

Enhancing Employability Skills through Cooperative Learning

in first year business undergraduate studies

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“Less us , more them”



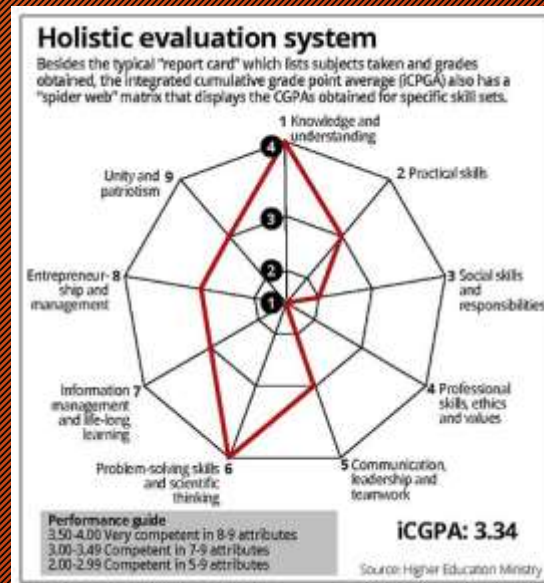
The Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) will be centered on 10 Shifts

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Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (HIGHER EDUCATION)

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Roadmap

Genesis of the idea

- *'Are our first year students as prepared as they should be for the real world?'*

Problem statement and significance of research

- To investigate how and to what extent our group work practices can explicitly promote graduate employability skills

Evaluation of the 4 selected first year business units

- *'Not all group work successfully implements the elements of cooperative learning'*
- *Speculate the level of successful implementation of cooperative learning in group work can be linked to the level of employability skills demonstrated by the students.*



Are employability skills coachable?

A NASSCOM report says only 10 per cent of newly minted graduates in India are employable. Nishant Saxena describes how students can learn communication skills, business ethics and basic managerial skills

Enough has been said and written on employability skills or the lack of them among Indian students. Essential for any job aspirant, these are non-technical skills and competencies which contribute to an individual's effective and successful participation in the workplace. According to a report by NASSCOM, only 10 per cent of fresh graduates in India are employable. Similar surveys on engineers and MBA graduates place employable professionals at no more than 25 per cent.

So let's begin by defining 9 missing requirements which limit a youngster's chances of landing a job.

- Attitude (Sincerity, Ownership/Motivation)
- Business Ethics/Honesty
- Grooming/Confidence
- Communication Skills
- General Awareness
- Basic Managerial Skills (Leadership, Teamwork, Time Management etc.)
- Basic Sales and Customer Service (most entry level jobs require one of these)
- Domain Knowledge
- Work Experience

While the obvious solution to unlock India's much discussed demographic



dividend is to empower students with these requisite skills, the question remains: can these employability skills be taught?

Attitude & Ethics are the most difficult to correct. Clinical psychologists have found that attitude can be improved through a six-nine month process involving motivation, extended practise and constant feedback. Being pedantic almost never works in improving attitude. Still, most

professors continue to hope that by repeating their unsolicited advice, students may change!

Even the use of innovative techniques like story-telling has thrown up mixed results. In reality, the effect of a few hours of class is often drowned by 22 years of grounding. While some borderline cases did change, for the most part, only the good ones got better.

Grooming & Confidence, on the other hand, are the easiest

to correct. Steady practise in small batches of 15-25 students, with people of similar ability carefully chosen and teamed up, giving every individual a chance to speak for 5-7 minutes every day for four-five months, brought about tremendous improvement. Workshops involving specially trained grooming instructors, emphasising lines such as 'dress to impress' worked too. The process requires strict discipline so that everyone gets time to

speak. Similarly, basic grooming checks on colour combinations of attire, hair and shoe polish, every day, for a few months so that students understand how to dress for formal situations.

Communication skills takes time and a scientific method of intervention.

Basic communication skills have to be sharpened. This involves improving students' listening skills, helping them understand their audience, and training them to be crisp and logical in their responses.

