

A Study on Collaborative Online Learning among EFL Students in Van Lang University (VLU)

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the benefits and drawbacks that EFL students met when they studied in a group online at Van Lang University. This is based on the theoretical framework of Laila Rawahi and Abdu Mekhlafi (2015). This study was conducted with 60 students from first-year students to seniors majoring in foreign languages at Van Lang University (VLU) and already experienced online learning. They answered a questionnaire to point out what they faced when working in a group via the Internet. The results show that while some students find collaborative virtual learning methods beneficial in terms of distance and the elimination of time and financial border, other ELF students had trouble in interaction and concentration.

Moreover, findings suggest that some technical problems such as the Internet connection and weak computer skills still play a main threat, leading to controversial issues between teammates. Moreover, some distractions such as social media, noisy outside environment, and talkative members also influence the learning progress. It is implied from the study that e-learning is such an evolution in education; however, it is not effective for learning in a group online. The purpose of this study will suggest some upsides and downsides of online collaborative learning so that schools and lecturers can seek solutions to solve the problems and enhance the positive impacts of online collaborative learning.

Keywords: online learning, collaborative learning, learning in a group, working in a group

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The background of collaborative learning:

Prior to this time, collaborative learning activities were regarded as difficult with students who had problems finding time and space to work together. In recent days, thanks to the high advancement of technology, members in a group can easily access Internet-based technologies to study together without commuting to school.

"Collaborative learning" is a type of learning that requires students' contributions or with a little support from teachers to broaden knowledge. Normally, children will work in groups of two or more, searching for learning materials, making a study plan, taking in knowledge, discussing, completing tasks, and so on. Collaborative learning exercises depend mostly on students' self-study skills, cooperation between them, not teachers' explanation or representation. (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Unlike cooperative learning, students will do work with collaborative learning and discuss together to complete the assignments (Razmerita & Brun, 2011).

Ashong and Commander reported that the practice of collaborative learning is highly deployed in virtual education because many program developers and instructors of web-based courses are beginning to understand its positive impact on students' academic performances. Therefore, collaborative learning integrated into the online classroom is significantly considered as one of the pedagogical strategies.

1.2. The role of collaborative learning in today world:

The world is changing ceaselessly, and the human must acquire new knowledge and new methods of learning to catch up with the developments of modern life. Collaborative networked learning becomes increasingly common in general education and language in particular (Thach, Vijay, Eva, 2014). Moreover, collaborative learning is believed to be one of the common skills students use to learn a lot of new things, help them gain knowledge, and renew the information (Contrast studying Alone to Studying in A Group, 2016). The concept of collaborative learning for the aim of accomplishing scholarly objectives has been broadly investigated and advocated throughout the professional literature. The term "collaborative learning" is a method in which students at different learning levels work together in a small group in order to gain the general-purpose (Anuradha A. Gokhale, 1995). In other words, students have to be responsible for their work and their teammates' work to make sure the work

goes as planned. Thus, each teammate plays an important part in providing information and trying their best to complete tasks, and all members are essential for project completion (Colbeck, Campbell & Bjorklund, 2000).

Despite the advancement of e-learning widely used worldwide as an alternative method of face-to-face learning, there are literally a few pieces of research about the connection between online learning and collaborative study, particularly in Vietnam. Although many studies have investigated collaborative learning at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels; however, there is little persuasive evidence about online collaborative learning, specifically at the undergraduate level. Moreover, the majority of the previous researches is about collaborative learning in regular live courses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the eLearning model had been applied at Van Lang University as the alternative way for traditional classes. It is believed that this modern learning and teaching method, it would be beneficial for collaborative learning among EFL students. And due to the negative impacts of this pandemic, students need to study in the group via online platforms including MS Team, Zoom, and so on. Specifically, with theory-oriented subjects, collaborative teams might find it easier to finish schoolwork due to the benefits of supervising each other's works than with practice-oriented subjects such as speaking or listening classes. Students might find it hard to communicate and discuss.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Besides, some proponents of the benefits of collaborative learning have been proved in some previous research papers. According to Nokes-Malach, Rickey, and Gadgil (2015), they reported that collaborative learning has also been hypothesized to increase individual motivation and engagement. Collaborative teams have given the obvious evidence that they achieve higher levels of thought and retain information longer than students who prefer to study alone (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). In the study conducted by Gokhale, the author has concluded that critical thinking development can be fostered by collaborative learning through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas.

Although we cannot deny some great benefits of collaborative learning, some students are still irresponsible for the group's work. Moreover, collaborative learning is important, requiring self-study skills so that if a member in the group works inefficiently and ineffectively and does not finish the work assigned for them, all of the works will be delayed. Finally, the assignment is not clear. For example, leaders always have to deal with a heavy workload while other members have nothing to do. As a consequence, this will put leaders under a lot of pressure and noncooperation among members. (Nguyen, 2007).

2.1. Operational Definition of Terms:

The researcher includes an operational definition of the term used in this study. It is as follow:

Collaborative learning is widely seen as an activity that is beneficial in the progress of students' learning since this learning style requires more than two students to construct knowledge and accomplish their common shared goals together. Chao, Sai, and Hamilton reported that carrying out a collaborative course is ideal for forming high-quality online courses.

Dilenbourg and Schneider claimed that when someone alludes to "distance education", the word "distance" regularly sounds as the keyword since it implies major technological use.

