Attitude of Students towards Collaborative Learning in Language Classroom

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Abstract

This research aims at exploring the attitude of students towards collaborative group work and learning in language classrooms by adopting a mixed-method strategy that combines questionnaires and interviews. To be conducted at the Institute of Management Sciences Peshawar, the research focuses on undergraduate students, who are pursuing the second semester of BS Accounting & Finance and BS-English programs. A total of 56 respondents were selected for the survey who were familiar with some group work activities, and further interviews with English instructors strengthened their understanding of collaborative learning dynamics. Research methods included semi-structured interviews with a Sony Voice Recorder and the Smart Learning Platform (Frog O. S.) for administering and collecting survey data. The survey consisted of only six brief questions intended to spark immediate replies among the students. Using precise recording and accurate transcription of interviews, the researcher went through the process of carefully analyzing the participants' attitudes to group work.

The results revealed that students greatly appreciated group work in their English classes. Collaborative activities were well received by the survey respondents with 75% stating they were happy with the activities and 88% indicating that their motivation and engagement had gone up. Notable results of the collaborative learning were revealed through in-depth interviews which pointed out the development of better language skills, active participation, and the creation of a supportive learning environment. This study reveals the importance of introducing cooperative learning methods in the language teaching classroom. Implementation of collaborative learning exercises by educators is an ongoing process. Assignments should be customized to each student to get the best learning experience. Future research should be focused on bigger and more heterogeneous groups so that we can make our comprehension of student opinions about group work activities in language classrooms more profound.

Keywords: *Collaborative learning, language acquisition, sociocultural theory, students' attitudes*

1. Introduction

Language training has transformed over the last three decades to a more communicative and practical style that stresses students' language use. Both teaching and learning are now centered on students. CL, which originated in an ancient society, has grown in popularity over the twentieth century (Chatterjee & Correia, 2020). According to certain research, students learn more and absorb more knowledge when they interact with their peers. In 1962, Lev Vygotsky conducted research on how the environment impacts learning. He said that social connections helped students study better and that interacting with friends and lecturers allowed them to learn more (Ehsan et al., 2019).

Giving pupils the opportunity to study individually and from their classmates is an important aspect of cooperative learning. Numerous definitions and studies of cooperative learning have been done.

According to Felder and Brent (2012), cooperative learning is a technique that improves learning and happiness as a result of being part of a high-performing team. Cooperative learning environments encourage students to help one another, take the lead in group collaborations, and uncover shared goals by completing assigned tasks. According to a review of the literature, Nunan (1992), Clark et al. (2007), and Ha Le & Wubbels (2018) all confirmed that the phrases "cooperative learning," "collaborative learning," and "group work" are sometimes used similarly. This is understandable considering that all three terms aim to diminish competitive individual learning by engaging students in supportive group learning experiences. The three approaches make use of student variety to promote social connection, equal participation, and reciprocal engagement.

Researchers have made it evident that the three methodologies differ from one another. Group work varies from CL in that students are just gathered and assigned tasks; nonetheless, group work may not result in teamwork. In certain studies, (Pica and Doughty, 1985; Flowerdew, 1998; Melles, 2004; Chen & Hird, 2006; Jiang, 2009), the term "group work" is still used to refer to a variety of instructional modalities related to cooperative learning. CL, on the other hand, entails more than simply grouping students and assigning them tasks. Instead, CL requires students to collaborate and rely on each other to finish homework. Gokhale, (1995) defines collaborative learning as "an instructional approach where students of diverse performance levels collaborate within small groups to achieve a shared objective (Qureshi et al., 2023)."

In essence, it entails dividing pupils into several groups and giving them academic assignments to finish within a set amount of time. This procedure is used by language instructors as a classroom exercise to encourage student participation and change the teacher's traditional function as a knowledge transmitter into a more effective facilitator. This research holds significance because, even though student viewpoints on instructional techniques and classroom protocols are often quite valuable, they are frequently overlooked. Examining how students feel about participating in groups might help identify patterns among those students who may not be completely engaged in these cooperative learning settings (Dignath, 2021). As a result, it becomes crucial to accommodate unique learning preferences. This study's main goal is to determine whether or not students prefer collaborative learning.

