

An Evaluation of Cooperative Learning Qualities and Its Impact on Classroom Assessment of Some Teacher Training Colleges in Cameroon: A Qualitative Perspective

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Abstract: *This study examines the qualitative relationship existing between the quality of a number of cooperative learning variables and their impact on classroom assessment of student teachers in Cameroon. These variables are academic, pedagogic, classroom management, and didactic qualities. Cooperative learning has gained much popularity recently in the Cameroonian teacher training department or sector. Therefore, colleges and the sector as a whole need in-depth data on the qualities to be examined and taken into consideration in ensuring effective and efficient classroom assessment. To achieve this purpose, a qualitative study was chosen, designed and a structured interview was used as the tool for data collection; six bilingual teacher training colleges and 6 student teachers respectively participated in the interview. Data collected was analysed with respect to hypothesis using percentages. Findings revealed that the quality of cooperative learning significantly influence classroom assessment. Based on these findings, recommendations are being made to students, teachers, parents, educational community, policy makers and the state (stake holders) on supporting and improving the quality of cooperative learning and evaluation of the teaching and learning processes in the entire educational sector.*

Key words: *Evaluation, cooperative learning, quality, and classroom assessment.*

I. Introduction

Cameroon has gone through a number of evolutions, so has its educational sectors and institutions. With regards to the advent of teacher training colleges in Cameroon and with respect to the denominational and private teacher training colleges for the English Speaking Cameroon, a Teacher training college for girls was opened in Kumba by the St Franciscan Missionaries in 1949, awarding a Grade III and later Grade II certificates. Later, another training college was opened in Mutengene for both men and women. Today what remains of these efforts is the training college in Tatum in the North West province. The Presbyterian Church had three teacher training colleges opened since 1966 and only Presbyterian Teacher Training College (PTTC) Mbengwi opened in 1981 for the training of Grade II teachers now exist.

The Baptist Mission with the German Development Service (DED) opened a teacher training college for Grade I and II Teacher Certificates with boarding facilities in Ndop in 1985. In addition to this, DED through the financial support of the Protestant Association for Cooperation and Development (EZE) initiated in-service training programs for academically qualified, but pedagogically untrained teachers in the Presbyterian and Baptist secondary schools in the North West and South West provinces as from 1994/1995 academic year. The program was to improve skills in the teaching of Mathematics, Pure Sciences, and Food and Nutrition. This initiative provides school-based in-service training opportunities for their teachers. However, today there are about 60 government teacher training colleges, with 11 of them being bilingual. On the other hand there exist hundreds of denominational teacher training colleges as well as private teacher training colleges.

With regards to the French Speaking Cameroon, they had only four private teacher training colleges in the whole territory by 1956, the first of which was opened at Nkongsamba. Between 1957 /1958 the Lutheran Evangelical Church opened a college which had as objective to train teachers. Other strategies for training were adopted by the mission, which lead to the creation of a centre in Ngaoundere in 1975 for the retraining of teachers. Other prospective teachers of the Lutheran schools were trained as private teachers in the then Government Teacher Training Colleges for all levels of the school systems as far back as 1972. Some of the

teachers were trained in Senegal and France. The importance of this was to improve on the quality of teachers at the primary and secondary levels.

In 1988 the leaders of Protestant education in Francophone Africa created a group to reflect on pedagogic reforms for the purpose of ensuring more active participation of pupils in the learning process and relevant programs that would facilitate the integration of pupils in their environment. The reflection led to the creation in 1989 a school of development network (Ecole de Réseaux de Développement) known by the acronym, RED. The pedagogic reform to improve teachers' skills focuses on the development of teaching methods that encouraged independence and initiatives. In addition to institutional offerings, the Catholic mission organized more school-base teacher training at diocesan level with the support of pedagogic animators and teachers needed to participate in a number of sessions to qualify as teachers.

On cooperation, Johnson and Johnson (2000) have a conviction that without the cooperation of its members, society cannot survive, and the society of man has survived because the cooperativeness of its members made survival possible. It was not an advantageous individual here and there who did so, but the group. Also, Gilles (2016) holds that the basic elements of cooperative learning does not only entail that learners sit side by side each other or on the same desk and do their own tasks; neither does it mean that learners are put in the same room and telling them that they are a cooperative group hence advising them to cooperate (Johnson and Johnson, 1998). It is therefore, imperative that qualities of cooperative learning are evaluated for improvement purposes.