2.2. Concepts

Online collaboration accompanying project-based learning can support learners in their language learning thanks to web-based tools which can store information in an organized way for future reference. Moreover, project-based learning stimulates students to interact with their peers to complete long-term projects, for learning becomes more meaningful and interesting (Koufman-Frederick et al., 1999). According to Palloff and Pratt, quality learning environments are designed to facilitate participation in interactive and collaborative activities among students. The researchers also recognized such conditions as advantages to adding to better learning results, including the development of higher-order thinking skills. Explicit pedagogical advantages of collaborative learning are enhancement of critical thinking skills, co-creation of knowledge and meaning, reflection, transformative learning. Different reports firmly suggest that knowledge made collaboratively is more likely to be reviewed (Freedman, 2009). Therefore, learners can acquire more significant comprehension of different points (Yang & Wu, 2011). Working in groups also creates more positive attitudes toward learning and disciplines than personal learning (Johnson et al., 1998). On the other hand, in a study of Changwatchai, the main challenge that graduate-level students often faced was the lack of group and individual accountability of their peers when it came to online collaborative learning. A good online collaborative environment was suggested to consist of student-faculty interaction, peer-to-peer collaboration, and active learning (Richardson and Swan).

2.3. Previous Studies

A study conducted by Chang Zhu (2012) examined satisfaction, performance, and knowledge construction of two groups of undergraduates via online collaborative work. College students majoring in educational sciences at Beijing University (China) and at Flemish University (Flanders) experienced a three-month semester of online group learning before filling the researcher's questionnaire about their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Apart from a 15-question questionnaire, a comparison of the performance and knowledge construction between two groups was investigated. The final results indicated both groups of participants satisfying with the functions of online peer learning. However, Flemish students tended to spend more time on this educational form and gained higher performance than Chinese students. In contrast, the Chinese group was more likely to enjoy peer learning online to a greater extent and were happier with members' contributions.

In another study in 2014, Muuro, Wagacha, Oboko and Kihoro, researchers from universities in Kenya, reflected the wider use of the e-learning platform in most Kenyan colleges. Digital data collected from total of 210 students in Kenya after given purposive sampling. On the one hand, the researchers agreed with the major contribution of collaborative learning in an online environment recognized in a lot of previous studies. On the other hand, the participants revealed various drawbacks of this platform. Particularly, most of the students got extremely frustrated when dealing with online group assignments due to awful connections. The lack of attention and participation of group members drove them crazy during the course. Another big challenge came from the instructors with no feedbacks for their work. There are not only state college students who experienced these, but also those in private schools did.

The research paper of Zhang, Peng, and Hung (2009) aimed to analyze college students' experience in learning in a group online for the first time in a project-based learning (PBL) environment in Taiwan. They conducted interviews with 48 selected students to collect qualitative data and from other sources such as instructor's field notes, online observation, students' virtual interaction, and group assignments. In each focus group, all different levels of participants were included in purpose. Due to the introverted students and a lack of response, group interviews were conducted, and a focus group may motivate students to give more and more answers as well as allow the questioner to witness and identify the interactive dynamics among different types of learners. At the end of the semester, the same researcher conducted all the interviews in person, which took 30 to 60 minutes each. All conversations were recorded with the permission of participants and later transcribed in Chinese. The survey figured out interesting phenomena that were because of the influence of culture and the educational system. It also revealed that online collaborative learning greatly changed the position of teachers from traditional, teacher-led, and teacher-centered face-to-face classes to project-based, online collaborative learning, in which students have to take more responsibilities and be more active to complete school works with a little support from lecturers, have contributed to a lot of uncertainty, worry, discomfort for college students. Moreover, some of them were still jealous of their colleagues' performance, which resulted from the competitive educational system in Taiwan.

The study of Kumi-Yeboah, Yuan, and Dogbey analyzed minority college students' perceptions of online interactive learning activities with 20 minority graduate students from diverse ethnic backgrounds involved (10 African Americans, 5 Hispanics, and five international students from Africa). All of them registered online learning technology for graduates and special education programs at a university located in the Northeastern United States. This qualitative research was collected by semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and observation by a non-participant. The study results indicate that teachers responsible for teaching online courses should consider the advantages, expectations, and difficulties of learners from different cultural backgrounds when they engage in interactive online learning activities. Six concepts on minority graduate student views of online interactive learning experiences were also established in the data review. (1) It is suggested that this team of participants are able to collaborate in a culturally integrated group that encourages them to tap into the dynamic awareness building of students participating in collaborative online learning experiences. On the one hand, collaborative online learning experiences allowed them to contribute to the development of knowledge by evaluating colleagues' activities, feedback, and feedback. Learners often benefited from learning in a dynamic group and the feeling of belonging to an online community where there was constant social contact between student groups and teachers. (2) The research pointed to the preference of small-group interaction in a collaborative learning environment among culturally diverse students over collaborative learning experiences within the group. Due to the small number of team members, learners claimed that they felt much more motivated and confident to contribute to small-group activities. (3) They stated that students also have a chance to share their cultural and educational experiences with others to improve cross-cultural awareness. The respondents also revealed that cross-cultural collaborative online learning experiences encouraged them to discuss and lead discussions. (4) This result indicates that online collaborative learning practices provided minority participants with opportunities to develop communication skills which helped them achieve access to group decision-making

process control, which helped them satisfy their learning preferences and cultural perspectives. (5) Researchers found that students still face some challenges in term of understanding particular preferences in collaborative online learning, lacking non-linguistic cues, finding hard to express disagreement, communicative limitations leading to less substantive postings; and mismatched forms of contact due to the diverse cultural backgrounds. (6) The survey found out that in discussing cultural gaps and the lack of cultural diversity in the instruction or content of the materials they read online, the participants found out that they encountered obstacles. However, this research still has a limitation in that data was collected from observing a group of 20 minority graduate students, so this cannot properly reflect the perceptions of all culturally diverse students' digital platforms. Via comparative research, future studies may look at the experiences of minority students in online collaborative practices. In order to compare the experiences of different minority graduate students from diverse programs and other similar variables such as ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic class, additional studies should be performed.

