitoring the cooperative learning strategy. The college dean was also in charge of monitoring and overseeing activities at the college level, as well as receiving reports on cooperative learning practices. The AAQA office holder was responsible for overseeing, controlling, monitoring, and evaluating cooperative learning practices across the university. These responsible bodies were interviewed using similar questions to elicit their perspectives on cooperative learning practice. The interview questions and responses were structured as follows:

Discussion of Interview Responses Regarding Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning Strategy Practice

Question # 1: Do you practice cooperative learning strategy?

Respondents provided similar responses to this question because they all use cooperative learning strategies. In support of this, the college dean stated as follows:

Cooperative learning strategy is the core learning method of the college. Students are encouraged to learn collaboratively. Students have structured group learning called *cooperative learning group*. Students stay in

the same group once they are formed into groups until they will graduate. Sometimes, group numbers were given as G1, G2, G3, …in the class. These groups are permanent and they are formed by the departments. The group members were assigned based on the students' ability basis. That is, students' previous performance or results, grades were considered in order to make the group heterogeneous ability. The number of the students in the group is five as a policy directive. However, sometimes the number of students in the class may not exactly five, it could be four or six. Therefore, a minimum of four or a maximum of six numbers of students in some groups were tolerated.

Regarding this question, all of the department heads provided similar responses. They replied that they all practice and use cooperative learning strategies. The dean responded that it is the department heads' responsibility to rearrange students into groups, identify students' abilities based on previous results, form groups, monitor and supervise them.

Furthermore, the response from the AAQA officer revealed the same information. The AAQA officer confidently responded that the cooperative learning strategy was and continues to be widely used in universities. As one of the university's colleges, the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences (CEBS) employs the cooperative learning strategy. According to the director's response, one of the AAQA office's primary responsibilities is to supervise, monitor, and evaluate the institution's cooperative learning strategy. For this purpose, one AAQA expert was assigned to each college to report on daily learning activities in accordance with cooperative learning implementation. As a result, colleges were notified about the status of class conductance and cooperative learning implementation.

This is due to two factors: i) the AAQA director provided such a response, most likely after considering the overall practice of CLS in the university, which, when combined, may be effective. ii) The dean also responded in this manner because the CLS practice is implemented at the classroom level and he may not be directly involved in the activity himself. He expressed his idea as a general principle of the institution.

Question #2: Do you think the practice of cooperative learning strategy is effective?

Regarding this question, all of the department heads genuinely stated that the effectiveness is poor. Some department heads even stated that the previous question about the practice was not addressed in a formal manner. However, because teachers divide students into groups and assign activities to them in some way, this is considered cooperative learning. As they mentioned, all instructors give group assignments, which is considered cooperative learning. According to the department heads, since the Corona virus outbreak (COVID-19), practice has been extremely poor, and there is currently no formal grouping of students.

Regarding this question, the dean and AAQA director were slightly more confident in their practice, but not in the effectiveness of the cooperative learning strategy (CLS). According to their response, the reason they were unable to say effective was that, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and its nature, no student or instructor was forced to effectively implement the CLS. Monitoring and evaluation were also loose.

Qauestion #3: What delineating factors can you mention as the reasons for the poor practice of the CLS and what can you suggest?

Regarding this question, respondents replied different responses. The responses were presented as follow:

Lack of commitment; In this regard, both the college dean and the AAQA director responded similarly, citing instructors' lack of commitment to effectively practicing CLS. As they stated, instructors do not usually use cooperative learning strategies. Their commitment is loose.

Instructor's Load - The department heads responded that one of the major factors influencing instructors' effectiveness in practicing cooperative learning is their workload.

Administrative Assignment As stated by all department heads, administrative assignments or position burden are another factor that affects instructors' ability to practice CLS effectively. They claimed that the heads'

administrative responsibilities prevented them from effectively practicing the CLS. According to them, this had a significant impact on the CLS's effective practice at the department level. This was due to the fact that their heads were so preoccupied with administrative tasks that they failed to monitor and supervise the CLS practices of the other instructors. On the other hand, they fail to implement effective CLS practices on their own.

Students' load and interest - Another concern raised by department heads was that students may be burdened by various assignments or activities assigned by their instructors. This had an impact on the effectiveness of CLS. The heads also identified student interest as a factor influencing the effectiveness of the CLS. According to the heads' theory, students have no interest at all. They don't want to work in groups. This is because most fast learners (students) do not wish to participate in CLS. They believe that having a low learner style affects their performance.