Research Aim

The aim of the current study is to investigate students' perspectives on group work and collaborative learning in language classroom

1.2. Research Questions

The central research inquiry is:

Are students inclined toward positive or negative attitudes when it comes to working in groups within language classes?

2. Literature Review

Cooperative learning has become a progressive way in foreign language instruction, receiving more and more attention from the educators and researchers. This review paper looks at the effectiveness and influence of

cooperative learning techniques on language learning, emphasizing student motivation, reduction of anxiety, language proficiency and classroom dynamics. Mourah and Moudeb (2020) state that cooperative learning and English as a second or foreign language instruction go hand in hand. They pinpoint the fact that cooperative learning emphasizes active engagement through mimicking real-life language encounters which, in turn, stimulates student motivation and reduces anxiety (Nasri & Labed, 2020). Cooperative learning with its collaborative nature helps the students to explore, communicate and interact in the target language which accommodates the different learning styles of the students. (Ning, 2010)On the other hand, although cooperative learning is a good indicator of improving the language learning process, it is still a matter of how class management is done as well as pedagogical implementation.

Suwantaratbip and Wichadee's (2010) research highlights the advantage in language proficiency and anxiety level reduction among university students by cooperative learning. Through a cooperative learning strategy, the students demonstrated a reduction in anxiety and a predilection for teamwork. Finally, Wahyukti (2017) emphasizes the value of cooperative learning in promoting active participation, raising conversation levels, and constructing a supportive classroom setting conducive to L2 learning. These results highlight the possibility of affective demands being addressed through group learning and the consequent improvement in language learning results. In the film Egitim (2021), the academic benefits of collaborative learning in language colleges are portrayed with an utmost emphasis on higher-level vocabulary usage and the promotion of language immersion through group conversations. Through group activities, learners have chances not only for language practice but also for correcting and negotiating meaning (Zarrabi, 2016). For this purpose, people-oriented tasks are extremely important because they help students to be more active and to develop their language proficiency and communication skills (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000).

Moreover, cooperative learning develops both interpersonal connections and negotiation skills among learners according to Ho (Cloudia, 2020). Qin and Jiang (2023) highlight an aspect of group work which makes it possible for students to collaborate and help others by rephrasing or clarifying their remarks, thus improving language production and cognition on the part of the students. By practising effective negotiation strategies, students acquire knowledge while employing various linguistic solutions within a conducive learning space (Qu & Cross, 2024). Through this repeated process of negotiation and collaboration, there is a deeper engagement with the target language and better achievement of these overall language goals.

While cooperative learning is proven to be quite effective, some problems may arise during its implementation and evaluation. Whilst social learning values the active participation of students, the achievement of this relies on the effectiveness of group dynamics and a fair distribution of all tasks (Wahyukti, 2017). During the group assignments, the teachers should pay particular attention to students who are actively engaged in group tasks and address any potential conflicts or inequalities in participation. Furthermore, evaluating the contribution by each student in group activities is methodologically challenging which is another factor to consider when assessing learning outcomes (Suwantaratbip & Wichadee, 2010).

However, some students may struggle in stress-free learning environments due to personal attributes and prior classroom experiences (Nasri & Labed, 2020). Language diversity and diversity of language backgrounds and proficiency levels in multicultural and multilingual classrooms can affect group dynamics and communication patterns, which can be another challenge for instructors (Mourah & Moudeb, 2020). Hence, such a comprehensive approach to fettering students' needs and cultural surroundings should be taken into account to maximize the positive aspects of cooperative learning in a multilingual environment.

2.1 Cooperative Learning Techniques

Despite ample proof in the scientific literature attesting to the advantages of CL, no one has explicitly suggested that students ought to work in groups at all times. Richards et al., (2001) and Gillies (2007) suggested that the following strategies be used in order to guarantee a successful CL implementation.