The purpose of Durrington and Mathews' study is to look at online student group discussions from a student's perspective so that we identify the essentials that students find important and that they are interested in their learning. Research papers applying the method ---- mentioning some of the main contents are "Importance of Group Work," "Group Size," "Prior Preparation," "Characteristics of Group Members," "Group Purpose" with research data is a system of 26-question questionnaires and applied to over 24 students to survey on issues surrounding online group discussion. Specifically, a survey about six issues: Quality of online learning discussions, The number of participants by groups in online discussions, Ways to respond in online discussions, Discussion-related issues and are liked in the online discussion, Priority is given to selected partners in the online discussion, Ways to prepare in online discussions. Research results show that the majority of students agree that the quality of online teaching is the best because they can use the knowledge gained in a group discussion to achieve high effectiveness in learning. Most students prefer online discussions with 4-6 students or as a group. Moreover, students will feel the discussion is more effective if carefully prepared, and students find online group discussion highly effective when discussing theoretical subjects. Most students will split discussion groups according to their interests or will choose those with good knowledge and expertise; others want to work alone. In order to prepare a good group discussion, the majority of students will read the reference materials first or contact the teacher first to find out the content of the lessons.

Based on research "Collaborative online learning in virtual discussions" by Fisher and Coleman. Due to the advancement of technology, more and more students access the Internet, so the educational system also develops in the direction of new technology to create virtual classes online, social networking sites. The purpose of this study is to find out the benefits of the education system. In detail, describing the structure and students' learning interactions in virtual group discussions includes a description of online students' learning strategies and different motivation functions. The content of this study is to present the structures and ways of working in online group learning. (1) "face-to-face" (2) Share own insights and experiences about the course learning. (3) End the exercise in the open direction. (4) project-based learning (5) Set originals and roles (6) Use metaphorical language and symbols. (7) Limit members' participation to easily control (8) Be the supporter, not the controller. The shortcoming in this research is that it has not been directly surveyed, and there are no specific data results for the research.

The research "Collaborative online learning: interaction patterns and limiting factors" of Fung in online communication, collaborative learning, and distance learning courses have two studies. That is "student participation patterns in online discussion" and "reported use and reasons for lack of active participation in online discussion", the research paper also adopts OLE in three courses. This research aims to provide a framework for students to understand the information of lessons online easily. Next, it will find why students do not participate in group discussions in collaborative online learning and measures to motivate students to engage in collaborative online learning. Study 1 in this research is "student participation patterns in online discussion". This research database is from E817 "learning, curriculum and assessment" for analysis and applied to 60 students. Study 2 in this research is "reported use and reasons for lack of active participation in online discussion". The tool used in this study is the questionnaire system on two issues. The first is a survey of students' access and OLE usage, and the second problem is that the survey lacks positivity when participating in online learning. This study shows that the direct cause of online collaboration is that students do not have time, and most students prefer to read rather than spend time in group discussion. Moreover, the way team-members work and their attitudes also affect students' participation in online learning.

One related research is the study of Laila Rawahi and Abdu Mekhlafi, which aimed to investigate students' perceptions toward online collaborative learning by investigating the benefits and impediments they endured during the process of collaborative e-learning. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods in launching a survey on 93 participants, the results showed that the students working in groups highly appreciated network

collaborative learning since it helped students gain a greater understanding of writing skills (vocabulary and grammar) and improve communication and interaction among peers. On the other hand, some pointed out that online collaborative learning is a tiring and difficult task because of slow connection and poor techniques; the inadequacy of time made group learning worse; insufficient language knowledge leads to group learning difficulties, and passive online peers also caused more problems. Besides, many solutions were proposed for facilitating students participating in online group learning and making progress more effectively, such as encouraging students to join, build and share new knowledge, provide adequate training, and invest time in peer-to-peer learning projects given.

In the previous findings, Brindley, Walti & Blaschke evaluated the effective strategies of creating collaborative learning in the online environment through forming two groups of students: Master of Distance Education (MDE) 601, and Master of Distance Education (MDE) 608 in which the students graduated and experienced online learning regularly. Based on the data showing that MDE 608 students were more satisfied with group learning online than MDE 601 students did and the different perspective of two groups in the relationship between grading and participation, the researchers finally expanded more instructional strategies used for enhancing collaboration in online learning including transparency of expectations, obvious instructions, appropriateness of task for group work, meaning relevance, incentives for participants embedded in course design, sharing responsibilities, respecting each other and giving regular feedback. The study is limited in implementing evaluation to test the efficacy of the strategies above to escalate participation in and satisfaction in group learning. Further investigation is required to understand better and check interactional factors among variables.

2.4. Review Method

2.4.1. Definition of qualitative method

Qualitative research has relied on data expressed in the form of words – descriptions, accounts, viewpoints, feelings as opposed to in the form of numbers so that it cannot be accurately measured or counted (Walliman, 2007). Moreover, the qualitative method is widely used to comprehend people's beliefs, experiences, outlook, behavior, and interactions. "Qualitative research focuses on understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach" (Pathak et al., 2013). Walliman also reported that the richness and subtlety of collected information create a greater understanding of human society. The qualitative method's fundamental weakness in dealing with corpus investigation is that their discoveries can't be reached out to a more extensive population with the same degree of conviction that the quantitative approach can. This is on the grounds that the discoveries of the research are not examined to find whether they are statistically significant or due to chance (Ochieng Pamela Atieno, 2009).

