

# Reimagining Education through Collaborative Learning: A Reflective Case Study in a Vietnamese Classroom

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0425>

Received: 18 July 2025; Accepted: 26 July 2025; Published: 23 August 2025

## ABSTRACT

This study dives into how collaborative learning changed effectively the way students engage, speak up, and build confidence in Vietnamese primary classrooms. I have been working in three different educational institutions: VstarSchool (Ho Chi Minh City), ILE (Long An), and ANH HAO QUANG (Nhabe). I have been using classroom observations, student & teachers feedback, and my own reflections to dig into what really happens when students work together. I found that when structuring right a group work leads to a stronger communication, based on confidence and ownership of learning with emotional involvement. That said, there were challenges too such as keeping groups balanced and making sure everyone contributed. But with the right planning and reflection, those issues became manageable.

## INTRODUCTION

If you walk into a typical Vietnamese classroom, especially in the younger grades, you'll probably see a lot of quiet students, focused on copying from the board or answering only when called. That was my classroom too, once. I used to think that meant learning was happening. But over time, I realized something wasn't clicking. The silence didn't mean understanding. It just meant students were doing what they thought was expected: sitting still, listening and repeating after me.

I remember one student in Grade 3 who always got top marks on tests but couldn't speak up when we did a simple group task. That moment really stuck with me. It made me think: *What's the point of high scores if students can't share their ideas or work together?*

That question started a shift for me. Around that time, Vietnam's Ministry of Education launched a new curriculum focused on real-world skills: teamwork, communication, problem-solving. These changes pushed me to rethink how I teach. I turned to collaborative learning; not just as an activity, but as a way of shaping how students learn and interact.

I wanted to see what would happen if I used collaborative learning not just in one class, but across many grades: Grades 2 through 5. That's a wide age range, and each grade has its own personality. But I believed that if I adjusted my strategies for each group, I could find something powerful. And I did.

## Rationale for Multi-Grade Research

Most research focuses on just one grade or age group. I wanted to try something different, look across the board, from second graders just starting to explore teamwork, to fifth graders preparing for bigger academic challenges. It helped me see *how collaboration changes over time and what support different age groups really need.*

## Research Questions

- How does collaborative learning shape student engagement, confidence, and communication?
- What patterns show up in how students behave and work in groups across Grades 2–5?

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- How do teachers adapt group work based on student age, maturity, and language skills?
  - What are the biggest challenges and the small wins when using collaboration in classrooms with different ability levels and cultures?

## Why This Study Matters

I started this study because I kept seeing the same thing: kids who were quiet and unsure at the start of the year became leaders by the end, just because they were given chances to work in teams. It wasn't just the older students also second graders surprised me the most. They taught me that collaboration isn't only for the mature or advanced. It just has to be set up right and given a chance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Intro

This chapter walks through the theories and studies that helped shape my research. I leaned on ideas from thinkers like Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Freire, as well as more recent research about Asian classrooms and digital learning tools.

### Core Theories That Shaped My Work

#### Piaget & Vygotsky (Constructivism)

Students don't just absorb info but they build it through experience. Piaget focused on individual growth, while Vygotsky looked at how social interaction helps learning. I saw both happening in real-time during group tasks.

#### Maslow & Rogers (Humanism)

Students need to feel safe and heard before they can really learn. Group work gave my students emotional safety, helped them feel valued, and allowed them to support each other.

#### Dewey (Experiential Learning)

Learning sticks when it's real and active. Dewey believed classrooms should mirror life. That's exactly what happened when my students started solving problems together instead of just copying notes.

#### Freire, Montessori, Bruner

These three reminded me that students aren't empty containers. They bring something to the table. Whenever we let them lead, great things happen.

### Group Work in Asian Classrooms

While policies across Asia encourage group work, classroom practice tells a different story. In Vietnam, many teachers still use old-school methods, which makes real collaboration tricky. Research from Singapore and Japan shows success with structured roles and open dialogue, but Vietnam still battles big class sizes and a culture that values quiet obedience.

