

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN AN ONLINE SETTING OF PHILIPPINE STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all classes have transitioned to online settings. However, Critical Learning Skills should not be compromised even if the learning experience is done virtually. Therefore, collaborative learning strategies are employed by educators in an online setting to develop the student's Critical Learning Skills. This transition has significantly affected the collaborative learning experiences of students. To address this gap, this study aims to understand in depth the essence of collaborative learning in an online setting as experienced by the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education students at a State University in Northern Mindanao. This study employed a phenomenological research design. Eight participants from the first-year to fourth-year levels were chosen for this study. Conventional content analysis was used in analyzing the data. The findings of this study revealed two themes: the lack of self-efficacy and being hopefulness. The findings of this study added to the literature about the experiences of BTLED students on collaborative learning in an online setting since there has been a scarcity of the previous study to understand the experiences of collaboration. The recommendation is discussed in this study.

Key Words: BTLED, Collaborative Learning, Online Learning, Philippine State University, Phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) has significantly challenged the education sector worldwide, particularly in the Philippines. The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on several industries, especially on education. It has forced teaching and learning methods to be held virtually or to adopt a modular strategy by the CHED Memorandum Order No. 4, series of 2020, also known as Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Learning. According to Larson and Miller [1] in their article on 21st-century skills, which are critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills, they emphasize that students should communicate and collaborate in both offline and online environments and educators must respond by preparing their students in the world they live in. In response to this, one of the state universities in Northern Mindanao released a Memorandum 047, s.,2020 [2], to adapt to the 'new normal way of education, which is to transition to online instruction and to adopt an alternative mode of delivery of teaching on all on-campus classes which also resulted in the students' collaborative learning to be done online. Collaborative learning promotes the enhancement of learning, whether in a traditional classroom environment or a non-traditional setting [3]. This has been done to continue providing effective education despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

The education world continues to evolve in terms of learning content (materials) and learning medium [4]. All educational institutions have been directed to employ online learning modalities during the pandemic despite the use of mostly offline learning by educational institutions formerly. The term online collaborative learning refers to learning that takes place virtually [5]. Collaborative activities aid students in developing higher-order abilities to be able to thrive in the current workforce [6]. As summarized in the previous study) on the students enrolled in the advanced level subject in Master Education program, seven problems of online group learning were identified [7]. These are student antipathy towards group work, the selection of the groups, lack of essential group-work skills, the free-rider, possible

inequalities of student abilities, the withdrawal of group members, and the assessment of individuals within the groups [8]. However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there have been no previous studies conducted to understand the experiences of BTLED students in collaborative learning in an online setting. To contribute to the gap in the literature, this study aims to elicit an in-depth understanding of the collaborative learning experience of BTLED students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Several studies have shown that collaborative learning among students situated within an online setting presents various challenges and benefits. These benefits have been observed from both traditional teaching styles and online class settings. However, implementing collaborative learning within an online setting is still a major challenge to both instructors and students [9]. In line with this, in a study that both challenges and benefits in collaborative learning contribute to the attitude of students towards collaborative learning [10]. The factors that shape students' attitudes towards collaborative learning are discussed in depth to tackle the underlying concepts and expound on each of its components.

Lack of Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an indicator of one's belief in his or her ability to succeed. It appears to impact student accomplishment directly and indirectly through motivation and past learning [11]. It measures how much effort a person puts out when confronted with a task or activity, which, in turn, affects the actions to be performed to reach respective goals, including estimated events [12]. Those with a higher sense of self-efficacy are more likely to engage in goal-directed actions and believe they can succeed despite the risk of failure [11]. Students' lack of motivation stems from denying them the tools they need and preventing them from achieving high levels of performance and overcoming hurdles to change. There will be no driving force behind achieving one's direction, control, and tenacity without motivation. Furthermore, the pupils' lack of confidence stems from the uncertainty that comes with a transition phase.

Hopefulness

Hopefulness is described as a cognitive and motivational

state that drives people to pursue their objectives and find ways to achieve them. Students are generally upbeat and view hurdles as opportunities, and they do not allow life's challenges to get in the way of their goals [13]. It involves planning and carrying out productive activities that are clearly related to achieving goals [14]. Students find hopefulness to be helpful and beneficial to them, especially with the difficulties presented by the pandemic [15] In this setting, it makes sense that an optimistic, adaptable, and practical attitude add to the student's growth of hope. Individuals with a greater degree of optimism do better in school, which helps the development of hope [16]. Furthermore, one of the benefits of being hopeful and adaptable is having a number of alternatives for understanding a certain subject, which helps pupils create a positive view [17]. Furthermore, establishing a practical attitude implies that a person perceives their experience as a good aspect for future use; this can be seen in the statements made by the participants.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study aimed to understand the essence of collaborative learning as experienced by BTLED students in a state university in an online setting. The research study applied the phenomenology research design. A phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that investigates a person's lived experiences in the world [18], thus aiding researchers to understand the experiences of BTLED students in collaborative learning within an online setting.

