

Students' Involvements with the Collaborative Learning Environment in Faculty of Law, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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Abstract: Current research describes an exploratory study conducted to elicit responses from law students about their collaborative learning environment. In addition, this study also attempts to capture important aspects of collaborative learning. This study was conducted among undergraduate law students from the Faculty of Law, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. This research explores individual features and main features that influence characteristics of collaborative learning, as well as characteristics of collaborative learning that influence student approval. The findings suggest students appreciate the opportunity to work together. The students showed constructive experiences and are contented with learning in a team. Lastly, group products influence the group regulation processes and group cohesion influences student satisfaction with collaborative learning. As a conclusion, professional educators are recommended to approach collaborative learning in education as collaborative learning viewed as a didactic method that promotes 'constructive educational strategies'.

Keywords: Collaborative, Technology, Law Students, Undergraduates

I. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration refers to activities related to how the group works in the task. Nowadays collaborative learning is seen as an important learning medium for education. Working in a group when performing an assignment is seen as an influential feature of the educational environment, aimed at actively building knowledge (Van & Paas, 2003). By working in a team, the students become active in communicating and engaging with the task. Furthermore, students are becoming actively in exchanging thoughts, sharing perspectives, resolving arguments and using prior experience or knowledge in deciding on the best solution to solve the problem. The use of a collaborative learning environment can help improve interaction and communication between students, peers and teachers and help improving learning environment. In addition, previous researcher mentioned that students in collaborative learning environment have better positive learning process and accomplish higher results than other students (Hiltz, 1995).

Scardamalia & Bereiter (1994) promoted collaborative learning as a flexible and reliable learning environment that provides equivalent prospects for students in contribution of their knowledge level. Collaborative learning environment motivates students to describe their opinions and ideas without feeling ridiculed and criticized (Rowntree, 1992). Furthermore, students have the prospect to manage their learning and become active students that absorbing information and combine prior and new knowledge to increase level of information in collaborative learning environment (Dewiyanti et al. 2007).

II. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN CLASSROOMS

When facing a problem or solving a task, student involvement in collaborative learning acts as the communication and involvement between fellow peers in a group. Previous studies showed that group size suggestively impacts student involvement in collaboration (Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Shaw, 1973). Numerous features in the collaborative learning environment can effect student involvement and the key features are course characteristics, individualities, aspects of learning and shared satisfaction (Dewiyanti et al., 2007). In addition, collaborating in small groups making inactive students to be stimulated and increase student's involvement (Hammond, 2000; Kaye, 1992; Wegerif, 1997).

Additionally, in general, class or task that encourage in collaborating indicate that students become more active members in the learning development when the task involves high-level collaboration (Cohen, 1992). A high level collaboration assignment requires teamwork not only to share knowledge or to decide working duties but also to discourse how to advance as a team. In contrast, tasks with low levels of collaboration do not have interdependence that may prevent group members from working together when performing their tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

Kagan (1985) reported that individualities such as students' ideas about collaborative learning and their capabilities with the usage of technology can encourage their involvement in the learning process together. Meanwhile, Bruffee (1995) mentioned that in collaborative learning, the responsibility of teacher is shifts to group member. This will provide team members the opportunity to control the collaboration activity and process. Collaborative learning makes them to plan the work together and ensure that the progression will be targeted. By supporting each other in a group, discussing learning content in depth and maintaining a collaborative process, they will accomplish the learning objectives.

Manuscript received on 23 August 2021 | Revised Manuscript received on 04 September 2021 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 September 2021 | Manuscript published on 30 September 2021.

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Defining plans, contributing thoughts, managing arguments and observing group progressions are significant characteristics of collaborative learning (Dewiyanti et al., 2007). Therefore, to achieve the learning goals all team members have the obligation to contribute in the collaborative development.