Most tier 2 colleges are concerned about the inability of their students to speak English fluently. A module which covers Grammar and spoken English, and pronunciation is required. Students are usually less inclined to focus on English at such a late stage in their career. So the training sessions need to be lively and interactive.

An everyday quiz on current affairs for six months can help students develop the reading habits. To build their interest, as part of the quiz, those who are unable to answer a question may be fined Rs 5 while those who answer correctly may be rewarded.

While it would be ambitious to think that a two-hour, team work session will make everyone a great team player, we have seen a significant improvement in the level of maturity through this method.

Many undergraduate students lack work experience in any domain. Moreover, most college faculty are not qualified to train students in industry-oriented skills. So the best practice is to get a significant portion of training to be delivered by industry experts. Those who can deliver live corporate experiences, share inside secrets and tips on the business world, explain what is not covered in theory and how to apply theory in real life must be invited to address students on campus.

Most companies want work experience before a degree like an MBA, but 80-95 per cent of MBA students are fresh BA/B Com/B Sc graduates. This can be corrected by offering industry projects during the course (internship, externships, etc).

The long-term solution may be for colleges to recruit experienced students, especially for a post graduate course like MBA.

Was it possible to bridge the gap in the classroom?

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First Year Business Units



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Management and
Organisational Behaviour



Introduction to
Marketing



Integrated Business
Challenge



Business Law



Group work

- Coping with large class size
- Engaging students
- Unleash creativity
- Lessening workloads
- Improving learning outcomes
- Academic achievement



Problem statement

“ Merely making students work on assignments or projects as a group may not produce employability skills.”

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- ① To explore elements and practice of co-operative learning by comparing group work between (4 selected) first year business units
- ② To acknowledge gaps exists and speculate a link between cooperative learning and graduate employability skills.

Cooperative Learning

- refers to students working in teams on an assignment or project under conditions in which certain elements are satisfied (Felder & Brent, 2007)
- demonstrated it an educational strategy that is beneficial to maximise academic and cognitive achievement in learning especially at school level (Schroeder et al, 2007, Felder & Brent, 2007)
- also, because it makes instruction relevant and responsive, it increases engagement with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, limited English proficiency and disabilities (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008)
- it is not used to its fullest potential or, used in an unsuccessful way (Johnson , Johnson and Holubec, 1998)

Cooperative learning model (Johnson & Johnson, 1998)

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Essential elements of cooperative learning

1. Positive
2. Face-to-Face Promotive Interaction
3. Individual accountability/ Personal Responsibility
4. Teamwork skills
5. Group Processing



Employability skills



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Victoria University (Australia) has six Graduate Capabilities (GCs)

1. problem solve in a range of settings;
2. locate, critically evaluate, manage and use written, numerical and electronic information;
3. communicate in a variety of context and modes;
4. work both autonomously and collaboratively;
5. work in an environmentally, socially and culturally responsible manner; and
6. manage learning and career development opportunities.

Group Work Process

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COMPARATIVE DIAGRAM OF COLLABORATIVE ELEMENTS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