Introducing pupils to CL

Before introducing CL to their students, qualified educators should provide them thorough explanations of the technology. They ought to offer details on a variety of topics, including evaluation methods, role and responsibility assignment, team development, and productive collaboration with group members.

Providing guidance

Instructions and directions that are specific about what students are expected to do, what skills they should acquire, what signals and expressions to use when responding to their teacher, and what behavioral conduct (Kroeper et al., 2022) they should internalize during group work should be given by teachers to their students. Establishing guidelines and standards in the classroom is also crucial because they help students participate, assist, communicate, share, and overcome obstacles.

Creating a Welcoming Environment

For CL to be implemented successfully, teachers must provide a laid-back, encouraging environment where students can assist one another in learning in a flexible, secure, and comfortable manner. Additional research demonstrates that the physical environment and seating arrangements in classrooms have an impact on the kind and volume of social interaction, communication, and desired student conduct in CL (Cornell, 2002). If instructors want their students to collaborate, they should steer clear of seating configurations that are best suited for lecture-style classes, like rows and floor-mounted columns, which impede student cooperation and communication. Students should be seated next to one another around a square or circular desk in the CL classroom (Odum et al., 2021). The pupils work and converse more peacefully while seated closer to one another. They should, however, have enough room between them to allow them to keep eye contact and share resources without interfering with one another's activities.

Establishing Groups

Diverse methods are used to form groups. Heterogeneous groups are created based on the racial, gender, and academic backgrounds of the pupils (Gabaldón-Estevan, 2020). This is the best kind of group because heterogeneity makes it possible to include a range of talents, styles, knowledge, and experiences, which raises the chances that students will learn from one another. Homogeneous groupings are established on the basis of shared attributes, such gender, skill level, or performance (Müller et al., 2021). Groups at random are created without taking any specific criteria into account. It's a simple grouping approach that makes the point that anybody can collaborate with anyone. Individual interests, like friendships or cliques, constitute the basis for the formation of interest groups.

Choosing the Size of the Group

Making groups small is the best course of action. Activities can be completed by smaller groups faster than by bigger ones. Utilizing smaller groups not only reduces the need for additional management strategies but also boosts student involvement and participation. Large groups are best for large or complex work, but they are more challenging to manage and can easily lead to a student feeling left out or ignored (Almendingen et al., 2021). Experts in CL advise teachers to divide their class into pairs at first, and eventually into groups of four. According to Cohen and Lotan (2014), four people make great cooperation teams and facilitate fruitful discussions. Members can

stay in close proximity to one another, listen intently to conversations, and make eye contact with one another because to this group size.

Putting Roles in Place

One way to lessen conflict and misbehavior in a group is to assign responsibilities. By assigning roles, a teacher gives each participant a task to complete so that students are aware of what is expected of them. Data recorder, timekeeper, monitor, observer, facilitator, reflector, investigator, checker, and elaborator are a few tasks that students can perform (Kendzi & Berkane, 2020). Making sure that the roles are appropriate for the activity type and that they are cycled regularly to allow students to take on new responsibilities is another crucial part of assigning roles.

Introducing Assignments

It is the teacher's responsibility to create or choose assignments that are suitable for CL. The organization of tasks should encourage collaboration among students to accomplish shared objectives. Students can collaborate in groups to solve problems, talk about problems, exchange ideas, create products, get ready for presentations, and design projects, for instance (Karmina et al., 2021). Once a task has been chosen, the teacher has to explain it to the class and give them enough information, including the goals, success criteria, and necessary abilities. In addition, the instructor must clarify the key ideas and techniques required to finish the assignment establishing a deadline. Time limitations are beneficial because they aid in the development of students' time management abilities, especially when one member of each group serves as a time checker (Wolters & Brady, 2020). Although most groups often finish their work within the allotted time, the teacher has the authority to extend it if necessary.

keeping an Eye on the Job

To keep an eye on the actions of the CL groups, the teacher should circulate about them frequently. In this phase, the instructor can address queries from the class, dispel doubts, encourage discussion, rectify errors, control overbearing and docile pupils, lower noise levels, inspire pupils, and offer feedback.

