

Emotions in SLA: Collaborative Learning for an EFL Classroom

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Abstract: This research article investigates the effectiveness of collaborative learning in teaching and learning foreign languages and students’ emotions that occur in SLA. Teams that are working collaboratively could attain high level thinking skills and keep the information for longer period comparing to students who prefer working individually. Working collaboratively leads students to build trust and promote open communication, maintain flexible norms in groups and consider self-esteem.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, interaction, share opinions, effectiveness, socialize.

Some linguistics think that collaborative learning is a key element that involves students working in pairs or small groups to share opinions and find solutions to problems. However, according to some educational researchers there is lack of observation and teacher instruction in peer learning activity.

Kagan (1992) claims that humans are social beings by nature and in many English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, in traditional education, students usually sit in fixed rows and they have little opportunity for interaction and collaborative work. This type of school settings often face with serious issues as lack of motivation and unsafe environment.

As a researcher who is investigating the effectiveness of collaborative learning in English Language, I preferred to implement an activity “Poster presentation” that involves all learners to participate actively and demonstrate their willingness to interact and socialize with their peers in group-work.

The experimental group of learners in this case study is secondary school students of the eleventh grade whose level of English is intermediate. The number of students is fourteen, nine of them are females and five are males. Students have been learning English for six years and most of them can freely communicate and able to express their opinion in different topics concerning daily events.

I have decided to use Smith and MacGregor (1992) theory of collaborative learning. They describe collaborative learning as the term for a variety of educational approaches that involves joint intellectual efforts by students, or students and teachers together. The basis for these approaches is constructivism that means knowledge can be constructed and transformed by students. Gerlach (1994) notes that collaborative learning is a natural social act. Students are supposed to talk each other through group work and much of the learning occurs in this talking. Yasuhiro Imai in his article “Emotions in SLA: New Insights From Collaborative Learning for an EFL Classroom”(2010) claims that in collaborative learning learners work together in order to achieve their task goals that can be involved by social interaction. Emotions associated with distributed cognition are supposed to arise in the process of goal achievement.

It is my belief that taking a collaborative learning approach in this study can be useful to organize teamwork, feel responsibility and ensure students to be engaged in discussion while taking responsibility for their learning. I suppose collaborative learning will help learners to build their vocabulary, grammar and confidence in learning English language. It is my own view that students learn effectively from their peers.

LEARNERS’ PROFILE:

Fifteen participants (9-girls, 5-boys) aged 16-17 years old took part in the study, which was organized in the secondary school EFL classroom. All the participants known to each other prior to the study. The class divided into two parts and the task for both teams was “Poster presentation”. The first part based on teacher- student interaction, while the second based on student-student interaction.

In the first part, participants were divided into two groups and asked to draw a picture of their dream university, and represent it to the class.

In the second part, participants were asked the following questions by the teacher. All the questions were about their future profession.

1. What is your favorite profession?

2. What are the advantages of studying in your dream university?
3. Why is it necessary to study at university?
4. What do you like most in your future profession?
5. What qualities should have a university student?

Participants answered the questions and discussed them with the teacher. In the third part, students were divided into small groups of two. This time one student asked the question the other one answered them.

Interestingly, during their collaboration, participants felt free, talked as if they were in a casual setting outside of classroom.

Findings

The duration of the research continued for two months. During this period of time various activities based on peer and group works as discussions, information exchange activities, jigsaw activities, completing shared tasks for example sorting, matching, ranking, role play and drama and a number of productive activities focused on improving all four language skills as speaking, listening, writing, reading successfully implemented in English Learning classes.

When student-student interactions occur in EFL classroom, the collaboration make students' relationship simple and causal. For example, student converges, he or she modifies and simplifies speech, so as to avoid communication breakdown or to make the conversation partner feel more relaxed when attempting to speak. Students may diverge, if he or she considers the students' annoyance and avoids affiliation with him. Therefore, students who participate in group discussion felt freely to talk about themselves. Due to the convergence which made their communication language simple and understandable, they were capable of participating in a group discussion.

Through collaborative learning students were able to develop their high-level thinking, oral communication, leadership skills and self-management. They increased self-esteem and responsibility as well as understanding the perspectives of diverse culture.

Collaborative learning developed when students came up with new ideas and expressed themselves without judgment in team working activity. Students expressed as many ideas as possible without fear and worry of being wrong. Then students chose the best ideas to present their work. One of the best ways to motivate a learner to collaborate was working with a partner and in small groups. Students led the learning and worked together to complete projects. Different kinds of projects made students enable to take information from their peers and present it in new and creative way.

Working in a team and mini- dialogues improved students' focus and attention on language learning. Organizing such kinds of activities made study time more productive and enjoyable. This gave students a sense of happiness, which leads to better results in their academic study.

Language learning Theory

Through this research, I understood that team working refers to the active participation of students and teacher in discussion and reflection. It gives students the opportunity to be involved in class decisions. The activities developed in the class were focused on linguistic components of the language. A meaningful learning environment was developed with the help of dialogue and questions. Students' capacities were enhanced by new perspective that changed their passive roles into more active and productive learning. The critical perspective stimulated collaboration, decision making, participation, and social responsibility.

Yasuhiro Imai notes that emotions such as boredom and frustration could become a psychological resource for development of individual learning. It depends on how learners participate in a learning activity that makes sense of appropriate emotions interactional.

Conclusion

This case study aimed to investigate collaborative teaching practice of English language teachers and the effectiveness of using this activity in classrooms. The results show that the teacher was engaged in developing materials that provide variety and equality in instruction. Organizing different approaches to learning activities proves teachers' creativity and responsibility to their work. Adapting collaborative learning successfully into lesson plans will lead English learners to be more involved and engaged in the learning process of the target language. If we speak about students, they benefited from being taught collaboratively as they had an opportunity to be well instructed by their teacher. With the help of their teacher's knowledge and skills, learners utilized different methods and styles.

The concept of collaboration in the context of Language Learning gives students an opportunity to interact and develop their speaking in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere.

However, it is important to mention that, every activity has its challenges and difficulties. So collaborative teaching also was not easy. The varieties between personalities, different level of knowledge, irresponsibility of colleagues, lack of flexibility, imbalanced teaching hours were the issues that required close and immediate attention. Moreover, learners can face with some disadvantages of collaborative learning as someone in the team may try to take over the group, that means they might dictate what others should do and what they do not. This kind of students are not perfect group workers. Another major problem might be the balance of power. Not all students have equal voice in a group. Sometimes, the leader of the group mostly presents others ideas, and will not give a chance to the rest of the team to express their findings or solutions.

Further implications

To organize a real collaborative atmosphere in a class, teachers should pay more attention to time management, to deliver clear instructions, try to involve all students to the activity equally and respect students' self-esteem while interacting with learners.

As a collaborative partner, students should be more flexible, honest, tolerant, supportive, willing to cooperate, energetic and respectful.

Additionally, collaborative practice should be organized more frequently by having various meetings and group discussions that can be beneficial for both teachers and students.

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