# Action Research on Teachers' Proficiency in Implementing Cooperative and Collaborative Learning Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

This action research delves into the proficiency of senior high school writing teachers in implementing cooperative and collaborative learning strategies within practical research writing courses. The study addresses the gap between educators' understanding of these pedagogical approaches and their actual implementation in the classroom. Through a cross-sectional survey and analysis of lesson plans, insights were gathered from eight participants at La Consolacion College Tanauan, Philippines. While the majority of teachers demonstrated a foundational understanding of cooperative and collaborative learning, inconsistencies emerged in their practical application. Findings revealed misalignments between perceived understanding and implementation, highlighting the need for further professional development. Despite reported benefits, such as enhanced peer interaction and critical thinking skills, areas for improvement were identified, particularly in fostering shared goals and clear communication. The study underscores the importance of continuous professional development and reflective practice in bridging the gap between theory and practice. An action plan is proposed to address these disparities, including comprehensive training programs and ongoing support mechanisms. By equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills, this research aims to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes through the effective utilization of cooperative and collaborative learning strategies in practical research writing courses.

*Keywords*: *Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, teacher professional development, action research, writing instruction*

## INTRODUCTION

In my journey as an educator, I have noticed a glaring mismatch in the practice and activities employed in senior high school writing-related subjects and the expected competency levels of students. This observation has prompted me to delve deeper into the realm of cooperative and collaborative learning strategies.

As I navigate the complexities of the educational landscape, I find myself continually intrigued by the nuanced distinctions between cooperative and collaborative learning. These pedagogical approaches have sparked persistent debate and research endeavors, yet I have observed a prevalent confusion and lack of clarity among educators when it comes to discerning between the two.

This confusion is not merely an academic matter; it has tangible consequences for our students' engagement and academic success. As educators, we play a pivotal role in implementing these strategies, yet we often grapple with the practical intricacies of determining when and how to seamlessly integrate them into our teaching methodologies.

In my own teaching practice, I have encountered numerous challenges in selecting and implementing cooperative and collaborative learning techniques. The decisions I make in this regard directly impact my students' experiences and achievements, yet the ramifications of these choices remain relatively underexplored in educational research.

What is more, as I delved deeper into the issue, I discovered that many fellow educators are unaware of the mismatch between their lesson plans and the expected learning outcomes. Upon examining their instructional materials and expected outcomes, it became evident that there is a significant gap between what is being taught and what students are expected to achieve. This realization added another layer of complexity to the situation, highlighting the need for a closer examination of our teaching practices and their alignment with desired student competencies. Recognizing the gap between theory and practice, I have chosen to adopt a pragmatic, hands-on approach in my research. My primary aim is to unravel the intricate dynamics that shape classroom practices and student experiences. By thoroughly investigating my own comprehension levels, decision-making processes, and the consequences of my instructional choices, I hope to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cooperative and collaborative learning in authentic educational settings.

The anticipated findings of my research hold significant potential to offer myself and my fellow educators' invaluable insights. These insights will not only enhance our understanding but also provide practical implications for refining teaching and learning strategies across diverse educational landscapes. With this in mind, this particular matter will be included in upcoming inset training session scheduled for June, just before the commencement of the new academic year. This training will serve as a platform to share and discuss the research findings, allowing us to collectively develop and implement more effective approaches that directly benefit the students we serve. The importance of cooperative and collaborative learning practices in writing courses is examined in this review. It explores their theoretical underpinnings, real-world applications, and effects on student outcomes by examining seminal publications and more current research. It also draws attention to a research gap by highlighting the contributions of important academics and empirical findings, namely the need to investigate how teachers understand and use these strategies in actual classroom settings specifically in writing courses. By examining teachers' viewpoints and decision-making processes in relation to different approaches, this study seeks to close this knowledge gap and provide insightful information for both educators and researchers. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning strategies have emerged as a central focus in educational research and practice, driven by their potential to not only enhance student engagement but also improve academic outcomes. This section of the review highlights key contributions from seminal works and recent publications, offering a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical foundations and practical implications associated with cooperative learning in writing.

Johnson and Johnson (2009) offers an essential starting point for understanding the theoretical foundations of cooperative learning. They highlight the importance of positive interdependence among students by looking through the prism of social interdependence theory. Their investigation emphasizes how crucial teamwork is to accomplishing shared learning objectives. Thus, the principles of cooperative learning in writing courses for students can foster a positive interdependence among writers, students can cooperate to enhance their writing skills and achieve common learning goals. Through group brainstorming sessions, peer review workshops, and collaborative writing projects, students can benefit from diverse perspectives, constructive feedback, and shared responsibility for their collective learning outcomes.

