

EMPOWERING PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS FROM RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS AMONG HETEROGENEOUS GROUP IN ESL COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract. Collaborative learning is deemed to be a widely used method in teaching and learning especially in tertiary education. It includes various group activities involving students to actively engage in classroom activities. This study investigates the attitude of students from religious school in higher learning institution towards collaborative learning in ESL classrooms. Based on teachers' experience in ESL classrooms, students from religious schools hesitated to actively engage in mixed-gender group activities. The research methodology uses a quantitative approach by distributing a set of questionnaire to students from religious schools in two higher learning institutions in Kelantan, Universiti Malaya Kampus Nilam Puri and Kolej Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Ismail Petra. This questionnaire consists of two parts; Part A and Part B in which there are 6 questions in Part A; mainly asking on the participant's information on their demographic information and the details about their study programme, while another 12 questions are asked in Part B specifically the students' perceptions towards Collaborative Learning in Heterogeneous Group according to gender.

Introduction

Learning a language is a cognitive process that requires social interaction as it involves many aspects of processes that require communication. It is fundamentally inter-personal and social in nature (Illeris, 2007). The purpose of learning a language is also to enable the learners to function in authentic situations. Hence, collaboration learning is important to motivate the students to think, share and interact among their peers in groups in order to achieve the interdependent target (Nilofer & Ismail, 2014).

While collaborative learning has been regarded as beneficial to upskilling students' interpersonal skills, there are still questions whether it is positively responded by students in heterogeneous groups. It is due to the aim of utilising the theory of Zone Proximal Development in the classroom (Panhwar, 2016). It is a way of providing an environment to facilitate the students' participation in social interaction. According to Karima (2014), collaborative learning received positive and negative feedback from students. Some appear to enjoy and benefit from it while for some others, working with the opposite gender made them uncomfortable while others perceive that the absence of their friends was challenging as establishing a working relationship was tough. Therefore, certain challenges that impede collaborative learning need to be investigated so that it can be further empowered in the future regardless of different gender.

Problem Statement. In designing classroom activities for language learning, many teachers employ collaborative approach to enhance positive engagement from students with language learning processes. The learning outcome primarily focuses on student-centered method as it is believed that the students will get the opportunity to learn by themselves and from their classmates (Johnson and Johnson, 2012). This mode of teaching and learning usually promote communication as it involves students to collaborate with one another to accomplish a given task. Therefore, collaborative learning is one of the preferred approaches which has been widely employed in this language learning processes. The term "Collaborative learning" includes cooperative learning, team-based learning, and peer tutoring to name, but a few (Davidson & Major, 2014). According to Er and Aksu Atac, (2014), cooperative learning drives the learners in achieving their learning objective in common.

Research objective. Therefore, the aim of this study is to further investigate the perception of students towards collaborative learning among heterogeneous group. In empowering the participation of students especially from religious schools, their attitude towards it is salient.

Research Question

1. What is the attitude of students from religious schools towards collaborative learning in ESL classrooms among heterogeneous group?

Literature Review

Collaborative Learning. Collaborative learning has accepted a growing interest among the teachers and learners as the academia has revolved so much in harnessing the role of teacher as a facilitator than merely a sage on the stage. According to Er & Aksu Atac (2014), students get to learn from themselves and their peers through the implementation of collaborative learning. Therefore, the students can mutually set the target as they are interdependent (Sharan, 1990). They eventually will receive the mutual rewards. They also sometimes need to compete to one another in order to appear better than others (Johnson and Johnson, 2012). There is a growing research under the field of the effectiveness of collaborative learning in language learning and thus, under certain circumstances, cooperative learning is seemed to be more productive than individual learning (Slavin, 1996). Therefore, empowering collaborative learning is fruitful to drive the students to be accounted socially for their learning process and to share their learning experience interactively with others as it will benefit them in terms of polishing hard skills and also soft skills.

1. Basic Principles of Cooperative Learning

It is found that there is no common conceptual framework in designing collaborative lesson. Obicini and Nandini (2014) states that there is no common ground of framework which can be internalized in order to promote collaborative learning to be more effective and coherent. In the light of pedagogic practices, Sharan (2010) asserts three prominent thinkers of the late 19th to 20th Centuries, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Morton Deustch. They contribute immensely during the first wave of the propagation of collaborative learning. Among the insights of this revolution are progressive education is crucial in promoting learning to effectively promote students to be more active rather than passive, provided that there is a conducive social and interactive nature of education (Panhwar, 2016).

