

EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS FROM TWO TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS IN SHARED COURSE

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Abstract

This qualitative research is action research that examined the learning experiences of teaching students from two different training programs who participated in the "learning based on physical activity" course. Ten students in the "Physical Education Training Program" (PETP) and twenty-seven students in the "Elementary School Teaching Training Program" (ESTP) participated in the study. The research tools included a reflective diary that each student wrote weekly during the semester as part of the course assignments and semi-structured interviews with each participant. The research questions are: 1. How do students from two training programs perceive the learning experience in a shared course? 2. What are the students' perspectives of the two training programs after participating in a shared course? The research findings indicate the complexity of cooperative learning that at the beginning of the course, the students expressed dissatisfaction with the partnership in the course, while later in the course, they cooperated and noted the mutual learning and their professional development. The study recommends that teacher training colleges and universities initiate joint courses for students from different training programs to promote integrative student learning. Such an experience the teaching students will lead to significant integrative learning and later will also be transferred to children in the schools.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, Teacher training, higher education, movement-based learning, Integrative learning

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Cooperative learning

cooperative learning is an educational approach that emphasizes collaboration and active participation among students to achieve mutual learning objectives. In a "collaborative learning" (CL) setting, students work together in small groups, typically consisting of three to six members, each having a specific role and responsibility. The primary goal of this method is to foster a positive and supportive learning environment where students can exchange ideas, build on each other's strengths, and collectively overcome challenges (Slavin, 1995 in Ansari & Khan, 2020).

Collaborations are organizational and inter-organizational structures that share resources, power, and authority, and bring people together to achieve common goals that could not have been achieved by a single person or by one organization" (Kagan, 1991, p. 3).

The Principles of Cooperative Learning are Active Student Learning, Cooperate Learning, Participatory Learning, Reactive Teaching, and Enjoyable Learning (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020). Cooperative learning is based on learning through group activities and achieving teaching goals in cooperation. According to this concept, a group of students' success depends on the success of their partners in cooperation. (Johnson and Johnson, 2003 in Bećirović et al., 2022). A book dealing with the identification, development, measurement, and teaching of 21st-century skills noted that inclusive and CL principles are one of the principles of meaningful learning (Griffin & Care, 2014).

A meta-analysis study provided an overview of existing evidence relevant to cooperative learning. The researchers noted that teaching and learning have evolved over the years. There is a consensus that students need to be active in learning and that traditional teaching styles may not suit them. Therefore, an alternative instruction that includes cooperative learning is asked to promote active learning in combat. Interest in CL has gained momentum among students in higher education since the early 1980s, and this type of teaching and learning can be done in many ways (Loh & Ang, 2020).

Using cooperative learning methods in mathematics is a significant change in education. (Davidson & Kroll, 1991) A meta-analysis examined 122 studies and compared the relative effects of cooperative, competitive, and individual on educational achievements. The study found that collaboration was more effective in increasing achievement and productivity (Johnson et al., 1981).

The purpose of the research done in Indonesia was to examine the application of a specific type of collaboration in a learning process. Students were asked to write narrative paragraphs using a cooperative learning model. The study found that following the use of the collaborative model, there was an improvement in the student's writing skills. The improvement is reflected in the student's behavior and academic achievements (Khair & Misnawati, 2022).

In another study at the College of Education, students participated in the first year of teacher training. The sample consisted of one hundred and fifty students, half speaking Hebrew and half speaking Arabic. The students studied the "project-based learning" (PBL) approach in the second semester. As part of the learning process in this approach, the students were asked to work in groups of three-four students. The study examined their perceptions of cooperative learning and teamwork. Few of the students perceived CL as problematic. However, most students perceived cooperation and collaboration as necessary. They emphasized the benefit they derived from the joint work and the fair task division among the group members (Levin & Salfati, 2019).

Despite the benefits of teamwork, various studies indicate that teamwork can be complex due to communication difficulties and conflicts between group members. Collaboration is created by trust and mutual contribution (Whatley, 2009).