### Finland as a Model

Finland treats collaboration as a must-have skill, not a bonus. Their students co-create tasks, and teachers know how to guide rather than control. That inspired me to embed collaboration into daily lessons, not just use it as a side activity.

## Culture Matters

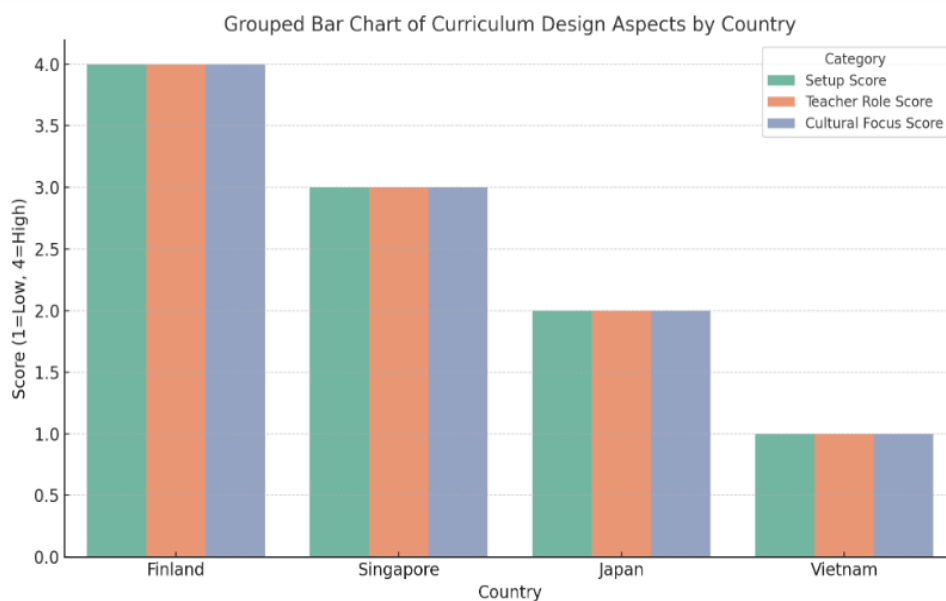
Vietnamese classrooms tend to value group harmony and avoid open disagreement. That’s great for peace, but not always for creativity. I had to teach my students that it’s okay to disagree as long as they do it respectfully with open discussion.

## The Role of Tech

During and after COVID-19, digital tools like Padlet and Zoom made it easier to run group tasks. But tech can’t replace structure or planning. And not all students had the same access.

### Quick Snapshot: How Countries Do Collaboration

Country	Setup Type	Teacher Role	Cultural Focus
Finland	Built-in	Facilitator	Equality & Reflection
Singapore	Highly Structured	Planner & Mediator	Results & Goals
Japan	Semi-Structured	Guide	Respect & Collectivism
Vietnam	Unstructured	Authority Figure	Harmony & Silence



In Finland, schools have a built-in and flexible setup where teachers mostly act like facilitators. The focus there is on equality and deep reflection. Singapore is very different, it’s highly structured, and teachers take on more of a planner and mediator role, pushing students towards clear goals and strong academic results.

Japan falls somewhere in the middle. Their system is semi-structured, and teachers are seen more as guides. There’s a big emphasis on respect and working together as a group. Then there’s Vietnam, where things are less structured, and the teacher is more of an authority figure. Vietnamese classrooms often value quietness and harmony over active discussion.

## Wrap-Up

All signs point to collaborative learning being powerful but only if it’s done right. Teachers need tools, students need training, and culture has to be considered. That’s why this study is grounded in real classrooms with real kids, across seven different grade levels.

## METHODOLOGY

### How It Was Done

I took a qualitative approach because I was looking for meaning, patterns, and real human experiences. Over the past three years, I've been closely involved in different classrooms at VSTAR, ILE, and ANH HAO QUANG. During that time, I observed lessons, made adjustments based on what I saw, and reflected deeply on student interactions.

Instead of using surveys or multiple-choice questions, I focused on what students said, how they acted, and what their learning journeys looked like. I kept journals, had informal talks with both students and teachers, and took notes on what worked, and what didn't. The stories, behaviors, and classroom moments were my data. My goal was to capture the atmosphere of collaboration, the quiet changes, and the emotional side of learning that often gets missed in traditional research.