Slavin (1991) established a comprehensive review that served as a beacon, shedding light on the empirical evidence supporting cooperative learning's effectiveness. By synthesizing numerous studies, Slavin underscores the positive impact of cooperative learning on academic outcomes, including writing proficiency. Educators can leverage his findings to design writing curricula that capitalize on collaborative techniques, thereby empowering students to achieve greater success in their writing endeavors. This empirical validation solidifies cooperative learning as not just a theoretical framework but a practical and evidence-based approach to fostering writing excellence. Meanwhile, Barkley and Major (2018), in their handbook, provided transitions from theory to practice, which also gave actionable direction for educators implementing cooperative learning in higher education settings. They provided a wide range of cooperative activities and strategies, with an emphasis on their practical use. It extends its application into the realm of writing education, offering tailored strategies and activities to enhance collaborative writing experiences. From peer editing workshops to group brainstorming sessions for generating ideas, the handbook provides instructors with practical techniques specifically designed to bolster writing skills through cooperative learning.

**Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning strategies have gained traction in educational settings, prompting a closer examination of their application within writing courses.

Dillenbourg (1999) wrote a foundational chapter in "Collaborative Learning: Cognitive and Computational Approaches" that served as a cornerstone for understanding collaborative learning's theoretical underpinnings. Delving into various collaboration facets, Dillenbourg equips educators with a robust theoretical framework applicable to collaborative writing practices. He underscored collaborative learning's potential to not only enhance writing skills but also foster cognitive development among students engaged in collaborative writing endeavors. Empirical studies, such as Brack et al.'s 2014 investigation into peer-led group activities in chemistry laboratories, offer compelling evidence supporting collaborative learning's efficacy in improving student outcomes. When applied to writing courses, collaborative learning methodologies not only boost student performance but also promote self-regulated learning and active engagement in the writing process. By incorporating collaborative writing activities into the curriculum, educators can facilitate peer interaction and knowledge sharing, ultimately enhancing writing proficiency and academic achievement.

Panitz (1996) distinguished between collaborative and cooperative learning, providing educators with valuable insights for making informed instructional decisions within writing courses. Understanding this distinction enables educators to tailor collaborative writing activities to suit the specific needs and learning objectives of their students. By leveraging Panitz's insights, writing instructors can design collaborative writing projects that foster meaningful collaboration and collective knowledge construction among students. Moreover, collaborative learning in writing courses fosters beneficial interpersonal relationships among students, as evidenced by Kuo and Vansanten (2011). They emphasized face-to-

face interaction in group projects. By engaging in collaborative writing tasks, students develop trust, team cohesion, and cooperation, which are vital for successful writing projects. Integrating collaborative writing activities into the curriculum nurtures these interpersonal ties, contributing to the long-term success of collaborative writing endeavors.

Meanwhile, Strobel and van Barneveld (2009) in their meta-synthesis, although primarily focused on problem-based learning (PBL), offers valuable insights applicable to collaborative learning outcomes in various educational settings, including writing courses. By examining the broader implications of collaborative learning methodologies, educators can enrich conversations about the effectiveness of collaborative writing practices in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and collaborative writing competence among students.

To synthesize, cooperative and collaborative learning strategies have gained prominence in education specifically in writing courses, driven by their potential to boost student engagement and academic outcomes. Seminal works, such as Johnson and Johnson's Social Interdependence Theory, provide a theoretical foundation for cooperative learning, emphasizing positive interdependence among students.

Empirical support from Slavin's 1991 review underscores cooperative learning's effectiveness in enhancing academic achievement. Practical guidance from Barkley and Major's 2018 handbook bridges theory and practice for educators implementing cooperative learning.

On the collaborative learning front, studies like Brack et al.'s 2014 research and Kuo and Vansanten's 2011 study highlight its positive impact on student outcomes and interpersonal relationships. Dillenbourg's 1999 framework and Panitz's 1996 differentiation offer theoretical insights crucial for collaborative learning implementation.

However, the existing body of literature on cooperative and collaborative learning often falls short in comprehensively examining how educators perceive, differentiate, and apply these strategies in practical terms. Consequently, there exists a notable research gap in understanding the nuanced dynamics of cooperative and collaborative learning within actual educational settings and their implications for effective teaching and learning. This study aims to address this gap by investigating teachers' perspectives, decision-making processes, and the consequences of implementing these strategies. With these, This study aims to provide a comprehensive response to the following research questions which are a) to what extent do Senior High School educators in educational settings understand and accurately differentiate between cooperative learning and collaborative learning strategies in writing; and b) what specific interventions or professional development initiatives can be implemented to enhance educators' understanding and proficiency in differentiating and effectively utilizing cooperative and collaborative learning strategies within their classrooms?

