



## Establishing Collaboration Practice in an English Young Learner Classroom

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**Abstract:** Collaborative Learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task. It is not easy for a teacher to apply collaboration to young learner students in the classroom, it could be that a young learner's emotions are still unstable, students are selfish who tend to like to do their own work and feel annoyed because they have to work with their friends who may be a little lacking and finally these superior students feel worried about their grades if they are directed to work with students who are slightly lacking in knowledge. This paper aims to discuss the strategies that a teacher can use in deepening collaboration between students in the classroom.

**Keywords:** Collaborative Learning, Young Learners, Strategies

### 1. Introduction

Teaching English to young learners is a sophisticated motion since teaching English at an early age is vital to developing children's language competence, especially in acquiring a foreign language (YILDIZ EKİN & ATAK DAMAR, 2013). When a foreign language is taught to young learners, they will be engaged effectively in building their ability. Teaching English to young learners has been conceived to teach a second language better than adult learners (Nguyen, 2016) because they learn without doubt and worry and are full of energy (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). Children also have good memories at an early age, which is essential for acknowledging the new language materials. Besides, children live and interact in a good environment and natural situation, influencing their social activities (Vygotsky, 2012). They tend to acquire knowledge through their eyes, ears and hands (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Therefore, teaching English to young learners is distinguished from teaching at another level.

Collaboration has very beneficial benefits, both for students and for a teacher. When students interact with peers to achieve common goals, a teacher can help students develop many skills for students, such as the ability to help each other, be a good team member, share material with friends, giving students a sense of responsibility; this is also able to teach students patience. Learning the skills involved in collaboration becomes as important as the task itself.

However, it is not easy for a teacher to apply collaboration to young learner students in the classroom, as we know that young learner students are still emotionally unstable, students are selfish, tend to like to do their work, and there may be some students who are smarter than their friends, and feel annoyed because they

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have to work with their friends who may be lacking. Finally, these superior students feel worried about their grades if directed to work with students who are slightly lacking in knowledge.

For that, how important is the role of a teacher in managing their class, especially in building collaboration between young learners in the classroom, to obtain effective learning goals and realise the desired learning outcomes? Based on the description above, this paper aims to discuss the strategies that a teacher can use to deepen collaboration between students in the classroom

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning" is an umbrella term for various educational approaches involving a joint intellectual effort by students or teachers. Usually, students work in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings or creating a product. Collaborative learning activities vary widely, but most centre on students' exploration or application of the course material, not simply the teacher's presentation or explication.

Collaborative learning significantly shifts from college classrooms' typical teacher-centred or lecture-centered milieu. The lecturing/ listening/note-taking process in collaborative classrooms may not disappear entirely. However, it lives alongside other processes based on students' discussion and active work with the course material. Teachers who use collaborative learning approaches tend to think of themselves less as expert transmitters of knowledge to students and more as expert designers of intellectual experiences for student coaches or mid-wives of a more emergent learning process.

Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. In the CL environment, the learners are challenged socially and emotionally as they listen to different perspectives and are required to articulate and defend their ideas. In so doing, the learners create their unique conceptual frameworks and do not rely solely on an expert's or a text's framework. In a CL setting, learners can converse with peers, present and defend ideas, exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks, and be actively engaged (Laal & Laal, 2012)

The collaborative learning model is an approach in the learning process where students work together in groups to achieve specific learning goals. In this model, students interact, discuss, and work together to solve problems, understand concepts, and develop skills with guidance from the teacher or facilitator. How to do a collaborative learning model:

- a. Group formation: The teacher or facilitator forms groups by grouping students based on interests, abilities, or compatibility between students. The group should ideally consist of 4-6 members so that each student could participate actively.
- b. Selection of topics or tasks: The teacher or facilitator determines the topics or tasks to be worked on by the group. The topic or assignment must be relevant to the learning material and have a clear purpose.
- c. Discussion and collaboration in groups: Once a topic or assignment is determined, students in the group are asked to actively discuss, share ideas, explore information, and find solutions together. In this process, students learn through social interaction and support each other.
- d. Presentation of group work: After working in groups, each group is asked to present their work. According to the learning objectives, this presentation can be in written reports, oral presentations, posters, or other formats.
- e. Evaluation and reflection: After the presentation, the teacher or facilitator evaluates the results of the group's work and provides feedback to the students. In addition, students are also asked to reflect on the learning process they have gone through and identify the advantages, disadvantages, and understanding they have gained.

### **2.2 Advantages of Collaborative Learning Model**

- a. Increase student engagement: In collaborative learning, students are actively involved in the learning process and could contribute directly. This increases students' motivation and interest in learning.

- b. Improve social skills: Through collaboration within groups, students learn to communicate, cooperate, listen, and respect the opinions of others. These social skills are very important for their future social life.
- c. Enhance concept understanding: In collaborative learning, students discuss and share their understanding of the concepts. This helps students deepen their understanding and see concepts from different points of view.
- d. Increase creativity: In groups, students can collaborate to generate new ideas and create creative solutions to problems. This builds students' critical and creative thinking skills.
- e. Broaden horizons: Through collaborative learning, students can broaden their horizons by hearing the opinions, experiences, and viewpoints of other group members. This opens a broader understanding of the topic being studied.

