
THE IMPACT OF COLLABORTIVE LEARNING ON EFL/ESL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Learning enhances humans' knowledge enormously and it also develops critical thinking. Humans' thirst for knowledge makes them intellectual as well as creative personalities. With the desire to retrieve knowledge from other sources lead them to establish themselves well in the society. According to the modern concept, knowledge sharing has got many benefits. This knowledge sharing is possible when people work in groups or teams. The concept of knowledge sharing has become a new trend in the field of education. Most of the teachers are implementing this technique in their classrooms as it encourages the learners to work in groups. In English language teaching also,this concept of knowledge sharing is introduced in the form of team work or group work. As the main concept of collaborative learning is to work in groups or pairs to perform a task easily and with mutual cooperation, learning takes place in a congenial and friendly atmosphere. Through this concept, the learners are encouraged to work in groups or pairs to find solution to a problem. In this process, the learners share their ideas and thoughts with the members of their group and try to learn new things from each another. As knowledge sharing is the main concept of collaborative learning, the learners'

knowledge and critical thinking immensely increase and even the average learners are motivated a lot and they also contribute something to the given task. Therefore, the English teachers try to implement this practical approach in their classrooms as it focuses more on collaboration of ideas to complete the given tasks successfully in a learner-friendly environment.This paper throws a light on the impact of collaborative learning on the learners. Therefore, this paper lays emphasis on the effect of collaborative learning that takes place in the form of pair or group work in the EFL/ESL classrooms. This paper mainly brings out the impact of collaborative learning on EFL/ESL classrooms. Moreover, it also explains the advantages of collaborative learning in detail with illustrations. This paper also explains the ideal group size for the perfect implementation of collaborative learning in EFL/ESL classrooms. Furthermore, this paper highlights how to motivate learners towards collaborative learning in EFL/ESL classrooms. Finally, some useful suggestions are given for teachers and learners to make collaborative learning more effective in the EFL/ESL classrooms.

Key words: approach; collaborative learning; critical thinking; EFL/ESL

classrooms; group work; knowledge sharing; pair work; strategies; teachers.

Introduction

In this globalization era, there has been great increase in knowledge and information on everything day by day. Learning is an important element that develops humans' knowledge. Learning is a continuous process and it starts from birth and it stops at death itself. In between, there should not be any gap for learning. Albert Einstein says, "Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death". When you stop learning, you start dying. Hence, it is understood that humans learn new things day by day through learning. Eager and endless learning leads humans to achieve the most of the important and valuable things in their lives. It is a fact that lifetime learning keeps humans' mind and body in good shape. When learners learn the things with utmost interest, they will be stronger in emotional, social, physical and financial matters.

In the process of motivating the learners in the classrooms, teachers apply different teaching techniques and strategies. To make their classes lively and attractive, teachers try to apply innovative teaching techniques and skills. As a result, the modern learners concentrate more on their lessons and learn them effectively in a welcoming milieu. When the teachers implement new trends in teaching and learning, the learners feel satisfied with the teachers' teaching and involve more in the learning process and participate actively in the classroom discussions.

Active and effective learning happens in the English language learning environment when the teachers concentrate more on the needs and interests of the learners. Therefore, the teachers of English have to implement various new strategies and approaches that involve their learners more on their learning. Hence the main responsibility of the ELT teachers is to motivate their English language learners towards the learning environment where they can comfortably, freely and independently express their views and ideas to apply them in performing the given work. Therefore, the teachers have to involve the English language learners to participate in groups in order to perform the given tasks or projects in a short time and with a very good output. When the tasks or projects are given to the learners to do in groups, each member contributes something to accomplish and they finally finish it in a learner-friendly and fun-filled environment. As students perform the tasks in an active and effective environment, the English teachers have to introduce such activities that involve the students to work in groups using collaborative learning approach. As the main concept of collaborative learning is to involve the learners to perform tasks in groups to develop the English language learners' knowledge as well as critical thinking, the ELT teachers have to apply this collaborative learning approach in the English classrooms.

The importance of Pair Work or Group Work

While learning, learners get to know many things and they acquire more

knowledge. The knowledge that the learners get from their schools is formal knowledge that is useful for learning how to learn. Whereas, practical knowledge is otherwise called applicable knowledge where the learners choose something to learn that interests them. Learners attain formal knowledge from their teachers and practical knowledge from the other people. Practical knowledge influences learners a lot and the learners will be in a position to think differently with a lot of new thoughts and ideas. As the main concept of collaborative learning is sharing knowledge and knowing new things from the other group members, the learners of the group gain a lot from one another. A lot of variation is found when the learners do the tasks individually and when do the same tasks in groups. So the knowledge that the learners get here is through practice and it will be their practical knowledge and it will retain for a long time in their minds.

