

Role of Collaborative Learning for Developing Speaking Skills of Secondary Level Students

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative learning is an engaged learning of the students in which two or more students work together for the same purpose. However, researches on the role of collaborative learning in developing language skills of the students have not been taken in a greater extent in the context of school education. In this regard, the present study aims to explore the role of collaborative learning for developing speaking skill of secondary level students and to examine the collaborative learning culture among the secondary level students. Keeping the objectives into consideration, forty secondary level students were selected as the sample by using purposive non-random sample strategy. The data, which was collected by using close ended questionnaires, analyzed and interpreted descriptively. The results of the study show that collaborative learning has constructive role for developing students' language skills, social skills and personal skills. In the opinion of the students, collaborative learning engaged them in meaningful interaction. Though the students realized the constructive role of collaborative learning, they had a little practice of collaborative learning. They had group discussion to solve problem, peer work and some collaborative projects as the part of collaborative learning practices.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, collaborative culture, perception, role, speaking skills

Introduction

Collaborative learning provides students an opportunity to share their ideas as they practice to speak and have self-correction to control their pronunciation in speaking. Piaget (1929) points out that collaborative learning and constructive cognitive development often go hand-in-hand. In the process of learning, students use various strategies such as having group discussion, doing collaborative project, co-operation, coordination; share ideas to one another and reflect. Among these different techniques, collaborative learning is one

of the effective ways of learning. The Russian teacher and psychologist, Lev Vygotsky in his social learning theories (1962) argues that people learn through interaction and communication with others. It is the educational approach of using groups to enhance learning through working together. In a collaborative learning, groups of two or more learners work together to solve problems, complete tasks, or learn new concepts.

Vygotsky (1978) is the foremost amongst the pioneers who explored the causal relationships that exist between social interaction and individual learning. Students are supposed to talk with each



other and it is in this talking that much of the learning occurs (Golub, 1988). Greeno in his theory of situated cognition (2011) postulates that the behavior of individuals can be understood from the behavior of the social system to which the individuals belong. Babikar (2018) has elaborated the concept of collaboration and states that collaborative learning refers to the act of giving students an opportunity to work with others, so they do some works in groups or pairs. Regarding the value of collaboration, Chickering and Gamson (1987, p.3) say, "Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is cooperative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding. Thus, learning is more like a team effort than a solo race". Thus, learning is collaborated and social, not isolated and rote memorization.

Speaking is an interaction between two or more people in exchanging ideas. According to Chaney (1998), speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Florez (1999) depicts that speaking is the interactive process of constructing meanings that involve producing, receiving and processing information. Pollard (2008) states that speaking is one of the most difficult aspects for students to master. Speaking is difficult language skill because they do not have enough exposure to English. According to Celik (2007, as cited in Tonsuncuoglu, 2012, p.333), "One of the expectations and surprises." Thorunbury (2005 as cited in Zohra, 2013, p.8) defines, "Speaking as a natural integral part of the person's daily life." In the same way, Pakula (2019) says speaking is an important skill in language learning, but it is not easy to learn or to teach. Speaking is the representation of speech sound by means of which human beings communicate.

Learning is more social interaction than solo activities. Speaking helps students sharing ideas, emotion and experience that plays pivotal role in

learning. That's why, for the successful teaching and learning speaking skill, it must follow collaborative learning approach.

Problem Statement

Collaborative learning (CL), which is recently emerged as a demanding task, requires the implementation of various policies ensuring the learning achievement of the curricular objectives and desired outcomes. Collaborative learning is believed to be more active, creative, productive and motivating than the traditional learning strategies that have been used for the long time. However, there are several things to be considered in the perception, practice and role of collaborative learning for developing speaking skills. With this regard, this paper principally addresses the questions like: 'Are the secondary level teachers in Nepal implementing collaborative learning effectively for developing English speaking skills in the ELT, EFL classroom? Or if they are implementing, to what extent they are effective to address the determined benchmarks of it?' Similarly, the other questions include; why collaborative learning is important in developing speaking? How does the collaboration play pivotal role in developing speaking? Is there any relation between collaborative learning and developing speaking? In what way, collaboration develops the speaking efficiency of the students? Why is the role of collaboration negated in developing speaking? How do the students perceive collaborative learning and what sorts of activities are being implemented collaboratively in their class for developing speaking? The available literature in collaborative culture and its role in developing school students' speaking indicate that there are only a few studies undertaken addressing the perception, practice and role of collaborative learning in the actual class room settings. So, this study has examined the role and studied collaborative culture among the students. The study aimed to find out the role of collaborative learning for developing students' speaking skill in secondary level education and to find out the students' perception on the teachers' use of collaborative learning for developing speaking skills in the secondary level classroom.

Literature Review

Collaborative learning is a concept derived from Vygotsky's social constructivism. It 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. According to Smith and MacGregor (1992, as cited in Pattanpichet, 2011, p.1), "Collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of approaches in education involving joint intellectual effort by students or students and teachers." It focuses on social nature of learning and gives emphasis on development of learning skills, work skills and life skills. It is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs.

