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## Cooperative Group Work as a Flexible Learning Strategy of the 4<sup>th</sup> Year College Students of MSU-Sulu

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### ABSTRACT

The education system has been shaken by an unprecedented health crisis. Various governments around the world have launched civic response efforts to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on education. Due to the movement and health protocol restrictions, the current situation may exacerbate the difficulty encountered during online learning. Teachers must take a different approach to learn in this situation. To improve learning, teachers must assist students and manage them. Teaching is most effective when the learner actively participates and cooperates. Through systematic classroom interaction, cooperative group work as flexible learning allows students to support and encourage one another. This study was conducted at MSU-Sulu on cooperative group work as an approach. The study's participants are 4<sup>th</sup> year College education students. The researcher used a checklist questionnaire to determine the potential effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning. The scoring scheme employed 4 points Likert scale. The findings of the study on the effects of cooperative group work on the performance of 4<sup>th</sup> year college education students. On the potential effects of cooperative group, workshop participants agreed. Students should be encouraged to adopt cooperative group work to enhance their knowledge and skills, especially during a pandemic. Teachers must ensure that this approach is used in learning sessions because it equates to improvement in students' academic performance.

### 1. Introduction

Recently, the education system has faced an unprecedented health crisis (COVID-19 pandemic) that has shaken its foundation. Thus, various governments across the globe have launched a crisis response to mitigate the adverse impact of the pandemic on education. This response includes, but is not limited to, curriculum revision, provision for technological resources and infrastructure, shifts in the academic calendar, and policies on instructional delivery and assessment. Inevitably, these developments compelled educational institutions to migrate to fully online learning until face-to-face

instruction is allowed. The current circumstance is unique as it could aggravate the challenges experienced during online learning due to restrictions in movement and health protocols. Students' online learning challenges during the pandemic and how they cope with them.

At Mindanao State University, Sulu, learners encountered changes in learning methods due to the new system of learning. The teachers used modules and online platforms as means of instruction, where modules were used as reading materials for the students' intended learning, and online platforms



such as Messenger on Facebook were used for communication purposes since face-to-face classes were prohibited during this pandemic. However, it is challenging for the students to have individual learning, and so there are some activities where students need to interact in group work to complete their tasks, in which case they can work as flexible learners and keep in touch with their teachers and classmates (Crookal et al., 2000).

Cooperative group work is essentially about teaching one another respect and self-acceptance. Small groups of students work on specified missions to correct their weaknesses and build on their strengths in order to share their experiences and gain a lot of knowledge. The learners will freely mix with each other without racial discrimination and share their useful thoughts. This condition is based on mutual support, respect for one another, and the ability to benefit from one another in a friendly and professional manner (Millis et al., 1992).

In cooperative group work, teachers have to be involved when they are needed. Their help should be relevant and encouraging. The study found that the teacher's role in cooperative group learning generally includes specifying problems, grouping students, explaining tasks, monitoring group work, and evaluating achievement and cooperation (Johnson et al., 2009). The first mission of teachers in cooperative group work strategies is to respect their students regardless of their ethnic, intellectual, educational, or social backgrounds and their benefit in the potential for academic success.

The teaching process is effective when done with the learner's active participation and cooperation toward the activities during the class period or even in an online community learning environment. The students would develop positive behaviours and attitudes toward one another. Meanwhile, they can be successful in life because they are full of inspiration and will stick together for their whole life. Furthermore, cooperative group work will help

students find their real friends, who will always be by their side, supporting and assisting one another as they face challenges in education and in life (Ding et al., 2007). Further explains cooperative learning as "cooperative learning promotes a shared sense of community, learning like living." This approach enables students to support and encourage one another through systematic classroom interaction.

As of now, the situation is different. We are currently in the middle of a crisis called the COVID-19 pandemic, and the cooperative group work strategies are even more challenging because they're only done as flexible learning, where students work together in groups but interact through chatting, using Google Classroom or Zoom, and online discussions of the subjects/topics being thought about. This study aimed to investigate the use of cooperative group work as flexible learning 4<sup>th</sup> year college students at MSU, Sulu, Philippines.