2.4.2. Applying the qualitative method into research

In Kumi-Yeboah and teammates' research, the qualitative method was carried out to conduct a survey about the perceptions of culturally diverse students toward online collaborative learning. Qualitative research was utilized in the psychological field when research found numerical measurement did not work effectively for this area (Pathak et al., 2013). Since then, the qualitative method was also leveraged in clinical research, for it helps people have a comprehensive sight of data. Marilyn Lichtman (2013) indicated historically scientific advancement through practical theories and qualitative data.

In this study, the qualitative method using closed and open format questions was mainly employed to collect participants' responses. The survey consists of 10 questions in a form which was sent through the Internet for the focus group to discover advantages and disadvantages of online collaborative learning. Particularly, there were students' perceptions, feelings towards theoretical and practical disciplines in a web-based collaborative environment.

Qualitative research methods may lead to some controversial issues for its flexibility and reliability, but its applications have made a major breakthrough in scientific research.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What benefits do students have when they worked in a group online?
2. What drawbacks do students tackle when they worked in a group online?
3. Is online collaborative learning as effective in this high-tech century as people believe?

4. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this study is twofold. In the broad sense, most universities and colleges in Vietnam have currently delivered courses and programs online without geographical barriers. Computer use is considered as a part of the curriculum at schools and universities. Online classes allow teachers and students to interact online synchronously by using many features such as communicating orally, exchanging texts through typing, audio chat, upload PowerPoint presentations, transmit video, and more, stated by JL McBrien et al., 2009. With online collaborative learning, Shea and teammates found that students taking online courses feel more satisfied in their learning experiences when they are engaged in collaborative assignments than in traditional classes (2012).

In the narrow sense, this research may help VLU students as well as the Faculty of Foreign Languages to have a deeper view of virtual online learning and have some solutions. First of all, universities can organize some orientational workshops to provide lecturers some useful skills for online teaching and how to supervise online group assignments. Next, educators can have some methods to prevent students from cheating while taking exams online. Thirdly, lecturers can have a new way to evaluate their students' academic level in online delivered classes. Finally, students can be aware of some disadvantages that they will meet during working in a group online.

5. RESEARCH SCOPE

By using the Google form website and sending it to some groups of EFL students from the first year to the fourth year of Van Lang University majoring in English, the research intends to find out the upsides and downsides of online collaborative learning.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1. Participants

The participants at first were randomly chosen among thousands of EFL students at the university. Under the condition of changing the learning method to online last semester, all EFL students at VLU experienced different problems, and they had different attitudes toward the learning style. Therefore, the study would investigate different generations of EFL students (regardless of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors) in order to explore the greater depth of their experiences. Finally, 60 students who dealt with online learning last semester would be sent the form plus the explanation of the main goal of the research. They were encouraged to respond in one week, and the form would be closed after each response was sent.

6.2. Design and data collection

Utilizing the online surveying software Google Forms, an online survey was well designed and sent to the group of 60 EFL students at VLU. With the encouragement for responding to the form in one week, 10 simple closed questions with options for them to choose from were time-saving and efficient ways to respond via smartphones, tablets, etc. Furthermore, in order for undergraduates to submit more opinions out of the options, the form was designed to have extra space to text. Also, they could keep anonymous during questioning. The responses were automatically recorded and illustrated in charts and figures by Google Forms before discussing specific data given by students.

7. RESULTS

The purpose of this survey is to identify some advantages and disadvantages when students experience online collaborative learning in theory-based classes and practice-based classes. This experiment attempted to test the following hypothesis.

“Online collaborative learning is more beneficial for students than face-to-face collaborative learning.”

7.1. Graphical Representation of results and statistics analysis

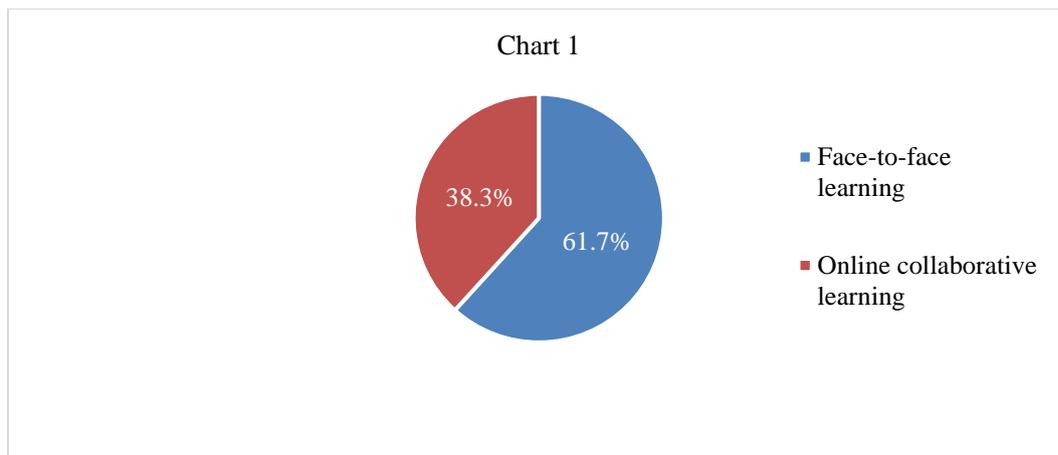


Figure 1: Method of learning that EFL students in Van Lang University prefer.