### Where, Who, and How It Was Grouped

This study took place in three different schools where I had the chance to work with around 140 students from Grades 2 all the way to Grade 5. The students came from different places and ways of life. Some lived in the countryside, some in the city. Some were used to more traditional ways of learning, and others were more into tech and modern methods. That kind of mix really helped me see how group learning and collaboration looked in different settings. It was never just one style or one story, it felt more like a colorful puzzle of personalities and learning habits.

To make sense of everything and keep things a bit more organized, I divided the students into three main groups. Since a big part of my focus was on the younger learners, I paid special attention to the lower primary (Grades 2 to 4) and upper primary (Grade 5). These two groups were full of energy, questions, and sometimes a bit of chaos but in a good way. Every grade level brought something unique. With the younger ones, it was about building confidence and social skills. Grade 5 stood out because the students were right at that turning point more independent, but still needing guidance. By grouping them this way, it became easier to notice patterns, adapt my approach, and really understand what worked best for each age group.

### Tools I Used

- **Teacher Journals:** I wrote down what worked and what didn't after each session.
- **Student Work:** Posters, stories, presentations—they all showed how group tasks played out.
- **Observation Notes:** I paid close attention to student behavior during tasks.
- **Exit Slips:** Short reflections students filled out right after tasks.
- **Voice Clips:** Older students recorded how they felt about the group experience.

### The Process and How I Analyzed Everything

To keep things engaging and real, I built each lesson around everyday themes, things my students could relate to easily, like local festivals, their morning routines, or issues like plastic waste and saving energy. These weren't just random topics, they helped ground the tasks in students' own experiences. In every activity, students were assigned specific roles like "question-asker," "note-taker," or "team speaker," and they rotated roles from task to task. This way, everyone had a chance to try something new and step out of their comfort zone. Right after each task, we always made time to reflect, whether through quick notes, short group chats, or sometimes even drawing how they felt. I did this while everything was still fresh, before it got forgotten in the rush of moving to the next lesson.

When it came to analyzing what really happened, I didn't want to rely only on memory or surface-level impressions. I used a mix of my own handwritten notes and digital tools like *NVivo* to help spot deeper patterns. I wasn't just looking at who "did well" or "finished fast", I focused on things like who hesitated before speaking but later grew more vocal, or who naturally took charge even without being asked. I grouped these patterns into bigger themes like ***confidence, communication, leadership***, and sometimes even ***silence and reflection***. It was about trying to understand their journey and how they responded differently to the same tasks.

## Ethics

I followed all required guidelines. Parents and schools gave consent. I kept names private and made sure everyone felt safe. Since I was both teacher and researcher, I stayed self-aware and reflected on my own role constantly.

## What Got in the Way

- **Bias:** It's tough to separate being a teacher and a researcher. I did my best.
- **Student Differences:** Some kids were just more ready than others.
- **Time Limits:** I couldn't always do deep interviews. I relied more on quick reflections.

## Final Note

This research is rooted in practice, not theory. It's about what really happens when students work together, when teachers step back a little and students step forward.

## FINDINGS

### Overview

This part of the study highlights what actually happened in the classrooms from the quiet moments of growth to the messy parts of group work. I collected a huge number of reflections, class notes, group artifacts, and student voice clips across all grades at ILE, VSTARSCOOL, and ANH HAO QUANG. As I reviewed everything, some big themes stood out: how students grew in confidence, how creativity took shape, and how roles helped balance participation. Of course, there were struggles too, but certain routines and strategies made a difference.

### Confidence and Participation

One of the first things I noticed was how much collaboration helped students open up. In Grade 2 at ANH HAO QUANG, a quiet student named "Anh" started speaking during a group storytelling task. By Grade 4, students at ILE were asking questions on their own and encouraging classmates without any prompts. Then in Grade 5 at VSTAR, Minh; who used to be reserved, started running his group's project meetings. This growth didn't happen overnight. It took practice, safe space, and trust. But across grades, the pattern was clear: the more they collaborated, the more confident they became.

