

Conference Paper

Collaborative Learning in ESP Speaking Classroom: Learners' Perceptions and Experiences

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Abstract

Collaborative learning approach has been widely used in classroom to improve the quality of learners' learning process. This present study tried to assess twelve ESP learners' perception and experiences with collaborative learning in their speaking class. The data were obtained by utilizing questionnaires and interviewing the learners. The findings revealed that most learners perceived collaborative learning positively. Collaborative learning effectively helped the learners learn in a comfortable environment. By implementing collaborative learning, the learners could work together to solve problems, to get meaningful feedbacks, and to trigger confidence which led to more opportunities to practice speaking.

Keywords: collaborative learning, group discussion, ESP learners, speaking class

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1. Introduction

The need for English learning increases along with the advancement of time, especially in developing countries where most of their citizens are non-English native speakers. English learning itself is divided into two: General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). GE usually provides only materials and exercises for learners to use English for everyday need. Different from GE, ESP teaches learners to use English in accordance with their professional need (Huthchinson & Waters, 1987).

Therefore, it is important that the learners who want to take an ESP class have prior knowledge of English. In line with that, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) highlighted the purpose of ESP, that is to accommodate learners' specific need in particular fields or disciplines. Thus, ESP uses a different approach from GE as it focuses on some activities in a particular area of study.

Language Center of University of Abdurachman Saleh Situbondo (UNARS) holds an ESP class regularly twice a year. It is held for lecturers working at the university. A needs analysis was done before starting the course to study what the lecturers needed and



how much they knew about English. After a month of needs analysis, it was found out that most of the lecturers wanted to improve their confidence to speak in public. The lecturers thought a good public speaking skill could help them present their papers in international seminars and conferences. The lecturers hardly presented in international events due to their being reluctant to speak in English. They were not confident to speak. The needs analysis also revealed that many of the lecturers found it difficult to practice speaking alone. They emphasized the importance of speaking partners and assistances when practicing.

As an answer for the problems found in the needs analysis, an ESP course was held for the lecturers to give them ample time and chances to practice speaking. The classroom activities were designed to make learners learn in a comfortable environment. The teaching approach chosen was collaborative learning since the learners, in this case the lecturers, felt more comfortable if they could have some friends to learn together. Further, collaborative learning is said to be more appropriate to be implemented to adults learners, for such technique demands individual's responsibility to contribute for group's learning outcomes.

There have been many results of research that show positive effects of implementing collaborative learning. Collaborative learning shows that it can bring advantages for learners in some aspects. One of the proofs is the research that employed collaborative learning to improve learners' English skills. A research conducted by Pattanpichet (2011) showed that collaborative learning successfully improved students' speaking achievement. Another proof of the success of collaborative learning implementation was revealed in Fakomogbon and Bolaji's experimental research (2017). They applied collaborative learning to their controlled group who gained better scores significantly after receiving treatment. The technique was implemented through think-aloud-pair problem solving in mobile learning experience. This research also revealed that collaborative learning styles were more effective for learning in a mobile learning environment compared to non-collaborative one. As an addition, collaborative learning proves that it is not only effective in improving learners' academic achievement. This was shown by Laal and Ghodsi (2011) in their research that studied in what way collaborative learning benefited the learners. The research proved that beside giving academic benefits, collaborative learning also contributed social, psychological, and assessment benefits for learners. The differences between this present study from the previous ones were the object of the research. This study was conducted to twelve adult ESP learners who studied in a conventional classroom. Another difference was this study employed many activities indicating collaborative learning process. The aims of this study also

focused on two things: learners' perceptions and experiences on collaborative learning when implemented in their speaking class, and the effects of collaborative learning implementation towards the learners'.

Concerning the success and positive perceptions given by learners towards collaborative learning in previous studies, the researcher was also interested in seeing how collaborative learning was when applied to ESP learners taking speaking class at UNARS. The research aimed at knowing how the learners experienced and perceived collaborative learning in their learning process. The research was purposely done to answer the following questions: (1) How do the learners perceive collaborative learning process when implemented to enhance their speaking skill?, (2) What effects got by the learners after implementing the technique in their speaking class? Thus, this article tries to explore the details of learners' involvement and perception towards the implementation of collaborative learning to enhance their speaking skills. This article will also set out some suggestions for language teachers, lecturers, or tutors on aspects that may affect the implementation of collaborative learning in classroom.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Collaborative learning (CL)

Collaborative learning has been applied in many English instructions and has shown positive and satisfying effects when done with a good preparation. As its name, collaborative learning facilitates the learners to learn and work in groups to solve problems or to complete a task (Laal and Ghodsi, 2011). However, they underlined that asking the learners to talk to each other while they do their own tasks cannot be said as collaborative learning. Collaborative learning means that the learners in a certain group should engage themselves in the learning process. All members in one group can reach the learning objectives if they perceive that they have similar goals. In other words, the group members are interdependent to each other (Herrmann, 2013).