Participants of the Study

The study's participants are 1st-year to 4th-year students who are currently enrolled in the BTLED program, with Home Economics and Industrial Arts as their major courses. The participants are qualified for this study as they are engaged in collaborative learning tasks in an online mode of education. The researchers have chosen only the BTLED students to be the participants in this study since there have been no previous studies conducted to understand the experiences of the BTLED students in collaborative learning in an online setting. The participants' names have been replaced with codes. The demographics of the research participants are presented in Table 1. The code names are 1HE and 1IA, the number represents the year level, whereas the HE and IA refers to the majors who are Home Economics and Industrial Arts.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the original participants

Code Name	Year Level	Age	Sex
1HE	1 st year	19	F
1IA	1 st year	19	F
2HE	2 nd year	25	M
2IA	2 nd year	20	F
3HE	3 rd year	20	F
3IA	3 rd year	20	F
4HE	4 th year	24	M
4IA	4 th year	22	F

Interview Protocol

The interview paraphernalia went through a validity evaluation by two qualitative experts and a knowledgeable researcher on the study [19]. The researchers reiterated the protocol to the participants during the interview, using open-ended and probing questions to understand and discover

further the students' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

It is essential to protect the study's participants and to keep the data confidential when conducting qualitative research [20]. The participants were provided a letter of consent before the actual data collection to guarantee that the Data Privacy Law in Republic Act 10173 was followed according to the research ethics [21].

Table 2 Interview Questions

Interview questions after the validation

Do you think there are advantages when working in a group online?
If yes, then what are these advantages? If not, why?
Do you think there are disadvantages to working in a group online? If yes, then what are these disadvantages? If not, why?
How do you feel when working with a group online?
Why do you feel such emotion or feeling?
With your experience working with a group online, will you still consider performing the task in the future with a group online? Why?
Did your perception of collaborative learning change now that it has been done online? Why?

The participants were also informed that the participation was entirely voluntary; they had the option to refuse to participate in the interview whenever they felt it was inconvenient or uncomfortable. The participants were also informed that the interview would be recorded. All of the participants were assured that their personal information would be kept private and anonymous [21].

Data Accumulation

The researchers sent a permission letter to the chosen participants of the study through their Messenger accounts for a one-on-one interview at their most suitable time. The interview was recorded through Google Meet with the permission of the participants. All interview questions were asked in the English language. However, it was up to the participants to answer in English or Cebuano. To conduct the interview smoothly, the researchers followed an interview protocol containing open-ended questions that the researchers constructed [22]. The conversation was video recorded with the participants' permission.

Data Analysis

The researchers utilized the conventional content analysis approach in analyzing the data. In traditional content analysis, coding and making categories come directly from the written data [23]. The researchers then reviewed the recordings and transcribed the audio data into written data. After the transcription, the researchers applied Brislin's Model, a well-known method of preparing valid and reliable tools for translating data [24]. The written data was translated into English by an expert translator and then translated back to Bisaya by another expert translator. Both English and Bisaya translation was then compared to ensure that the translation is correct. Moreover, the researchers identified the similarities between the answers to create codes. Similar answers were considered as one code. After the codes were identified, these were then grouped into categories. Finally, categories were then utilized in formulating themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings of the data analysis revealed two themes that gave meaning to the collaborative learning strategies as experienced by the BTLED students in a Philippine state university during online learning. These are the lack of self-efficacy and hopefulness.

Theme 1: Lack of Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to carry out tasks that are required to achieve specified performance standards [25]. It also refers to a person's belief in their capacity to manage their motivation, conduct, and community factors. Furthermore, this is a cognitive capability that refers to a person's confidence or conviction in their capacity to participate in actions that lead to desired outcomes [26]. In the context of this theme, two categories emerged, namely, lack of confidence and lack of motivation.

Data analysis revealed the students' lack of motivation toward collaborative learning as a negative attitude. One of the root causes of the student's lack of motivation is being reluctant to the situation at hand. 1HE mentioned, *"as much as possible, I don't want to work on a task online anymore, but if we have to, then I have no choice but to comply as long as everyone in the group fixes their internet problems."* 3HE also added, *"yes, I still consider group works online if and only if there is no other choice, and then face-to-face has a greater advantage rather than online."* Moreover, students are unwilling to participate in collaborative learning in an online setting. This was proven by the statement mentioned by 1IA *"No, personally, I won't consider it. Because I am used to planning things with my groupmates face-to-face."* In correlation to the previous statement, 4.1IA also said that *"Through online learning, it is tough for us to collaborate, interact with others, and connect. Unlike face-to-face, they can provide the idea you need in just one question. Now, there are various channels that I have to go through only for us to connect with them. I am not motivated by this."*

Students' lack of confidence was evident and was supported in the statement made by 1HE *"Right now, I feel comfortable talking because my camera is off."* It was also mentioned by 3HE *"I find it hard. It feels comfy if it is not online, like meeting each other in person, and working together not online but physically present."* Moreover, 2.1HE stated that *"I was becoming shy than before due to this online setting. It triggers my social anxiety."* On the whole, these experiences in collaborative learning shaped the attitudes of the BTLED students in a negative manner. Students' lack of motivation has to do with depriving individuals of the tools they need and discouraging them from reaching high-performance levels and overcoming obstacles in terms of changing. Without motivation, there will be no driving force behind attaining one's direction, control, and perseverance [27]. Furthermore, the lack of confidence of the students was a result of the uncertainty that comes with this period of transition [28].

