

## Collaborative Learning: How Do Ibri College Students View it?

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### Abstract

Collaborative learning method involves students and/or employees working together as a team to discuss a certain issue provided that all members participate and reach a result. In order to fathom the depth of this method -approach- the researchers distributed a questionnaire among twenty students (male and female) at Ibri College of Applied Sciences and Technology-Sultanate of Oman. The results were promising; a high percentage of the respondents advocate the Collaborative approach, as it gives the chance to all participants- especially the shy ones- to take a vital role in the discussion. Discussion, recommendations, and explanations will be highlighted in detail throughout the paper.

**Keywords:** approach, collaborative, collective, groups, online discussion, pairs, teams,

### Introduction

Ministries of higher education normally prepare students- graduates or undergraduates- to gain certain competencies and skills in order to deal and cope with dynamic and rapid changes and development in the work arena. Students should acquire certain skills to effectively use while dealing with certain problems. Critical thinking, face-to-face communication, and collaboration are all necessary for the future workplace. Teaching and learning in the traditional way does not help students to successfully develop better competencies, so innovation and rejuvenation have become a must. This paper explores the importance of the Collaborative approach and highlights its merits and side effects.

### Literature Review

“Collaborative learning, which generally refers to students working together in an attempt to create knowledge and achieve shared learning goals, has been identified by scholars as an especially promising instructional approach to higher education” (Nguyen, 2022, Para. 1). Laal

& Laal (2011, Para. 1) “Collaborative learning (CL) is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. “Collaborative learning is an educational approach of teaching and learning in which groups of students participate in solving issues, completing tasks, or creating products together” (Ahmed, 2021, Para.4). From the above definitions, Collaborative learning is a method of working together to discuss a certain issue and find a good and reasonable solution. Do all classes need collaborative learning approaches?

In fact, not all classes require applying the collaborative way of teaching. Some are purely teacher-centered that depend mainly on the teacher. Take, for example, traditional teaching, which still exists in different parts of the world. In Some classes such as computer labs, students work individually with not much guidance from the teacher, unless needed. In higher education institutions, especially at graduate schools, students, most of the time, work in teams and pairs.

“...some classes are simpler in terms of structure and may be up to 100% teacher-centered (such as a lecture) or entirely student-centered (such as a computer lab or online research. Sports activities are naturally pair- and group work-based.” (Green, (n.d), Para 5). As it is always said, the teacher is the master of his class; he/she can manage it in the way he/she sees beneficial for students and the educational process as a whole. Collaborative learning encourages students to discuss freely and flexibly as one unified team. In addition, experienced teachers apply this technique to explore students’ inner capabilities in expressing themselves in an intimate and friendly way. What about the differences between fresh and experienced teachers?

Generally speaking, fresh teachers may lack confidence in the classroom and may not have the skill to assume control over the class. They spend some time under pressure, especially if they have some naughty, noisy, and problematic students. So to avoid anxiety and pressure, they ask students to form pairs or groups.

Beginning teachers often fall into the trap of implementing pair and group work as often as possible to reduce the anxiety and stress of teaching and managing 30-odd students at once. However, as they gain experience and confidence, teachers soon learn that teacher-centered activities (even with more challenging classes) are usually easier to manage than student-centered activities (or at least they are on par. (Green, (n.d), Para.9)

Are there any crucial differences between collaborative and cooperative learning? Well, let’s see.

The terms Collaborative learning and Cooperative learning are often used interchangeably although there are some differences. Cooperative learning is where students work together to achieve a pair or group outcome such as solving a math

problem. Almost all pair and group work in schools is cooperative learning. The teacher plans and coordinates short activities that target specific core skills (Green, (n.d), Para.9)

The researchers do cherish group working, but sometimes it is noticed that some students tend to use their first language in the discussion, which is not acceptable at all; English is the language of instruction. “In addition, research proved that students tend to use their first language during pair work activities”. (Zohairy, (n.d), Para.6). Collective learning highlights personal relations, as well as sharing ideas and thoughts about a certain topic. It is a combination of merits under the umbrella of teamwork. Exploring visions and cognitive behavior are also stressed during the collective learning process. “Most conceptions of collective learning highlight characteristics such as relationships, shared vision and meaning, mental models and cognitive and behavioral learning”. (Garavan & McCarthy, 2008, Para.1). Do all pair and group work go smoothly; with no problems or mess?