Consequently, learners have to understand that their participation will contribute to their group's learning outcomes. This is the job of the teachers, lecturers, or tutors to set up the activities to be done in class so well that they can make sure each student participate actively in groups. Teachers, lecturers, or tutors should concern about the core elements of collaborative learning that signify its success implementation (Sbertoli, 2014). The first core element is called **Positive interdependence**. It occurs when all group members realize and understand that they share the same goals to reach. Each

member will support other members by encouraging and facilitating them. The second element is **Individual accountability**. This aspect is important even though the group members work together to reach the same goal. Each member's fair share is assessed and evaluated, and the results are given back to the group. If teachers, lecturers, or tutors can make sure that this element plays an important role for group's sake in every task given to the learners, there will be no group members who will feel burdened because of the "hitchhikers". There is also another element named **Promotive interaction**. This kind of interaction occurs when members of a group are willing to share learning resources. They should support, help, and encourage each other. In other words. The process of working together involves both participation and interaction among members. The success of collaborative learning is also influenced by **Social skills**. Social skills can also be said as team-working skills. These skills cover effective communication, interpersonal, and group skills. How these skills are used can be assessed in the ways each member of the group acknowledges or accepts leadership in a process, in the decision-making involving dynamic process, in the level of trust built within the group, in the efficiency level of the group's internal communication, and in the level of success in conflict management. **Group processing** is the last core element affecting collaborative learning implementation. Group processing is needed to be done to see a group's performance. Group members should discuss regularly and openly to express concern on making better progress and achievement. Thus, the members should review what should and should not be done to maximise the results.

Thus, the preparation done before the course begins should set up the five elements of collaborative learning into the design of the classroom activities. The activities need to be arranged in such a way that they are able to make learners reach the learning objectives by working cooperatively. Here, the purpose of implementing collaborative learning is therefore to make learners responsible for their own learning. Further, this can train the learners to develop their critical thinking.

2.2. Perceptions on benefits of collaborative learning

As has been mentioned previously, collaborative learning can give many benefits for learners if planned and prepared well. These benefits can be formulated from Vygotsky and Piaget's theories of collaborative learning. Piaget, in Dimitriadis & Kamberelis (2006), believed that individuals must be able to adapt to their environment. He described two processes for adaptation, an organism's ability to fit in with its environment: assimilation

and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of using or transforming the environment so that it can be placed in preexisting cognitive structures, while accommodation is the process of changing cognitive structures in order to accept something from the environment. Vygotsky, in Blake and Pope (2008) explained that social interaction plays an important role in student learning. Students learn from each other from social interaction. Briefly, collaborative learning is supported by three theories. First is Cognitive theory. This theory is related to the exchange of concepts among group members on collaborative learning so that in a group the process of science transformation on each member will occur. The second theory related to collaborative learning is Social constructivism theory. This theory shows the existence of social interactions among members that will foster individual development and enhance mutual respect for the opinions of all members of the group. Then, there is also Motivation theory that is applied in a collaborative learning structure, since it provides a conducive environment for students to learn. It also increases the courage of members to give opinions and create mutual need situations for all group members.

By implementing collaborative learning in class, it is hoped that learners can take cognitive, social, and motivational advantages. How learners see and perceive collaborative learning, hence, can be seen from these three factors: cognitive, social, and motivational benefits.

3. Method

3.1. Research instruments

This research employed questionnaires and semi-structured interview guide to obtain the data. The questionnaire used was in the form of survey. The survey which was adapted from Aguelo (2017), consisted of twelve questions on how the learners saw and perceived the process of collaborative learning as a technique used to enhance their English speaking skill. The results of questionnaires were measured by using Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Meanwhile, the interview guide consisted of questions dealing with students' opinion about the benefits they got when learning collaboratively to enhance their speaking skill. The researcher used semi-structured interview to obtain the data. The interview guide consisted of four questions. The questionnaires were delivered to twelve ESP learners taking speaking class held by Language Centre of UNARS. The interview was conducted with seven out of twelve learners due to some personal issues.