## 2. Literature Review

Cooperative group work was defined as a result of frequent participation in cooperative learning activities or group work (Tsay et al., 2012). Students will turn to their group mates not just when assigned to do so by their distance education teachers, but that peer interaction will become a kind of natural reflex, as students come to see learning as something that is often done in collaboration with others, although individual learning of all group members constitutes the main goal. One way that students exercise this reflex for collaboration is via what in the face-to-face learning space has been called "Out-of-class academic collaboration" (OCAC) (Crookall et al., 2000). In other words, without any prompting from their teachers, students collaborate to learn more and enjoy their learning more. This OCAC has a natural distance education equivalent because at any stage in the learning process, at any time in the term calendar, and even after a course ends and students graduate, they potentially benefit from interacting with classmates or



former classmates, even without prompting from teachers, not to mention the ongoing collaboration with teachers and others in broader learning communities (Travers, 2016). One important point to remember when cooperative group work is infused into flexible learning education arises from the fact that education seeks to make each student a more capable person. Therefore, even if a group has done an excellent project, has answered every question correctly, or has given a top-notch presentation, the group's task remains incomplete until each group member can do equally well on their own, i.e., the group's ultimate goals lie in strengthening each group member. Fortunately, ICT provides multiple assessment methods, although it is true that assessing each group adds to the work of already overburdened distance education teachers (Travers, 2016).

One assessment practice (Suen, 2014) in modern distance education is peer and self-assessment. Moving away from one hundred percent reliance on teacher assessment becomes particularly important in distance education, as teachers' observation of students is so far away from teachers. Of course, peers are often not in the same physical space. Nonetheless, peers can engage with each other much more often than teachers can. Furthermore, rather than relying solely on teachers to motivate students, in cooperative learning, peers can motivate each other, and being part of the assessment process enables students to be better-informed motivators. Online tools for peer and self-feedback are available for all rubrics, including peer grades and teammates.

Furthermore, learning management systems (LMS) like blackboard includes self- and peer-assessment tools. Not to be forgotten is that peer interaction forms a common work mode in many companies and government organizations. A great deal of software and other affordances that have been developed for work contexts can also be used in educational contexts. Most teachers can benefit from assistance in infusing

cooperative learning into distance education. Firstly, change is not easy. As a saying in teacher education puts it, "We teachers tend to teach the way that we were taught." Unfortunately, most teachers were not taught to use cooperative learning. Secondly, as the literature on cooperative learning and related approaches makes clear, doing cooperative learning, especially in distance education, entails much more than just asking students to collaborate. Guidance and patience are needed just as much as guidance and patience are needed for teachers.

Cooperative learning is frequently researched in education. This is a learning situation in which two or more students are working together to complete a common task. The primary benefits of cooperative learning are that students learn better when they work together because they are held accountable to each other. Cooperative learning is a teaching practice that breaks students into groups of 3-4, with each student having a particular role within the group. There are many benefits to cooperative group work over individual learning. To use this strategy correctly certain structure is needed, which will be discussed. Cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goals (Johnson et al., 1998).

Group activities in cooperative learning strategy promote critical thinking and deeper understanding. Vygotskian's sociocultural theory of mind serves as the theoretical foundation for group work (Vygotsky, 1978). Cooperative group work has emerged as the leading approach to classroom instruction. Students involved in group work can change the role of expert and novice as they all have different strengths and weaknesses.

### 3. Methods

This study is an observational study. The study was conducted at Mindanao State University-Sulu, Capitol Site, particularly in the College of Education, which is composed of three major courses (English, mathematics, and general science), and one general



course (elementary education). The participants of this study were the selected 4<sup>th</sup> year college students taking up bachelor of elementary education at Mindanao State University-Sulu during the year 2021-2022.

