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Empowering Tertiary Students
through Collaborative Learning

Dr Nazira Osman
Academy of Language Studies,
UiTM Perlis Branch

Majdah Chulan
Academy of Language Studies,
UiTM Perlis Branch

Introduction

Collaborative Learning (CL) is a pedagogical approach that is suitable for higher education. This is because tertiary level students are expected to acquire the 4cs of the 21st century which are creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. The CL approach, if practiced correctly, can help students acquire those skills. It relates to the process of working with peers to solve a problem or to create a product (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). CL is an effective educational practice that supports cognitive and social processes, outperforming learning alone (Nokes-Malach et al., 2015). The growth of communication abilities, individual thinking, communication culture, and the capacity to play a variety of social roles in collaborative activities are all supported by CL (Sumtsova et al., 2018).

Collaboration is a spontaneous emergence of interactive dynamics, which allows for natural role differentiation (Roselli, 2016). CL, in comparison to competitive and individualistic endeavours, has numerous advantages and typically results in greater achievement and productivity; more caring, supportive, and committed relationships; and improved psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). CL is thus a positive pedagogical approach that helps students be in command of their learning. At the same time, it can improve their teamwork capabilities, which is important for future job seeking. When students understand each other and develop mutual respect, this may help reduce stress and anxiety. Therefore, CL is recommended to be used in higher education as appears to have great potential among nontraditional educational environments and methods available for enhancing higher education (Smith, 2014).

Collaborative Learning at Tertiary Level

Numerous research, particularly on online platforms, have been conducted on the usage of CL. Among these include the research by Ansari and Khan (2020), which looked at how students perceived social media and mobile devices through group projects and interactions with professors and peers, and its major effects on academic achievement. This survey of 360 students at an Eastern Indian institution served as the basis for empirical investigation. Based on the study, using online social media for CL significantly affected students' online knowledge sharing behaviour and their ability to communicate with teachers and peers. Students who used online social media for CL were also found to be more imaginative, active, and focused on their studies.

CL is applicable to a range of courses. A study was conducted by Muñoz-Carril et al. (2021) involving 701 master's students who were enrolled in 4-month courses worth 6 ECTS credits under the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) framework to describe their understanding of the critical factors that influence satisfaction and perceived impact of learning. While attitude, usefulness, and enjoyment had an impact on learning in online collaborative work settings, perceived enjoyment, confirmation, and utility were also found to have a major impact on students' happiness in CSCL contexts. The researchers offered a thorough explanation of the steps involved in the online collaboration process as well as the phases, goals, and assignments to teachers and students in a CL environment. Teachers were identified as essential in teaching students how to use collaborative communication techniques that facilitate smooth and productive interactions in work groups and act as mediators when disagreements arise within the group (Muñoz-Carril et al., 2021).

Medero and Albaladejo (2020) examined how a group of university lecturers use the creation of a Wikipedia page to create an environment where their students actively collaborate and learn from each other. Notwithstanding certain problems, the results were favourable: students became committed to the practice, learnt how to collaborate with others in groups, and overcame obstacles by talking to their fellow students; their interest in the subjects grew, and useful resources for others were also developed. In order to make learning more relevant to their students, the teachers also employed cutting-edge pedagogical techniques in their lessons.

Next, Almusharraf and Bailey (2021) recruited 329 students from four (4) South Korean universities to investigate the mediating effect that agentic engagement had on CL learning orientations (CLLO) in an EFL video-conferencing course. This was to gain a better understanding of how interactions affect academic learning expectations. The study confirmed EFL students' favourable attitudes towards online collaboration, but this was highly dependent on their tendency to interact with the instructor during the video conference. This led the researchers to propose the

provision of a variety of learning activities to support both collaborative and individual learning styles (Almusharraf & Bailey, 2021).

In short, in higher education institutions around the world, CL has been researched as a possible way to enhance students' learning and the studies have shown positive impacts. The method can also be applied in the ESL classroom.
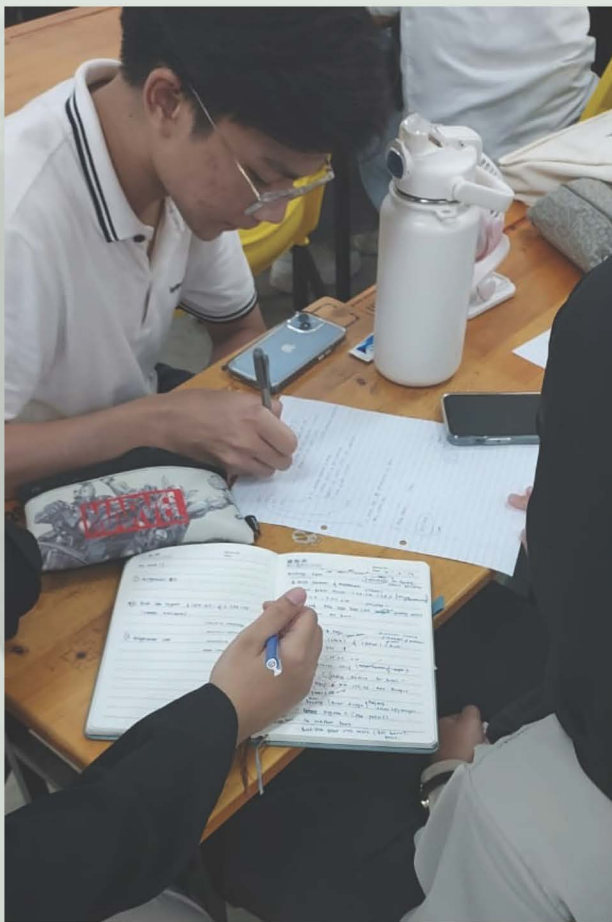
Collaborative Learning in ESL Classroom

Learning the four (4) skills—speaking, writing, listening, and writing—is essential in an ESL classroom. Researchers have found that CLA [CL] can be a useful tool for teaching English language to students as it fosters the development of their analytical, practical, holistic, social, and communication skills—all of which are essential for overcoming obstacles in their path (Qureshi et al., 2021). Additionally, it offers educators several ways to help students complete their assignments as they learn the English language (Khan et al., 2023). Students appreciate the approach since it gives them a chance to practice their English, reduce anxiety and stress, build confidence and relationships, and more (Adesina et al., 2022).

Furthermore, CL supports ESL students' development of higher order thinking abilities. A 2009 study by Zuraina (2009) serves as an example of how to apply CL in an ESL classroom. Students demonstrated higher order thinking abilities as well as CL when they were put in groups. This occurs when learners who are more proficient in the language can use CL activities to help learners who are less proficient by editing their sentences and helping the less proficient students make sense of their ideas. Because it is easier to work with numerous minds to analyse, synthesise, and evaluate, it became imperative that thoughts and ideas be shared (Zuraina, 2009). Saha and Singh (2016) also asserted that various language games played in small groups helped lower students' anxiety levels and encourage shy learners to participate. This way, students can acquire collaboration skills like active listening, respect, manners, positive attitude, and social awareness.

Conclusion

Malaysian tertiary students can benefit greatly from CL in numerous ways. Depending on the institution, policy makers should consider the advantages and disadvantages of implementing it. It is advised that, in the event that CL is appropriate, its implementation should be made clear in the teaching document as a means of encouraging lecturers to engage their students in CL activities.

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