II. Review of Literature

2.1. Conceptual Background

Academic Quality

According to Coombs (1985) in Fredriksson et al. (2009) academic quality or quality in education simply refers to how well the knowledge imparted to learners fits the present and future needs of the learners. Coombs is trying to looking at the relevance of that which is taught and learned when academic quality is mentioned. So when talking of academic quality we are looking at how well learners do have a mastery of what they have learnt, we are looking at how relevant that which is learnt to learners day to day life be it in the present as well as in the future. Knowledge and skills should not just been impacted to the learner but learners should have a good mastery of that which they are taught. Likewise that which is taught should be of relevance to learners to enhance transferability. To the Teacher Union, quality and standard are somehow related because the concept quality is not static. To them, quality in academics or education refers to the relevance of subject matter taught as well as the objective of education.

Pedagogical Quality

Pedagogical quality in this study is examined through group competition, motivation, imitation and individual accountability. According to Barber and Mourshed (2007) in Chris and Pearce (2012), Performance in education is greatly influenced by the quality of teaching. Implying that, the high performance or bad performance of learners is based on the quality of teaching. It is in the same light that Barber and Mourshed (2007) state "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" because based on their conclusion, schools with the best teachers are those that have good school systems. Pedagogy centres on teaching, thus the various techniques used in the classroom in transmitting knowledge influences learners' performance. The use of group competition, motivation imitation and individual accountability influence classroom assessment because they have a way to pushing and motivating learners to work hard and put in their best.

Classroom Management quality

Emmer and Stough (2001) believe that classroom management deals with the ability of the teacher to organize and manage learners behaviours which will intend enable them (learners) achieve positive educational outcomes. Thus classroom management establishes a good environment that makes the teaching and learning process effective and possible. To Ogunu (2000) classroom management consists of planning, supervising, controlling and coordinating learner's activities during lessons. Classroom management in this work is examined through classroom management to accommodate group work, monitoring activities in group work,

discipline and rules and regulations. Favourable learning climates fosters learning and comprehension, this explains why teachers in their classrooms should monitor learners as they construct knowledge in their small groups to ensure they are not doing something else than working on assigned task, ensure that there is discipline to put the learners on track and instill a favourable working atmosphere. And as such, influencing learners' performances, hence classroom assessment

Didactic Quality

Didactics can be defined as the science that generally deals with teaching and learning (Dolch, 1967). This explains why Core and Meyer (2002) put forward the following questions in trying to understand the concept of didactics; "*who should learn, from whom, when, with whom, where, how, with what and for which purpose*". Didactics is a science in education that deals with the teaching and learning processes. It's a science of education that lays emphasis on how instructors, learners and knowledge interact to support each other. To this, it's a key subject in teacher education curriculum as it serves as a hinge between the general education subjects and the specific ones. Learning content and activities that reflect learner's prior knowledge and experiences have a way of captivating their interest and enhancing understanding of learners. Thus interesting lessons instil in them the zeal to work better, hence influencing classroom assessment.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Social Constructivism theory by Lev Vygotsky 1962 and Kirkpatrick four level models. Vygotsky (1962) examined social environments influence the learning process. He suggested that learning takes place through the interactions students have with their peers, teachers, and other experts. Consequently, teachers can create a learning environment that maximizes the learner's ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration, and feedback. According to Vygotsky (1978) the theory laid emphasis on the role of social interaction in cognitive development; and the Zone of Proximal Development considered as the area where the most sensitive guidance or instruction should be given in order to allow the learners to developed skills they will use individually, through this, they will develop higher mental functions. This theory has been greatly exploited over the years in enhancing the qualities of cooperative learning.

Furthermore, Kirkpatrick (1996) states that Kirkpatrick four level model is designed for evaluating learning outcomes in training programs. It focuses on the outcome of a program. This model puts together information in assessing four hierarchical levels of program outcome. The first hierarchical level assesses reactions, second level assesses learning, third level is transfer or changes, and the fourth hierarchical level assesses the final results of the program. Although this model has been appreciated, Holton (1996) holds that it does not take into consideration the relationship between program elements and programs context, the effectiveness of the resource used and other important questions. However, the data gotten from all these levels are exploited to improve the quality of an educational program.