This study used a checklist questionnaire that was comprised of 20 questions about the possible effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning on the academic performance of the students. The survey questionnaire is presented to investigate the effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning on the academic performance level of the students. The participant was asked to choose among the four options, which is strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

In this study, the data gathering used by the researchers was to create a checklist questionnaire. Before it was administrated to the selected respondents, the instrument was validated by the research adviser and the panel to make it more

credible. After the validation, the researchers proposed to the experts such as panel members, advisers, and chairman. Following the proper protocol in conducting the research instrument to the respondents, and afterward, the findings of the survey were clearly analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated.

This study applied a scoring scheme, and it has two tables of scoring schemes. These are scoring schemes for validating the students' perception of the effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning and also for the academic performance level of the respondents. The scoring scheme used to validate the effects of cooperative group work is four points Likert. The statement on the effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning was composed of 20 items; each was provided with four options, 4 - a points scale, for choices of responses: 4-strongly agree (SA), 3-agree (A), 2-disagree (DA), and 1-strongly disagree (SD). The scoring scheme used 4 points Likert scale, as shown in the two tables below.

Table 1. The scoring scheme in validating the effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning.

Range	Scale	Response	Qualifying statement
3.50-4.00	4	Strongly agree	Students strongly agreed with the statement
2.50-3.49	3	Agree	Students agree
1.50-2.49	2	Disagree	Students disagreed
1.0-1.49	1	Strongly disagree	Students strongly disagree with the statement

Table 2. Scoring scheme for the academic performance level of the respondents.

Level of performance	Grading scale	Remarks	Qualifying statement
Excellent	1.0/1.25	Passed	Very highly proficient in knowledge and skills of students
Very good	1.5/1.75	Passed	Highly proficient in knowledge and skills of students
Good	2.0/2.25	Passed	
Satisfactory	2.5/ 2.75	Passed	Moderately proficient in knowledge and skills of students
Passing	3	Passed	Slightly proficient in knowledge and skills of students
Condition	4	Failed	Did not meet proficiency in knowledge and skills of students
Failure	5	Failed	
Incomplete	Inc	Failed	



The scoring scheme used for validating students' performance levels was based on the latest grading scale of CHED that uses ranges such as excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, passing, condition, and failure. This was made to show the academic performance level of the selected participants. The participants were surveyed on their final grades on CPE 198 to find out their academic performance level when taught using cooperative group work as a flexible learning approach.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 3, the list of the possible effects of cooperative group works as flexible learning on the academic performance of students. Cooperative group work as flexible learning can improve the knowledge and intellectual skills that got the highest mean of 3.86. This result implies that most students are strongly agreed that their knowledge and intellectual skills are enhanced by means of working in a group with other students.

Table 3. Effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning on the academic performance of the students.

No	Statement description	Mean	Qualitative
1	Cooperative group work as flexible learning motivates students to do well in doing the assigned task.	3.06	Agree
2	Cooperative group work as flexible learning promotes individual responsibility for learning and metacognitive awareness	3.71	Strongly agree
3	Cooperative group work as flexible learning can help in building the self-esteem and confidence of students in expressing their opinions.	3.09	Agree
4	Cooperative group work as flexible learning can improve knowledge and intellectual skills.	3.86	Strongly agree
5	Cooperative Group Work as flexible learning can enhance performance and grade.	3.06	Agree
6	Cooperative Group Work as flexible learning enables students to effectively accomplish the assigned task.	2.97	Agree
7	Cooperative Group Work as flexible learning equips the students with the ability to derive a deeper understanding of the subject.	3.06	Agree
8	Cooperative group work as flexible learning improves interaction and more well-developed social skills and retention of knowledge.	3.26	Agree
9	Cooperative group work as flexible learning enhances the productivity of each individual.	2.97	Agree
10	Cooperative group work as flexible learning is a staple part of academic life, allowing students to explore complex tasks.	2.91	Agree
11	Cooperative group work as flexible learning cannot improve the academic performance of students in school.	1.71	Disagree
12	Cooperative group work as flexible learning makes students feel embarrassed and unconfident in sharing their thoughts.	1.51	Disagree
13	Cooperative group work as flexible learning cannot provide students learning.	1.43	Strongly disagree
14	Cooperative group work as flexible learning cannot encourage students to do their responsibility as a member of a group.	2.17	Disagree
15	Cooperative group work as flexible learning students often finds it difficult to accept criticism from their peers.	2.29	Disagree
16	Cooperative group work as flexible learning will provide students with conflict ideas that will negatively impact the student's enjoyment in the class.	2.26	Disagree
17	Cooperative group work as flexible learning can be extremely time-consuming in preparing the class activities.	2.54	Agree
18	Cooperative group work as flexible learning students will quite often have difficulty in expressing their ideas in a group.	2.34	Disagree
19	Cooperative group work as flexible learning can cause blaming and responsibility issues.	1.89	Disagree
20	Cooperative group work as flexible learning increases the number of students who is always dependent on their group members.	2.09	Disagree
	Overall	2.61	Agree