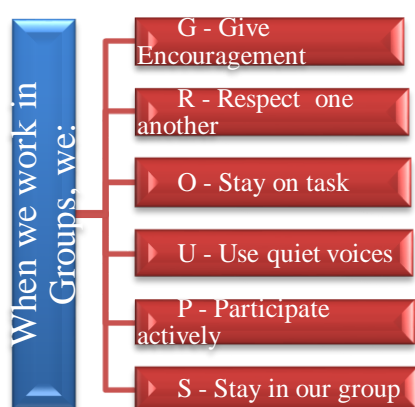


Fig: The Advantages of Group Work

The above figure discloses that there are many advantages while working in a group. When learners work in a group, it gives encouragement and moral support

to each and every member of the group. At the same time, the members of the group develop the concept of respecting one another. As the work is done collaboratively by the group, they stay on the task until they finish doing it. Furthermore, they also argue when needed, but they use quiet voices. Since the task is done in a learner-friendly environment, all the learners of the group participate actively to accomplish the task. Finally all the members stay on the same group as they are mingled friendly with one another.

There has been growing harmony in pedagogy throughout the world about the prerequisite of shifting from the traditional and old-fashioned teacher-centered approach to the latest and novel way of teaching, i.e., learner-centered approach. When the teaching and learning process continues in learner-centered approach, the learning takes place in a friendly and congenial environment. Moreover, the modern learners are vexed with the traditional lecturing method and they show more attention towards working in groups. The learners find it interesting doing the work in groups by sharing their thoughts and ideas with each other and contribute something to the given tasks. When the learners are divided into groups or pairs to perform tasks in the classrooms, they are highly motivated and participate in the tasks very actively.

The Importance of Collaborative Learning

As Rao, P. S. (2019a) says, “In collaborative learning, a group or team of learners works together to achieve a common objective that is generally to assist one another in order to learn their

teaching material. Collaborative learning teams not only have higher level of thinking but also store information for longer times than that of the learners who work individually". As the main concept of collaborative learning is to work in pairs or groups to perform the given tasks, the teachers are now-a-days implementing it in their regular classrooms and getting better results. When the learners work in pairs or groups, they also actively participate in their work and try to achieve better results. This will be a successful and lovely method when the work is done with collaboration of ideas and thoughts of the group members. Moreover, the members should be given complete freedom and responsibility in doing the tasks. In this regard, Nagata and Ronkowski (1998) aptly say, "Collaborative learning assigns responsibility primarily to the students". As the learners do the tasks by putting their ideas together, the learners will become stronger academically and they develop the concept of commitment. In this competitive world, collaborative learning is the best and the most useful and appropriate tool for getting success in any business as it is often linked with the players of the team. In this context Ingleton (2000: 2) says, "There is an upswing in demand by staff, students, and employers for students to graduate with good interpersonal skills, knowledge of group dynamics, the flexibility to work in teams, the ability to lead, to problem-solve and to communicate effectively. New curricula include a strong emphasis on generic skills, and we have the task of turning those emphases into actual graduate attributes. In the process, teachers' roles are changing from

imparting information to facilitating students' acquisition of learning and generic skills".

In the collaborative learning practices, the role of teachers is to act as facilitators and guide them properly in attaining the above mentioned skills. Various people define collaborative learning in different ways. According to Gokhale (1995: 1), "Collaborative learning is an instructional method in which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups towards a common academic goal". Gokhale's definition emphasizes on the ability of mixed groups' achievement and efforts. Whether the groups are with mixed or the same ability, it only depends on the objectives of the lesson or subject taught in the classroom. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), "Collaborative learning is a strategy that involves learners in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing". They give more emphasis on the active participation of the learners and it reminds the Chinese Proverb, "Tell me, I forget; Demonstrate me, I remember; Involve me, I understand". This is really more suitable for collaborative learning as the basic theory underlying it is to involve the learners in their work in order to attain better results in a shorter time. Moreover, Ingleton (2000) says, "Collaborative learning occurs as a result of interaction between peers engaged in the completion of a common task. Attention in on what students can do to initiate and manage their own learning through collaboration with others". Furthermore, learners acquire social skills through collaborative

learning. This provides the learners an opportunity of making friendship with new people where they cooperate with each other in learning new skills and getting new knowledge. At this juncture, the teachers are advised to organize the groups instead of leaving the selection part to the students.