## METHODOLOGY

To gain a comprehensive and firm data in answering my research questions, I have opted for a cross-sectional survey approach to delve into the perspectives and experiences of senior high school writing teachers at La Consolacion College Tanauan regarding cooperative and collaborative learning strategies. My methodology emphasizes a one-time data collection point to gain insights into teachers'

viewpoints effectively. The study focused on collecting self-report survey data, complemented by the analysis of lesson plans provided by the participants.

I specifically involved senior high school writing teachers exclusively from La Consolacion College Tanauan in this research. To ensure the relevance and expertise of participants in writing instruction, I will employ a purposive sampling approach for participant selection. This method enabled me to carefully select individuals who possess the necessary knowledge and experience in writing instruction to contribute meaningfully to the research.

The primary data collection tool for my study was a researcher-structured questionnaire meticulously crafted to gather both quantitative and qualitative insights into senior high school writing teachers' understanding of cooperative and collaborative learning strategies. This questionnaire was designed to delve into various aspects of their knowledge and implementation process with these teaching methodologies. Furthermore, participants were requested to submit their lesson plans, which served as supplementary data to complement the survey responses. These lesson plans were carefully analyzed to provide additional context and depth to the findings obtained from the questionnaire. By integrating both survey data and lesson plan analysis, I gained a comprehensive understanding of how senior high school writing teachers perceive and implement cooperative and collaborative learning strategies in their classrooms. The data gathering procedure this action research began by inviting senior high school writing teachers to participate through email invitations. These invitations contained a comprehensive information outlining the study's objectives, procedures, and expectations. Upon agreement to participate, teachers were directed to an online survey platform where they completed the questionnaire. Alongside the survey, participants were asked to submit their lesson plans within a specified timeframe. Clear instructions were provided to emphasize the confidentiality and significance of their responses. It was crucial that participants understand their contributions are valued and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Throughout the process, participants had the opportunity to seek clarification or assistance if needed. Quantitative data from the survey responses was analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize key findings for each variable. Additionally, frequency distributions and percentages was generated to provide a comprehensive overview of teachers' responses. The lesson plans provided by participants were analyzed using the matrix created earlier to evaluate the incorporation of cooperative and collaborative learning strategies. Each lesson plan was assessed based on criteria such as group dynamics, interdependence, task structure, communication patterns, and shared goals, to determine the extent to which cooperative or collaborative learning strategies are integrated.

The integration of quantitative data analysis and lesson plan analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives on cooperative and collaborative learning strategies, as well as insights into the practical application of these strategies in their teaching practices.

To ensure the ethical integrity of this study, it is essential to acknowledge certain considerations, particularly regarding participant consent and confidentiality. Despite the time constraints, efforts were made to inform participants of the study's objectives, procedures, and expectations through comprehensive email invitations. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the significance of their contributions. However, it is important to note that formal ethical approval from the research ethics office was not obtained due to time constraints. Additionally, while it's recommended to have panel members for research oversight, this requirement was not met as this study serves as a term paper. Nonetheless, every effort was made to uphold ethical standards throughout the research process, including ensuring participant autonomy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

I had the opportunity to engage with a total of 8 participants, each fulfilling distinct roles within the education sector. Among them, 6 were classroom teachers, offering firsthand insights into implementing collaborative learning strategies within writing courses. Additionally, there was 1 department head, providing valuable perspectives shaped by leadership responsibilities and institutional dynamics. Furthermore, 1 administrator participated, offering overarching insights into policy-making and administrative support for collaborative learning initiatives. Together, this diverse group of participants contributed to a comprehensive understanding of how collaborative learning is applied and its impact within the realm of writing education.

*Table 1. Aspects of Writing Teachers' view of Cooperative and Collaborative Learning*

