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ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES IN COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN UKRAINE

Статья посвящена результатам исследований в области распространения совместного обучения в основных университетах Харькова и факторов, влияющих на его эффективность.

Стаття присвячена підсумкам досліджень в галузі розповсюдження спільного навчання в основних університетах Харкова та факторів, що впливають на його ефективність.

Nowadays many students all over the world are involved into collaborative learning process. This great shift in the education toward new and more effective methods of learning is caused by several factors. The main of them are the process of globalization, development of interactive technologies, Internet [1], which cause the development of the society in general and, particularly, of the educational system. And, actually, collaborative learning is one of the main directions of this progress.

Collaborative learning is a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together. More specifically, collaborative learning is based on the model that knowledge can be created within a population where members actively interact by sharing experiences and take on asymmetry roles [2].

This method of learning represents the great shift away from traditional lectures and seminars, where lecturer gives information to the students and they have only to remember it.

In collaborative classrooms, the lecturing/ listening/note-taking process may not disappear entirely, but it lives alongside other processes that are based on students' discussion and active work with the course material [3].

One of the main methods of collaborative learning is group work. In this method students of various levels of knowledge work together in small groups to achieve a common goal.

Nowadays, team work is actively used in the universities of Europe and the USA. According to the research made by Anuradha A. Gokhale in the Illinois State University, it was discovered that students who participated in collaborative learn-

ing had performed significantly better on the critical-thinking test than students who studied individually [4].

Basing on the experience of the developed countries, teachers in Ukrainian universities have also started to use collaborative learning methods and group work particularly.

Consequently, the research objective of this paper is to assess the popularity and effectiveness of collaborative learning among Ukrainian students and teachers and their attitude to team-work on the basis of the survey among three major universities of Kharkiv, Ukraine.

The research methodology was based on interviewing students and faculty by applying the questionnaires developed by Glennys Parsell & John Bligh [5]. To make the survey clearer and to receive as much as possible multifaceted opinions we randomly chose students of different universities, courses and majors, as well as teachers from different departments and universities.

The interviewing was done at three major Universities in Kharkiv, namely at: V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, National Technical University «Kharkiv Politechnic Institute» (NTU «KhPI»), and Yaroslav Mudryi National Law Academy of Ukraine. The fields of study of the respondents are:

- Management and Economy (NTU «KhPI»);
- Linguistics (Karazin National University);
- Law (National Law Academy of Ukraine)

The questionnaire for 45 students contained 12 closed questions where each needed only one answer, which represented the student's opinion the closest. The questions required the sharing of respondents' collaborative learning experience and their opinion on team-work, its effectiveness and usefulness, communicative and professional benefits it gives [6].

The questionnaire for 15 teachers was based on 13 closed and open questions some acknowledging more than one answer. The main purpose of these questions was to find out the teachers experience concerning Collaborative learning if there is any, their understanding and attitude to the team-work, and personal methods they apply to the groups of students they form in the classroom [7].

Both questionnaires contained the brief information about collaborative learning at the beginning of the paper in order to avoid concept misunderstanding, which could appear according to the rare usage of such term in Russian language.

After the analysis of the results of the survey among Ukrainian students and teachers, we received the general statistics of awareness about collaborative learning. The results show that although the term «Collaborative learning» is still not widely used in Ukraine, its methods already serve the educational system in the presence. 81% of teachers examined answered positively about their usage of CL in the classroom, as well as 77,78 % of students appeared to be at least once participants of CL activities during their studies. But the distribution of CL usage is different in 3 universities.

The highest percentage of its usage is showed in NTU»KhPI», the lowest was represented by the Law Academy.

The further analysis of the results was focused on the identifying of the opinion of Ukrainian students on the effectiveness of teamwork, and also revealed rather precise and positive results. The correlation of two variables «students' attitude to teamwork» and «teamwork helps in better understanding of course materials» has shown the biggest correlation coefficient among all others . (Tabl 1).

Table 1

Correlation between variables «Students' attitude to teamwork» and «Teamwork helps in better understanding».

		Teamwork helps in better understanding of course material					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Students attitude to teamwork	Very negative	2,3%	,0%	,0%	,0%	,0%	2,3%
	Negative	,0%	6,8%	,0%	,0%	,0%	6,8%
	Undecided	,0%	4,5%	6,8%	18,2%	,0%	29,5%
	Positive	,0%	,0%	9,1%	20,5%	2,3%	31,8%
	Very Positive	,0%	,0%	,0%	9,1%	20,5%	29,5%
Total		2,3%	11,4%	15,9%	47,7%	22,7%	100,0%

This fact means that almost all students who have experienced working in teams liked such kind of learning activity because it has contributed to better understanding of the course content [8]. Therefore they agreed on effectiveness of teamwork in the learning process, thus proving the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of research of the given paper. Therefore the experiment shows that

teamwork, as a main method of Collaborative Learning, is a very effective method to understand and process the information given in the course.

At the same time, the correlation coefficient of two variables «presence of experience» and «team effectiveness» also showed a significant result. (Table 2).

Table 2

Correlation between variables «Experience» and «Team effectiveness».

		Group Effectiveness					Total
		Don't know	Not at all Effective	Not too Effective	Effective	Very Effective	
Experience	No	6,8%	,0%	6,8%	2,3%	4,5%	20,5%
	Yes	2,3%	2,3%	13,6%	43,2%	18,2%	79,5%
Total		9,1%	2,3%	20,5%	45,5%	22,7%	100,0%

This means that only students who have experienced working in teams marked the high level of team's effectiveness. The fact is rather obvious, but it also means that students, who have no experience in Collaborative learning activities, showed their negative attitude about the effectiveness of the course, but not because they really think so, but because they have never experienced it. Thus basing on the results, showed in the previous paragraph (about the effectiveness of teamwork in understanding course materials), we turn to the point, that the lack of information and usage of Collaborative activities in universities, as well as propensity of some teachers only to traditional methods of learning, form the misunderstanding of teamwork effectiveness among students. Also it deprives them of opportunity to choose to learn the material in more interesting, interactive and effective way.

The analysis of the questionnaires showed also some unexpected but interesting results of Collaborative learning usage. The correlation coefficient of two variables «communication» and «team effectiveness» showed the result – ,391. Together with better understanding of the course material, students also pointed to fostering of communication among those, who engages into Collaborative learning process, which is also a significant contribution to the «effectiveness» of teamwork, which can be characterized from different sides. Thus the results of the experiment show the effectiveness of teamwork, basing on two positive characteristics of it: new knowledge understanding and communication skills acquiring.

In conclusion, the research proved positive attitude to the collaborative learning in Ukraine confirmed by rather high mark given to teamwork by Ukrainian students. The hypothesis about teamwork as effective method of learning put forward before the experiment also proved to be successful. Therefore we can conclude that interactive methods of learning are very welcomed in Ukrainian educational system, because they are not only used, but they work and work effectively even now, at the beginning of their implementation. From this follows that Ukraine has high potential to developing and improving its educational system, because the majority of students and teachers are opened to new methods of learning, that have proved to be effective in making students more interested and competent in the field of knowledge they have chosen.

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