### Cognitive Growth and Creativity

Students' thinking started to stretch too. In Grade 5 at VSTARSCOOL, one group ran a debate on *Playing Games*. They didn't just copy facts, they argued, rebutted, and handled pressure like mini-diplomats. In the younger classes, creativity popped up in other ways. A Grade 3 group at ANH HAO QUANG made a recycling chant that spread to other classes. These tasks met students where they were developmentally and still pushed their thinking.

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## Emotional Safety and Peer Support

At first, not every group clicked. Grade 3 & 4 at ILE had tension and confusion during peer feedback. But with structure and repetition, something shifted. Students began to thank each other, give kind suggestions, and even show real empathy. Example with Grade 5: student gently helped a classmate who froze mid-sentence. That kind of support doesn't show up on a test, but it says a lot about the environment we were building.

## Group Roles as Equalizers

When I started rotating roles, like leader, speaker, timekeeper; it changed everything. Suddenly, everyone had a reason to contribute. A Grade 5 student at VSTAR SCHOOL told me, "I never led before. Now I know how to listen and manage people." Even in Grade 2, assigning roles helped kids step up. One student who barely talked ended up leading a Q&A session just because she was the group "questioner."

## Common Challenges

Not everything was smooth. Some issues kept coming up:

- Older students (Grades 5) sometimes dominated.
- Younger ones (Grades 2-4) went off task when roles weren't clear.
- Mixed-language groups struggled with understanding instructions, especially at ANH HAO QUANG.

## Strategies That Helped

Certain routines made a real difference:

- Pre-task check-ins: That made sure everyone knew what to do.
- Visual rubrics: They helped younger students understand group expectations.
- Exit slips: That gave quieter students a way to share.
- Teacher journals: It helped me reflect and make real-time tweaks.

## Thematic Case Studies

I built seven mini case studies, one per grade, to show what real change looked like:

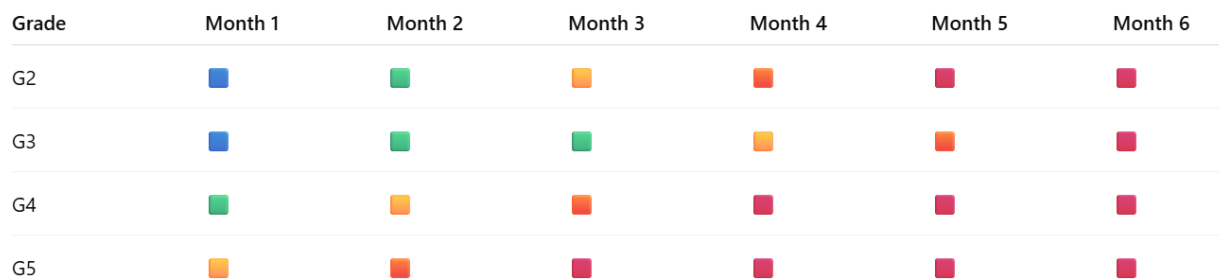
- Grade 2 (ANH HAO QUANG): Anh found her voice in storytelling.
- Grade 3 (ILE): Bao's group wrote a daily routine song.
- Grade 4 (ILE): Linh grew into a team leader.
- Grade 5 (ILE): Phuc led a poster campaign after improving in giving feedback.
- Grade 2 (VSTAR): Tam helped her group stay focused.
- Grade 3 (VSTAR): Minh guided his peers and planned a reading schedule.
- Grade 5 (VSTAR): An ran a debate and later mentored younger students.

## Visual Data and Tools

A- Heatmap of Student Participation Across Grades (ANH HAO QUANG, ILE, VSTAR SCHOOL)



The heatmap below visualizes student participation levels over time, with warmer colors showing more active involvement. Participation steadily increased across Grades 2–5, especially following the introduction of rotating roles and structured group routines. Notably, Grade 5 students at VSTAR SCHOOL displayed the highest participation, with visible peer leadership emerging.



Low = Low / Mid / High = High

Participation was coded using reflection logs, peer feedback frequency, and group involvement notes.