In the process of collaborative learning, the learners are grouped or paired together to perform the given task. In performing this task, each and every member of the group is responsible for his own learning and at the same time, they are also responsible for the other members' performance also. Therefore, role of the learners in each other's learning is vital here as they share responsibilities of working together. In this regard, Gokhale (1995) aptly says, "The success of one student helps other student helps other students to be successful". Therefore, the learners get a chance to converse with their group members, present their ideas and defend them, discuss different views and opinions, demand other conceptual frameworks and involve very actively in the ongoing leaning process. Hence, it is understood that the main goal of collaborative learning is a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approach where the learners learn by discussing and working with the group members. The best suitable places to

implement collaborative learning are classrooms, laboratories and online.

The Impact of Collaborative Learning on EFL/ESL classrooms

In the twenty-first century classrooms, collaborative learning has become a prevalent teaching approach in EFL/ESL classrooms. So, most of the English teachers, linguists, curriculum designers and researchers put their emphasis on collaborative learning to get better results. As the concept of collaborative learning approach supports mainly the pragmatic approach where the learners have to perform the work on their own, it yields very good results for both EFL/ESL teachers as well as learners. Learners by observing their group members' performance in doing the tasks or projects, learn more things from them and try to contribute a lot for the getting fruitful results within the stipulated time.

Proponents of CL claim that the active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also promotes critical thinking (Gokhale, A.A., 1995).

Technology makes collaborative learning easier and provides more opportunities for learning. For online meetings, online collaboration technologies with free savvy tools are used like Stixy, an online shared whiteboard space, Google groups or Mikogo. The teachers should create the classroom environment to encourage the learners' independent thinking.

According to some research findings, boys receive and give elaborate explanations more and the stances they make are accepted by their group very

easily. It is also found that girls were ignored in a majority of male groups. In most of the girl groups, they mainly inclined to direct questions to the boys who generally ignored them. The teachers sometimes desire to form equality of gender as a standard. Even if it looks apparent, sometimes it seems missing. If teachers want to discuss it with older students, it becomes an issue. When the teachers understand that the learners start understanding the concepts taught in the classrooms, they generally try to reduce their responsibility or scaffolding. Here the teachers serve as facilitators just by gauging the groups' interactions and allowing the groups to develop their duty as time passes. It allows teams to develop their own products or topics in their classrooms as their goal of collaborative learning is increased responsibility over learning. Studies on collaborative learning suggest that when the study focuses on challenging questions and a higher level of cognitive thinking is produced by rich contexts. Hence, the English language teachers should give the assignments like study groups, problem-solving, project writing, collaborative writing, laboratory work and debating in their EFL/ESL classrooms. Since collaborative learning is very much useful in the classrooms to increase the learners' knowledge and develop their critical thinking, now-a-days it is widely used in most of the classrooms, especially, in their EFL/ESL classrooms. Most of the English language teachers are adopting collaborative learning approach in their EFL/ESL classrooms to involve the learners busy in their work and to get successful results from it. Now, we shall discuss the benefits that the learners get

from collaborative learning in EFL/ESL classrooms.

The benefits of Collaborative Learning in EFL/ESL classrooms

Since the concept of collaborative learning is to involve the learners in their tasks or projects through pair work or group work, the teachers as well as the learners get benefitted a lot by following this approach in their regular EFL/ESL classrooms. It is apt to quote Rao, P. S. (2019b) who asserts, "The learners get a lot of benefit from collaborative learning where the learners share the ideas with the members of the group and also learn many new things and gain more knowledge from it". Learners enjoy doing their work independently in groups by sharing their ideas with each other and every learner contributes something for the successful completion of the given task. Moreover, the learners participate with a lot of enthusiasm and encouragement as the tasks are performed with the coordination of the group members. As the teachers play the role of helpers or facilitators or directors, the learners perform their tasks in a learner-friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, the learners also develop critical thinking and habituate social relationship with the members of the society. Since collaborative learning has several benefits for the learners, let us examine how they are benefitted for the learners in EFL/ESL classrooms.

- Collaborative learning supports learners to work in pairs or groups to complete the tasks given to them.

