

Exploring Filipino students' attitude toward the use of cooperative learning in social studies

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Abstract

As a response to the demands of the 21st century, innovative strategies are encouraged to help students develop 21st-century skills. In Social Studies, cooperative learning (CL) has been one of the strategies used by teachers to answer the call for innovation. In line with this, this study aimed to explore the student's attitude towards CL in Social Studies. Following a convergent parallel-mixed method, the study concurrently gathered, analyzed, and interpreted quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected using a descriptive-survey method that required 200 students from public and private school as respondents. Qualitative data, on the other hand, were gathered through face-to-face interviews among 20 selected students. Quantitative results showed that students both from public and private school possess positive attitude towards the use of CL in Social Studies. However, the qualitative data suggested that students seem to have reservations about the use of CL in the classroom instructions. Based on the findings of the study, teachers both from public and private schools are recommended to use this strategy, but to maximize the benefits of CL, teachers must be reminded that in essence CL is not only cooperation among students but cooperation between students and teachers. Teachers are recommended to design CL appropriately, act as a facilitator of learning in CL, and reflect and learn from the process itself for continuous improvement.

Keywords: attitude, cooperative learning, social studies

Introduction

Under the new K to 12 curriculum of the Philippines, the Social Studies program has been revitalized and deemed improved. This learning component aims to produce citizens who are critical, reflective, responsible, pro-active, pro-nature, nationalistic, and humane ^[1]. The educational reforms led to renewed interest in learner-centered approaches. In line with this, the primary consideration of Social Studies teachers has been the engagement of students in the learning process.

The progress in social and behavioral sciences which led to the proliferation of insights as to how humans learn offers assuring canon of effective teaching strategies ^[2]. Bandura and Vygotsky advocate the use of a social and constructivist approach to learning in which humans naturally learn knowledge and build meaning through interaction with other human beings. According to the constructivist and social learning theories, learners construct knowledge and meaning for themselves individually and socially as they learn things and when they reflect on those things ^[3]. In line with this, students may learn concepts in social studies through Cooperative Learning (CL).

CL refers to instructional strategies that involve students to interact with one another or work in small groups to help each other learn ^[4]. Additionally, this is a student-centered approach that groups students together to work as a team and cooperatively work toward the success of the activity ^[5]. ^[6]. According to Farzaneh and Nejadansari ^[3], this is first initiated in Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics. Akdemir & Arslan ^[7] cited Student Teams Achievement Divisions, Team Game Tournament, Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, Team Assisted Individualization, Group Investigation, and Jigsaw as the well-known techniques of CL.

The instructional benefits of CL include having positive classroom experiences for ethnically diverse students ^[8], fostering the development of students' socio-emotional skills and competencies such as empathy, assertiveness, and consensus ^[9], and setting the stage for students to be responsible for their own learning and the learning of others in their groups ^[2]. Evidence suggests that this instructional strategy increases and makes learning outcomes lasting.

While CL has its benefits, it has also its set of criticisms. It is criticized for its inconsistency because of teachers not knowing how to use it properly as a result of learning about it incidentally rather than intentionally ^[10]. The students' disruptive behavior and incapability to learn in cooperative groups ^[2], the school's lack of facilities and equipment, and cooperative learning's difficult-to-understand and time-consuming nature ^[11] are sources of criticisms as well.

The effectiveness of CL for Filipino learners as a teaching strategy has been empirically documented ^[6]. ^[12-14]. Together with the cited criticisms against CL, the challenge now is how to improve the use of CL particularly in Social Studies education.

Conceptual framework

This study is anchored to Constructivism Theory and Social Learning Theory of Lev Vygotsky and Albert Bandura, respectively. According to these theories, learners construct knowledge and meaning for themselves individually and socially as they learn things and when they reflect on those things ^[3].

Following these theories, students may learn concepts in social studies through cooperative learning. To illustrate, the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning and students work together and construct meaning. This is where the study comes in. It aims to discover whether students feel

positively or negatively towards cooperative learning as a strategy in learning concepts in Social Studies. In effect, it is believed that attitude – positive or negative – affect learning content in Social Studies.

Attitude is said to be one of the constructs that affect students’ motivation in learning concepts and learning in general [3]. Data gathered would help in generating insights as regards to how students respond and feel toward learning Social Studies concepts taught by the teacher through cooperative learning tasks. Insights gained can be used in improving the teaching of Social Studies as well as the use of CL in Social Studies.