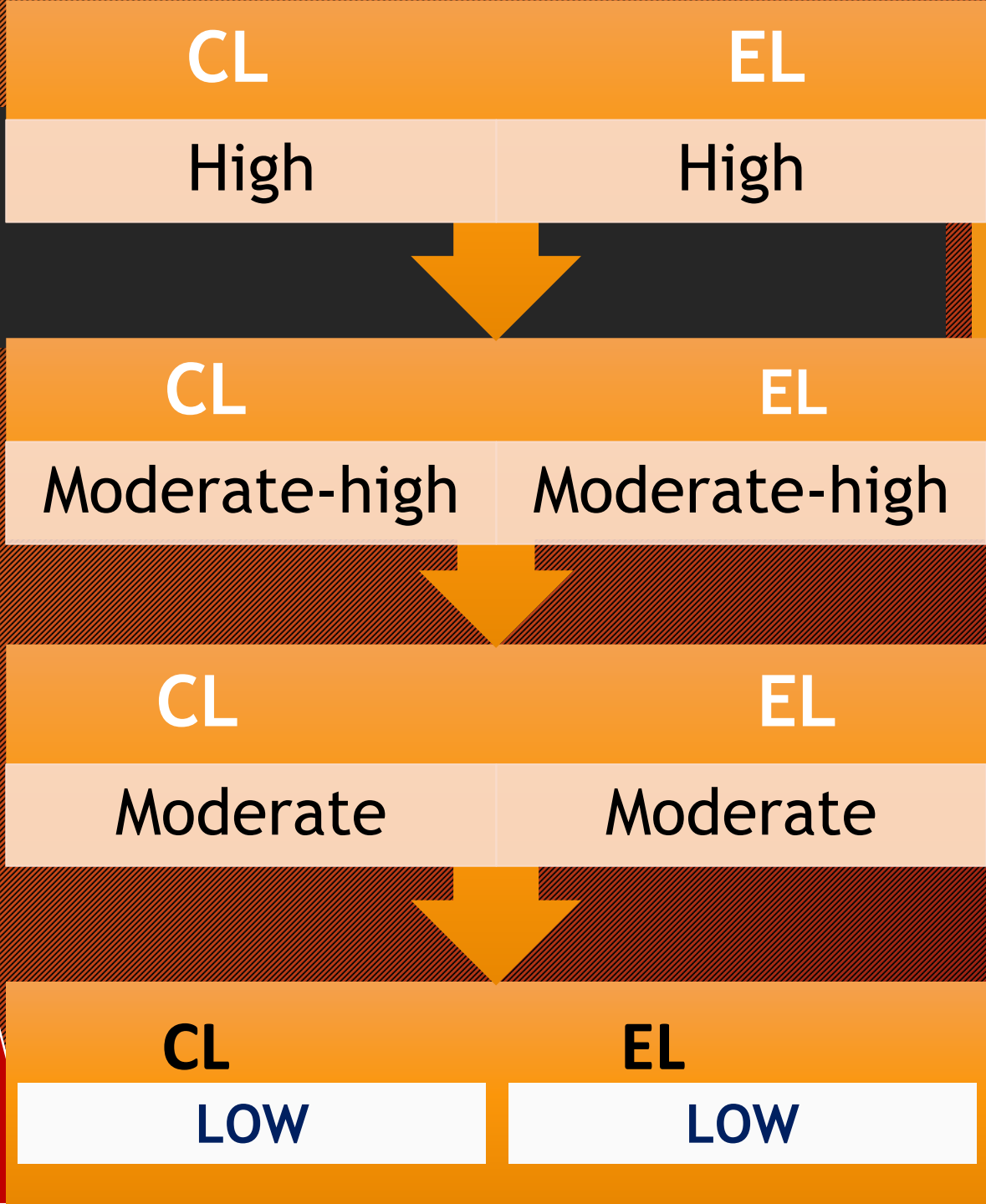
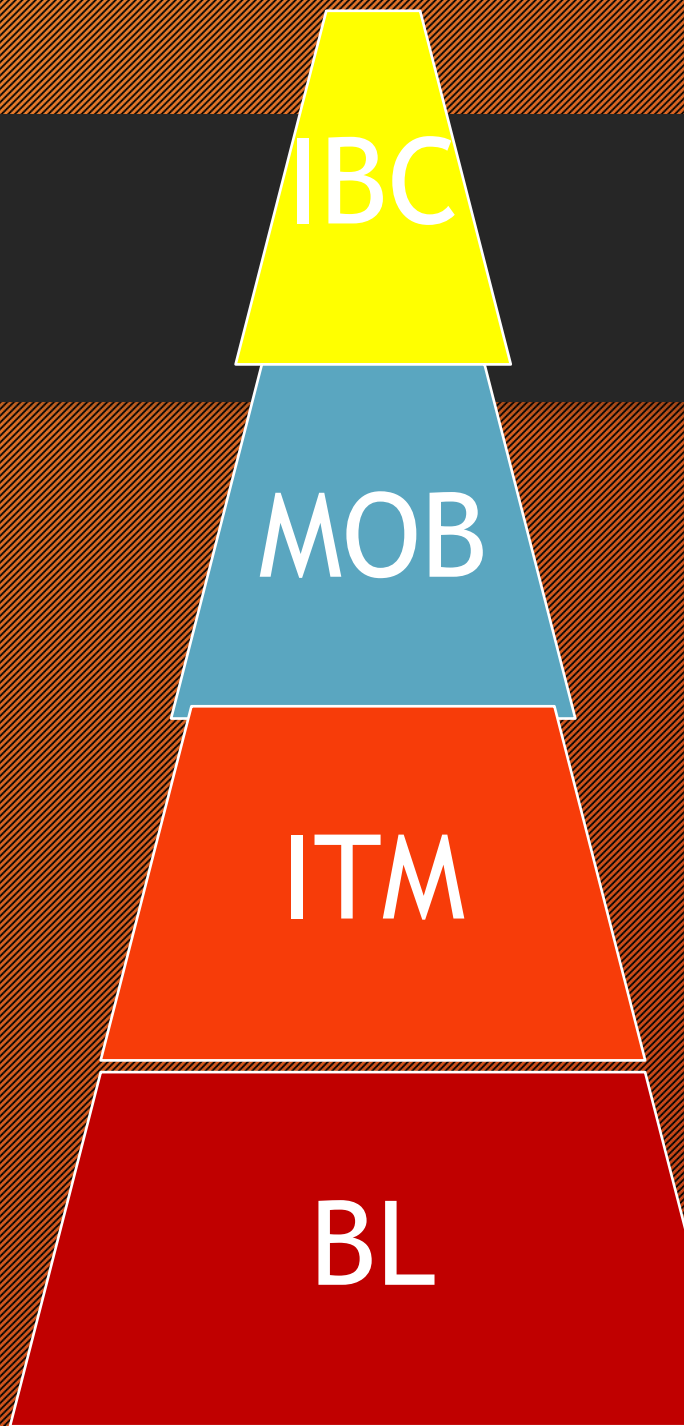
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POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE
FACE TO FACE PROMOTIVE INTERACTION
INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY
SOCIAL SKILLS
GROUP PROCESSING