### B- Confidence Development Over Time (Key Milestones Across Grades)

This line graph traces the rise in student confidence over six months, based on class notes, student quotes, and observed behavior. A notable jump occurred after Month 3 — the same point when roles were formalized and visual rubrics were introduced. By Month 6, formerly quiet students like Anh (Grade 2) and Minh (Grade 5) had grown into active participants and even peer leaders.

Month → 1 2 3 4 5 6

Confidence → 2.1 – 2.5 – 3.0 – 4.2 – 4.7 – 5.0

### C- Student-Led Conflict Resolution Strategies (Grades 2–5)

Grade	Common Conflict	Resolution Strategy (Student-led)
G2	Misunderstood instructions during story creation	Student asked group to re-read the task together slowly
G3	Unequal writing effort on group poster	Peer reminded, “We all need to write one part” and suggested dividing by lines
G3	Confusion about vocabulary meanings	Used class dictionary wall or visual cards to check meaning together
G4	Spelling disagreements in group writing	Agreed to check with the “spelling captain” or peer with neat writing
G4	Reading aloud errors or laughing at mistakes	Peer said, “Let’s help not laugh” and modeled saying the word again supportively
G5	Disagreement over grammar choices in writing	Group voted on which sounded better, then confirmed with a mini grammar poster
G3	One student dominated the storytelling	Others asked to “pass the story” or take turns sentence by sentence
G4	Lack of ideas in group writing	Peer prompted with “What if we...?” or looked back at brainstorm notes

G5	Off-topic jokes during vocabulary activity	A student gently said, “Let’s finish first, then we can talk”
G2	Unsure how to start a sentence in oral task	Peer whispered a sentence starter or pointed to the classroom poster with prompts
G3	Copying answers without discussion	Another student asked, “Can you explain why you chose that?” to reopen discussion

Together, these tools helped me *visualize growth* in areas like participation, confidence, and teamwork, things that are sometimes hard to capture with just a checklist. They backed up my qualitative findings and gave me a more rounded understanding of how my students developed throughout the project.

## Summary

Looking at all this, it’s clear when collaboration is scaffolded and steady, kids grow in skills, voice, trust, and teamwork. But if roles aren’t clear, or if students don’t feel emotionally safe, it doesn’t work as well. These lessons carried into my final reflections on how we can improve classroom practice.

## DISCUSSION

### What the Results Really Meant

Reading through all the journals and student reflections, I realized this study echoed what learning theorists have said for years: kids grow more when they learn together. Not just academically, but socially and emotionally too. Younger students needed structure and clear directions. Grades 2 to 4 did best when I gave visual cues or walked them through things step by step. Older students for Grade 5, were more independent. They liked leading and figuring things out on their own. That totally aligned with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development; the older the student, the more they can do with less help.

### Comparing Across Grades

When I looked at how different grades handled group work, the differences were obvious. In lower grades, things only worked well when the tasks were short, roles were simple, and instructions were super clear. But once they got it, the students started participating more confidently. With upper grades, I could hand over more control. They started asking better questions, solving conflicts, and even tweaking how their groups worked. The one thing that helped every group regardless of grade was emotional reflection. When we asked, “How did you feel during this activity?” the whole mood changed. It brought out honesty, and students started connecting more deeply with each other.

### What This Means for Vietnamese Schools

This study made me rethink what collaboration could look like across Vietnamese schools. It can’t just be a few group games here and there. If we really want collaborative learning to work, we need to change how schools function. Some key takeaways:

- Teacher training should focus more on how to guide rather than lecture.
- Collaboration should be built into the curriculum, not an extra.
- Classrooms need to be flexible: movable furniture, open layouts, space to talk.

I remember trying a group task in a room where the desks couldn’t move. Everything felt stiff, and the students barely interacted. That moment showed me how space shapes behavior.



## Learning from Finland

Finland changed the way I saw collaboration. There, it's not just a teaching technique, it's a mindset. Teachers trust students more, and in return, students take more ownership. Tasks are open-ended, and assessment is more verbal than written, reflective, and group-based. These shifts are totally possible in Vietnam, but they need more than policy; they need school-wide trust and belief in the process.