### **2.3 Disadvantages of the Collaborative Learning Model**

- a. Participation imbalance: Sometimes more dominant or passive students are in groups. This can result in an imbalance of participation in the group, and more passive students may not get the maximum benefit from collaborative learning.
- b. Conflict between group members: Conflict between group members can occur in collaboration. This can interfere with the learning process and affect student motivation and performance.
- c. Lack of communication skills: Students sometimes struggle to communicate well and clearly in groups. This can hinder effective collaboration and reduce the benefits of collaborative learning.
- d. Dependence on other group members: Students who lack confidence or are less experienced in collaborative learning may rely on stronger group members. This can hinder their growth as learners.
- e. Time required: The collaborative learning process takes longer than individual learning. This can be a challenge if the learning process has strict time limits.

### **2.4 The Principle of Collaborative Learning.**

#### **2.4.1 Provide more language practice opportunities.**

Collaborative Learning allows the students to be engaged in the learning process as they work together towards a common learning goal. When they discuss or share ideas, they automatically practice their language competency. In the EFL class, this is one of the challenges in which the students are asked to speak English as a foreign language as the main targeted goal. The problem will exist more when there are fewer capable students than the expert ones. The teacher must switch his/her learning approach to the traditional one as he/she tries to explain certain language focus to the students. The fact that the students need to practice the language independently for a certain amount of time will be reduced by the long duration the teacher needs to explain the difficult material. Another challenge is that the more capable students have no peers with whom to practice the conversation since the weak students cannot respond meaningfully to the English conversation.

#### **2.4.2 Improve the quality of student talk.**

Zhang (2010) explains that the teacher creates discourse in traditional EFL classrooms in an artificial setting. In contrast, CL can be designed to create a social setting like a real-life situation regarding how language is used. It helps the students produce quantity and optimise the conversation by engaging in requesting, clarifying, and negotiating conversation during the CL. Furthermore, as Long and Porter (1985) and Lin (2015) indicate, in CL-directed learning, language adjustment occurs as the students try to make themselves understood.

Consequently, they will also try to make others understand what they intend to say. They will speak in different ways to ensure others listen to and comprehend what he/she is saying. By this, students are subconsciously accustomed to using appropriate language.

#### **2.4.3 Create a positive learning climate.**

Lin (2015) states that language learning is an emotional and psychological experience to some extent. Thus, when learners' psychological condition is troubled, the learning might not be accomplished maximally. CL creates a situation where learners feel more convenient and relaxed since there is no strict regulation of how

they should learn. Learners are also free to discuss difficult points from the material given by the teacher with their peers. This is quite different from the traditional learning approach, where the students are afraid to make mistakes in speaking as they must speak organised in front of their friends with correct and proper grammar and accuracy. This situation limits the students' opportunity to experience various learning situations that could result in a deeper understanding of certain topics. (DiNitto, 2000) suggests that CL "allows for the negotiation of meanings and therefore the learners' understanding is reshaped". A positive affective situation thereby improves the students' learning and further achievement.

#### 2.4.4 Promote social interaction.

In collaborative learning, the interaction between the learners and their peers is constructed through discussion and sharing of ideas. The interaction takes place in a very comfortable situation while, simultaneously, learners exchange different ideas and perceptions among themselves. (Jiang, 2009) claims this situation is also improving learners' linguistics competence and communicative skills. This also promotes social interaction between the learners through discussing, questioning, responding, and organising the learning process.

#### 2.4.5 Characteristics of Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning differs from traditional language teaching approaches in several aspects; the first is in its objective structure. (Lin, 2015) calls the goal structure a type of interdependence among students and is categorised into three: collaborative, competitive, and individualistic. In a collaborative goal structure, learners can achieve learning goals when their peers also achieve them. Although the portions are different, students with low abilities will still be able to achieve learning objectives, depending on their capacity.

The second difference between the collaborative learning approach and the traditional approach lies in the participation of students in teaching and learning activities. Traditional approaches tend to focus on teacher-centred rather than student-centred learning. Students are rarely involved in the teaching and learning process but only pay attention to what the teacher explains. Many traditional learning approaches use grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods as materials. Such teaching methods only focus on certain aspects of language without providing sufficient training for students to practice and deepen their understanding of the material provided. Most of the interactions that occur are limited to teacher-student interactions. Student-student interaction is rarely seen. Students are conditioned to be passive most of the time. They only become recipients of knowledge conveyed by the teacher. There is not enough space given to discuss and enlarge their communicative competence.

Meanwhile, collaborative learning shares the same idea as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), where there is interaction between teachers and students and between students (Zang, 2010). When students are allowed to communicate with the teacher and their friends, it facilitates the students to acquire communicative competence. The communication that occurs activates their mental functions to maximise thinking, reasoning, and solving problems. When this activity takes place, students unconsciously enrich their knowledge stores. They are not only passive recipients but very active because they absorb knowledge as input and question, criticise, debate, and engage in other critical thinking activities.