Forming pair and group work is an art; teachers have to know the nature of their students’ personalities, strengths, weaknesses, etc. Moreover, the instructions given should be clear and to the point and students have to receive a complete idea about working in teams from the beginning of the semester in case some problems arise such as misunderstanding, fuss, and blank stares. “Working in pairs is one of the most-loved setups in the language classroom. However, without proper care and attention, these moments can crumble into a mess of misunderstood instructions, blank stares, or chaos of chatter in any language *but* English”. (Walton, 2020, Para.1). Teachers, or employees in any establishment, should undergo training courses as soon as they start work. It is no use delaying this matter, otherwise, they will keep asking others about small and minute things.

Imagine a situation where an employee can rely on peers to get answers to day-to-day issues from day one on the job. Scheduling training can occur at any time, but people don’t have to wait for it to start being productive so ramp-up is reduced. (Shanahan, (n.d), Para.7).

Working together gives students self-confidence and trust; they can talk and exchange ideas with team members. Moreover, they can have some inspirational goals for the academic institution they belong to. “Equip students with the confidence they need to pursue ambitious goals together”. (Coote & Hattie, 2022, Para. 1). Two or three heads are better than one; this happens in discussing past events as everyone has some different information to support the whole topic. Human history could be discussed and highlighted by means of Collective approaches. “That’s why I believe collective learning is the key to understanding human history” (Christian, (n.d.), Para.11). What about blogs? Are they considered good ways of learning or teaching? Well, blogs are useful in our life and play a good role in gathering groups of people on a certain platform. They provide members with information about different topics and are considered good means of

learning, not teaching, and the outcome cannot be under control because many people, members or guests, share at the same time.

Blogs are a medium for learning, but they do not teach. Rather, they generate space for a collective to emerge. It is impossible to predict what that collective will look like, and once it forms, equally difficult to manage it in any traditional way. (Brown & Thomas, 2013, Para.15).

Forming pair or group work can be done in an easy way, but is it guaranteed that this way can be as beneficial as required? Can it give additional value to the matter discussed? Some conflict might happen while expressing opinions like what happens in some parliaments in some countries in the world. “It is not difficult to put a group of people together, but how do you ensure that being together adds value? And how do you avoid getting mired in conflicts and contradictions?” (Donahoo & Katz, 2022, Para.5). Regardless of conflict in these situations, or alike, in the teaching arena, teachers may encourage participants by making competitions as a source of acquiring knowledge or information, or reaching a goal. “Competition can be the source of learning”. (Suryani, 2012, Para.4).

Collective learning takes place in the health sector, as well. During their morning rounds, senior physicians lead a group of fresh and beginning doctors to discuss patients’ cases. This way gives new doctors a better chance to learn from each other.

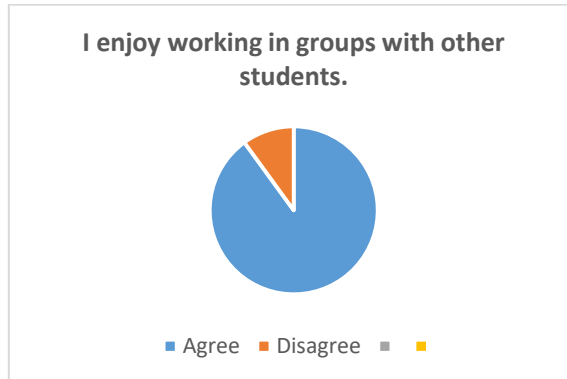
Disagreeing during the discussion is not always bad; sometimes it is a merit because it is a sign of healthy discussion. “some of the most productive moments are when team members disagree because it shows critical thinking and can move the team closer to a better understanding of the problem”. (Glassdoor Team, 2021, Para. 3). Agreeing, on the other hand, comes after an extensive discussion and useful and effective individual communication with brilliant opinions based on ideas.