Figure 1 shows information about which method of learning that EFL students in Van Lang University prefer.

Overall, the survey finds that more EFL students have a tendency to choose the traditional learning method rather than the modern one.

According to the survey, students who voted for "online collaborative learning" are 38.3%. And the percentage of students who are interested in face-to-face group work is 61.7%.

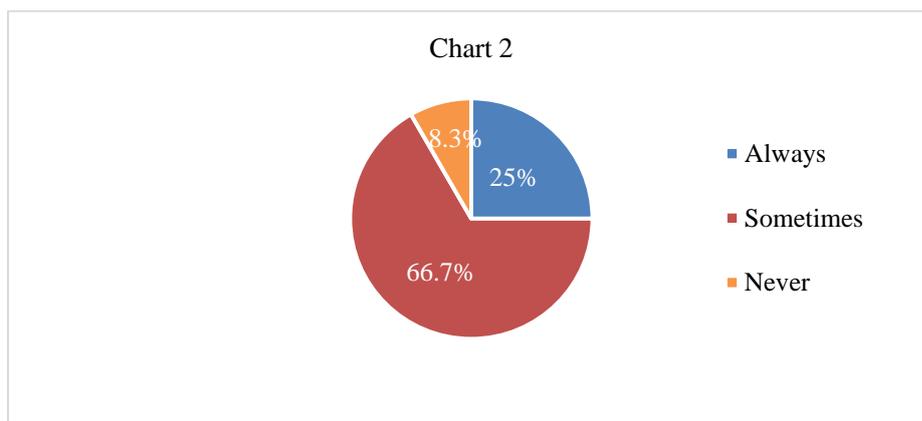


Figure 2: Learners experiencing conflict during collaborative work.

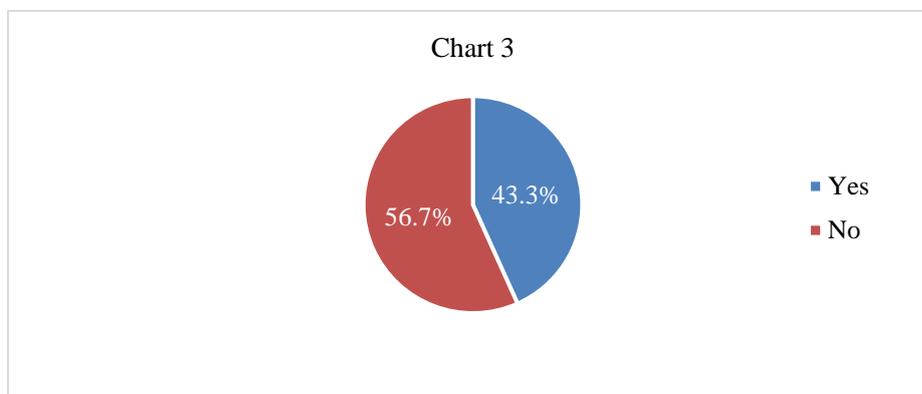


Figure 3: Learners solving conflict during collaborative work.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate data about how often EFL in Van Lang University learners experience conflict during collaborative work and whether those conflicts have been solved easily through online platforms.

Overall, most of the students admit that they sometimes had conflicts with peers during online group work. In addition, the majority of English learners believe that conflicts will be easily resolved through the Internet

According to the survey, the figure of students who occasionally argue with their teammates during working in a group online is 66.7%. The number of students who always have conflicts with colleagues during collaborative learning time is 15 out of 60 EFL students, accounting for 25%. 8.3% of the respondents think they never have arguments.

We can obviously see from chart three that more than half of EFL students believe that they can easily solve group conflicts through the Internet, which is 56.7%. In contrast, 43.3% of learners have the opposite idea.

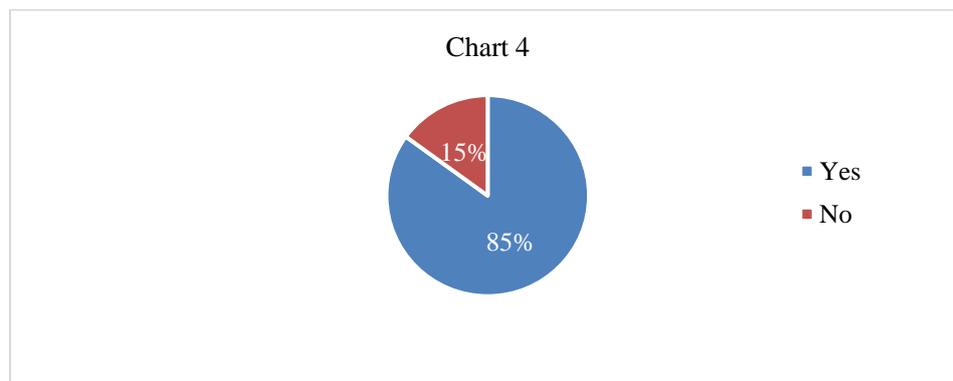


Figure 4: Learners sharing responsibilities.

Figure 4 shows information that whether EFL learners in VLU share responsibilities to finish work.

Overall, the survey found that more EFL students are keener on sharing tasks to get teamwork done than those who do not.

The results show that the majority of EFL students agree to share responsibilities to complete group work is 51 students, accounting for 85%. At the same time, 15% of the respondents have an opposite view.