### 3 Research Methods

This section presents the research design and research question. This paper is the result of deepening the literature study, which relates one theory to another presented in the problem description. An analysis presentation accompanies it on the collaboration model applied in the English learning process.

#### 3.1 Research design

This study was a literature review wherein the articles relevant to the research topic were reviewed and summarised in paragraphs. The information collected is in the form of data on a teacher's strategies to deepen collaboration between students in the classroom.

### 3.2 Research Question

What strategies can teachers use to ensure collaboration between students in the classroom? What strategies teachers can use to ensure collaboration is defined as "the skills of teamwork, working in." groups, and working cooperatively with others" (Handsley, 2011: 1). Collaborative Learning is a teaching approach that engages groups of students to solve problems or produce products (MacGregor, J.T., 1990). Learners can work together in a group to solve problems found (Bialek & Fadel, 2015). Become Capable

## 4 Discussion

Collaborative learning is a type of group-based method with several possible assessment objectives. Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and respecting the abilities and contributions of their peers. In all situations where people come together in groups, it suggests a way of dealing with people which respects and highlights individual group members' abilities and contributions. The first study was conducted by (Osipov and Ziyatdinova, 2015); the study found that many professors' analysis of problems and obstacles to collaborative learning techniques proves that they can be solved or eliminated only through collaborative learning approaches. It is important to start using them; the result will appear shortly.

The other study about collaboration in the classroom was also conducted by (Saha & Singh, 2016) about collaborative learning through games; she found that using games in the classroom seems fun for students. Games can also be used for pedagogical purposes when learning English. Using games, either virtual or face-to-face, can help students to develop social skills to collaborate can motivate students to participate actively in class.

Based on the explanation above, it has become an important task for a teacher to introduce and even apply collaborative learning in the learning process, whether through games or other ways. Teachers believe in the power of collaboration, and they may already involve students in collaborative activities. However, there is a weakness of teachers; they put students in groups only to see students interact with laptops, not each other, or pursue their own goals. They may even complain about lazy group mates, as previously explained. If a teacher wants real and successful collaboration in learning, a teacher needs to design the best possible learning activities in the classroom; here are strategies that a teacher can use to encourage effective and deepen student collaboration in the classroom:

### 4.1 Create Complex Learning Activities

Complex activities are challenging, engaging, stimulating, and multilayered. Complex activities require "positive independence" (Johnson et al., 2008), a situation in which attaining the goal, completing the task, being successful, and getting a good grade requires that the team work together and share knowledge.

One way to do this is through playing games with students that naturally and fully collaborate, for example, doing floor puzzling together, making a meal in the play kitchen or building a tower of wooden blocks with friends.

### 4.2 Prepare students to be part of a team.

Collaborative groups cannot be assigned. They have to be built and nurtured. Students often need to learn how to work effectively with others and as part of a team. We have to help students understand what, why and how of collaboration. We can do this in several ways:

- a. Help students understand the benefits of collaboration and what successful collaboration looks like.
- b. Guide students through the stages of team building (forming, storming, norming and performing).
- c. Give students time and opportunities within the activity to develop leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills.
- d. Establishing expectations and norms for working together.

### 4.3 Minimize opportunities for free riding

When students complain about collaborative groups, it often concerns the free-riding of one member who lets others do all the work and then benefits from the group grade. We can eliminate free riding in several ways:

- a. Create small groups of more than four or five people. When there is less room to hide, non-participation is more difficult.
- b. Ensure a high degree of individual accountability (Johnson & Holubec, 2008) by assessing students individually and as a group. For example, give the students an individual quiz based on the intended outcomes of their collaborative activity.
- c. Have students evaluate their participation and effort and that of each member and triangulate that assessment with your own.

### 4.4 Focus on strengthening and stretching expertise

The challenge of designing good collaborative activities is ensuring that all students, even those who struggle, play an important role. Collaboration should strengthen students' existing skills and ensure that their interactions stretch existing knowledge and expand one another's expertise. For example, a student is much stronger in one skill than her peers in her group; she can teach others, and her grade can be contingent upon how much her peers learn.

In collaborative activities, we want to ensure that students do not just occupy the same physical space but also share an intellectual space where they learn more, do more and experience more together than they would alone. As teachers, we can promote collaboration by shifting from instructor to coach, promoting team autonomy, checking in on students, providing instant feedback, and helping them increasingly learn to work together productively to attain a common goal.

## 5 Conclusion

Collaborative Learning is an umbrella term for various educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort, from small group projects to the more specific form of group work known as cooperative learning. In the teaching and learning context, collaborative learning allows the teacher to be more of a facilitator than a classroom controller. The teacher mediates the learners' interaction and works collaboratively towards a common learning target.

Students become actively involved in the learning experience and take responsibility for their learning through interaction and collaboration. This affects the learning atmosphere to be conducive. A fun and less-stressed learning situation is established, and self-development and self-autonomy are enhanced; thus, learners' achievement is improved.

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