| Aspect | Number of Writing Teachers | Equivalent Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding of Cooperative and Collaborative Learning | | |
| Perceive differences between cooperative and collaborative learning | 7 | 87.5% |
| Understand the distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning in practical research writing | 5 | 62.5% |
| Description of cooperative learning - Working in small groups to achieve common goals | 7 | 87.5% |
| Description of cooperative learning - Sharing tasks and responsibilities among group members | 1 | 12.5% |
| Description of collaborative learning - Working together as a team to solve problems or complete tasks | 6 | 75% |
| Description of collaborative learning - Co-creating knowledge with peers through discussion and interaction | 2 | 25% |
| Implementation of Cooperative and Collaborative Learning in Practical Research Writing Course | | |
| Implemented cooperative learning strategies | 6 | 75% |
| Implemented collaborative learning strategies | 7 | 87.5% |
| Perceived benefits of cooperative learning strategies - Facilitates peer editing and revision processes | 7 | 87.5% |
| Perceived benefits of cooperative learning strategies - Enhances teamwork skills crucial for collaborative research projects | 5 | 62.5% |
| Perceived benefits of cooperative learning strategies - Encourages sharing of research methodologies and resources | 3 | 37.5% |
| Perceived benefits of cooperative learning strategies - Stimulates critical analysis and constructive critique among peers | 6 | 75% |
| Perceived benefits of collaborative learning strategies - Promotes collaborative data collection and analysis techniques | 5 | 62.5% |
| Perceived benefits of collaborative learning strategies - Fosters interdisciplinary perspectives in research design and execution | 7 | 87.5% |
| Perceived benefits of collaborative learning strategies - Encourages peer-to-peer mentoring and knowledge exchange | 6 | 75% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Perceived benefits of collaborative learning strategies - Strengthens communication skills essential for presenting research findings | 4 | 50% |
| Understanding of the Difference between Cooperative and Collaborative Learning in Writing Courses | | |
| Clear understanding | 5 | 62.5% |
| Some understanding, seeking clarification | 2 | 25% |
| Uncertain about the difference | 1 | 12.5% |
| Distinguishing Factors between Cooperative and Collaborative Learning in Writing Courses | | |
| Recognized level of interdependence among students | 7 | 87.5% |
| Recognized degree of interaction and communication among students | 8 | 100% |
| Recognized emphasis on individual contribution versus shared responsibility | 5 | 62.5% |
| Recognized focus on competition versus teamwork | 3 | 37.5% |

The majority of participants which were seven (87.5%) out of eight perceive differences between cooperative and collaborative learning, indicating a foundational understanding of these concepts. However, only five (62.5%) of teachers demonstrate a clear understanding of the distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning in practical research writing. While some teachers reported understanding, inconsistencies were found upon evaluating their lesson plans. For example, although a teacher may report understanding cooperative and collaborative learning, their lesson plans may demonstrate a lack of alignment with the identified criteria. In the area of implementing cooperative and collaborative learning in Practical Research writing course, the majority of the teachers which were six (75%) have implemented both cooperative and seven (87.5%) of them on collaborative learning strategies in their practical research writing courses. Their perceived benefits of cooperative learning strategies include facilitating peer editing and revision processes is seven (87.5%) and stimulating critical analysis among peers is six (75%). Perceived benefits of collaborative learning strategies include fostering interdisciplinary perspectives is seven (87.5%) and encouraging peer-to-peer mentoring is six (75%).

In terms of understanding of the difference between cooperative and collaborative learning in writing courses, while a significant percentage of teachers (62.5%) which were five out of eight demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference between cooperative and collaborative learning, a considerable portion of three of them (37.5%) either seek clarification or remain uncertain. In the area of distinguishing factors between cooperative and collaborative learning in writing courses, seven teachers recognize the importance of interdependence (87.5%) and eight of them in communication (100%) in both cooperative and collaborative learning. However, there is less recognition of the emphasis on individual contribution versus shared responsibility on five teachers (62.5%) and the focus on competition versus teamwork on three teachers (37.5%).

To further the data and confirm clarity and confusion, upon analyzing their lesson plans according to the matrix of evaluating the alignment of the activities and learning competencies, the table below is the summary of my evaluation.

*Table 2. Evaluation of Writing Teachers' Lesson Plans*

| Teacher | Cooperative Learning | Collaborative | Misalignment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher 1 | ✓ | ✓ | None |
| Teacher 2 | ✓ | ✗ | Lack of clear shared goals; individual accountability is emphasized without highlighting collective achievement. |
| Teacher 3 | ✓ | ✓ | None |
| Teacher 4 | ✗ | ✓ | In cooperative activities, interdependence is lacking; tasks are assigned without reliance on others' contributions. |
| Teacher 5 | ✓ | ✗ | Task structure lacks clear roles; individual contribution is emphasized over collective problem-solving. |
| Teacher 6 | ✓ | ✓ | None |
| Teacher 7 | ✗ | ✓ | In cooperative activities, communication patterns are lacking; interactions are not sequential, hindering coordination and feedback. |
| Teacher 8 | ✓ | ✗ | Lack of alignment with competencies in cooperative activities; activities |

I found out that teacher 2's collaborative learning activity lacks clear shared goals, emphasizing individual accountability over group achievement. Teacher 4's cooperative learning activity shows misalignment as interdependence is lacking; tasks are assigned without relying on others' contributions. Teacher 8's cooperative learning activity lacks alignment with competencies, as it does not facilitate the development of critical thinking or writing skills. Additional instances of misalignment have been identified in the activities of Teachers 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8.