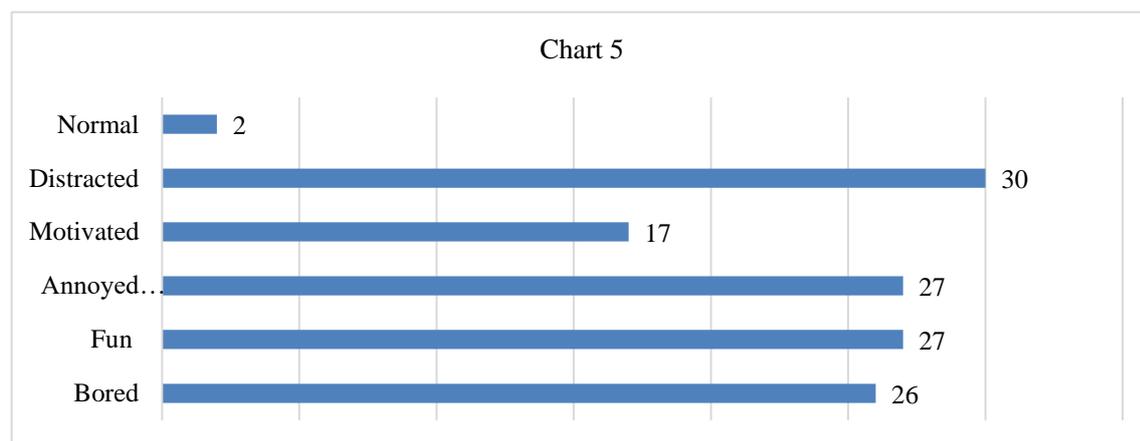


Figure 5: Feelings of EFL students in the online environment

Figure 5 illustrates EFL students' feelings in Van Lang University when they engage in online group work.

Overall, most of the students feel distracted. While just a few respondents feel normal.

The survey finds that 30 EFL students feel online collaborative learning is extremely distracted. The number of students who feel annoyed and angry is 27, as much as the figure of respondents who have fun during online group work.

Next, 26 EFL learners usually feel bored, while only 17 students are motivated by online collaborative learning. And only two people admit that they find it normal.

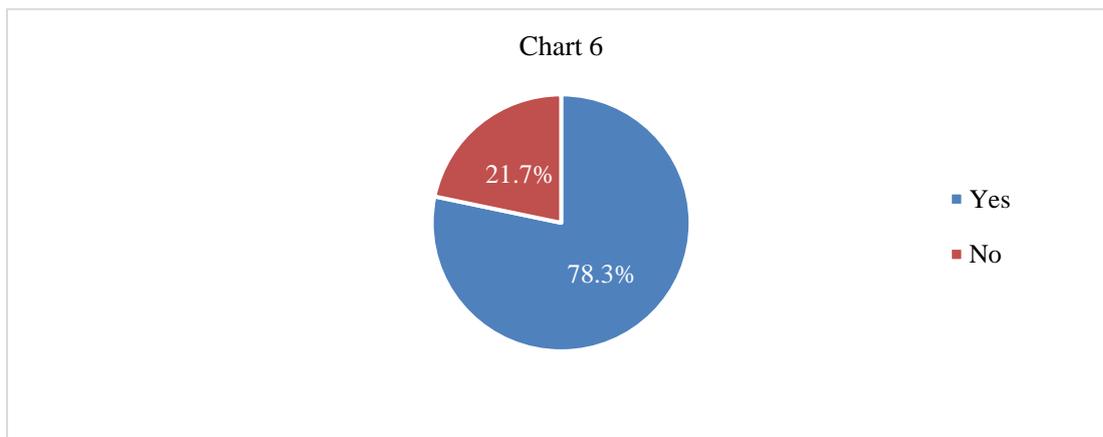


Figure 6: Frequency of group work in learning speaking and listening online

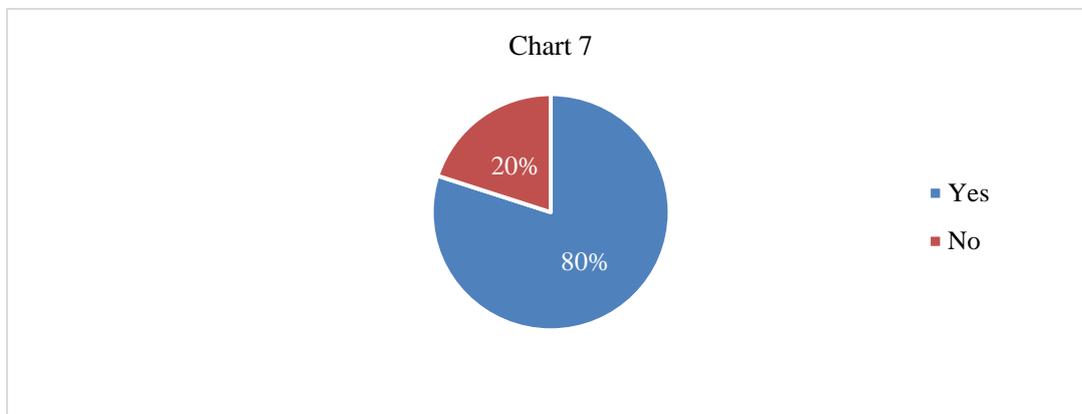


Figure 7: Frequency of group work in learning reading and writing online.

Figures 6 and 7 show how frequently the students worked collaboratively online when learning speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

Overall, a large number of students admitted that they already experienced working in a group when learning theory-based subjects (reading and writing) and practice-based subjects (speaking and listening).

It can be seen from pie graph six that nearly 78.5% of participants answer that they have engaged in online group working while around 22.5% of students never have a chance to take part in this type of learning.