2.3. General Research Question

To what extent does the quality of cooperative learning influences classroom assessment?

2.3.1. Specific Research Questions

- 1) To what extent does academic quality of cooperative learning influence classroom assessment?
- 2) Does pedagogic quality of cooperative learning influences classroom assessment?
- 3) Does classroom management quality of cooperative learning influences classroom assessment?
- 4) To what extend does didactic quality of cooperative learning influences classroom assessment?

III. Research Methodology

This study is carried out in six (6) out of the ten (10) regions of Cameroon, and six (6) Government Bilingual Teacher Training Colleges (G.B.T.T.Cs). This includes the North (G.B.T.T.C Garoua), Adamawa (G.B.T.T.C Ngaoundere), East (G.B.T.T.C Bertoua), Centre (G.B.T.T.C Yaounde), North West (G.B.T.T.C Bamenda) and Littoral region (G.B.T.T.C Edea). Cameroon is a country in central Africa, situated in the bay of East Atlantic ocean called the Bight of Biafra (World Population Review, 2019). It consists of 10 regions, 58 divisions, and 360 subdivisions with headquarters in Yaounde. Cameroon has 60 primary school teacher training colleges. The investigation made use of interview guide as qualitative data collection method, technique and instrument used for collecting qualitative data on the quality of cooperation learning and its impact on classroom assessment. Six (6) participants took part in the interview process and presented their experiences and views on

question items asked by the researcher or moderator. The participants were one from each college containing the sample population of this study. The respondents were schooled on the modalities of interview.

To obtain the target population for the interview, the non-probability sampling was used, wherein the participants chosen for the interview were drawn from the sample that resulted from the simple random sampling. In addition to non-probability sampling, the convenience sampling technique was used which is a non-probability sampling technique. Amin (2005), the convenience method is also referred to as an “accidental” sample where by the researcher selects units that is convenient or closes at hand or easy to reach. Thus some 6 student-teachers were chosen from the sample for interview (structured- interview) for they were the most convenient and readily available participants for the study.

Structured interview

The researcher used a structured interview to collect quality data on the evaluation of the quality of cooperative learning and its impact on classroom assessment. The interview guide and structured questions were drafted by the researchers and sent to the WhatsApp inbox of the respective participants in G.B.T.T.C Garoua, G.B.T.T.C Ngaoundere, and G.B.T.T.C Bamenda due to health reasons, distance and insecurity in some of these regions. But for G.B.T.T.C Bertoua, Edea, and Yaounde the researchers went down the field on three different occasions to interview participants since it was accessible to her. The participants equally answered by expressing their views in relation to the subject under study. interview guide required more than a straight forward response, for students- teachers had to respond by expressing their views. Thus it was little demanding and lengthy. The interview was carried out as such; the researcher constructed 24 questions (items) which were divided in to 5 main sections based on the main variables of the study.

The researchers worked with the participants of G.B.T.T.C Garoua, G.B.T.T.C Ngaoundere, and G.B.T.T.C Bamenda for five different weeks. The first week, the participants were in boxed the first 5 questions (items) based on some main variables of the study. Their responses were sent directly to the inbox of the researchers and came in, through the following ways: voice mails, text, video and audio call through WhatsApp. The following week, the researcher equally sent the next five set of questions (items) on the structure interview guide based on the variables of the first research question through the WhatsApp inboxes of the participants. The respondents did same by sending their responses through text messages, video and audio calls through WhatsApp. The same procedure was repeated for the third, fourth and fifth week based on the different variables of the second, and third and fourth research questions respectively. At the end of the fifth week, the findings were analysed according to the respective research questions. This technique enabled the researchers to gather an in-depth knowledge on the subject under study due to the fact that participants’ feelings, attitude, and opinions could be seen and judged and this was relevant for the study.

Table 1: Sample population according to schools and regions

REGION	COLLEGE	SAMPLE
Centre art	G.B.T.T.C Yaounde	1
East	G.B.T.T.C Bertoua	1
Extreme North	G.B.T.T.C Maroua	1
Littoral	G.B.T.T.C Edea	1
North	G.B.T.T.C Garoua	1
North West	G.B.T.T.C Bamenda	1
Total		6

Table 1 shows the distribution of structured interview participants according to their colleges and regions. Each teacher training college was represented by one interviewee.

