STRATEGIES OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN A COURSE OF THE DEGREE IN TOURISM

Pilar Alberca, Laura Rodriguez
UNED National Distance Education University (SPAIN)

Abstract

Collaborative learning includes a set of methodological strategies that emerge from the new approach to higher education. Group work is a key element to be developed in teaching-learning activities. To achieve this, emphasis should be placed on the active participation of students in the process.

In the case of the university, there are several educational platforms that constitute an ideal means of integrating collaborative work. Given the importance of performance improvement strategies, comparative effective analysis of training and innovative actions are of interest.

The project that we present focuses on the design of voluntary activities for students. The theoretical framework corresponds to the collaborative work literature. In order to develop the study, a course of the Degree in Tourism has been selected. Through the aLF platform the teacher presents the basic contents that the students have to work on, and complement to the traditional printed materials.

The main objective of the study has been the organization of evaluating the activities, separated from the conventional modes, in the framework of collaborative work. To this end, students are involved in an active learning process, through the elaboration of supervised practical contents for the subject. The main results are presented relating to the performance achieved by the students who participated in the project. Results related to the dynamization of the virtual course are also presented.

The main conclusion is related to the impact that the design of activities in the framework of collaborative work contributes to the dynamization of virtual courses. In particular using tools that are related to the communication in the virtual course.

The use of the virtual platform based on strategies with pre-designed activities and the use of other resources allows us to achieve improvements in the teaching process. There is also a positive impact on the academic performance of the activities designed in the framework of collaborative work. The result is more generally favorable for students who have participated in the control group. In a dynamic context, it would be interesting to expand the analysis that allows us to make longitudinal comparisons. Future extensions will try to expand the number of participants based on increasing the motivating actions.

Keywords: Collaborative learning Innovation, technology, research projects, higher education, distance learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

This project focuses on the theoretical framework of virtual environments, distance learning and collaborative work [1] [2] [3]. It forms part of a group of initiatives targeted at developing the assessment of learning achievements [4] [5] while focusing on the implementation of new teaching methodologies [6] The aim is to improve continuous assessment and address other prominent issues such as collaborative learning and the effectiveness and enhancement of academic performance [7]. The project consisted of the conception, organisation, design and assessment of voluntary activities and tasks, which have an impact on the continuous assessment of students studying for a degree in tourism.

Our overall objective is to design and organise teaching and assessment activities that enable students to take part in a learning process geared towards improving academic performance by providing voluntary activities that impact on continuous assessment.

Accordingly, tasks have been created for an online course and deadlines set for students to complete these activities; once they have been assessed by the teaching staff, a decision is made as to whether to include them in the online course. Some of the proposed activities consist of students coming up with multiple choice questions with a single correct answer, including feedback or a brief explanation.
as to why the answer is correct. Additionally, students are expected to make PowerPoint presentations on several different topics.

To encourage participation, the following rewards system has been put in place: students who correctly complete the proposed activities receive an additional qualification that can be added to their overall final grade, provided their final grade is a pass.

2 METHODOLOGY

The development of the project activities was carried out in a number of stages:

- First stage - (Planning Stage): In practice, this entails the planning and design of activities and tasks to be carried out. It consists of drafting guidelines to be incorporated into the online course.
- Second Stage - (Organisation Stage): Receiving applications from participants, setting deadlines and responding to any doubts expressed by students about the activities in the online course.
- Third Stage - (Monitoring Stage): Checking the work submitted.
- Fourth Stage (Assessment Stage): Assessing the work submitted, standardising the format of the files submitted, and deliberating as to whether the activities will be incorporated into the online course the following year. This stage concludes with an analysis of the questionnaires completed by students.
- Fifth Stage (Final Conclusions): Drawing conclusions and writing the final report.

The instruments applied by the teaching staff were the communication tools that form part of the virtual course, and which allowed students taking part in the project to submit their tasks. Additionally, the Teaching Staff designed a feedback form to determine the extent to which the participating students thought they had met their goals.

Of the 40 students who originally applied to take part in the project, the final number of students who submitted the activities was 33.

3 RESULTS

The activities designed enabled us to carry out two types of analysis:

First, an analysis of the impact on the performance of the group of students who took part in the project. Second, an analysis of the feedback forms of students who took part in the project regarding the effectiveness of the proposed activities and possible suggestions for improvement.

Regarding the performance of students who took part in the project compared to the rest of the students, generally speaking, the results are more positive for the groups of students who carried out the net-based activities (NET group) than for the group who did not (NON-NET group).

For the grading scale, this hypothesis uses "Fail", "Pass" and "Distinction":

- The percentage of students who were awarded a "Fail" grade in the NET group is lower than the percentage of students who were awarded a "Fail" grade in the "NON-NET" group.
- The percentage of students who were awarded a "Pass" grade in the NET group is higher than the percentage of students who were awarded a "Pass" grade in the "NON-NET" group.
- The percentage of students who achieved a “Distinction” in the NET group is higher than the percentage of students who achieved a “Distinction” in the “NON-NET” group.

It should be pointed out that the conclusions are limited given the number of observations of students in the NET group (33 students).

Overall, the findings of the questionnaire reflect positive feedback of participating students, in the following areas:

- Completing the activities helped to provide a better understanding of the assigned topic.
- Activities planned by the teaching team were rated positively by students.
Regarding preferences for one activity over another, there is no clear favourite, with similar percentage values for all activities. This was also the case when students were asked which activity they would eliminate.

Regarding the additional activities to consider for inclusion in future editions of the project, participating students provided us with some interesting suggestions. Some of the most interesting ones are as follows: practical and numerical exercises, drawing diagrams and writing summaries, and the possibility of including short-answer questions.

The time taken by students to carry out both activities ranged between 3 and 5 hours.

The rewards system was considered fair and participation in the project was rated very positively, as it helps students to better understand the chapter.

4 CONCLUSIONS

By implementing this teaching innovation network, we incorporated new didactic approaches into the teaching methodology. This involved designing, organising and assessing different activities targeted at improving the assessment of learning achievements, improving continuous assessment and addressing other prominent issues such as collaborative learning and the effectiveness and enhancement of academic performance.

The main conclusion relates to the impact that implementing voluntary activities has on improving continuous assessment and learning achievements. Consequently, and following an in-depth analysis of the effect on academic results, the positive impact of the activities designed should be taken with caution given the small number of students who volunteered to take part. The results are more favourable in the case of the NET group, in all grade groups, except for the “Very Good” group. We do not know why this difference arises, but we believe that it may well be due to the limited size of the sample group of participating students. This result may require further qualification and should be reinterpreted by breaking the group down into smaller subsets (Very Good - 7, Very Good - 7.5, Very Good - 8, etc.) given that the group of participating students who received a “Very Good” grade have a higher average numerical score than those of the NON-NET group.

The main limitations of the study are related to the number of observations, which affects any conclusions that can be drawn about the entire group of students on the course when it comes to comparing results.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNED - Research Networks for Teaching Innovation: development of pilot projects for the improvement of teaching quality in the European Higher Education Area

REFERENCES