Whereas students' satisfaction with collaborative learning is a result of the collaborative process and can be evaluated by a feeling of optimistic in association with their collaboration experience. Gunawardena et al. (2001) reported that student satisfaction can influence the teamwork, such as working environment of the team, team progress, communication within group and focus as a group. However, Harasim (2001) and Hiltz (1995) reported that there are still many considerations before the implementation of collaborative learning as a tool of education.

Finally, understanding students' experiences is important as it can help educators give detailed guidelines to improve the learning process's quality (Dewiyanti et al., 2007). Current research conducted an explorative study conducted to get feedback from undergraduate students on how they experience collaborative learning and efforts to have a grasp on the key features of collaborative learning. The results of current research will provide useful suggestions for assisting effective learning in a collaborative learning environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

Participants are asked to complete a survey invited through Google Forms. The survey is administered after the course is completed and comprises of three sections on individualities, experiences and satisfaction regarding collaborative learning; first section aims to obtain information about student characteristics, second section aimed to provide info on student experiences with collaborative learning and the third section aimed to provide information on student experience with collaborative learning and student satisfaction with collaborative learning.

B. Sample

The study investigated the students' experiences with the collaborative learning environment in the Faculty of Law, UKM. 116 undergraduate law students were selected to participate in this research.

C. Instrument

3-part survey was given to students. The questionnaire of individualities consists of five influences. The first influence is evaluating students' attitudes toward cooperation. The second factor collects information about individual activities within the group. The third effect is to obtain information about student's familiarity with text-based communication. The fourth influence is to obtain information about students' prior knowledge and, ultimately, to evaluate students' opinions on Internet use. Students' experiences regarding collaborative learning were evaluated with six influences developed for this study and three existing influences. The six influences are (a) Observing Procedures (b) Participation, (c) Monitoring the Progress of the Group, (d) Helping Others, (e) Providing Feedback, and (f) Monitoring. Then, the three influences evaluate group progression, strategy conflict and intra-group strategy. The influence of

group progression was revised from Savicki et al. (1996) aimed to evaluate the degree of cohesion achieved in collaboration process. The influence of intra-group conflict and task strategy was adapted from Saavedra et al. (1993) aimed to evaluate the level of conflict within a group and evaluate the judgements and selections made by the group in concluding the task.

The student's satisfaction with collaborative learning was evaluated with three influences that are evaluated (a) Satisfaction with Group Membership, (b) Satisfaction with Group Learning, and (c) Group Satisfaction. Lastly, students' satisfaction with their final product was evaluated with just one point. Current research used a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire; 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree).

D. Data Analysis

The study was done by using the quantitative data obtained and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Individualities

Before deciding on a research question, a closer look is made on the characteristics of the student (first part). The analysis of the variables used in Table 1 demonstrates that the data distribution is normal based on the mean scores with low standard deviation. All of the items had the mean scores between the ranges of four to five. It is understood that the means of the answers is 4.34, and this means equal to (4.16-4.46: agree). As a result of these findings, the general average of the survey was in the range of "agree" and "strongly agree". It seems that students are familiar and having experiences in collaborative learning. Student's show that they are used to the Internet for resources and that their knowledge of communicating via online media is relatively good showed by low standard deviation. The influence of individualities on features of collaborative learning will be discussed on the next point.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of characteristics of the student

Influence	Mean	SD
Working together in a group making me interested	4.40	0.96
I like to take the initiative	4.25	0.95
Communicate in group discussion is a pleasant way	4.46	0.86
I can clarify to team members about the task	4.16	0.90
Internet was good source of information	4.46	0.90
Total Mean Score	4.34	

Students' experiences with collaborative learning

To analyse students' experiences with collaborative learning, the group was taken as a unit of analysis as students worked in groups and interacted with one another. Based on Table 2, all of the items had the mean scores between the ranges of four to five.

It is understood that the means of the answers is 4.18, and this means equal to (3.12-4.45: Neutral). As a result of these findings, the general average of the survey was in the range of “neutral” and “strongly agree”. Ever-changing intragroup conflict scored relative lower mean scores as shown in Table 2. This indicates that there is no severe conflict between in the group when studying together or performing a task.