A three-year longitudinal study examined the development process of teamwork and collaboration among students. The program aimed to give the students optimal training to help them teach in partnership with the school teacher trainers. Another goal was to provide the students with teamwork and cooperation skills, understanding that these are essential tools in the work of the future teacher. The research found that the team's work was done in stages: some expressed discomfort and difficulties; on the other hand, others say feelings of empowerment, responsibility, and belonging. (Bashan and Holzblatt, 2013).

To reach its full potential, cooperative learning should incorporate five components, namely positive interdependence, personal responsibility, promoting interaction, interpersonal skills, and group processing, as suggested by (Johnson and Johnson 1994 in Bećirović et al., 2022).

"Cooperative learning represents a paradigm shift for many classroom teachers. Although the advantages seem obvious to some teachers, others see the complexities of implementation as forbidding. Particularly at the secondary level, there is a reluctance to incorporate cooperative learning into a repertoire of strategies" (Lyman & Davidson, 2004, p. 86).

In light of the importance of cooperative learning, Lyman & Davidson (2004) suggest that colleges of education should commit to teaching both the rationale and technique of cooperative learning to undergraduate and graduate students.

1.2 Cooperative learning has advantages

Cooperative learning enables the development of essential social and communication skills. The partners learn to work as part of a team, listen to diverse points of view, express their ideas, and engage in constructive discussions. These skills are essential for cooperation and future success in various professional and personal settings (Keramati et al., 2021).

Cooperative learning promotes engagement and active participation among students. It allows them to discuss concepts, share ideas, and solve problems together. This approach stimulates critical thinking, deeper understanding, and improved knowledge retention. Silalahi & Hutauruk (2020) referred to the period of Covid 19 when schools closed, students stayed home, and learning occurred online. They argued that many teachers taught traditionally instead of adapting the teaching to the new situation. They suggested adopting online learning through a collaborative model. A collaborative model can be one of the solutions for online learning.

Most Japanese universities have launched online learning during the 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. A study in Japan examined the preferred mode of online learning during the pandemic and the impact of online CL on student participation in class by analyzing their voluntary comments. It was found that the students' enjoyment resulting from interaction encouraged their involvement in a synchronous class and discussion. They expressed themselves and listened (Sugino, 2021).

Cooperative learning motivates and creates a positive and supportive learning environment. Students often feel motivated and encouraged when they work together toward a common goal. The sense of belonging and shared responsibility inspires them to participate actively, take ownership of their learning and strive for success. Research has shown that cooperative learning positively impacts academic performance. Working collaboratively allows students to benefit from the strengths of their peers, learn from each other, and fill knowledge gaps. This leads to a deeper understanding of the subject matter and often results in improved grades and overall academic achievement. A recent study examined the benefits and challenges of implementing CL in instructor teaching in Iran and Australia in higher education. The study found that despite challenges such as the need for familiarity with CL and how it can be implemented in university curricula, CL created an interactive, pleasant, and safe environment for deep learning in both countries (Keramati & Gillies, 2021).

Students who have experienced cooperative learning are more likely to become lifelong learners. They feel comfortable seeking help, consulting, and participating in group work in future academic and professional endeavors. Cooperative learning in the academy enhances academic performance, nurtures vital life skills, promotes social interaction, and prepares students for success in a collaborative and interconnected world. The research in Saudi Arabia aimed to measure the effectiveness of cooperative learning compared to the traditional method of teaching English courses to dean students in the preparatory year and supporting studies. Sixty students divided into two groups participated in the study, thirty students in the research group and thirty in the control group. The research hypothesis was that cooperative learning would be more effective than traditional teaching in learning English and developing better academic achievements. The results of the study confirmed the research hypothesis (Al-Mubireek, 2021).

Cooperative learning values diversity and encourages inclusive practices. Students from different backgrounds, abilities, and perspectives can contribute their unique insights and experiences, enriching learning. It fosters a sense of respect, empathy, and appreciation for diversity among students, including students with disabilities (Grenier & Yeaton, 2019).

Development of Leadership Skills: Cooperative learning offers opportunities for students to take on leadership roles within their groups. They can guide discussions, delegate tasks, and facilitate collaboration. By assuming these responsibilities, students develop leadership qualities, such as communication, organization, and decision-making skills, which are valuable in various aspects of life. A review study examined teaching methods in a Romanian university to propose a model for improving students' leadership skills through cooperative learning. The researchers pointed out the need to make traditional teaching more interactive. After implementing CL, the results showed positive effects in developing students' leadership skills, such as critical thinking, effective communication, decision-making, and teamwork (Petre, 2020).