## Reflection Through Frameworks

Several frameworks helped me make sense of what was happening:

- Vygotsky's ZPD helped me understand why younger and older students responded differently.
- Dewey reminded me that experience matters more than just outcomes.
- Hofstede's cultural ideas, especially about power distance, explained why some students held back in group settings, they were waiting for approval or permission.

## Some Challenges

Not everything went smoothly:

- In mixed-gender groups, boys often took over.
- Students with lower language confidence tended to stay quiet.
- Some teachers felt exhausted managing group work every day, they needed more support.

## Vietnamese vs. Finnish Scaffolding

The way we support students differs a lot. In Vietnam, scaffolding is very direct: steps, examples, clear models. In Finland, it's looser: they offer space, wait, and let students try. Vietnamese students often want direction, while Finnish students are more used to uncertainty. Neither is better, but the difference matters.

## Teaching Strategies by Grade

Grade Level	Strategy	Why It Worked
Grades 2	Visuals, short tasks, simple roles	Helped with focus and concrete thinking
Grades 3	Mixed-ability groups, sentence starters	Supported speaking confidence and peer learning
Grades 4	Role rotation, student questions	Encouraged responsibility and ownership
Grades 5	Open tasks, peer feedback	Built deeper thinking and group culture

Throughout the project, it became increasingly clear that collaboration doesn't work as a one-size-fits-all approach. What helped second graders thrive wouldn't necessarily work with older students and vice versa. Each grade level brought its own set of needs, which meant the strategies had to shift to meet students where they were, both academically and socially.

In Grade 2, the focus was on clarity and structure. Simple roles, quick tasks, and plenty of visual support allowed younger students to stay grounded. They needed concrete cues and routines to help them engage, especially those still developing basic group habits.

As students moved into Grade 3, they began experimenting more with language, and that brought its own challenges. We found that sentence starters and mixed-ability groupings were key in building confidence. In some groups, a more vocal student would naturally model how to begin a response, which encouraged others to follow. These early peer-led moments of support were powerful.

Grade 4 marked a shift toward independence. By then, students were ready to rotate roles and take more responsibility for how the group functioned. They also began asking their own questions, which changed the tone of discussions from task-focused to more curious and collaborative.

In Grade 5, the strategies had to stretch further. Students needed space to think deeper, and that came through open-ended tasks and peer feedback. It wasn't perfect at first, some comments were blunt, others missed the point; but over time, they learned how to give and receive feedback in ways that felt respectful and useful.

## Final Thoughts

The main aim was about watching real kids grow, become better teammates, better thinkers, and honestly more caring humans. Across all grades, what worked best was the way the strategies grew alongside the students, gradually giving them more voice, more choice, and more responsibility in their learning.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### What I Learned

Collaboration is a whole new way of seeing the classroom. It brought life, honesty, and energy into lessons. I saw students grow in knowledge and in how they treated each other. Quiet kids spoke up. Loud kids learned to listen. And they all started taking more responsibility when they felt trusted. Trust, more than anything, seemed to be the spark.

### My Advice for Other Teachers

If you're thinking of trying collaborative learning, here's what worked for me:

- Start small. Don't try to change everything overnight.
- Be open. Let students see you make mistakes too.
- Make time to reflect. Ask students how the group work felt.
- Adjust by grade. Little ones need more help; older ones want freedom.

### If I Could Redesign a School...

If I had the chance to rebuild a school, collaboration would be at its heart:

- Teachers plan and reflect together.
- Rooms are open and moveable.
- Students are assessed as groups, not just as individuals.
- We celebrate effort and teamwork not just scores.

It's possible. It just takes belief and support from everyone.