CRITICAL THINKING
PROBLEM SOLVING
ABILITY TO WORK WITH OTHERS
TIME MANAGMENT
LEADERSHIP SKILLS
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS



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FINDINGS

An Assessment of Comparison between VU 1st year Modules with regards to Co-operative Learning Elements

	POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE	PROMOTIVE FACE TO FACE	INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTBILITY	SOCIAL SKILLS/Teamwork skills	GROUP PROCESSING
1. MOB	Moderate	High	Moderate	High	High
2. IBC	High	High	High	High	Moderate
3. ITM	Low	High	High	Moderate	Low
4. BUSINESS LAW	Low	High	Low	Moderate	Low

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS EVALUATION AND OBSERVATION FOR 1ST YEAR MODULES OF THE VICTORIA UNIVERSITY PROGRAM AT SUNWAY

LEARNING OUTCOMES/GRADUATE CAPABILITIES	MOB	IBC	ITM	BUSINESS LAW
Critical Thinking	MODERATE	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW
Problem Solving	LOW	HIGH	MODERATE	MODERATE
Communication(Verbal and Written)	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
Ability to work with others	HIGH	HIGH	MODERATE	MODERATE
Time Management	HIGH	HIGH	MODERATE	LOW
Interpersonal Skills	HIGH	HIGH	MODERATE	MODERATE
Leadership Skills	MODERATE	MODERATE	LOW	LOW

What we learnt so far:

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- Units that rank from the lowest to the highest for level of cooperative learning employed and degree of employability skills demonstrated are in the same order.

Conclusion

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- Cooperative learning is conducted in each module but in varying degrees/extent depending on the nature of the module
- This paper posits the idea that the more group work can be developed, managed and assessed to follow the Cooperative Learning Model, the more likely that graduate employability skills can be enhanced

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THANK YOU

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