Research objectives

The current study aimed to describe Filipino students’ attitudes towards CL in Social Studies. It is argued that by doing so, students’ favorable attitude, or lack thereof, about

CL in Social Studies would be empirically established and the knowledge about it would justify if CL is indeed working as it should for students. The insights from the findings of the study can be used as a guide by Social Studies teachers to maximize the benefits of CL and to minimize the concerns against this teaching strategy.

Materials and Methods

Research design

The researchers adopted a convergent-parallel mixed-method design to achieve the goals of the study. Under this design, researchers concurrently collect and analyze both quantitative data and qualitative data. Then, results are compared and are merged [15]. Figure 1 shows the paradigm of the study, which is based on Creswell and Plano Clark’s [16] Convergence Model.

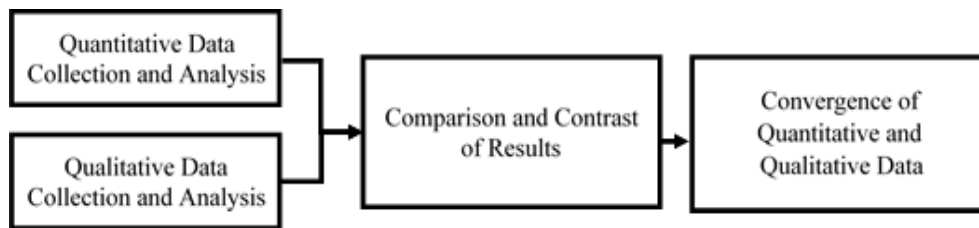


Fig 1: Paradigm of the study

Respondents of the study

The participants for the survey were conveniently selected 100 Grade Ten (10) students at Angeles City National High School (Public School in Angeles City, Philippines) and 100 Grade Ten (10) students at Amazing Grace School (Private School in San Pedro, Laguna, Philippines). For the interview, participants were ten (10) purposively selected students from each school and they were chosen from the students who responded in the survey. The researchers purposively selected Grade Ten (10) students considering that they have already studied all the phases of Social Studies in Junior High School (JHS).

Instrumentation

To measure students’ attitudes towards CL in Social Studies, the researchers adapted the survey questionnaire developed by McLeish [17]. The survey is composed of 12 items measuring students’ attitudes towards the use of CL. Since the validity and reliability of the instrument have been established by its author, the researchers of the current study opted to only conduct face validation. The adapted questionnaire was reviewed by selected experts in Social Studies education. Similarly, to gather qualitative data about students’ attitudes in the use of CL, a structured interview, adapted from the works of McLeish [17], was used. It is composed of five questions about students’ preferences on CL. Similar to the survey questionnaire, this was also subjected to face validation of selected experts in the field of Social Studies.

Table 1: Mean, qualitative description, and interpretation for students’ attitude toward the use of CL.

Mean	Qualitative Description	Interpretation
1.0-1.49	Strongly Disagree	Very low (Negative)
1.5-2.49	Disagree	Low (Negative)
2.5-3.49	Neutral	Average (Neutral)
3.5-4.49	Agree	High (Positive)
4.5-5.0	Strongly Agree	Very High (Positive)

Data Collection

The data collection commenced when the researchers obtained the permission of the school principals of Angeles City National High School and Amazing Grace School. During the actual data collection, each student was given ample time to complete the survey. The face-to-face interview with the selected students was also conducted. Students were given the questions before the interview to allow reflection on their part. This is to gather rich and meaningful answers from the students. Before the actual survey and interview, researchers introduced themselves, explained the goals and objectives of the study, and how their responses would be used in the study. Furthermore, the identity of the students was kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this study.

Data analysis

The average mean score and t-test for equality of means were used as statistical tools to analyze the gathered quantitative data using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were interpreted using the data interpretation shown in Table 1. For the qualitative data, the interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and subjected to content analysis. The results in quantitative and qualitative data were then compared and merged in accordance with the goals of the study.

Results and Discussion

The Quantitative Results

Students’ Attitude toward the Use of Cooperative Learning in Social Studies

Quantitative data showed that with an overall mean of 4.02 (agree) students both from private and public schools possess a positive attitude towards the use of Cooperative Learning in Social Studies. Separately, public and private school students got an overall mean of 4.18 (agree) and 3.87

(agree), respectively. Following these results, Social Studies teachers both from public and private schools are hereby recommended to use cooperative learning in their classroom instruction.