### How to Roll It Out Over a Year

Grade	Term 1 > Build Norms	Term 2 > Practice It	Term 3 > Go Deeper
<b>Grade 2</b>	- Icebreakers and group rules with visuals - Word and matching games - Outdoor group role-play	- Group storytelling tasks - Spelling puzzles - Drawing vocabulary cards	- Class storybook project - Spelling bee teams - Drawing scenes for Q&A

		- Outdoor phonics hunt	- Nature walk with sketch + writing
<b>Grade 3</b>	- Group norms poster (with drawings) - Sentence scramble games - Buddy spelling challenge - Outdoor drawing and labeling task	- Vocabulary chants with illustrations - Grammar board games - Group drawing competitions	- Song-writing + visuals - Comic strip grammar stories - Illustrated presentations - Field drawing and report writing
<b>Grade 4</b>	- Create role rotation wheel (drawn by students) - Team drawing of group expectations	- Peer feedback and visual rubrics - Collaborative drawing stories	- Group debate visuals - Student-designed comic debates
<b>Grade 5</b>	- Leadership role cards (student-designed) - Team rule posters with drawings - Outdoor symbols of group identity	- Debate visuals - Illustrated peer feedback checklists - Outdoor interview	- Student research posters with visuals - Mentorship journals with drawings - Design a grammar board game - Draw & write: field community report

### Ideas for Future Research

There's more to explore:

- Tracking students over years to see lasting growth.
- Studying digital collaboration tools in real classrooms.
- Comparing results in urban and rural schools.
- Looking at how AI (for Education area) could support group learning.

Most importantly, let students talk. Their reflections are powerful.

### How This Changed Me

This changed me too. I went from controlling lessons to trusting the process. I listened more. I stressed less. And I felt more human in the classroom. I remember one Grade 4 student who barely spoke at first. By the end, he led his group presentation. That moment made everything worth it.

### Reflection and Closing Thoughts

*"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."* – African Proverb

This research journey did more than help me study collaborative learning, it changed the way I see teaching. Before, I thought a successful lesson was one where everything went as planned. Now, I've come to realize that the best learning moments often happen in the unplanned spaces, in the mess of group discussions, in the quiet nod of a shy student finally speaking up, in the scribbles of a team drawing trying to figure something out together.

### Teaching Feels Like Gardening

If I had to choose one image that captures what I've learned, it would be gardening. Teaching, to me now, feels like planting seeds. You don't always know what's going to grow or when. You prepare the soil, create the right conditions, and then you wait. Some learners surprise you, they blossom fast and wide. Others stay quiet

longer, needing more sunlight, more patience. But when the environment is right, when collaboration becomes the sunlight; they all start to stretch and bloom in their own time. That's what I saw across all the grades I worked with.

I watched second graders take care of one another in ways I didn't expect. I saw fifth graders take leadership naturally, even mentoring their peers. And in between all of that, I also changed. I learned to step back more often. I listened more. I let go of the need to control every outcome and trusted the process. That, for me, is growth.

### Final Thoughts

One of the biggest takeaways from this study is that collaborative learning isn't a perfect system but it's a deeply human one. It doesn't always go smoothly. There are bumps: group tensions, uneven contributions, misunderstandings. But the impact it has on confidence, creativity, and emotional safety is real. It makes learners feel seen. It gives them ownership. And it gives teachers like me a reminder of why we chose this path in the first place.

Now, whenever I design a lesson, I no longer begin by thinking about outcomes or materials. I start by asking myself: **What kind of space am I creating?** Is this a space where someone might feel safe to try? To lead? To grow?

Because if this study taught me anything, it's this: growth doesn't just happen when we teach; it happens when we make room for others to learn, in their own way, at their own pace. And if I can keep doing that, then I know I'm teaching in a way that matters.

### Future Research and Application

While this case study has offered meaningful insights into how collaborative learning plays out in a Vietnamese context, it's also clear that it represents only a small piece of a much larger picture. The experiences I've gathered across three institutions, though rich and revealing, are still limited in scope. To build on what this study has started, there are several areas that deserve deeper exploration.

One of the most immediate needs is to **broaden the context**. This research was based entirely in the south of Vietnam, and the findings reflect the cultural, social, and educational dynamics of that specific setting. Including case studies from other parts of the country, such as the central highlands or the northern provinces, could surface different patterns, challenges, and successes. Even more interesting would be to look beyond Vietnam, exploring how collaborative learning unfolds in classrooms across Southeast Asia, where teaching traditions and student expectations may differ. A broader regional lens would help us test how universal or context-bound these findings truly are.