Shortage of Time – One of the factors that impeded instructors' effective CLS practice was a lack of time. Department heads noticed that instructors were running out of time to cover their courses due to a variety of factors, most notably an institutional calendar change. Sometimes, especially since the outbreak of COVID-19, the university has accidentally changed its normal academic calendar numerous times. This discouraged instructors from effectively using the CLS. Other factors that significantly contributed to poor CLS practice included instructors' personal, social, psychological, and economic factors.

Loose Supervision and Monitoring Mechanism – According to the AAQA director, loose supervision and monitoring mechanisms were another factor that had a significant impact on the effective practice of CLS. According to the office director, school leaders and departments fail to supervise and monitor the use of cooperative learning strategies. The departments do not strictly adhere to the CLS practice, regardless of whether instructors apply it or students use it in their daily activities.

Lack of Awareness - According to the AAQA director, the most significant cause of poor CLS performance was a lack of awareness about the CLS. Both instructors and students lack a thorough understanding of the CLS. Some instructors are unfamiliar with the term CLS. As a result, they are unfamiliar with the formation and practice of CLS groups. Similarly, unless they are oriented, all students do not understand what CLS is or how it works. According to the director, this gap was created by the heads of the relevant departments or schools, though his office shares it in part.

Discussion of Interview Responses Regarding the Challenges of Cooperative Learning Strategy

Question #3: What challenges do you face when exercising cooperative learning strategy?

Regarding this question, most of the respondents produced similar responses. The responses, which were identified as challenges of CLS were stated bellow:

Instructors Poor Commitment - all the respondents, meaning the dean, the AAQA and the heads of the departments similarly replied that instructors were not committed enough to practice CLS effectively. Teachers were not committed. Thus, instructors' poor or lack of commitment highly affects the effective practice of the CLS.

Poor Supervision and Monitoring Mechanism – Another barrier to effective CLS practice has been identified as a lack of supervision and monitoring mechanisms. The department heads, university management, and other external bodies such as HERQA (Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Ministry of Education) and other stakeholders make little or no contribution to supervising and monitoring the CLS.

COVID-19 Policy Guideline/Principles - One of the most difficult aspects of CLS was the Policy Guideline/Principles established against COVID-19. According to these principles, students were not to sit in groups, and there had to be at least two meters between them. Students should not share their learning materials. Thus, it completely prohibited students from sitting together. As a result, this was a determining factor in blocking CLS practice.

Classroom Facilities - Other respondents identified inadequate classroom facilities as a barrier to effective CLS practice. As they mentioned, some classroom settings are not conducive to cooperative learning. They have fixed seats, making it difficult to arrange students in groups in the classroom.

Lack of Support – Regarding this point, the department heads stated that both instructors and students do not receive the necessary support from the relevant bodies, such as AAQA and higher management.

Students Interest – The heads and AAQA also mentioned the students' interest. That is, students are not interested in effectively practicing CLS. As a result, this was identified as a significant issue.

Perception of Instructors - another challenging factor strongly raised by the heads was that instructor's perception on CLS. According to their reply, almost all instructors perceive CLS as imposed by the government or higher officials. Hence, instructors lack commitment to practice it effectively.

The AAQA Poor Planning, Supervision and Monitoring Mechanism – a) Department heads report that AAQA does not adequately train and supervise university instructors and program leaders in implementing the CLS. It is only effective at monitoring and evaluating the CLS. Thus, AAQA was only responsible for monitoring. The directorate office performed poorly in terms of planning and supervision. As a result, these are some of the challenges that instructors face when implementing CLS effectively.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, the study found that the status of cooperative learning strategies is extremely low. The practice existed, as did the implementation, and the need and interest of university management bodies were present. However, the practice was extremely low, resulting in low status. Furthermore, the effectiveness of cooperative learning has been very low since the COVID-19 outbreak. Many factors influenced these, including COVID-19 police guidelines, a lack of awareness, interest, commitment, supervision and follow-up, a poor learning facility, a teacher's workload, insufficient time, a lack of support, and others. Cooperative learning entails students working together to achieve common goals, and this sense of interdependence drives group members to assist and support one another. When students work together, they learn to listen to others, give and receive help, reconcile differences, and solve problems democratically. However, simply putting students in small groups and telling them to work together does not guarantee that they will cooperate. Groups must be structured so that members work together to reap the academic and social benefits that this approach to learning is widely credited with. The teacher's role in promoting cooperative learning in the classroom is critical to its success. This includes understanding how to structure cooperative learning in groups, such as group size and composition, task type, expectations for student behavior, individual and group responsibilities, and the teacher's role in monitoring both the process and the outcomes of the group experience.(palmer et al., 2017)

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