2.2 Analysis of prior Studies

Researcher delve into two distinct studies. The initial study, spanning a year, investigated the teaching of English in secondary school classrooms in Hong Kong through cooperative learning and group work activities (Sachs, Candlin, and Rose, 2003). The second study, conducted in 2013, examined students' sentiments regarding group projects in a Spanish ESL class (Fernández et al., 2013).

Study One (Hong Kong, 2003)

The study involved 520 student candidates from three separate local secondary schools, all of whom had diverse degrees of English language competency. Along with their native Cantonese, English served as the language of teaching. Notably, problems with student behaviour and a lack of enthusiasm were particularly evident in the secondary school with the lowest level of language competency (Kissau et al., 2021). The other two schools, where the children were categorized as average to advance in terms of competence, nevertheless, did not show any such problems. The classroom activities that took place in these schools were the everyday ones, and among them was the regular English language practice. Eight teachers were included in the research and six of them had university

degrees in literature while the other two had certificates for teacher preparation (Suryani, 2020). All of the teachers had more than three years of teaching experience and several of them had more than eight years of it.

Launching the Project

Cooperative language teaching and group work were the main areas of professional development that the school teachers were taught to achieve when the research project started. The main aim of this training was to help teachers to be able to plan their lessons properly and execute the related activities (Bergmark, 2020). The workshops were full of problems which all led to the data collection process. This paper was about the following subjects, namely, cooperative learning concepts and methods for language education, task-based learning, observation of classroom group work and the sharing of group work experiences.

Designing Materials

The research group used the workbooks and curricula given by the schools to create the assignments for the cooperative learning tasks (Öztürk and Korkmaz, 2019). After that, the teachers were given these projects to use in their classes. Teachers were also told to create their own projects later on and include them in their weekly class plans along with the assignments given by the researchers.

Review and Discussion

The pre-test and post-test data resulted in a lot of useful conclusions. Surprisingly, the group that participated in group projects and cooperative learning did not perform better than the group that did not. The researchers caution against making direct parallels between cooperative learning and standard language instruction, saying the findings should be treated with care.

Regarding input from students on cooperative language learning, classroom observations showed a discernible rise in students' satisfaction and motivation in studying English thanks to this novel strategy (Panhwar, 2023). Students experienced a greater sense of freedom and relaxation when collaborating with their peers. They derived satisfaction from their group discussions, even when tackling challenging tasks or issues. Surprisingly, high achievers found cooperative learning to be very beneficial since it gave them the chance to work on more difficult assignments that matched their skill levels (Millis, 2023).

This was in contrast to traditional language programs, when teachers frequently neglected high achievers in favor of low and medium achievers, depriving them of such opportunities. Students who performed poorly gained from exposure to their more gifted peers, which led to improved communication. In contrast, such exchanges were less common in the typical language classroom. Overall, group work activities were extremely beneficial and fun for learning for both low- and high-achieving kids.

After the project was finished in 1999, the researcher decided to speak with the same eight professors again in order to get more detailed input on the experiment. These interviews mainly focused on the perceived value of cooperative learning and the restrictions or difficulties involved with its use in the Hong Kong educational setting. Most educators shared the opinion that group work was very beneficial and interesting for kids. The fact that these cooperative learning activities provided additional possibilities for interactive language use (Jesionkowska et al.,

2020) peer assistance with critical thinking, decision-making, and error correction reinforced the assumption that both more competent and less proficient students benefited from them.

