



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES AMONG TESL/
ESL UNDERGRADUATES**

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by

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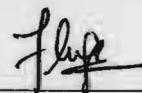
**Final Year Project Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
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A project entitled
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It is hereby confirmed that the student has done
all the necessary amendments of the project for acceptance.



(Signature of Supervisor)

Ms. Florence G. Kayad
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Date May 2007

Abstract

Collaborative Learning Activities Among TESL/ESL Undergraduates

Asmah Bt Abdul Hamid

The purpose of this study was to investigate the TESL/ESL undergraduates' perception towards collaborative learning and to what extent it affects the students' cognitive and social skills. One 28-item questionnaire including 2 open-ended questions was administered to 150 TESL/ESL undergraduates that were picked randomly in UNIMAS who made up the samples of the study. Descriptive statistic was used for this study to analyze the percentages and the mean scores.

The findings showed that TESL/ESL undergraduates had positive perception towards collaborative learning. The findings of this study also indicated that collaborative learning affect on students' cognitive and social skills. Based on the development of students' cognitive and social skills in collaborative learning, some other important issues needed to be discussed for further research in order to explore more about collaborative learning.

Abstrak

Aktiviti Pembelajaran Secara Kolaboratif Di Kalangan Siswazah TESL/ESL

Asmah Bt Abdul Hamid

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti persepsi siswazah TESL/ESL dalam pembelajaran secara kolaboratif dan di tahap manakah ia boleh mempengaruhi kemahiran kognitif dan sosial. Satu soal selidik yang mengandungi 28 item termasuk 2 soalan terbuka telah diedarkan kepada 150 orang siswazah TESL/ESL dan mereka ini telah dipilih secara rawak di UNIMAS untuk dijadikan sampel dalam kajian ini. Statistik deskriptif telah digunakan untuk penganalisan data kajian untuk mendapatkan peratus dan skor min.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa siswazah TESL/ESL mempunyai persepsi yang positif terhadap pembelajaran secara kolaboratif. Berdasarkan hasil kajian ini ia juga menunjukkan bahawa pembelajaran secara kolaboratif telah mempengaruhi kemahiran kognitif dan sosial pelajar. Berdasarkan kepada perkembangan kognitif dan sosial pelajar dalam pembelajaran secara kolaboratif, terdapat isu-isu lain yang lebih penting yang perlu dibincang dan disiasat dengan lebih lanjut untuk lebih memahami tentang pembelajaran secara kolaboratif.

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CHAPTER I

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the overall purpose of the proposed study, the research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the study

One of the useful learning techniques in the classroom instruction is collaborative learning, which researchers have found to be important for cognitive and social development (Rogoff cited in Gumperz & Cook- Gumperz, 1999). Working collaboratively not only involves the active exchange of ideas but also promotes students thinking and social skills. The purpose of collaborative learning is to move from the traditional classroom, which is working individually towards working in groups, which requires intensive interaction between the students to accomplish complex projects (Cabrera, 2002). This may assist the students to acquire the language where two or more students sit together to discuss the process and content in the target language.

Collaborative learning was extensively used and had been implemented in schools and many studies had been carried out in elementary and secondary schools. In the late 1980's, collaborative learning became an essential pedagogy in higher education (Cabrera, 2002). Much studies that had been carried out showed that

collaborative learning practices influence positively on the learning outcomes (Featherstone, 1986; Tinzmann, 1990; Cabrera, 2002; Kamsah & Talib, 2005). Much research that had been done shows that collaborative learning encourages social skills and cognitive skills among the students when they work together to accomplish their task (Cabrera, 2002; Kamsah & Talib, 2005). However, the process of collaborative learning seems to be slightly overlapped with cooperative learning.

In collaborative and cooperative learning, the student work together where they need to accomplish the shared goals. But the difference between these learning strategies is on how the task is carried out. According to Dillenbourg, Baker, Blaye and O'Malley cited in McInnerney and Roberts (2004, p. 206), collaborative learning "involves the mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve the problem" while cooperative learning "is accomplished by the division of labour among the participants". Therefore in collaborative learning, "partners do the work together" whereas in cooperative learning, "partners split the work, solve sub-tasks individually and then assemble the partial results into the final output" (Dillenbourg et al.cited in McInnerney & Roberts, 2004, p.206).