Generally, students demonstrate a constructive experience by occupied in a collaborative learning environment. In addition, the variable scores in collaborative learning, namely participating and assisting another, were lower than those of the other variables. Students look forward to participating in the collaboration process from the beginning. Therefore, it is recommended for scaffolding members to control the team progression from the start of their collaboration.

Overall, most of the group communications discuss learning content and activities such as debating, clarifying and providing additional resources are subjugated by controlling actions such as preparing, monitoring and reflection. This finding is in agreement with previous studies indicated that students have experience with collaboration and indicate that team members are responsible for performing task together (Veerman, 2000; Veldhuis-Diermanse, 2002). The results also showed that learning in a collaborative learning environment focuses more on completing tasks than other unimportant activities. Finally, all of the variables showed that the mean is above the midpoint and can be established that students have had a constructive experience with collaborative learning.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of analyse students' experiences with collaborative learning

Influence	Mean	SD
I remind group member who does not work together properly	3.78	0.99
All group members participate in discussions to reach a consensus	4.55	0.73
I have the responsibility to maintain our plan	4.40	0.81
I help other group members who have difficulty to understand the learning material	4.30	0.82
constantly gave feedback to other group member works	4.10	0.91
I feel pleasant if group member reminds me of the target	4.47	0.85
All group members comprehend the group goals and were focussed to them	4.47	0.74
There was a lot of pressure among people in our group	3.12	1.47
Our group established a good plan for doing the tasks	4.39	0.79
Total Mean Score	4.18	

Students' satisfaction with collaborative learning

Table 3 showed the group means and standard deviations of the satisfaction variables. All of the items had the mean scores between the ranges of four to five. It is understood that the means of the answers is 4.28, and this means equal to (4.41-4.60: Agree). As a result of these findings, the general average of the survey was in the range of “agree” and “strongly agree”. This result shows that the average score for all satisfaction variables is above the median

showing that students are generally satisfied with their learning together. Current findings are in agreement with previous research by Bures, et al. (2000) and Harasim (2001); specify that students are content with education in a collaborative learning environment. The findings showed that students are quite happy with collaborative learning.

In addition, the results showed that group unity is a significant factor affecting student satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous research by Johnson et al. (1991) emphasized that the importance of group cohesion during cooperation to keep the progression of the teamwork. Gillies (2003) supported current research by stated that group process guidelines have a positive effect on task satisfaction in a group. Gillies (2003) also reported that group without firm structure and establishment caused students to be less optimistic about their group experiences. These results indicate that group process rules are required during collaborative learning and are considered as supportive of the learning process. Lack of group process rules can result in loss of control over the group in achieving their goals.

Lastly, the findings showed that product type affects the group process. The results show that group products stimulate students to adjust group processes because they involve teamwork before the doing the assignment or task (Cohen, 1992; Johnson et al., 1991). Therefore, the need for group products to improves students' knowledge of the topic and motivates students to improve team abilities such as preparation, development and monitoring.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations students' satisfaction with collaborative learning

Influence	Mean	SD
All group members can get along well	4.60	0.64
I learn a lot from other group members	4.47	0.77
I feel pleasure to work together in the group to solve a task	4.46	0.88
I am satisfied with the final product	4.41	0.75
Total Mean Score	4.28	

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings showed several important implications for collaborative learning. First, current study recommended assigning projects that require high levels of collaborative process such as; tasks that need group products. Second, to maintain the teamwork, we may ponder examining students to reflect on their team development. Therefore, everyone in a team should have the chance to reflect on their team actions and gain information to increase performance of their team. Third, the experience of less instruction of team processes may be improved by giving detailed strategies on how to organize the team. Finally, it is suggested to integrate a collaborative learning environment in education, as collaborative learning viewed as a didactic method that promotes 'constructive educational strategies'.

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