Theme 2: Hopefulness

Hopeful is the second theme that emerged in this study. Hopeful is defined as an excellent motivating condition based on an interactively formed sense of accomplishment [29]. Under this theme, three codes were identified, namely: optimistic, adaptive, and practical.

Optimism is apparent in the statement of 2IA, which stated that *"there is a lot advantage when working online than face-*

to-face. It is more convenient because everything is one click away..." which was also the standpoint of 3HE, which stated that *"Doing collaborative learning online is a very nice experience, we can easily access the internet and provide better ideas. We learned a lot..."*, the participants showed optimism in their statements which has a significant impact on students' [30].

Student 3IA stated, *"we can still learn and work together even if my groupmates and I are far from each other. We learn to communicate and understand each other better"* 4IA also made a similar statement saying, *"I have groupmates who live in hinterland areas which have weak internet connection despite this challenge we were able to adjust with this setup"* it is evident that the BTLED students have adapted the new setup of collaborative learning.

In an interview, 4HE asserts that *"we already know the advantages and disadvantages of working online, so in the future, we would already know how to deal with collaborative learning tasks,"* in relation to this statement, according to 2IA, *"a time will come in the future where we have to collaborate with someone to do our job."* It is evident in their statement that BTLED students are concerned with the practicability of their experience in collaborative learning.

It is coherent in this context that the being optimistic, adaptive, and practical contribute to the student's development of hope. Students with a higher level of optimism enhance student's performance in school which contributes to the development of hope [31]. Moreover, according to Bilous, (2020), an advantage of being adaptive is having a variety of options for mastering a specific topic which aids the students in developing a positive outlook. In addition, developing a practical attitude means that a person positively views their experience as a beneficial factor for future use; thus, it can be distinguished in the statement given by the participants.

CONCLUSION

Collaborative learning has been proven to have educational benefits [3] and challenges [8]. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, classes were transitioned online as per the CHED memorandum, and education has evolved as a result of this phenomenon. Since there has been no previous study conducted about collaborative learning in an online setting experienced by the BTLED students is a scarcity of previous literature, this study aims to understand the experiences of the BTLED student on collaborative learning in an online setting. This study identified two variables that would address the gap in the literature, which would describe the collaborative learning experience of the students in an online setting. The students have negative and positive experiences towards collaborative learning in an online setting.

The BTLED students are reluctant to online learning and deprived of the tools they need to accomplish their tasks, which affects their motivation in online learning. Furthermore, the uncertainty bought about by the transition of classes also resulted in a lack of motivation. Both lacks of confidence and motivation experienced by the BTLED students resulted in the lack of self-efficacy, which is the student's ability to carry out the task.

Some of the BTLED students are hopeful due to the positive experience they had with collaborative learning in an online setting. Working on collaborative learning activities in an

online class setting enhances their learning which made the BTLED students optimistic toward collaborative learning. Moreover, the students were able to master the platforms used in online collaborative learning, which aided them in communicating and working collaboratively. As a result of this experience, the BTLED students were being adaptive and practical. On account of being optimistic, adaptive, and practical, the students develop hope in their experience of collaborating learning in an online setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the essence of collaborative learning in an online setting paved the way for providing recommendations and shedding light to investigate this topic further. The results specified two themes that would describe the experience of BTLED students in collaborative learning; lack of self-efficacy and hopeful. Correspondingly, it is recommended that educators and curriculum developers generate new learning strategies that may yield additional improvement in students' confidence and positive outlook. This may also provide an avenue for the policymakers and the universities to prompt and remind the educators of the needs and understanding of their student's situation. In addition, it is suggested that the parents or guardians of the students guide and understand their children in learning through online collaborative learning. Above all, it is recommended that the same study about the experiences of the students in collaborative learning in an online setting be done to BTLED from private schools or students from another program since they have different experiences. Thus, it may play a vital role in solving or improving these existing students' experiences. Lastly, the themes are variables that could be studied quantitatively to generate objective facts that would be expressed effectively through statistics and figures.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The design of this study cannot be generalized, for this is solitarily intended to understand in-depth the collaborative learning experiences of a specific group of students. This study focuses solely on collaborative learning experiences via computer-mediated communication of BTLED students enrolled in a state university in Northern Mindanao. The study would tackle, but are not limited to, the experiences of BTLED students on collaborative learning. The scope of the participants of this study is limited only from 1st year to 4th-year BTLED students who major in home economics and industrial arts and are enrolled in a state university in Northern Mindanao during the Academic Year 2021-2022. Other topics and discussions are excluded if not stated in this section.

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