This study focuses on the philosophy of collaborative learning where the students work together to complete their task. In collaborative learning, the students involved in discussion, sharing ideas, negotiate meaning, make decisions about

the materials studied and decide about the ways they should study. This practice can develop their cognitive and interactive skills in order to improve their language learning. The reason to work effectively with others is to share the target goals and it is important to practice the communication skill throughout the English language learning. The students may practice and develop collaborative skills in the learning context, when these opportunities are provided by the instructors. These encourage meaningful collaboration among the students, in which they learn easily from one another. Any difficult material and concepts can be solved and learned effectively in groups.

The diversity in the classroom allows students to interact with one another, to share their perspective and experience and to assist others when they are facing difficulties and problems in the learning materials (Kamsah & Talib, 2005). Working effectively with others is a skill, which many instructors encourage their students to practice in solving problems when the students are assigned with a complex task.

The students that engage in collaborative learning are to learn and care about others. They work together in order to achieve their target goals and arrive at the benefits of sharing ideas with one another rather than working alone as in the traditional method (Tinzmann, 1990).

Studies have shown that students who are involved in collaborative learning team feel successful at every academic level. The low-achieving students can make contributions to their group and experience success. The students also can increase their understanding of ideas by explaining them to others (Featherstone, 1986). It is believed that collaborative learning gives a positive impact on the academic achievement of the students. It is said that the success or failure of collaborative practice within the group depends on the individual perceptions of the group members. Researchers have found that the students' perceptions of collaborative learning activities on cognitive and social skills development bring the positive effect and benefits to the students. This could lead to the improvement of students' communication skills (Kamsah & Talib, 2005).

This study aims to find out the students' perception of collaborative learning and to what extent it affects the students' cognitive and social skills. The students are the in service teachers of ESL and TESL programme who is going to be teachers of English Language. They are chosen as the focus of the study, which is to investigate on their perceptions of collaborative learning when they are assigned with a task that need them to accomplish and shared ideas among their group members.

1.2 Statement of the problem

One of the important methods of teaching and learning in Malaysian Education system is collaborative learning. It has been emphasized in schools and the

institution of higher learning. According to Cabrera et. al (2002), much studies has been done in schools but there is still lack of studies done at the higher education on collaborative learning. Majority of the research in collaborative learning that has been done at the college level is in non-technical discipline and for students in technology.

Collaborative learning can promote better understanding in the language, provide problem-solving skills and enhance better communication skills in learning English as a second language. This is because of the poor communication skills in using English as a second language among the students and majority of them have limited exposure to English in their daily lives and they are expected to use English for different purposes (Chitravelu & Sithamparam, 1999).

This study focuses on the TESL and PKPG-ESL in service students because collaborative learning is an important learning strategy. It is to find out to what extent this strategy is used or practice by these teachers and to what extend is their perspective towards this learning strategy in class. This study looks at the aspects of students' perception on collaborative learning that affect the student cognitive and social skills. This is because collaborative learning is claimed to be an active exchange of ideas between the learners that takes place in groups, which can develop the students' cognitive skills and give the opportunities to improve their learning in ESL. Thus, it also encourages the learners, critical thinking and are able to increase the learners interest to participate in discussion (Gokhale, 1995).

Study shows that students' social interaction can be fostered among each other to build a good team, self-confidence and positive behaviors that allow them to generate ideas in completing their task (Galton & Williamson cited in Lyle, 1996).

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the students' perception towards collaborative learning.
2. To find out to what extent collaborative learning affects the students' cognitive skills.
3. To find out to what extent collaborative learning affects the students' social skills.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do students feel about collaborative learning?
2. What do students think of collaborative learning?
3. Does collaborative learning promote students thinking skills?
4. How does collaborative learning enhance students thinking skills?
5. Does collaborative learning promote students' communication skills?
6. How does collaborative learning enhance students' communication skills?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study hopes to determine the related issues on collaborative learning by knowing the students' perception as well as their cognitive and social skills. This also helps educators to identify relevant information so that they can work towards making collaborative activities a positive and meaningful learning strategy. According to Bruffee (1999), "collaborative learning implies that educators must rethink what they have to do to get ready to teach and what they are doing when they are actually teaching" (p.72). It is also hoped that this study can assist students in practicing collaborative learning and uses interaction to build their knowledge that involve collaboration.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Collaborative Learning

According to McInnerney & Roberts (2004), "collaborative learning is working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual's contribution to the whole" (p. 205).