3.2. Data collection

The data were collected after the learners attended four meetings. Collaborative speaking activities that were used in this research were group discussions to get an understanding on a certain issue, shared-tasks like matching and sorting, group games (guessing game, bingo, and whispering game), role play (including similar task such as simulation, puppet show, and screen adaptation show), making a small project, and debate.

An example of the procedures of collaborative speaking activity was group performance. The class was divided into some groups. One group consisted of two or three students. Each group was asked to watch a short video. While watching the video, every learner in each group had to note down anything that came to their mind. After watching the video, each group was asked to formulate the problems based on the video they watched. Each member of the group had to give one problem. Then, each group was assigned to discuss and to come up with the solutions for every problem given. After the discussion ended, each group had to share the results of the discussion. Each member of the group had to be given the same chance to speak.

At the end of the fourth meeting, the learners were given questionnaires to fill in. This stage was done in one day. The interview was conducted in four days. The researcher had to visit the interviewees who worked in different buildings at campus to obtain the data on learners's perception on what benefits they got from collaborative learning implementation. Each interviewee had seven minutes, more or less, to answer the questions given.

3.3. Data analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed quantitatively. The responses given were in the form of scale, ranging from 1 to 4 with different criteria. 1 means strongly disagree, 2 means disagree, 3 means agree, and 4 means strongly agree. Answers "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were classified into "disagree", while answers "strongly agree" and "agree" were classified as "agree". Therefore, all the items were then interpreted either 'agree' or 'disagree' based on the majority of the responses given. Then, these remarks (agree or disagree) were displayed in the form of percentage.

The questions consisted in the questionnaires were divided into three categories:

1. General benefits of using collaborative learning in learning English (Items 1- 6)
2. Specific benefits in speaking (Items 7- 10)

3. Negative aspects of collaborative learning (Items 11-12)

Meanwhile, the data from the interview were analysed qualitatively. The questions covered the learners' perceptions on the benefits they got when experiencing collaborative speaking activities. The responses given by the interviewees were then analysed and interpreted qualitatively. The responses given by the interviewees were then classified into three: cognitive benefits, social benefits, and motivational benefits.

4. Results

Based on the results of questionnaires and interview, it was revealed that the implementation of collaborative learning was perceived positively by the learners. The activities carried out during the class gave the learners many opportunities to practice speaking which then led to their speaking skill improvement. Their learning experiences during the implementation of collaborative learning also help them find out their learning styles and patterns. These include how to solve problems in groups, how to get along and communicate with other group members, and how to reach the group goals by working together. Hence, knowing their own learning styles and patterns help the learners develop and improve their speaking skills. Here we can conclude that collaborative learning brings many advantages for the learners, which covers cognitive, social, and motivation benefits. The followings are the detailed results of the questionnaires and the interview.

4.1. Results of questionnaire

Figure 1 displays the results of the questionnaires delivered to the learners. The questionnaires were filled in by twelve respondents.

Below are the aspects measured by questionnaires:

1. This approach helps me learn English easily.
2. This approach makes learning English more interesting.
3. It enhances my communication skills.
4. This approach helps me gain more knowledge through working in a team.
5. I become more participative in English class through this approach.
6. This approach makes me understand the working process.