Teachers did, however, note some drawbacks and limitations. Sometimes weak pupils have trouble properly interacting with peers during group discussions. Furthermore, group work activities were seen to take a lot of time, and there were constraints on teaching time and timetables in the classroom. This latter problem may account for teachers' sporadic resistance to including group work exercises. This project is hailed as a brave experiment that forced both educators and students to leave their academic comfort zones and adopt a fresh, exciting strategy that improved language teaching and learning (Alarifi, 2023). Teachers traditionally occupied the role of knowledge providers in traditional classrooms, while students typically played the more passive one of knowledge consumers.

2.2.2 Study Two (Spain, 2013)

The follow-up investigation, examining students' attitudes toward group projects, was conducted in a 2013 Spanish ESL classroom. In this research, 55 English learners who spoke Spanish as their primary language engaged in a collaborative writing activity, with 50% of them working in pairs and the remaining 50% working in groups. A post-task questionnaire was then given to the students (Fernández, Dobao & Blum, 2013).

Students reported many benefits of participating in collaborative activities and generally displayed very favourable views. The majority of the complimentary remarks and reactions centre on the fact that students had more chances to use their language skills and engage actively in conversations while working in pairs (Tong et al., 2022). Students also remarked that they learned useful information and valuable suggestions from their peers. Only four students indicated a preference for working alone on the writing job, but the majority of students showed significant involvement and a positive view towards their collaborative learning task.

3. Research Methodology

The research combined the qualitative and quantitative methods of survey and interviews to investigate the views of students regarding collaborative learning in the context of the Institute of Management Sciences Peshawar (None Sanaullah et al., 2023). The survey carried out in May 2023 targeted college students in the second semester of the Bachelor's Degree in Accounting & Finance and Bachelor's Degree in English Literature (Ganesha & Aithal, 2022). The survey received a total of 56 responses from these programs since the participants were selected based on their familiarity with group work activities due to the nature of their studies.

Furthermore, interviews were done with English teachers who are well-experienced and successful in managing group projects and collaborative strategies. These interviews not only illuminated educators' perspectives but also enriched the picture of collaborative learning at the institution.

The research tools involved were semi-structured interviews utilizing a Sony Sound recorder of up to 90 minutes recording capacity (Rayment et al., 2023). The device helped to perfectly capture the detailed participant responses and was convenient during the transfer for transcript and analysis. Furthermore, the smart learning platform known as Frog O. S. was utilized as the primary tool for survey administration and data collection (Whang & Miranda, 2024). The online platform with built-in surveys allowed the collection of not only qualitative and quantitative data but also maintained high-quality standards of reliability, validity, and accuracy throughout the study. The survey, which consisted of six brief questions intended to produce immediate and spontaneous responses from the students, was designed to be very comfortable on the Smart Learning Platform. In this way, the survey was not only administered quickly but also high-quality information was automatically generated in a format that is suitable for an analysis. Additionally, the researcher selected these tools based on usefulness, dependability and user-friendly aspects of the tools, keeping the aim of consistency and accuracy of data on track.

The researcher was able to carefully review and transcribe the interview records to figure out the attitude of participants by paying attention to the words they used and how they spoke. This qualitative data, supported by the quantitative information received as a result of the survey, offered a comprehensive point of view on the students' attitudes towards collaborative learning. In short, the employed methodology follows a well-organized and appropriate pathway that combines more than one method of data collection to offer a better understanding of students collaboration dynamics within the Institute of Management Sciences Peshawar.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted Io the Institute of Management Sciences in Peshawar to identify students' attitudes towards group work and collaborative learning in their language classrooms. The study employed a mixed-method design with both survey and interview techniques to gain a better overall understanding of the student's attitude toward group learning.

Survey Findings

The survey results showed the majority of students were having positive attitudes toward group projects in their English language classes. Respondents were clear in their response as 78% expressed satisfaction with collaborative learning activities which are considered very useful as far as language acquisition and active participation are concerned. Besides, 86% of the students also said that they were more motivated and active in groups, which added to the fact that cooperative learning helps students to get motivated as well.