Collaborative also refers to an instruction method in which learners' work together in small groups at various performance levels toward a common goal. The learners are responsible to collaborate with one another's learning as well as their own (Gokhale, 1995).

As indicated above, collaborative learning is believed to be a philosophy of interaction where the students deal with their friends with respect on their abilities and contributions. This reflects the students' work together as a team to achieve their goals by completing their task through discussion and share knowledge and experience among them.

1.6.2 Perception

According to Devito (1993), "perception is also greatly influenced by an individual's experiences, needs, wants, value systems, belief about the way things are or should be, current physical or emotional states and experiences" (p.47).

Perception is an attitude or sensitivity in behaviour in accepting views or a subject matter (Hasting & Graham, 1995).

At this point, perceptions reflect on student belief, attitude and emotions. Therefore, different students have different perceptions on collaborative learning and they have their own belief, value and needs of the target goals.

1.6.3 Cognitive Skills

The cognitive skills takes place in the mental processing which involve communication and students interaction when they collaborate among their group members in completing their task or during their discussion (Chafe, 1998).

Cognitive involves the foundation of students understanding of knowledge in the subject matter and constantly as an active and mental process. However, this concept acquired the process of acquisition of the student's basic knowledge. It teaches the learners on how to analyze problems and how to think for themselves.

1.6.4 Social Skills

According to Chafe (1998), the social skill is the collaboration with each other that gives the benefits to help their team because they care about the group that focuses on the characteristics such as desired behaviors, positive interdependence and roles of group members.

In other words, researchers suggest that the social process develop the students' communicative skills where the students involve in question and problem, discourse for negotiation and make joint decisions.

1.7 Summary

In this study, the researcher tries to determine on the students perception towards collaborative learning. The issues of collaborative learning will be discuss in detail in the next chapter by reviewing the literature of the understudied research from other research that has been carried out.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of other related studies on collaborative learning that has been used as an instruction method and how students' perception towards it.

2.1 Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is defined as the instruction method where the students at various performance levels work together in groups to accomplish shared goals (Gokhale, 1995). It is a philosophy of interaction that takes place when the students work together toward the achievement of particular task. For example, when they help each other with problem solving task. Therefore collaborative learning strongly reflects on meaningful personal interaction, discussion promotes a variety of learning, including content, skills, attitudes and processes. It is to improve both thinking and the speaking skills and enhance students' analytical skills (Furinghetti et.al cited in Orlich et.al, 2004).

Panitz (1996) reviews that collaborative attach into the social constructivist movement, emphasize both knowledge and authority of knowledge. The researcher who has investigated on collaborative learning, Brufee cited in Panitz (1996) reports that the result has been change from "foundational (cognitive)

understanding of knowledge to a nonfoundational ground where we understand knowledge to be a social construct and learning a social process”.

Much research suggests that collaborative learning brings positive results. For instance, the students can enhance deeper understanding of content, increased their overall achievement, and improved self-esteem as well as higher motivation in doing the task (Featherstone, 1986; Tinzmann et.al, 1990; Cabrera et.al, 2002; Kamsah & Talib, 2005). At this point, it is necessary to say that collaborative learning gives the students an exposure of real-world tasks that link to new information based on their prior knowledge (Tinzmann et.al, 1990). It also helps the students to practice on their language for effective communication, which they collaborate among the instructors and with other students in the collaborative classroom.

On another research done by Cabrera et.al (2002) on 2,050 second year students at 23 institutions had found that exposure to collaborative learning practices influenced positively each of the outcomes under study. By using collaborative learning, students breakdown stereotypes, learn to work together in groups, develop listening and speaking skills, learn the art of compromising and negotiating, learn interpersonal skills and are exposed to a variety of different people.