### **Questionnaire Analysis**

In order to gather more information about Collective Learning, a survey was distributed among (20) male and female Foundation Program students, at Ibri College of Applied Sciences-Sultanate of Oman. The study is conducted by means of a questionnaire that consists of (10) questions. The first part contains (5 agree/disagree) questions, while the second one consists of (5 yes/ no) questions.

**Table 1**

I enjoy working in groups with other students.	Agree	Disagree
	18	2
	90%	10%



**Graph 1**

Table (1) shows that 90% of participants believe that working in groups is enjoyable, on the other hand 10% don't enjoy it, may be because of their shyness. It's obvious from the data collected that students mostly like working in groups.

**Table 2**

Working in groups helps me understand the material well.	Agree	Disagree
	17	3
	75%	15%



**Graph 2**

According to (Table 2) 75% of the students are of the view that working in groups becomes fun and there is a lot of learning through peer intervention. This makes it clear that collaborative learning is a useful tool for teachers to adopt for good future results.

**Table 3**

Collaborative learning is my favorite as a learning method.	Yes	No
	17	3
	85%	15%

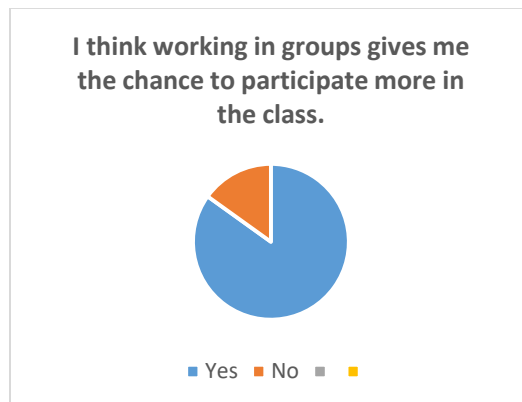


**Graph 3**

Table 3 proves that collaborative learning is quite popular among students like it more than the traditional teaching methods.

**Table 4**

I think working in groups gives me the chance to participate more in the class..	Yes	No
	18	2
	90%	10%



**Graph 4**

Table 4 makes it clear that teaching through collective method gives an opportunity of participation to students, and obviously the learning is better obtained. The teacher should choose active learning procedures instead of old style passive teaching methods to ensure the learning is enjoyed well by the recipients.

### **Recommendations**

-teachers should dedicate a good percentage of class to utilizing Collaborative learning as it is beneficial for students, especially shy and slow achievers.

-by applying the Collaborative learning approach, students become actionable pioneers and agents of change in themselves and society, as well.

-teachers should train students to always discuss problems and issues face to face, or via social and academic platforms.

- teachers should attend/ conduct professional development courses and workshops to extend their understanding and skills about teaching methods.

-teachers should be more flexible and play diverse roles in the classroom; sometimes they are facilitators, counselors, teachers, etc. They should approach groups to check how seriously they are discussing certain issues; sometimes members spend some time talking about irrelevant topics.

-teachers should make students familiar with group or peer work from the start of the semester and have a plan for each stage with the way they will be evaluated and graded.

-before beginning their collaborative activities, students should be familiar with the team's members and given a warm-up time: learning names, and finding some common interests.

-teachers should be patient and more understanding when moving students from their places to sit with other colleagues; there might be noise and uncontrollable situations.

### **Conclusion**

The collaborative approach plays an important role in the educational process. Students sit together in groups or pairs and discuss certain topics under the supervision of their teacher. These topics are not given to students randomly; they are well chosen by the teacher with a time limit. This encourages shy students to start talking and sharing with their colleagues in a constructive discussion. From the questionnaire given to Ibri College students, it seems most of them are for the Collaborative approach.

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