A meta-analysis study examined the existing empirical literature investigating the role of teachers in primary and secondary education in facilitating the collaborative process. The review aimed to determine which aspects of teacher guidance are most helpful in fostering successful collaboration between students. Their research showed that teachers are crucial in supporting student interaction that stimulates learning. They believe the teacher's challenge is to remain a central figure in helping CL without dominating the moments when learning opportunities arise for students (Van Leeuwen & Janssen, 2019).

Cooperative learning mirrors real-world scenarios where individuals often need to work in teams and collaborate with others. Students develop highly relevant skills in professional settings, such as teamwork, communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution, by engaging in cooperative activities.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research method and paradigm

The present research is based on the qualitative paradigm. This paradigm was chosen for its ability to shed light on the subjective point of view of the students on their participation in joint studies and their experience in elementary school co-teaching. This research was carried out in the qualitative-ethnographic paradigm. Qualitative research is effective for learning sensitive, complex, and changing issues (Rosenblatt. & Fischer, 1993). It was chosen because it makes it possible to understand the subjective meaning that students from different training programs attribute to their participation in a joint course and pair teaching in an elementary school. Ethnographic research is characterized by seeing the whole, that is, by examining a phenomenon for its complexity and symbolic meanings (Hammersley, 2016). Ethnographic qualitative studies are often based on the phenomenological approach. This approach focuses on the essence of the participants' experience in certain events and their perception of the meaning of the events (Patton, 1990).

The research method used was "action research." The term "action research" was first coined by Lewin (1946), denoting a research method in which actions performed in the study generate knowledge and create meaningful long-term changes. According to McNiff (2016), action research has different approaches. However, they are all commonly characterized by the active involvement of the researchers as part of a team that strives to improve the general process, which includes the planning, implementation, and examination of the action.

2.2 Participants

- Thirty 3rd year students from the Elementary School teacher training program, who specialized in various fields, such as Bible, mathematics, literature, sciences, and Hebrew language teaching.
- Ten 4th year students from the Physical teacher training program have already had their first year as teachers.

2.3. Research tools

- A reflective diary was written by each student every week during the semester as part of the course assignments .
- A semi-structured interview was conducted once in the middle of the course and once more at the end.

2.4. Research question

- How do students from two different training programs perceive the experience of learning in a shared course?
- What are the students' perspectives on the two training programs following their participation in shared learning?

2.5. Procedures

The "action research" described in this paper was a four-year longitudinal study conducted in an education college. The author participated in the study since its beginning, as director of an elementary school teacher training program in the college. The goal of the study was to examine the insights of students from two different teacher training programs, who participated in a joint course called "*Learning based on physical activity*". The two teacher training programs in the course were the "Physical Education Training Program" (PETP) and the "Elementary School Training Program" (ESTP). During its first year, the course was at its pilot stage, during which the students joined voluntarily, with no set time frame and no budget. Following the pilot's success, the course was already budgeted in its second year and had its formal time frame. Since its beginning, the course has been accompanied by an evaluation study.

The "Learning based on physical activity" course was conceived as a joint initiative by one of the teachers in the PETP and by the head of the ESTP. Before the course began, several work meetings were held to outline some principles that would underly a joint course designed for two different training programs. The general frame was a single-semester course accompanied by an evaluation study. During the course, the students read theoretical articles on the importance of integrating physical activity in teaching and more practical ones that describe methods of putting such principles into practice. Working together in pairs the students were required to design teaching units, in a peer-learning-based process. The contents of the teaching unit were chosen by the student specializing in elementary school teaching, in coordination with the mentoring teachers, while students specializing in PE suggested physical activities that suit these contents. Teachers from both training programs followed the process and gave the students feedback.

2.6. Data analysis

The data analysis followed the inductive content analysis approach that Elo & Kyngäs (2008) proposed. Initially, the content unit was carefully chosen for analysis. Subsequently, an open coding process was undertaken, involving the creation of categories and abstraction of data. Following the open coding phase, the compiled lists of categories were organized under broader headings. Each category was then labeled with descriptive words that best represented its content.