The respondents agreed that CL allows them to practice and enhance their self-expression, sensitivity, goal-orientedness, and interpersonal skills. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and interpretation for students’ attitude toward the use of CL.

Item	Statement	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
		Public School Students		Private School Students	
1	I willingly participate in cooperative learning activities.	4.43	Agree	3.9	Agree
2	When I work with other students I achieve more.	4.12	Agree	3.87	Agree
3	Cooperative learning can improve my attitude towards work.	4.43	Agree	4.14	Agree
4	Cooperative learning helps me to socialize more with my classmates.	4.14	Agree	4.34	Agree
5	Cooperative learning enhances my working relationships with my classmates.	4.44	Agree	4.17	Agree
6	Cooperative learning enhances my class participation.	4.28	Agree	3.78	Agree
7	My creativity is facilitated through group setting.	3.78	Agree	3.45	Neutral
8	Group activities make my learning experience easier.	4.24	Agree	3.87	Agree
9	I learn to work with students who are different from me in gender, cultural background, and socioeconomic status.	4.16	Agree	3.93	Agree
10	I enjoy the subject matter or task more when I work with other students.	4.08	Agree	3.9	Agree
11	My work is better organized when I am in a group.	3.86	Agree	3.47	Neutral
12	I prefer that my teachers use more group activities / assignments.	3.84	Agree	3.6	Agree
		4.18	Positive	3.87	Positive
	Overall			4.02	Positive

The Correlation between Public and Private School Students’ Attitude toward the Use of Cooperative Learning in Social Studies

Public school students earned an overall mean of 4.18, while private school students earned a mean of 3.87. Statistical analyses, specifically the t-test for Equality of Means, yielded a p-value of .008, which is less than the significance level of 0.05 (p-value < 0.05). Therefore, the positive attitude toward the use of CL in Social Studies of public and private school students is significantly different. In other words, public school students tend to possess a higher level

of a positive attitude toward the use of Cooperative Learning in Social Studies than students from private schools. To shed light, the qualitative data reported that public school students believe that group work lessens personal expenses in a project. As explained by the participant (P) 1, “mas gusto ko po yung group work, kasi po, lalo na po kapag magastos yung project. Mas maganda yung group work kasi hindi mo po solo yung baba yaran (I prefer group work especially if the project is expensive. Group work is better because it does not make you shoulder all the expenses).”

Table 3: Significant difference between students’ positive attitude.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Attitude	Public	12	4.1808	.25354	2.918	22	.008
	Private	12	3.8683	.27078	2.918	21.905	.008

The Qualitative Results

The quantitative data showed that students have a positive attitude and that public school students have a higher positive attitude toward the use of CL in Social Studies than private school students. However, qualitative data did not entirely agree with that. Therefore, it can be said that while students have a positive attitude toward CL, they have reservations or concerns about how it normally works based on their experiences. This is like the findings of Gonzales and Torres ^[14] who also made use of convergent-mixed methods design in exploring the relationship between Filipino ESL learners’ attitude toward the use of CL and

reading comprehension. They found that while students have a positive attitude toward CL, they have certain reservations.

CL is structured learning

All ten (10) public school students interviewed preferred small groups composed of four (4) or fewer members. Meanwhile, it was found that six (6) private school students gave a similar response. The students argued that small groups are more manageable, and this design allows members to have a significant contribution to the task. “Mas gusto ko po yung four members below po. Kasi po kung

group work yan, madi-divide namin ng equal po. Di po yung, yung iba po walang gagawin, yung iba may gagawin. Parang ang unfair dun sa iba na may gagawin at yung iba wala (I prefer a group of below four members because it allows you to divide the tasks equally to members. This way, all members have tasks to do. Because it would feel unfair if there will be members with no contribution),” shared by P8.

On the other hand, only four (4) students interviewed preferred big groups of five (5) or more members. As explained by students, they enjoy socializing with other classmates and that big groups in CL allow more ideas to emerge. “Pag mas marami mas marami ang ideas na makukuha (more members would mean more ideas to gather),” explained by P20. As Dimabuyo^[13] and Lebrilla^[18] noted, CL makes students interact with their classmates more.