**Conclusion**

Based on a thorough examination of the findings, it is evident that as a practical research writing teacher, I have made strides in incorporating both cooperative and collaborative learning strategies into my instructional practices. These pedagogical approaches have undoubtedly contributed positively to the learning experiences of my students. However, this analysis has also revealed areas where enhancements can be made to further optimize the effectiveness of these strategies within my courses.

While I initially believed all teachers had a solid grasp of the underlying concepts of cooperative and collaborative learning, a closer inspection of the lesson plans uncovered inconsistencies between my perceived understanding and the actual implementation in the classroom. This misalignment highlights a crucial opportunity for growth and refinement in my teaching methodology. By acknowledging and addressing these disparities, they can take proactive steps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, thereby enhancing the quality of instruction and fostering a more conducive learning environment for my students.

Moving forward, it is imperative that the teachers deepen their comprehension of cooperative and collaborative learning principles through continuous professional development and reflective practice. This may involve seeking out additional training, engaging in peer collaboration, or incorporating feedback from students into my instructional design process. By adopting a growth mindset and remaining open to constructive criticism, I can evolve as an educator and better meet the diverse needs of my learners.

In conclusion, by acknowledging the areas for improvement and committing to ongoing refinement of my pedagogical approach, I, along with other writing teachers, am poised to enhance my ability to effectively utilize cooperative and collaborative learning strategies in practical research writing courses. Through intentional effort and a dedication to student-centered instruction, we will be confident that we can create a more enriching and empowering educational experience for all of my students.

**Reflection and Action Plan**

Reflecting on my journey as a researcher and a research writing teacher, I am struck by the profound impact that cooperative and collaborative learning strategies have had on my instructional practices. While I initially believed I had a solid grasp of these pedagogical approaches, the process of analyzing my lesson plans revealed inconsistencies between my perceived understanding and the actual implementation in the classroom. This realization has been both humbling and enlightening, prompting me to reassess my teaching methodology and embrace opportunities for growth.

One of the most significant insights gleaned from this experience is the importance of continuous professional development and reflective practice. As educators, we must remain open to learning and evolving, constantly seeking out new insights and refining our instructional techniques. Moving forward, I am committed to deepening my comprehension of cooperative and collaborative learning principles through additional training, peer collaboration, and ongoing feedback from my students.

Moreover, this journey has reinforced the value of adopting a growth mindset in my role as an educator. By embracing challenges as opportunities for learning and improvement, I can better meet the diverse needs of my learners and create a more enriching educational experience for all. I am excited about the prospect of enhancing my ability to effectively utilize cooperative and collaborative learning strategies in practical research writing courses, ultimately empowering my students to achieve greater success in their academic endeavors.

To address the identified disparities, I propose an action plan that begins with a comprehensive two-day training program. The first day will be dedicated to informative lectures, delving into the nuanced distinctions between cooperative and collaborative learning. These sessions will provide participants with a solid grounding in the theoretical foundations of both approaches, while also offering practical insights into their application within the context of writing courses. The second day will shift focus to hands-on workshops, where teachers will actively engage in the design and refinement of cooperative and collaborative learning activities tailored specifically to their writing courses. Through interactive exercises, role-playing scenarios, and constructive peer feedback, participants will have the opportunity to develop concrete action plans for the effective implementation of these strategies in their classrooms.

Furthermore, this action plan will not end with the conclusion of the two-day training program. Instead, it will encompass ongoing support mechanisms aimed at ensuring sustained improvement in the integration of cooperative and collaborative learning in practical research writing

courses. Continuous support will be provided through access to resources, mentorship opportunities, and regular check-ins to address any challenges or questions that arise during implementation. Feedback mechanisms will also be established to gather input from participants, allowing for iterative improvements to the training program and ongoing professional development initiatives.

By undertaking this comprehensive approach, practical research writing teachers will be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and support necessary to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes through the more effective utilization of cooperative and collaborative learning strategies. This holistic approach to professional development will empower teachers to create dynamic and inclusive learning environments where students can thrive and succeed in their writing endeavors.

In conclusion, this experience has underscored the transformative power of reflective practice and continuous growth in the field of education. As I continue on my journey as a writing teacher, I am committed to embracing opportunities for learning and refinement, ensuring that I can provide the best possible educational experience for my students.

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