2.7. Reliability and Ethics

The research was conducted alongside a comprehensive evaluation study that employed diverse evaluation tools to validate and ensure the reliability of the data collected. Strict measures were implemented to protect the participant's privacy and confidentiality, and all individuals involved were assured of complete anonymity. Additionally, before their participation, the participants were explicitly informed about the evaluation study's purpose, which aimed to assess the potential viability of the course in the future. Furthermore, they were assured that the data collected would be solely utilized for research purposes,

2.8. The uniqueness of the study

The inception of an integrated course for teacher training marked a pioneering initiative in the college. Integrating diverse cognitive courses appears highly desirable. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that each training program inherently encompasses distinct courses germane to its specialized discipline, and integrative learning typically involves fields of knowledge that share intrinsic affinities. In this case, the share course tied two fundamentally disparate training programs, albeit with a shared goal that could advance the specific goals of each program.

3. RESULTS

The data analysis refers to two periods during a course lasting one semester. The first period refers to the first half of the semester in which the students first encounter a shared course for two training programs. The second period refers to the second half of the semester in which the student was asked to plan together a teaching unit for children in elementary school.

3.1. First period – Dissatisfaction with learning in a shared course

During the first part of the shared course, students from two different training programs studied. Students from a training program for teaching in an elementary school and students for teaching physical education. In the first stage of the course, the students learned about the benefits of integrating physical activity into teaching in elementary school. They also learned the principles of planning an integrative teaching unit. At this stage, difficulties, misunderstandings, and even resistance to cooperation were evident. Students from both programs talked about obstacles and feelings of frustration.

Some PETP students expressed their dissatisfaction with merging with PSTP students. They claimed they needed to become more familiar with the various disciplines taught in elementary schools; therefore, studying in a shared course did not make sense.

B., a PETP student, expressed his frustration with the course, and suggested that it be canceled:

"We are unfamiliar with the study content of the students in the training program at the elementary school. We learn how to teach physical education and not how to teach science or math. Therefore, the course together does not contribute to me and even frustrates me. I suggest canceling this course and offering a more relevant course for our training program" (student B.).

Other PETP student N also claimed that he was only interested in teaching physical education, so he expected all courses to be relevant to physical education. He did not intend to study teaching in elementary school, so in his opinion, there is no reason for him to study with students who plan to become teachers in elementary school.

"I came to the college to receive knowledge for teaching physical education in various educational settings and not necessarily in an elementary school. I need to meet students with the same goal, and it is less relevant for me to take a course with students who specialize in teaching in an elementary school" (Student N.).

During the first phase of the course, the ESTP students also wanted to change the idea of integration. L., an ESTP student, said he was unhappy with the combination. In his opinion, the PETP students are not skilled in designing teaching units and cannot do much for the tasks they were required to perform in pairs during the course.

"I have the desire and motivation to succeed and get a good grade in the course. They asked us to submit a joint assignment, so my progress depends on him. I try to arrange with my student partner, but it doesn't work because we have a different schedule. In addition, they didn't learn how to plan a teaching unit, and I don't know if he can contribute to completing the task required in the course" (student L.).

The different teaching habits acquired in the two training programs were a source of misunderstanding and tension between the students participating in the combined course.

D., an ESTP student, thought incorporating physical activity into the planning of a teaching unit could be a source of restlessness and confusion in the classroom. In her opinion, the active game tends to provoke concentration problems and disrupt learning:

"As a student teaching in an elementary school, I plan the study unit with my partner student. I fear that the physical activity he suggests will come at the expense of the academic content. The pupils may enter an atmosphere of interruption. I explain that I do not want to lose control, and my partner disagrees. Our different opinions create an unpleasant atmosphere" (student D.).

3.2. Second period – Interactions between the participants during the practical part of the course

In the next phase of the course, the students were asked to plan teaching units together. The lecturers clarified that the teaching unit should incorporate movement into learning. They realized they needed each other to get a good grade in the course. The interaction between students from the two training programs improved significantly at this stage. They reported a positive experience of mutual learning.

The PETP students were exposed to engaging content in different disciplines. In contrast, the ESTP students received various ideas for incorporating physical activity in the teaching unit and learned diversifying teaching methods.