Both small and big groups have their set of advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, for CL to be effective, cooperation between students should be facilitated. For teachers to do this, they should plan ahead and design the learning activity in such a way that all members have significant roles to play. Teachers should evaluate if an activity requires small or big groups. Activities appropriate for small groups should not be assigned to big groups, and vice versa. Also, teachers should maintain a balance between individual and cooperative learning. In other words, the application of the principle of variety in classroom instruction is expected from teachers. It can be said that CL is not the only teaching strategy to explore; therefore, use CL only when it is appropriate. Truthfully, alignment between learning competencies and learning activities should also be considered. Practically, this means that when competencies call for independent learning, CL is not recommended. Taken all these things together, CL only works when it is a structured learning.

CL is individual learning through group work

The second interview question asked if students prefer to work alone or work in a group. It appeared that ten (4 from public school and 6 from private school) students prefer to work alone. Similarly, ten (10) students were found to prefer working in a group (6 from public school and 4 from private school). The data showed that more students from public school prefer working in a group. It must be remembered that based on quantitative data, students from a public school have a higher positive attitude towards CL.

The students who prefer to work alone shared that working alone or independently makes them learn a sense of responsibility and time management. Additionally, it saves them from the complications of a group work. “My own kasi minsan maraming masyadong complications kapag by group kagaya ng hindi nadala yung gamit so hindi na matutuloy yung activity o hindi nagampanan yung responsibility nung isa so madadamay na lahat (I prefer to work alone to avoid the complications of working with a group. Like for example, just because a member forgets to bring his assigned material or neglects his/her responsibility, the whole group or the task itself is affected),” P12 further explained.

In defense of group works, the students argued that working cooperatively makes the project get finished faster and better. For P1, group work makes the task done faster because “mas maraming kamay yung magtatrabaho (more

people do the work)”. Additionally, for P2, group work makes the output of a task better because “mas nakukuha ko po yung suggestions ng iba...para mas gumanda po yung trabaho (it facilitates more suggestions coming from members...to improve the work). Also, the interviews suggested that students believed that they would learn concepts in Social Studies through cooperative learning. To students, CL helps them to learn more by listening to others’ ideas, opinions, and perspectives.

Taken together, it showed that for CL to remain effective both for students who prefer group work and students who prefer individual work, teachers should emphasize that in CL, students are responsible for their own learning. To do this, teachers should inform students of learning competencies and objectives and monitor them closely during the learning activity^[15]. Hence, students should be informed of what is expected of them in the learning activity. CL is learning individually and in a group. Practically, teachers should devise tools to measure and evaluate students’ individual learning from cooperative learning processes.

CL is an active involvement of students

The participants in the interview were asked whether they prefer if their teacher give more group activities. Three (3) public school students and five (5) private school students answered the question affirmatively. “Yes, kasi kapag more group activity, di ka lang matututo, mageenjoy ka pa. Kasi po may times na nakakabored po yung AP so having this cooperative learning po nagiging mas enjoyable and interesting po yung subject and the topic as well po (Yes, because in a group activity, you are not only learning but also enjoying. At times, Social Studies gets boring, but through having cooperative learning, the subject itself and the topic becomes more enjoyable and interesting),” shared by P20. Additionally, students claimed that group activities enhance their skills, make them socialize with their classmates, and allow more learning to take place.

However, five (5) private school students responded negatively to the idea of “more group activities” in Social Studies. Surprisingly, while public school students have a higher positive attitude towards CL based on quantitative data, seven (7) public school students said in the interview that they do not prefer having more group activities in the classroom. “Kadalasan po, kapag pangkatang gawain. Pag may masipag po, siya lang po gagawa. Wala na pong gagawin yung iba. So parang umaasa po sila, nagiging dependent po sila. Parang easy life lang po sila. Ganun. Kaya mas gusto ko po yung mas maraming gawing individual,” (Oftentimes, during group works, only the diligent student do the work. Other members do nothing. They become dependents. For this reason, I prefer more individual works than group works), P8 explained.

These sentiments reaffirm the call for the idea that tasks of each member in CL should be well-defined and that there should be individual evidence of learning aside from the group output. Additionally, students are expected to help other members of the group with signs of difficulty achieving the expected outcomes [19]. Evidently, teachers employing CL should stress that the success of the activity is dependent on students’ active involvement in the group activity and this is only possible when they play their role and responsibilities^[6, 9].