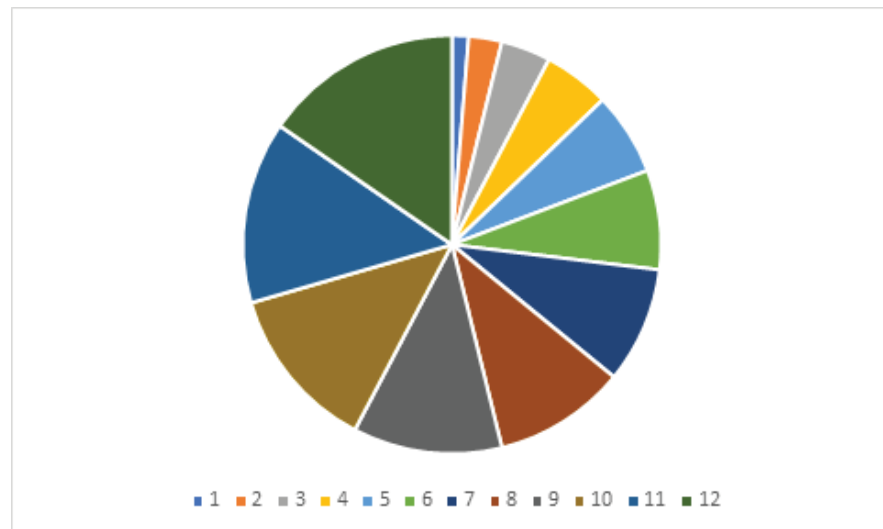


Figure 1: The Results of Questionnaires.

7. This approach helps me become more confident in doing speaking activities by participating in sharing information, making decisions, and solving problems.
8. Collaborative learning can improve my speaking skills through working in a team.
9. Collaborative learning helps me get better confidence to speak.
10. This approach helps me grasp more ideas to speak about.
11. It is a waste of time explaining things to my groupmates.
12. It is difficult to actively involve my group members in group activities.

4.2. Results of interview

The interview was conducted with seven lecturers as interviewee samples. The interview focused on their perception whether the implementation of collaborative learning benefited them to help improve their speaking skill. Almost all of the interviewees showed positive attitude and perceptions towards collaborative learning. They considered it effective in triggering their learning motivation because of the help from their group members. Cognitively, they were benefited because during the group activities, they shared knowledges and learning resources. The faster achievers helped and assisted the slower ones in finding certain English terms, reexplaining the instructions, and developing ideas. It was effective in making some slow achievers catch up with the faster ones. Thus, the learners were happy because working in groups made them learn speaking comfortably. Some of them did admit that at first they were worried that they could not rely on their friends. They also felt that they would feel unconfident working together

in group, thinking that their friends might be smarter and superior than they were. Few students experienced some difficulties adjusting to their group members at the first meeting because of different ages and academic statuses. However, as time went by, they could blend and get along very well when given tasks. Briefly, they were benefited socially when doing speaking collaborative activities in class. Then, the learners also felt that they motivationally benefited from working collaboratively. This happened because the learners never bullied others for not being able to do a certain task. When stuck, they gave longer times for the slower achievers to finish their parts and encouraged each others to keep motivated. This comforting learning atmosphere made the learners comfortable, confident, and motivated to learn speaking.

Nonetheless, the implementation of collaborative speaking activities was not without any drawbacks. Few learners thought it was a little inconvenient to work in the same group with their supervisors at office. They thought they would not be able to say things and to share ideas freely. They were afraid if they “lost control” in behaving, it would affect their relationship at office. Another major problem that occurred during the implementation of collaborative speaking technique was how to reach consensus in group. This happened because of several causes:

1. Different interpretations from the students about the instructions.
2. Different background knowledge each individual had.
3. Different method individuals had to complete a given task.

Yet these minor drawbacks did not influence the group’s learning outcomes significantly. Despite the differences of the group members, all group members were always be able to finish the tasks on time.

Briefly, it was evident that collaborative learning brought positive effects for the learners. They worked together to solve problems, to get meaningful feedbacks, and to trigger confidence which led to more opportunities to practice speaking. As a result, the existence of their cooperative friends and assistance from the tutor levelled up their confidence to speak.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1. Conclusions

From this research, some conclusion can be drawn. First, the learners felt much helped by the characteristics of collaborative learning which required a group members to work

and learn cooperatively. Learners also had positive perception towards collaborative learning because it effectively helped them learn in a comfortable situation. The comfortable situation created during collaborative learning activities made the students felt confidence so they had many opportunities to practice speaking. Their experiences during learning collaboratively with their friends made them enjoy learning English in general. Besides learners could get some benefits from collaborative learning, not only in terms of cognitive benefits, but also social and motivational benefits. Briefly, the learners positively perceived the implementation of speaking collaborative activities effective in helping them learn English.

5.2. Suggestions

Since the implementation of collaborative learning represents the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered environment, it is essential that teachers, lecturers, or trainers have good skills in organizing, facilitating, and supervising the group work. Concerning the role, it is better that the teachers, lecturers, or trainers have some practices beforehand. As an addition, considering the benefits collaborative learning technique can give for the learners, institution should encourage its teachers, lecturers, or trainers to implement collaborative learning in their classes because of the positive effects it brings.

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