IV. Presentation of Findings and Discussions

4.1. Research Question 1: To what extent does academic quality of cooperative learning influence classroom assessment?

On the issue of the concept “academic quality”, all of the six respondents had a minimum understanding of the term academic quality, thus giving a 100% understanding of that concept. However, they advanced different definitions to the said concept, nevertheless they were still within the scope of the meaning of academic quality as some saw it as that which learners have learnt so well and have a mastery of and

enhances integration in the society, others holds that it refers to the value of what learners have learnt, also some referred to it as all the learning opportunities offered to learners to enable them achieve rewards or the learning objectives outlined in the official syllabuses, courses and programs.

On the role of cooperative learning in achieving academic quality, the respondents were in accord at a rate of 100%. They all agreed that academic quality can be achieved through cooperative learning. They viewed cooperative learning as a catalyst to the attainment of academic quality because learners' interaction during group work brings about an increased in learning. This increase in learning fosters academic gains and facilitate students in completing their work and be rewarded at the end of the course. On the other hand, some of the participants felt that in heterogeneous groupings there are different abilities which strengthen slow learners and provide them with a platform to easily construct knowledge, acquire skills and improve on their performances. The last set of respondents hold that, it puts learners at the centred of the teaching and learning process, thus learners are able to construct their own knowledge base on mastery. Mastery equally enhances transferability which improves academic quality.

On the influence self-constructed knowledge on classroom assessment, a majority of the participants on a rate of 83.33% accepted the point of view that classroom assessment can be influenced when learners construct their own knowledge, against a minority of 16.66% who was not in accord with the other interviewees. Those who were of this view presented reasons like; some questions are open-ended and require learners to bring in their different experiences. Others thought that if learners are effectively guided on the assigned task, they will construct useful knowledge which will influence classroom assessment. The point of view for some was that since the main objective of assessing learners is to see if objectives have been attained and verify students ability construct knowledge related to the objectives, then classroom assessment will be influenced by auto knowledge construction. The last but not the least school of thought was of the point of view that, learners constructing their own knowledge facilitates the teaching and learning process by enhancing comprehension and mastery which will ease assessment on teacher's part.

4.2. Research Question 2: Does pedagogic quality of cooperative learning influences classroom assessment?

On the issue of the difference between group work, group competition and motivation, and other instructional strategies, the participants shared diverse views and opinions but they had common concepts running through their different responses like: in group work, usually there are group competitions which push the learners to work harder. Another school of thought holds that all members are active in group task as well as construct their own knowledge for the accomplishment of group task. Others hold that, group work is a learner's centred strategy thus engages learners in the assigned tasks and motivation encourages learners to work hard so as to achieve rewards. Thus learners engagement in the teaching and learning process as they interact in group task will influence their performances, hence classroom assessment.

On the point on the influence of group work, group competition and motivation, and other instructional strategies on classroom assessment, all the interviewee shared the view that the above instructional strategies can influence classroom assessment, thus giving an agreement rate of 100%. According to the views of the first group of participants, when learners are assigned tasks, they are given clear instructions as to how to carry out task. To another, it is because instructional strategies gives the possibilities to the learners to build self-esteem, build knowledge, and do auto clarification; this enhances the attainment of assessment objectives. Others concluded that it make learners to be active, therefore the slow learners are pulled up by the fast (intelligent) learners; moreover when learners are active and construct knowledge, it gives them added advantage with respect to performance during classroom assessments.

Furthermore, with respect to how cooperative learning facilitates the teaching and learning process, some of the reasons advanced as to how cooperative learning facilitates the teaching and learning process are as follows: the first group of participants thought that given that learners are engaged in accomplishing assigned tasks, they end up building their own knowledge which fosters understanding as they interact, and the teacher simply serves as a facilitator or guide. Another group were of the opinion that since cooperative learning is learner centred, it enhances retention of knowledge in learners and encourage them to work harder, making the work load of the teacher lighter. To the third group of participants, learners are assigned tasks and they work in their little groups where they brain storm and construct knowledge. Constructing knowledge enhances their

understanding and mastery of that which is learnt; while teachers on their part just give clear instructions and guide them in the work, hence facilitating the teaching and learning process.