- It supports the theory of pragmatic way of learning i.e., learning by doing concept.
- It promotes learners to develop friendly relationships among the group members.
- It motivates learners to finish the tasks quickly and easily.
- It develops critical thinking skills among the learners.
- It inculcates learners to devote more time on the tasks.
- It enhances learners' knowledge as they share their knowledge from one another.
- It even motivates the passive learners to engage energetically and enthusiastically in the given tasks.
- It promotes learners to have positive approach towards the teachers.
- It encourages learners the practice of active involvement in their learning.
- It develops the communication skills of the learners.
- It promotes learners' knowledge sharing skills.
- It encourages learners to have both mutual understanding and cooperation among the group members.
- It inculcates learners how the real success is attained in pairs and groups.
- It establishes a strong bond among the group members.
- It creates learner-centered atmosphere to complete the tasks without any stress.
- It lessens the burden of teachers' classroom teaching.
- It promotes teachers as facilitators to supervise and assist the groups whenever and wherever they need help.
- It inculcates learners to understand how to solve problems by putting ideas together.
- It promotes learners to focus more on peer interaction.
- It encourages even the average learners to shine in gaining more knowledge.



Fig: The main benefits of Collaborative Learning

- It develops learners' social interaction and social relationship with other people.
- It prepares learners to face any kind of problems in their lifetime.
- It helps learners to get successful results in their work.
- It promotes learners to develop rational thinking.
- It develops learners to have good leadership qualities.
- It enables learners to be self-confident in doing the tasks.

- It promotes learners to develop the techniques of solving any critical problems.
- It develops learners to think innovatively.
- It reduces anxiety as well as tension among the learners.
- It gives maximum freedom to the learners to perform their tasks.
- It keeps learners always on the track of success.
- It encourages learners to maintain good relationship with the members of both the group and the society.
- It welcomes learners with innovative ideas to find solution to the given problems.
- It creates congenial atmosphere for the learners to get qualitative results.
- It encourages learning communities.
- It creates interest towards the topic or subject that the learners learn.
- It develops practical knowledge for the learners.
- It promotes learners to be self-dependent while tackling any difficult problem.
- It prepares learners to become good leaders as well as good citizens in the society.
- It promotes learners to attend the classes regularly.
- It inculcates the importance of unity among the learners of various leaning levels.

As collaborative learning is beneficial to the EFL/ESL learners, this approach is widely practised by almost all the English

teachers in their regular EFL/ESL classrooms in order to involve the learners in their tasks.

The Ideal Size of EFL/ESL Groups in Collaborative Learning



Before the teachers start giving any collaborative activity to the EFL/ESL learners, first of all, their main concentration should be on the formation of groups. As Dishon and O’Leary (1994) state, “A smaller group size is beneficial to group success”, it is better to form smaller groups at the initial stages. There are many factors that influence the size of the group such as the EFL/ESL learners’ age group, their working experience in groups, their learning styles, the material available for the time given to finish the activity. The teachers should initially involve the learners in pairs to perform the tasks until they get good progress in working together. Once the learners gain some experience in doing the tasks successfully in groups, then the teachers have to increase the size of the groups to three, then four and perhaps five also. There is a possibility for more interactions when there are more learners in the group. It also gives more challenging to the learners and even in terms of contributions also, the larger group of learners also gives greater contributions to their task. But smaller groups of three to five are ideal for the

learners to share their ideas and it also gives chance to all the learners to participate in the activities and it is also easier for the teachers to supervise the progress of the task. Hence, the ideal collaborative learning group should be between three and five to achieve better and quicker results in EFL/ESL classrooms.

The motivation of learners towards Collaborative Learning in EFL/ESL classrooms

There is no doubt that teachers are considered as one of the main pillars of teaching-learning process and their role in collaborative learning is also very crucial. Even if the learners work together on a common task in collaborative learning, the role of the teachers is important to instruct, advice, guide, help, control, coach, motivate and evaluate in the progress of their learners in EFL/ESL classrooms. The main aspect of implementing collaborative learning in EFL/ESL classrooms is to advance the learners' foreign language skills and to promote their communication skills. Furthermore, "Collaborative learning is a strategy", according to Crandall (1999: 227), "which affords students the opportunity to develop a range of cognitive, metacognitive and social as well as linguistic skills while interacting and negotiating in the classroom". From this definition, it is understood that the EFL/ESL learners have to get mastery over the four language skills equally. Simultaneously, the EFL/ESL learners have to be thorough with social and linguistic skills in order to have social contacts with the learners of other languages and also to enhance their vocabulary. As there is an increase in the

number of EFL/ESL learners, the English teachers have to motivate them properly towards learning the English language by implementing various techniques and approaches to their teaching. Statistics shows that the growth of EFL/ESL learners is increased enormously and this is true in the case of the US.

