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Cooperative Learning Strategies for Learners with Disabilities in Virtual Inclusive Education: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract — This study describes the cooperative learning strategies for learners with disabilities in inclusive virtual education. Specifically, it tried to identify the quality of collaborative learning strategies in virtual classrooms using the following criteria: positive Interdependence, individual accountability, small group and interpersonal skills, and group self-evaluation. It also described the participants' interventions to their challenges, learners' motivation, and engagement. The phenomenological qualitative approach aimed to collect the necessary data from the ten Special Education teachers through an in-depth interview. Five (5) Filipino participants and an equal number of five (5) American participants were among the study's participants. The data were collected and presented through descriptive analysis. From the collection of data, the following themes were generated: (1) Collaborative Activities Facilitated by Educators, (2) Invigorate Positive Interdependence, (3) Foster Undeniable Commitment, (4) Social Skills for Collaborative Learning (5) Self-Group Assessment as Product Learning Demonstration, (6) Intervention on the Predicament in Virtual Inclusive Education (7) "Learners' Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive Engagement" and (8) Extrinsically and Intrinsically Catalyst of Learning. These characteristics of participants' perspectives characterized certain perceptions and lived experiences during inclusive virtual classes. Respondents used differentiated instructions in cooperative learning to improve learners' social skills, communication skills, and group accountability. They faced difficulties with digital literacy, poor internet connections, and behavioral issues.

Keywords — Cooperative Learning Strategies, Inclusion, Virtual class, Children with Special Needs

I. Introduction

Cooperative Learning is one of the most indispensable and practical approaches to use in the classroom. It is a learner-centered approach based on social learning theories and socio-economic factors. The instructor has to facilitate learning rather than impart knowledge. It entails generating and maintaining relevant learning experiences and encouraging learners to think critically about real-world issues. (UNESCO, 2017). Furthermore**,** cooperative learning as a pedagogical strategy is a precursor to positive educational outcomes such as motivation, engagement, and achievement. Indeed, an instructional approach provides meaningful interaction among students to achieve a mutual goal.

Consequently, it is debatable if establishing worldwide norms for poor performance in a widely diverse group of countries with varying expectations of individuals' abilities makes sense.

However, this study sets the bar at a fundamental level of achievement that all young people in the twenty-first century should strive for education. Reading, for example, is a transition from reading as a task to reading as a learning tool. Mathematics also necessitates a fundamental comprehension of mathematical concepts and operations. Individuals and societies alike suffer long-term effects when they do poorly in school. Students who perform badly in school around age 15 are likelier to drop out. A country's long-term economic success is compromised when a significant population lacks basic skills**.** Indeed, the economic output became low due to education policies and practices. As a result, many countries are in what amounts to a prolonged state of economic recession—one that could be much worse than the one brought on by the financial crisis at the turn of the millennium. Many countries are still in the process of becoming independent. (Schleicher,2016)

In times like this, learners need a more engaged and enticing activity, particularly in setting a new normal of learning: hybrid or online classes. Finding means to help students' physical, mental, and social-emotional health is essential. Incorporating cooperative learning activities that touch students' holistic aspects could make a difference in their learning. It could also intensify their optimum contribution to their group. Indeed, these processes are rigorously "well-designed" in advance to guarantee that each group member is fully accountable while ensuring that everyone depends equally on peers to perform the task at hand — without further preparation, coaching, or monitoring from the teacher.

Students with special needs are the main priority in the research. They appear to be falling behind intellectually, yet they have a history of missing developmental milestones and losing skills needed for self-sufficiency. Though educational policies have become more comprehensive globally (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020), the social integration of children with special educational needs (SEN) remains a concern. Hence, people with disabilities are entitled to special treatment and teaching and learning approaches adapted to their needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cooperative learning procedures, which vary from customary learning methods, have limited benefits resulting from social cooperation between students (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that encourages students to collaborate on academic assignments (Namaziandost et al., 2019). It can also refer to a teaching method in which students engage in groups on a specific activity to optimize one another's learning and achieve particular objectives (Nasri & Biria, 2017). CL involves students working in small groups to assist one another in learning academic material (Amedu & Gudi, 2017.