It is obvious in Chart 7 that 80% of learners have applied online collaborative learning in learning theory-based subjects. In contrast, only 20% claim that they did not experience virtual group working when learning reading and writing skills.

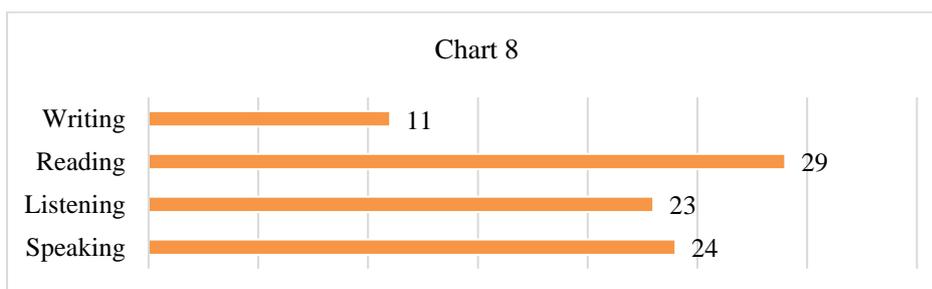


Figure 8: Students choosing their most favorite skill areas to learn online.

The bar chart above shows students choosing their most favorite skill areas to learn online with other students.

Overall, the majority of participants prefer applying to online group working in Reading classes, while just a few students are interested in experiencing this style of learning in Writing classes.

It can be easily seen from the chart that nearly half of respondents, 29 people are interested in applying online collaborative learning in Reading classes. On the contrary, only 11 students enjoy working in a group online in Writing classes. Moreover, with Listening and Speaking classes, there are 23, and 24 learners respectively would like to engage in group working online.

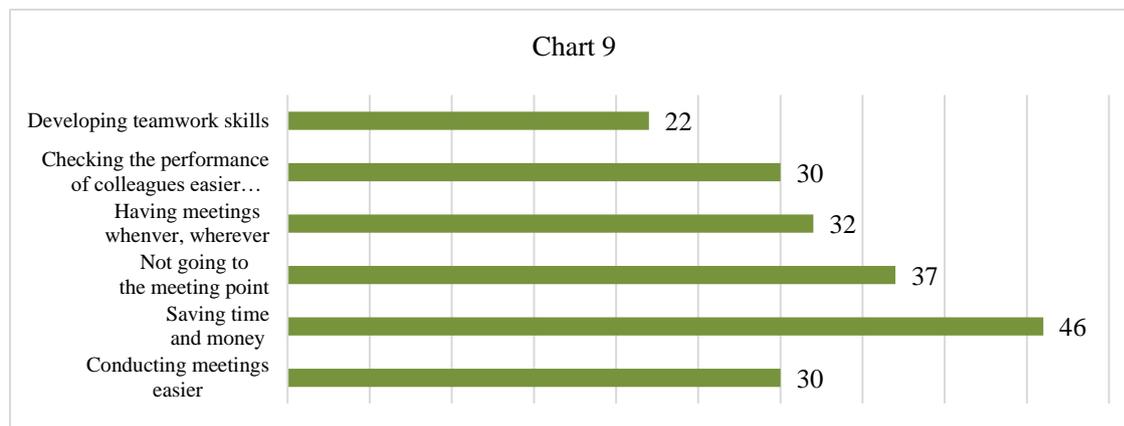


Figure 9: Advantages of online learning.

Figure 9 illustrates the advantages of collaborative learning. Overall, a great number of respondents admitted that learning in groups online is beneficial for them in terms of saving time and money. On the other hand, the figure for developing teamwork skills is not as high as other figures.

Firstly, we can see from the chart that more than two-thirds of students agree that online collaborative learning helps them save money and time in terms of eliminating living expenses, tuition fees, and commuting time, about 46 people. Next, 37 respondents admit that with the help of web-based collaborative learning, they do not need to go to the meeting point as they used to do. Besides, more than half of learners, about 32 people, confirm that they think virtual collaborative learning is useful, as they can conduct the meeting on online platforms regardless of how far they are and what time it is.

Furthermore, the same number of students choose "checking the performance of colleagues easier with the help of screen-sharing function" and "conducting meetings easier" as another advantage of distant collaborative learning. However, just more than one third of learners can totally develop teamwork skills via Internet, about 22 people.