According to National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2011), "More than one half of states have experienced a growth rate of over 100% in their English language learners' numbers". It is crystal clear that there is a huge increase in the total number of ESL/EFL learners and it happens not only in the US but also all around the world. The English language teachers have to implement various strategies and techniques in order to motivate these EFL/ESL learners towards learning English. For this purpose, the English teachers have to implement certain techniques that involve the learners in pairs or groups to perform certain tasks in the classroom. Through this approach, learners involve greatly in the given tasks and try to attain the goals with mutual cooperation from the members of the group. Since collaborative learning happens by involving learners in groups, the learners find it interesting and complete the given tasks with utmost care by devoting more time in the tasks. As the learners discuss with the other members of their group to resolve the problems, they also develop critical thinking and cultivate social relationships with the members of the group.

While selecting the topics for the EFL/ESL learners, the English language teachers have to consider their levels, needs and interests. Moreover, the teachers should adopt some useful and innovative tasks that create more interest among the learners. As a result, the learners perform the given tasks with utmost interest and lots of enthusiasm. Furthermore, the learners also devote more time to the tasks when they find the tasks are more interesting to them. So the level of concentration also increases and they also try to develop self-learning. While implementing collaborative learning approach in the EFL/ESL classrooms, the English language teachers have to implement activities such as pair and group activities, think-pair-share, group projects, role-plays, case-based learning, classroom problems, Phillips 66, jigsaw activities and so on. Furthermore, the learners' learning process has to be taken into account by the teachers as part of their evaluation process. Moreover, the learners enhance their social contacts and communications through jigsaw strategy. With this type of collaborative activity, the EFL/ESL learners get the opportunity to become more expertise on the topic given to them. It is time to bring to notice that the University of Iowa also debates on some more strategies like fish bowl debates, round robin, using clusters, buzz groups or learning cells.

When learning takes place in a pleasant way, the learners also participate actively in the given task. In this connection, Rao, P. S. (2019c) states, "As the teachers introduce the materials according to the needs and interests of the

students, there is no doubt that the students will participate in the classroom activities with a lot of enthusiasm and zeal. As a result, the students learn a lot in groups". Once they are used to do the tasks in groups, they will automatically do the same on their own in the future. It is wise to quote the words of Vygotsky in this regard. Vygotsky (1962) says, "What children can do together today, they can do alone tomorrow". Therefore, the teachers of English are advised to concentrate more on pragmatic activities that involve the learners in doing the work in the EFL/ESL classrooms in order to make the learners self-dependent. For this purpose, the teachers have to adopt as many task-based learning activities as possible in their EFL/ESL classrooms so that the learners find more interest in doing the tasks and work hard to achieve the desired goals. Moreover, the learners have to concentrate more on the tasks and should devote more time on learning the language skills while working with groups.

As collaborative learning has got many advantages, the English teachers have to concentrate more on group activities to promote active learning among their learners in the EFL/ESL classrooms. Furthermore, the learners should follow the instructions of the teachers carefully while doing the tasks. With a proper coordination of the group members and an ounce of hard work, the most difficult tasks also become easier for them to achieve good results.

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to emphasize the impact of collaborative learning on EFL/ESL classrooms. First of all, this paper has

discussed the importance of learning. Then it has also focused on the importance of group and pair work and also the importance of collaborative learning. Moreover, the main emphasis has been laid on the impact of collaborative learning on EFL/ESL classrooms. Furthermore, the benefits of collaborative learning have been discussed in detail including illustrations. Then the ideal size of groups for perfect implementation of collaborative learning in EFL/ESL classrooms has been elaborated. This paper has also highlighted how to motivate of learners towards collaborative learning in EFL/ESL classrooms. Finally, some useful suggestions are given to the teachers and learners to make collaborative learning more effective in the EFL/ESL classrooms.

Since collaborative learning takes place in the classrooms in the form of group work, the entire group members put their ideas together to complete the given tasks. As the whole process of doing the tasks is done in a friendly and fun-filled environment, the EFL/ESL learners are highly motivated to towards the given tasks. Moreover, the learners participate every actively in the tasks with more enthusiasm and each member of the group contributes a lot in accomplishing the work given by their teachers in EFL/ESL classrooms.

The teachers have to think of various activities that are suitable to the needs and interests of the learners so that they involve actively in the given tasks with their pairs or groups in EFL/ESL classrooms. Moreover, the teachers have to monitor the work done by the students from time to time and also assist or guide

them when they need any kind of help or support to complete the tasks given to them. Furthermore, the learners are suggested to come out with innovative ideas to do the given tasks in a learner-centered approach. Eventually, the teachers play a vital role in making the projects or tasks successful. Therefore, the teachers should always encourage the groups with proper motivation and constant support so that successful collaborative learning takes place in the EFL/ESL classrooms.

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