Panhwar, (2016) includes the general philosophy of constructivism is one of the theories that can fit collaborative learning as the students are regarded as the contributor and not solely the receiver. The pedagogy of constructivism holds that the interaction with the material studied will enlighten the students' comprehension of the knowledge. 'Zone Proximal Development' is an offshoot of the theory of constructivism purported by Vygotsky. It is defined as "...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Summing up, it can be simplified as the different rate of doable action of learning with and without help. According to Forman and McPhail, (1993) the underpinning theory of this socio-cultural theory is deemed to contribute more ideas in preparing classroom activities that emphasise on social interaction and mutual inclusive in classroom.

Language learning is associated with the acculturation process which it implies that learning a target language is apparently a social process. The socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky has been adopted by many ESL teachers as the active interaction learning approach can empower more social interaction in more formal and organised way (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996; Lantolf, 2008; Lantolf and Poehner, 2008; Grabis, 2008; Magnan, 2008)

2. Collaborative Learning in ESL classrooms

It is believed that collaborative learning has been one of the best methods in teaching English as a second language. According to Borich (2007), he states that students work well together in a group where they can share ideas, communicate face-to-face and guide each other outstandingly. In addition, the implementation of collaborative learning in ESL classroom has opened a big chance in students' participation, gain new experience as well as collaborate in completing tasks given. Apart from that, Collaborative learning as opposed to individual efforts have been reported to affect students' performance particularly in complex problem-solving tasks (Chennabathni & Rejskind, 2014). Johnson and Johnson (1994) state that collaborative promotes higher levels of thought and students preserve information longer than those who work alone. The shared learning brings the opportunity to students to be actively engaged in discussion, speak their thoughts and therefore enable them to be critical thinkers. Moreover, Kagan and Kagan (2009) highlight that collaborative learning offers positive interdependence which refers to a positive collaboration among the students in achieving group's goals. The students are encouraged to share the ideas and cooperate with each other in a group to ensure that the collaborative learning goal is achieved.

3. Collaborative Learning and Gender

Collaborative learning approaches differ extensively in their structure, however it depends on students; how students collaborate, interact and share ideas (Chennabathni & Rejskind, 2014). When students cooperate in contributing ideas to any discussion in group, their confidence level is said to be increased. In accomplishing collaborative learning goal, it is believed that gender has been one of the factors that affect students' performance

especially in acquiring second language. In collaborative learning, it is said that men are comfortable to be in group for discussion as they are regarded as competitors in learning. According to Jordan, Walker and Hartling (2004), men will perform much better when they are in group as they favour competitive environments compared to women. Women on the other hand have been regarded as more distinctive because women are known for their exclusive emotions in handling collaborative learning method. In contrast, according to Ellison and Boykin (1994), the involvement of women in collaborative learning activities is a great accomplishment more than they study alone. They found that women have shown positive attitudes in cooperating with each other.

The Proposed Research Methodology

The study is conducted at two institutions; University of Malaya (UM), Nilam Puri, Kelantan and Kolej Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Ismail Petra (KIAS), Nilam Puri, Kelantan. Both of these institutions require their potential students to have academic background in religious study in their SPM level as a prerequisite to their programme. This is parallel to our objective that aims to empower participation of students from religious schools among heterogeneous group in ESL classrooms.

Participants. The participants of this study consists of 100 students from two selected higher learning institutions in Kelantan as mentioned above in which 50 students are selected from each institution. They are semester 3 students, enrolled in Degree programme (KIAS) and semester 2 students, enrolled in Foundation programme of various faculties. They are selected because they have passed their previous English courses, thus, their English proficiency level is no longer be a factor that may influence the result of this study.

The technique used when selecting participants is nonprobability sampling technique and the sampling method used is convenience sampling due to wide population of students from religious schools available at these two institutions.

Instrument. The instrument used is questionnaire adapted from Er and Aksu (2014) in order to collect the quantitative data. This questionnaire consists of two parts; Part A and Part B in which there are 6 questions in Part A; mainly asking on the participant's information on their demographic information and the details about their study programme, while another 12 questions are asked in Part B specifically the students' perceptions towards Collaborative Learning in Heterogeneous Group according to gender.

Procedures. The participants are required to answer the instrument given based on the Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (scale 1 to scale 5). They will tick their response for each statement according to the scale above. This instrument is distributed by the language teacher at the end of collaborative learning activity and after having a few sessions on collaborative learning.

Data Analysis. Data collected from this study will be analysed using an established statistical programme; IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 and descriptive analysis will be conducted. The frequency and percentage of distribution will be determined.

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