Teachers' Design and Implementation of Collaborative Learning Tasks in Higher Education

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Abstract : Collaborative learning (CL) has been regarded as a way to facilitate students to gain knowledge and improve social skills. In China, lecturers in higher education institutions have commonly adopted CL in their daily practice. However, such a strategy could not be effective when it is designed and applied in an inappropriate way. Previous research hardly focused on how CL was applied in Chinese universities. This present study aims to gain a deep understanding of how Chinese lecturers design and implement CL tasks. The researchers interviewed ten lecturers from different faculties in various universities in China and usedGroup Learning Activity Instructional Design (GLAID) framework to analyse the data. We found that not all lecturers pay enough attention to eight essential components (proposed by GLAID) when they designed CL tasks, especially the components of Structure and Guidance. Meanwhile, only a small part of lecturers made formative assessment to help students improve learning. We also discuss the strengths and limitations and CL design and further provide suggestions to the lecturers who intend to use CL in class. Research Objectives: The aims of the present research are threefold. We intend to 1) gain a deep understanding of how Chinese lecturers design and implement collaborative learning (CL) tasks, 2) find strengths and limitations of CL design in higher education, and 3) give suggestions about how to improve the design and implement. Research Methods: This research adopted qualitative methods. We applied the semi-structured interview method to interview ten Chinese lecturers about how they designed and implemented CL tasks in their courses. There were 9 questions in the interview protocol focusing on eight components of GLAID. Then, underpinning the GLAID framework, we utilized the coding reliability thematic analysis method to analyse the research data. The coding work was done by two PhD students whose research fields are CL, and the Cohen's Kappa was 0.772 showing the inter-coder reliability was good. Contribution: Though CL has been commonly adopted in China, few studies have paid attention to the details about how lecturers designed and implemented CL tasks in practice. This research addressed such a gap and found not lecturers were aware of how to design CL and felt it difficult to structure the task and guide the students on collaboration, and further ensure student engagement in CL. In summary, this research advocates for teacher training; otherwise, students may not gain the expected learning outcomes.

Keywords : collaborative learning, higher education, task design, GLAID framework

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