Another point worth considering is the **integration of quantitative tools**. In this study, I focused on qualitative data: student voices, journals, classroom artefacts, and observations. These gave depth and emotional clarity to what students experienced. But numbers also tell important stories. Future research could benefit from including surveys, participation tracking, and perhaps even academic performance indicators before and after collaborative learning is introduced. That kind of data would offer a more rounded understanding and help bridge the emotional with the empirical.

Something I couldn't capture in this project, but that really matters, is **time**. Most of my data was collected within a single academic cycle. What I'd love to know and what future studies should examine is what happens **in the long run**. Do the confidence gains and teamwork habits stick? Do students continue to speak up and support one another a year later? Longitudinal studies could show whether collaborative learning leads to lasting change, both academically and socially.

In terms of application, **teacher development** deserves special attention. While I adjusted my methods over time, I know not all educators feel ready to implement collaboration effectively, especially in large or mixed-ability classrooms. Future research might explore what kind of training, mentorship, or reflective practice

actually helps teachers grow into this role. It's not enough to tell teachers to "do group work", they need frameworks, tools, and emotional support to do it well.

Finally, one of the most useful outcomes of future work could be the creation of *practical, adaptable models*. These could take the form of teaching templates, classroom routines, or even policy guidelines that other schools can use and adjust to their context.

In short, this research opens the door to many more questions than it answers. But that's the nature of reflective, classroom-based inquiry. It's about inviting others to step in and keep writing it. The more voices we add to the conversation, from students, teachers, trainers, and policymakers, the closer we get to building classrooms where collaboration is not just encouraged, but deeply embedded in the way learning happens.

## DECLARATION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is 100% my own work and hasn't been submitted anywhere else. I want to give a big thanks to everyone who supported me through this journey: my school managers, mentors, coworkers, and students at VstarSchool in Ho Chi Minh City, ILE (I Love Education) in Long An, and ANH HAO QUANG in Nhabe, Vietnam. Your encouragement, insights, and energy helped shape this whole process. I'm especially thankful to my students, their curiosity and participation made everything worthwhile.

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## APPENDICES AND VISUALS

### Appendix A: Exit Slip Prompts by Grade

- **Grades 2-3:** What did you enjoy doing today with your group? What was hard? Who helped you the most?
- **Grades 4-5:** What was your main contribution? What conflicts emerged and how were they solved? What would you do differently next time?

### Appendix B: Rubric Sample (Team Collaboration Score)

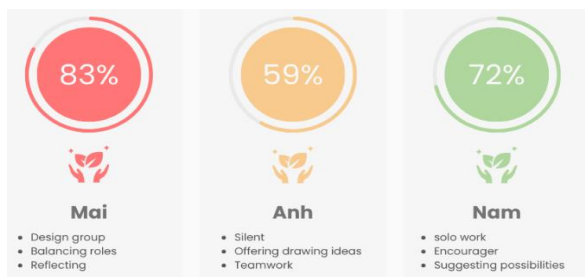
Criteria	Excellent (3)	Satisfactory (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Participation	All members contribute	Most contribute	Few contribute
Communication	Ideas clearly shared and discussed	Some discussion	Limited sharing
Conflict Resolution	Problems solved respectfully	Minor issues resolved	Frequent unresolved conflict

### Appendix C: Student Case Profiles

**Anh (Grade 2):** Initially silent; began offering drawing ideas in storytelling group.

**Nam (Grade 3):** Preferred solo work. After several tasks, became a consistent Encourager.

**Mai (Grade 5):** Led a campaign design group. She balanced roles well and reflected deeply.



### Appendix D: Sample Collaborative Lesson Plan

#### Grade 5 English Lesson: *Team Together 5*

**Task:** In groups, students created a short-animated story or conversation using their own dialogue and ideas

**Focus:** Practising speaking, learning new words, and working together

**Roles:** One student wrote the script, another did the voice acting, one helped with the animation, and another edited

**Assessment:** They used a team checklist, gave feedback to each other, and wrote quick reflections at the end

**Outcome:** Everyone joined in, tried out new words, and got creative with how they told their stories