As Feldman (2019) emphasized, five elements have been described as principal components in most cooperative learning studies to evaluate the collaborative learning experience's consistency. Positive Interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual responsibility, small group and interpersonal skills, and group self-evaluation are listed factors. Individual bits can be used as these components. As a result, when all of these fundamentals exist

in an erudition scenario, a cooperative learning group occurs. Positive interdependence anchors in collaborative learning describe a condition where group members rely on one another to realize and complete a task. Individual accountability makes students conscientious for undertaking their reasonable share of the work and mastering all necessary materials. Students must assess community and individual achievement in achieving collective learning goals. Similarly, According to Marchetti (2018), assigning group work is an effective teaching technique. Students can strengthen their critical rational skills, exchange knowledge, share expertise, increase motivation, and improve their attitudes toward learning by working in small groups. Group efforts determine individual goals, and students are evaluated based on their learning outcomes. Hence, collaborative learning activities should use challenging and relevant tasks to build shared ownership with students. Furthermore, Puji and Barrat (2018) emphasize that individual accountability is exemplified through presentations to individuals, groups, classes, and other peer interactions. The data also revealed that learners had more opportunities during CL to communicate with and interact with their peers than during traditional group work.

The fourth element necessitates interpersonal and small-group social skills. According to Lazaro et al. (2018), Students can use the cooperative methodology to acquire interpersonal, social, and teamwork skills that might be critical to their career and social success. Lastly, the fifth element of cooperative learning covers group self-evaluation. Through this, they set team goals, sporadically gauge what they are doing well, and distinguish changes to function more effectively in the future. Students analyze and reflect on the feedback they receive. Group members receive recognition for their hard work, achievements, and success. Celebrations encourage students to continue improving their group work.

Cooperative learning is an evidence-based teaching strategy. Teachers manage learners' relationships and equip them for small-group cooperative learning to support one another's learning processes. (Jurkowski & Abramczyk, 2020). The research on cooperative learning determined a few strategies used in the classroom. These reflect the essential elements of the collaborative learning experience: positive Interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, small group, interpersonal skills, and group self-evaluation. Subsequently, these identified cooperative learning strategies include jigsaw, learning together, student teams-achievement divisions, teams-games-tournaments, and academic controversy. It allows them to set group goals, regularly evaluate their work as a team, and identify improvements they can make to become more successful. Moreover, students should examine and consider the input they have received. They celebrate their hard work, efforts, and achievements in groups.

The common challenge for special education teachers in inclusive classes is making themselves available to all learners. For example, if an ESE instructor has 50 students in 15 classes at any given time, the instructor will not be able to help every one of them every day. Students may be pulled out of class a few times a week for additional assistance, which affects the child's and teacher's ability to keep up with the class. (Gerber, 2019).

Other challenges develop as a result of teachers' struggles to promote inclusion. Principals play a significant role in fostering inclusive schools and how color, disability, family background, language, and immigration status affect principals' attempts to promote inclusion. To develop inclusive schools, leaders must evaluate various issues and draw on various strategies in the face of resistance and hurdles to real change. (Dematthews et al., 2019). Moreover, Molly (2021) emphasizes that school administrators should give opportunities for teachers to interact and consult with one another and encourage participation in professional development. As a result, these educators are less stressed than their counterparts, who do not have the same advantages.

According to Buchs et al. (2017), teachers found CL implementation challenges, particularly when assessing children's work and integrating CL into the curriculum. Indeed, it is necessary to improve teachers' design beliefs and efficacy when utilizing theories to motivate children. Many ideas and concepts exist to engage students better in online contexts (Chiu et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2020); nevertheless, teachers may not put theoretical ideas into practice in the classroom.

A study on online education focusing on the personal and social motivation of Chin (2021) revealed that individual and social motives influenced learners' involvement in online classrooms where they learned about specific concerns. The findings of their study showed that interaction positively impacts problem content attitude and word-of-mouth intention on social media. Still, the issue of content attitude did not affect the expression of mouth intention on social media. The ramifications of these discoveries are numerous. First, when it comes to the relationship between motivation and engagement, it is clear that personal reason has a more significant impact on improving flow and immersion in class and meeting with the topic than social motivation. Further, the findings suggest that when interest stimulates analyzing and structuring the issue, a more active learning impact occurs than when such lectures are more significant for improving social life or relationships. Hence, online education provides the advantage of bypassing classroom space's physical limitations while offering students sufficient educational materials.