A., a PETP student, said he was learning some interesting content he had not been familiar with and was being exposed to new teaching methods. He also said it was important that school teachers specializing in different subjects should collaborate with PE teachers:

"From my experience in this course with my partner student, I learned a lot of new teaching methods. I understand how important it is to cooperate with other teachers in schools. The more cooperation there is between all the teachers in the school and the physical education teacher, the more significant the contribution to the pupils. We contributed to each other (Student A.).

H., an ESTP student, also reported that the collaboration improved as the course progressed. She stated that although there were gaps between some of the principles taught in the two training programs, she and her colleague overcame these gaps during the planning phase of the teaching unit for elementary school students.

"We overcame the challenges and worked together. My colleague taught me much about combining physical activity games with academic content. I am sure that the children at the school will benefit socially, academically, and physically from the teaching unit we planned together" (Student H.).

Y., an ESTP student, also noted that as the course progressed, the collaboration improved. According to him, the cooperation in planning the teaching unit promoted the professional development of each of us. Ultimately, we all have a common goal to encourage the children's achievements in school and create meaningful learning adapted to their needs.

"It was beautiful to see all the couples overcome the difficulties and work together. We all want to provide our students with quality instruction tailored to their needs. Learning in combination with movement can suit many children for whom traditional teaching is less suitable" (student Y.).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this action research that examined the experiences of students from two different training programs who participated in the joint course *"Learning based on physical activity"* the following conclusions can be drawn:

Regarding the first research question, it was found that the interaction and cooperation between students from different training programs can be complex. It was found that the complexity stems from the knowledge gaps, the areas of interest, and the desire to focus on what is relevant to the field of specialization. For this reason, to run a shared course for students from different programs, careful preparation is required so that the students come to the course willingly and willingly. A similar finding was found in a study by Whatley (2009). He discovered that there could be difficulties, disagreements, and conflicts between group members in teamwork. Sometimes the complexity stems from the gaps in knowledge, the different areas of interest, and the desire to focus on what is relevant to the field of specialization. Also, Bashan & Holtzberg's research (2013) found that parts of the team's work expressed dissatisfaction, difficulties, and challenges. In contrast, satisfaction, empowerment, responsibility, and belonging were revealed in other parts.

Regarding the second research question, it was found that as the course progressed, there was an improvement in the interaction between the students. This improvement occurred mainly when the lecturers asked them to perform a joint task. In this case, they were asked to plan a study unit for pupils in an elementary school. They managed to work together to meet the lecturers' expectations and get good grades. It can be concluded that a joint task that requires the mobilization of each participant's knowledge leads to the partnership's success.

The study in Saudi Arabia that measured the effectiveness of cooperative learning in teaching English courses also found that collaborative learning was more effective than traditional teaching in learning English and developing better academic achievements. (Al-Mubireek, 2021). in the same way, the research done in Indonesia found that by following a collaborative model, the students improved their writing skills. The improvement is reflected in the student's behavior and academic achievements (Khair & Misnawati, 2022).

Cooperative learning in the academic setting offers numerous advantages for students. Students who have experienced cooperative learning are more likely to become lifelong learners. They feel comfortable seeking help, consulting, and participating in group work in future academic and professional endeavors.

Cooperative learning in the academy enhances academic performance, nurtures vital life skills, promotes social interaction, and prepares students for success in a collaborative and interconnected world.

5. APPLIED RECOMMENDATIONS

- Colleges of education and universities are recommended to initiate joint training courses for students from different training programs to promote interdisciplinary learning.
- It is recommended to provide opportunities for future teachers to observe and engage in teaching experiences that combine physical activity with learning to develop their skills and confidence in implementing such approaches.

6. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- The research was carried out in one college with unique characteristics. Students attend college; Some speak Hebrew, and some speak Arabic. It is possible that the opposition to the cooperative course was also due to cultural differences. Examining the subject at other colleges and universities with additional characteristics is recommended.
- Furthermore, the research was done on one course and is a case study. Expanding the research to additional courses is recommended, which will further increase the overall reliability of the findings.
- The study examined cooperative learning in two different training programs. It is recommended to explore also collaborations between similar disciplines.

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