4.3. Research Question 3: Does classroom management quality of cooperative learning influences classroom assessment?

With regard to the views of the interviewee on their understanding of the concept of “management quality”, they presented diverse views. However, a majority made up of 66.66% of the responses had a lot of elements in common. This had to do with the organization of the classroom to enhance a smooth functioning of the teaching and learning processes. Thus a majority of the participant were abreast with the above concept. On the other hand there were 33.33% whose views of the said concept consisted of the organization of the class and the teacher exercising control and his authority over the classroom

Also, on the issue of how a favourable atmosphere can be maintained in the classroom when learners are working in groups, the respective participants advanced different ways of maintaining a favourable climate in group work, which were in line to maintaining a favourable working condition. Nevertheless, a minority of the respondents rated at 33.33% shared a common view, when they talked of teacher monitoring learners frequently to give them some assurance as well as motivating them. While a majority of 66.66% gave diverse means such as addressing learners’ needs, celebrating the learners’ success as well as asking questions on group work to individual group members.

Furthermore, on the phenomenon of ensuring learners contribution to the accomplishment of task assigned to them, participants advanced diverse means of ensuring learners participation in tasks. The first group of respondent affirm that, the teacher should have a good mastery of the different types of learners so as to make sure to directly ask questions to slow learners as he monitors work in their groups. The next thought that learners should be occupied by apportioning responsibilities to them. To some others, tasks assigned should make use of visual aids and didactic materials to captivate the learners’ interest so they can stay focused.

With regard to measures for smooth functioning or implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom for quality purposes, 50% of participants thought that constructing heterogeneous groups and groups which are not large is one of the measures that can enhance the smooth functioning of cooperative learning. To others participants, as a measure; learners should be apportion tasks, there should be division of labour, everyone should be engaged in doing something to the general accomplishment of group task.

4.4. Research Question 4: To what extend does didactic quality of cooperative learning influences classroom assessment?

On the issue of the influence of classroom assessment by learners’ responsibility on learning, the interviewee at a rate of 100% shared the view that learners taking responsibility for their learning influences classroom assessment. To this, the following reasons were given; responsible for their learning simply makes learners to construct knowledge, their skills for learning is empowered and there are able to understand what they have learned. Moreover, when they construct knowledge, it’s possible to get additional knowledge and have a better understanding which enhances mastery. This will go a way to influence learners’ performances as well as classroom assessment.

Also, on the phenomenon of the influence of didactic materials on classroom assessment, responses gotten from all the participants demonstrated that classroom assessment can be influenced positively or negatively by didactic materials. Some of the reasons postulated by some respondents indicated that when the didactic materials that are used reflect the local colour of learners’ environment, there will be a positive influence and vice versa. The next group of participants had the view that didactic materials have a way of making lessons concrete and interesting, thus influencing learner’s performance. The last group of respondents shares the view that interesting and captivating lessons have a way of increasing learners understanding of the subject matter. Thus learners’ understanding will certainly influence classroom assessment.

V. Conclusion And Recommendation

Cooperative learning has the ability of influencing classroom assessment through interaction, individual accountability and knowledge construction which enhances mastery and integration, consequently

improving the quality of education. Goal number 4 of sustainable development (SDG) dwells on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities to all. Quality education is that which inculcates in learners the ability to master and integrate knowledge, skills and abilities which fosters lifelong learning through the “*development of human potentials through continuously supportive process which stimulates and empower individuals to acquire all the knowledge, skills and understanding they will require throughout their life time and apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments*” (Longworth and Davies, p.22). Therefore, the views of the respective interviewees have answered questions and address worries with respect to academic, pedagogic, classroom management, and didactic qualities of cooperative learning and how they influence classroom assessment of student teachers.

Based on the findings of this work, the researchers made the following recommendations with the potentials of improving the quality of cooperative learning used in respective classrooms as well as generally improving the teaching and learning processes: Learners should understand cooperative learning has the ability to make them have a good mastery of what they are learning, as such; knowledge acquired in the classroom can easily be used anywhere and at any time due to mastery. Teachers should understand that the use of cooperative learning is very important when it comes to developing learners academically and socially. To this, those in charge of drawing school syllabuses should try to bring in content and methods that will enhance the use of cooperative learning in the schools. They should equally provide teachers with the necessary facilities for the implementation of cooperative learning as well as basic resources needed to implement cooperative learning during seminars and workshops. To this, parents are called upon to encourage the learners by providing them with necessary materials, equipment, finances that will help in accomplishing assigned group tasks.

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