Notes: 4.00-3.50 (strongly agree); 1.50-2.49 (disagree); 2.50-3.49 (agree); 1.00-1.49 (strongly disagree)



Meanwhile, table 3 shows the lowest mean of 1.51 in terms of making students feel embarrassed and unconfident in sharing their thoughts. This result implies that the students disagree on the effect of cooperative group work as flexible learning, particularly in making students feel embarrassed and unconfident in sharing their thoughts. Furthermore, cooperative group work contributes to positive effects on the academic performance of students and boosts students' self-confidence, and is socially active with their classmates and teacher during class or on an online platform. The overall means is 2.61, which shows that the majority of students agreed with the listed possible effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning toward their academic performance. It means that their responses were closely related, considering that they have a common perception of the listed possible effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning.

This finding corroborates the idea of Johnson et al. (1998), which stated that cooperative learning in group work is a situation in which there is a positive interdependence among students' goal attainment. The students will learn individually through participating and socializing with their group mates. They added that group activities in cooperative learning strategy promote critical thinking and a deeper understanding of knowledge. However, teachers must have a clear understanding of the needs in a culturally diverse classroom to be able to use knowledge effectively.

Another supporting statement on how cooperative group work as flexible learning can enhance knowledge and intellectual thinking skills is idea transfer (Tsay et al., 2012). When in a group, the interaction between members allows for an exchange of ideas much more quickly and effectively. The group interaction allows for the more knowledgeable students in the group to help those with less understanding of the materials.

Distance or flexible learning can be a major

adjustment for both students and teachers, and including peer interaction in that distance learning presents yet another adventure for students and teachers. Fortunately, it can be a rewarding adventure, as cooperative learning provides students with more communication opportunities, more opportunities to give and receive assistance, and more opportunities to add a social element to their learning to enhance their social skills as well as their knowledge (Slavin, 1999; Siegel, 2005).

Positive effects of cooperative learning have been identified as helping students in deepening thoughts, improving knowledge, and critical thinking, being creative, building a healthy relationship with group members (Johnson et al., 1999) as well as gaining tolerance and appreciation of differences among diverse individuals (Tinto, 1997; Suen, 2014). Therefore, cooperative group work can promote effectiveness in the teaching method as well as the learners to enhance their metacognitive and psychological. At the same time, it will promote a positive and harmonious relationship among the learners in dealing with their academic tasks (Vygotsky, 1978; You, 2014).

Furthermore, when summing the academic performance of the respondents, it got an overall mean of 1.82. This implies that the respondents have very good academic performance, and none got failed or did not meet expectations. It means that the students are highly proficient in knowledge and skills. Hence, cooperative group work as flexible learning increases the possibility of obtaining passing marks through involvement and participation with the group.

## 5. Conclusion

The selected college students strongly agreed on the effects of cooperative group work as flexible learning that can enhance knowledge and intellectual skills. The academic performance level of students is very good. Hence, individual and group participation must be improved that is, students must be active,





attainable, and deserving of cooperating and sharing their personal ideas with their group mates.

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