Interview Insights

The study carried out interviews with students and teachers of English to gain background about the application of collaborative learning as well. The students said that they were thrilled by the opportunities to interact with classmates, to share their thoughts, and to improve their language skills through teamwork. Most of them stressed the cooperative nature of learning which offers them the chance to tackle something new fearlessly and engage in discussions teachers emphasized that the benefits of collaborative learning were language acquisition and student engagement promotion. They described the role of group work as crucial in creating a friendly and welcoming environment where each student felt respected and stimulated for the difficult language acquisition path they were embarking on.

Discussion

This study's outcomes are in line with the previous research showing that cooperative learning works in language education very well. The impact of technology in motivating students, developing their language proficiency or creating a community in the classroom is surprisingly great (Nasri & Labed, 2020). Group projects act as a stage for students where they can use their language abilities in a natural context as well as feel confident when using language to communicate with others. Additionally, the positive attitudes toward collaborative learning, as evidenced in this study, draws attention to the need to develop nurturing learning environments that empower students and give them a role to play in classroom activities. The strategic implementation of cooperative learning techniques highlighted in the literature (Richards et al., 2001; Gillies, 2007) is one of the keys to gaining maximum benefit from collaborative learning and fostering student success. Therefore, the conclusions reached in this study add to our perception of the students' perspectives of collaborative learning in language classrooms and emphasize the role of cooperative learning methods in language education pedagogy. Moving ahead, more research should be carried out and professional development activities should be pursued to figure out the subtleties of joint learning and how to enhance learners' engagement and language development in varied settings.

5 Summary of Findings

The large percentages of students actively participating in group work indicate that participants are generally familiar with collaborative learning activities in their classes. The main finding of this study is that the vast majority of students find group work enjoyable and view it as a "fun" way to learn with their classmates. This study also

found that group work fosters social connections and a spirit of teamwork, both of which are essential for attaining the stated educational goals.

This brings us to the third important discovery, which deals with the effectiveness of group projects for student learning. The majority of participants thought that group projects were really beneficial and effective learning tools. The interviewed teachers echoed this perspective and underscored the efficacy of cooperative learning as a teaching strategy within the language classroom. The interviews repeatedly showed that the participants had overwhelmingly favourable opinions towards working in groups. Participants employ expressions such as "beneficial," "perform optimally in a group," "unleashes my potential," and "enhances creativity" in their remarks, a sentiment that is strongly reinforced by the audio recordings. The kids' upbeat and enthusiastic voices when speaking about the subject also highlight their enthusiasm for group projects.

5.1 Possible Limitations

The sample size of this study, which was completed with 56 students out of a total of 100 due to system issues in the smart learning platform that prevented the participation of the remaining students, could have been a possible weakness. It is significant that there were no male participants in the interview stage. In order to acquire a more in-depth understanding of both genders' attitudes towards group work activities, the researcher hopes to solve these constraints in future work by doing comparable studies with a bigger and more diverse student population, including both male and female students.

5.2 Recommendation and Conclusion

Collaborative learning exercises should continue to be used in language classes by teachers. Most students have favorable opinions of these kinds of group activities, which not only indirectly improve their learning but also make it fun and socially fulfilling. Instructors are urged to integrate collaborative learning activities more fully into their lesson plans, abandon the old passive individual instruction model, and take on a role more akin to a "guide on the side" as opposed to a "sage on the stage."

However, it's important for teachers to recognize the minority of pupils who could have unfavorable opinions and attitudes about group projects. It might be helpful to incorporate some individualized assignments within the curriculum to meet their demands. Teachers are also encouraged to keep an eye on group activities and think about joining in on a few of them to support and guarantee the success of all team members who could have distractions.

To keep up with the quickly changing teaching methods of today, it is essential to incorporate collaborative learning activities into curriculum and lesson plans. Additionally, it is advised that students receive time management instruction while participating in group projects because efficient time management is essential for success in both the activity at hand and life in general. Collaborative learning, also known as group work, has a strong foundation in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and is crucial to the learning of second languages. Learning collaboratively.

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