Similarly, Tacla (2017) says that respondents' academic motivation is high, primarily when the inner desire to study occurs. Low-performing students are willing to pursue new information and fresh ideas like others. Given society's highly technological contexts at this time and age, easy access to numerous details has readily been made available to all learners; thus, a penchant for the novelty of ideas and knowledge becomes evident even among low-performing students. Brown (2021) affirmed that Cooperative learning improves student intrinsic motivation, student age influences suitable learning capacity, teacher training is beneficial in implementing collaborative learning, and student preparedness directly impacts the success or failure of cooperative learning in the classroom. It is a helpful teaching technique for improving intrinsic motivation because it may link to satisfying basic psychological needs based on self-determination theory. This model can help meet the demand for relatedness by fostering positive peer relationships and meeting the need for competence by enhancing social skills.

Indeed, Rechmayer (2019) mentioned another factor to consider: instructor involvement in student engagement. Principals can better cooperate with teachers to foster a culture of engagement by voicing their ideas on many topics that affect their participation. Together, they can create a more conducive setting for teacher productivity, producing the ideal classroom climate for student involvement, hope, and learning.

According to the literature, there are various reasons why student participation is essential in the educational context. Chen (2018) emphasized that cooperative learning strategies improve learners' classroom engagement by recognizing more productive problem-solving with the involvement of the entire group. In the same way, Individual transformation occurs in higher education when students connect with content, peers, and teachers (Collaço, 2017). When students had opportunities to participate in an academic community that mirrored their interests, they reported feeling more fulfilled and energized.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of children with special needs using cooperative learning strategies in virtual inclusive education. The following guidelines and questions led to this purpose.

Specifically, it found answers to the following problems:

1. What specific cooperative learning strategies do the participants incorporate in the class?
2. How do you incorporate the following qualities and goals of the cooperative learning strategies in virtual inclusive education?
3. How do the participants deal with the challenges they have encountered?
4. How do cooperative learning strategies impact learners' motivation and engagement in virtual inclusive education?

II. Methodology

This study used a phenomenological, qualitative method design. It began with theoretical frameworks that analyzed research problems conveying the meaning of a social or human situation by individuals or groups. This study used qualitative methods anchored on phenomenological research. According to Rossman and Marshall (2016), there are various reasons why academics value phenomenological analysis, including the exploration of culture and values, the inquiry into individuals' lived experiences, and the focus on texts and dialogue.

The researchers provided informed consent to the selected participants of the study. Once the participants approved their consent, they scheduled a virtual interview at the most convenient time. The interview process occurred in thirty minutes or an hour. The researcher established a good rapport with the participants to feel comfortable before the actual interview. After that, the researcher started interviewing the participants using the interview guide. In this case, the researcher clarified the participants' answers before ending the interview. Participants should be informed to record the virtual or audio interviews so that the researcher can transcribe data accurately. Furthermore, the researcher asked the participants to describe students' behavior, engagement, and motivation during cooperative learning activities.

III. Results and Discussion

The results of the study led to the fact that the majority of the participants in the Cooperative Learning Strategies virtual inclusion class were in the following:

1. Most participants used differentiated instructions in cooperative learning in virtual inclusion classes because learners' capabilities, interests, preferences, intelligence, and engagement were relevant. These would strengthen their social skills, communication skills, and accountability in their group.

2. The quality of the cooperative learning strategy is high when these elements are present: positive Interdependence, individual group and interpersonal skills, accountability, and group self-evaluation.

3. Intrinsic Motivation was high among participants, especially when they were happy doing cooperative learning activities. The more they worked with their colleagues, the more it boosted their self-rewarding and satisfying confidence. The inclusion class was more effective and engaging because they experienced collaborating and brainstorming to pursue new information and fresh ideas. Given the highly technological milieu we live in, all learners now have quick and easy access to data. As a result, even students with special needs desire innovative ideas and knowledge.

4. The Participants were optimistic about dealing with their challenges and initiating initial actions.

5. Based on the findings, high academic engagement among respondents was evident, specifically affective engagement. This provided a viable reason for students to be interested in doing the assigned task with happiness, excitement, compassion, and gratitude when they accomplished it.

6. They were also extrinsically motivated because they believed completing the task would improve their grades. Hence, they received rewards, recreational activities, and recognition.

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