CL is a cooperation between the teacher and students

It appeared that the success of CL does not only rely on cooperation among students. It was suggested that teachers also play an important part. All 20 students agreed that clear and well-delivered instructions from the teacher help them understand the task required and, as a result, saves them time to devote to working as a group. According to P9, “*mas mabilis na matatapos ang isang proyekto kung malinaw at maayos ang instruction ng teacher upang hindi masayang ang oras kakatanong* (A project gets finish faster when the instructions are given clearly and comprehensibly by the teacher. This saves time because students need not to ask questions repeatedly). Additionally, it makes them deliver what is expected from them.

For cooperative learning to be successful proper design and implementation of learning activities should be delivered by the teacher. Thus, clear guidelines, rubric, and other materials must be prepared by the teacher and presented to the students^[5]. Also, teachers should monitor student progress and guide students toward individual and group

success^[5, 6]. Again, CL is not only about the students working together but students and teachers working together.

The Convergence between Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The quantitative data suggested that students have a positive attitude in the use of CL in Social Studies. Accordingly, teachers are recommended to use CL in their classroom instruction. It is argued that students, through CL, learn to develop their self-expression, sensitivity, goal-orientedness, and interpersonal skills. While CL is recommended, qualitative data suggested that Social Studies teachers should properly implement CL in the classroom. That there are principles teachers should consider and this include (1) CL is a structured learning, (2) CL should promote individual learning through group work, (3) CL is an active involvement of students, and (4) CL is a cooperation between the teacher and students.

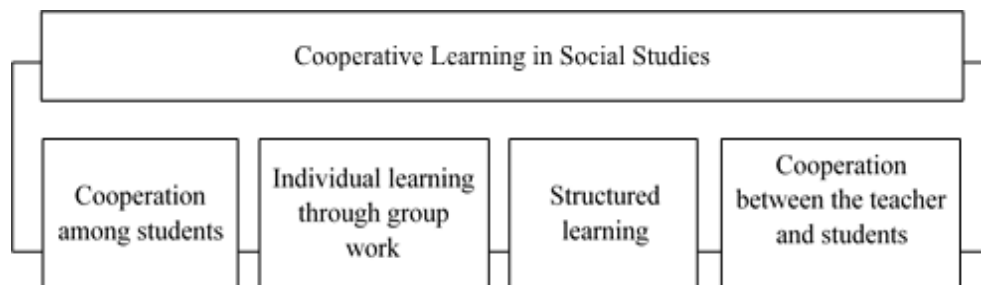


Fig 2: Guiding principles in the use of cooperative learning in Social Studies

Conclusions and recommendations

In Social Studies, CL has been one of the strategies used by teachers to answer the call for innovation and development of 21st-century skills among learners. In line with this, this study aimed to explore student's attitudes towards CL in Social Studies. This is to guide teachers in effectively and efficiently conducting CL.

The quantitative data showed that both students from public and private schools have a positive attitude towards CL. Additionally, it was found that public school students tend to have a higher positive attitude. Therefore, Social Studies teachers should capitalize on using this strategy as CL allows students to practice and enhance their self-expression, sensitivity, goal-orientedness, and interpersonal skills. CL is a symbiosis between teachers and students. The qualitative data, on the other hand, reported that students have certain reservations against CL. To express this, four themes were developed. These themes indicated that CL should be geared toward (1) structured learning, (2) individual learning through group work, (3) active involvement of students, and (4) cooperation between the teacher and students.

CL can be an effective teaching strategy if executed properly by the teacher. For educators to maximize the benefits of cooperative learning, groups within a class should be decided based on the nature of the activity and the target learning competencies. In line with this, objectives of not only the lesson but also the activity must be made clear among the students. Additionally, it is important that while students actively do the work, and construct their own meaning about a lesson, teacher's presence and supervision

are explicitly expressed or shown. As not all students know how to work or learn in group, teachers can help students to distribute tasks between members of the group. Apart from this, it is equally important that teachers provide mechanisms for students to monitor and evaluate their own and their member's participation and contribution in the group.

While it may be true that not all teachers know how to conduct cooperative learning effectively and efficiently, this should not be a reason to avoid this strategy. CL is demanding on the part of the teacher, but that is the challenge. Teachers should take the responsibility to learn how to properly execute CL. Following the findings of the study, teachers should be re-oriented about the guiding principles about the use of CL in Social Studies. Also, future research should deal on the effectiveness and effects of CL in the learning of students.

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