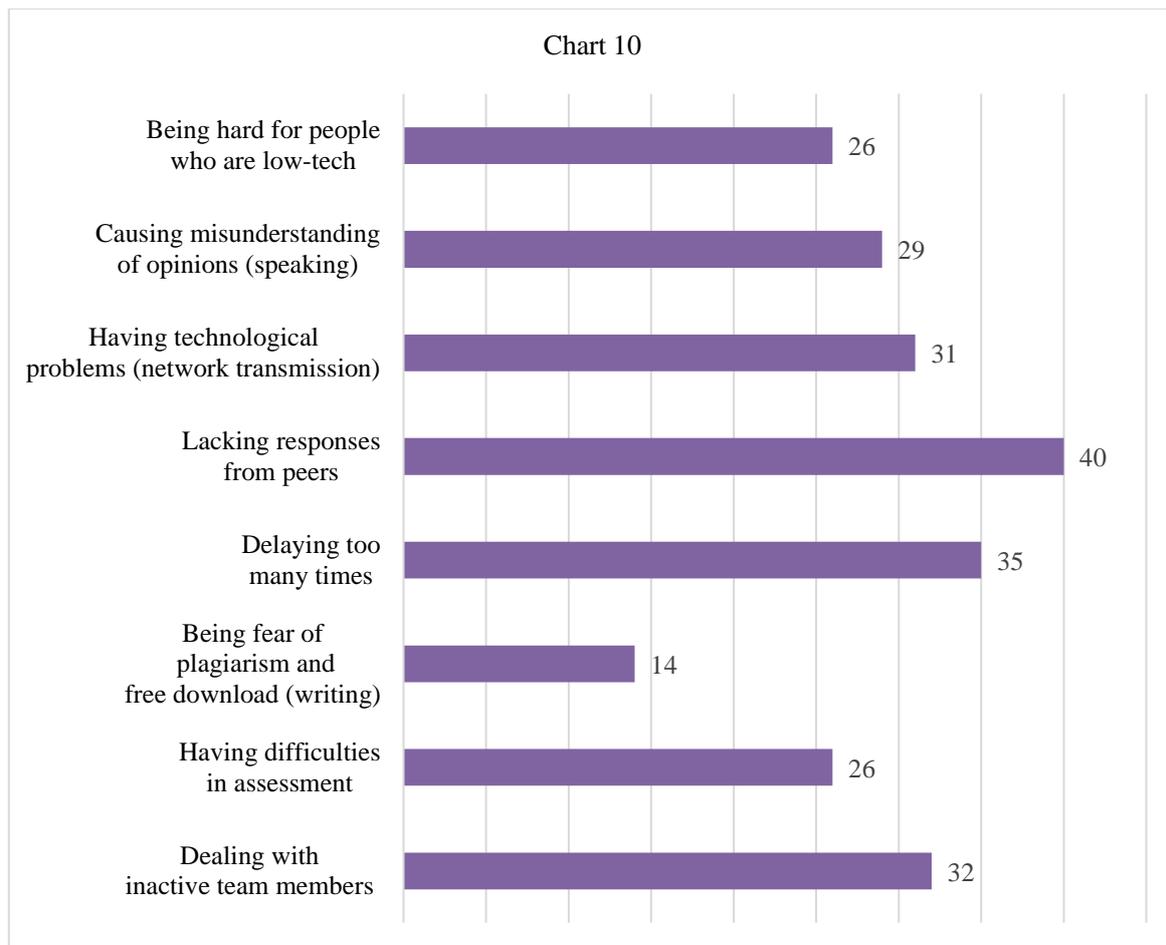


Figure 10: Disadvantages of online learning.

Figure 10 identifies some of the disadvantages that respondents listed in online learning. In general, most students lack responses from peers, while not many learners have trouble with plagiarism and free download.

In general, most students lack responses from peers, while not many learners have trouble with plagiarism and free download.

As shown in the graph, 40 people admitted that they have difficulties in contacting other members. Next, about 35 students find it nearly impossible to choose a suitable time for conducting meetings that suit every member. Next, the figures for having technological problems, including unstable Internet connection and dealing with inactive, irresponsible peers, are 31 and 32 people respectively.

Looking at the graph in more detail, 29 learners think online collaborative learning causes misunderstanding of opinions during the process of discussion. Besides, the same number of students who struggle to deal with some technological functions because they are low-tech and have difficulties in assessment is 26 respondents. However, being fear of plagiarism and free download is not a common drawback among students. Only 14 students choose it.

8. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to investigate the positive as well as negative impacts of online collaborative learning on the discussing progress among students. It suggested some materials for further discussion and considerations. As virtual learning is a new learning method in Vietnam, specifically in VLU, students still found it difficult to work in a group on online platforms. The use of virtual classes seemed to be not as effective as traditional learning. The responses from the questionnaire pointed out that the disadvantages of applying virtual collaborative learning on speaking skills outweighed the advantages.

The study found that students still met some difficulties related to Internet connection, social media, eyes problem, and so on (chart 10). And the most notable drawback is lacking peer-to-peer interactions during learning online.

In contrast, students highly appreciated some benefits of learning in a team online in terms of distance and especially the elimination of time as well as financial borders.

9. CONCLUSION

Collaborative learning in an online environment is thought of as a universal method benefiting undergraduates in different ways in which the ability to appeal to online learners' satisfaction and self-motivated participation in groups is obvious. Moreover, the major positive impact on learners' skills can be seen through their better capacity for solving hard conflicts, sharing responsibilities, etc.

Despite its enormous potentiality, peer-to-peer learning in a virtual environment will absolutely be influenced by several internal and external factors causing negative feedback from learners. For these drawbacks, the low connection among equipment is considered a major problem. Furthermore, a lack of initiative and of interaction with instructors is clearly available.

Finally, we gain perspectives of this learning style from the study that it is not efficient to apply this method of study in any context and period. That is due to its pros and cons, which changeable depending on an individual's background. Understanding the impact of collaborative online learning would help learners gain and enhance their performance and instructors design more effective educational activities. According to those figures, we think that virtual collaborative learning is not as effective as traditional learning.

10. LIMITATIONS

The study remains a certain limitation that should be noticed. Although the findings of the research revealed significant benefits and drawbacks specifically, the relationship of the pros and cons of online group learning and learners' differences relating to different cultures, educational systems, the social environment has been neglected, which makes the results not pertinent in various contexts. Further, because the survey was conducted with 60 participants, it cannot totally evaluate exactly the situation.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The researcher suggests the following ideas and titles for further studies.

- a. The effectiveness of virtual classes on developing the students' communicative skills.
- b. The effectiveness of virtual classes on EFL students' academic performance and attitudes.
- c. The impacts of online learning on EFL students' speaking skills.
- d. How to supervise students and evaluate their performances fairly and effectively.

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