Similarly, Oxford (1997) states that collaborative learning is acculturative process which supports learners to become members of the knowledge communities whose common property is different from the common property of knowledge communities they already belong to. Wiener (1986) talks about the existence of collaborative learning and states that collaborative learning is dependent on the positive interdependence of group members, which provides the achievement of a common goal. Specially, students put into groups are only students grouped and are not collaborators, unless a task that demands consensual learning unifies the group activity. Macaro (1997, as cited in Arta, 2018, p. 150) perceives collaboration as a process and views that collaborative learning is a process in which students collaborate together to attain 'common learning goals.' It shows that when the learners learn in groups, they are more comfortable and share their knowledge with each another and learn many new things from the group members. Collaborative learning has a broader scope.

Considering the scope, Smith and Macgregor (1993) opine that collaborative learning covers a broad territory of approaches with wide variability in the amount of in-class or out-of-class time built around group work. Collaborative activities can range from classroom discussions interspersed

with short lectures, through entire class periods, to study on research teams that last a whole term or year. The goals and processes of collaborative activities also vary widely. Some faculty members design small group work around specific sequential steps, or tightly structured tasks. Others prefer a more spontaneous agenda developing out of student interests or questions. In some collaborative learning settings, the students' task is to create a clearly delineated product; in others, the task is not to produce a product, but rather to participate in a process, an exercise of responding to each other's work or engaging in analysis and meaning-making.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society. Vygotsky's theory is comprised of concepts such as culture-specific tools, private speech, and the Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky's theories stress the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978), as he believed strongly that community plays a central role in the process of making meaning. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that intelligence changes as children grow. A child's cognitive development is not just about acquiring knowledge, but the child has to develop or construct a mental model of the world. Cognitive development occurs through the interaction of innate capacities and environmental events. He asserted that a child starts to perceive the knowledge involving in different actions and experiences. Teaching learning should be oriented keeping in mind competence and performance level of students in collaborative learning class room.

According to Bandura (1977) imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities. This theory is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. Separately, by observing the behaviors of others, people develop similar behaviors. After observing the behavior of others, people

assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if the observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behavior. It covers cognitive and behavioral framework of learning. Collaborative learning has a number of benefits in developing students' language skills. A study by Arta (2018) mentions the many benefits of collaborative learning on students' speaking ability and one of them is to reduce the language anxiety. Similarly, Suleimenova (2013) points out that anxiety is defined as distress or uneasiness of the mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune. General anxiety is the excessive and exaggerated worry about everyday things.

Foreign language learners often experience anxiety in speaking the target language because the classroom environments seem threatening for students (Dornyei, 2002). Firstly, CLA can contribute in reducing language anxiety because it offers safe environments of learning English as a foreign language in order that the language anxiety decreases. Performing speaking English in small groups can make students feel more comfortable in making language mistakes than trying to deliver a speech in front of large groups of students. Once students can feel less anxious in starting conversations, they tend to maintain their participation in the learning process. Therefore, the second benefit of CLA regarding speaking skill is it increases students' participation. Besides providing secure learning environments to increase students' involvements, CLA also promotes more opportunities for students to practice speaking English. Manurung (2015) emphasizes the importance of opening wide opportunities to practice in the teaching of speaking. The third benefit of CLA in improving students' English-speaking skill is development of self-confidence and self-esteem.

As mentioned above, students encourage one another in collaborative groups. To be confident, one needs other people to shape it by intensively communicating ideas or feelings and confirming curiosities or interests (Dornyei, 2002). Self-esteem and self-confidence are social products, which

means that they are created by people around us (Dornyei, 2002, p. 90). The more students interact with their peers using English, the more confident they will be to employ English as a medium of communication.

Methodology

This study followed survey research design. Random sampling procedure was employed to attain the objectives and address the questions raised in the study. The participants were 40 students of class-9, from Budhanilkantha Secondary School, Kathmandu, Nepal. In direct observation of the class room, close ended questionnaires were used as research tool in order to explore the perceptions of students on the role of collaborative learning for developing English speaking skills and to examine the collaborative learning culture among the secondary level students. Descriptive approach was used for the analysis and interpretation of data and the data has been presented using different display devices such as tables, lists, statistical tools and so on.

Findings and Discussion

Considering the questions problematized in the study, the discussion has been subsumed under the following themes and sub-themes:

Students' Perception and Significance of Using Collaborative Learning Approach

Dealing with the statements such as students' perception on collaboration, supremacy of pair work and significance of collaborative learning approach, the result shows that 77.5% students strongly agreed on learning through co-ordination, 5% strongly disagreed, 12.5% agreed, 2.5% disagreed, 2.5% was neutral. Out of total number of participants, 75% participants strongly agreed that more potent speaking skills can be provided through collaborative learning approach, 5% strongly disagreed, 12.5% agreed, 5% disagreed, and 2.5% did not have opinion on it. Out of total participants, 70% students strongly agreed that learning through collaborative learning approach is extremely important in developing speaking,

7.5% strongly disagreed, 10% agreed, 10% disagreed, and only 2.5% was neutral. From the result, it is clear that largest percentage of the students strongly agreed, while least percentage of the students had no opinion on it. Thus, talking to students' perception on collaboration, supremacy of pair work and significance of collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills of students, it is indispensable for learning in the schools.

Teachers' Use of Collaborative Learning Approach

The result of the study shows that minority of the students responded that their teachers encouraged and involved them in collaborative activities. According to the data, 12.5% strongly agreed that their teachers use collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills in secondary level ELT class room. Likewise, 67.5% strongly disagreed 5% agreed, 10 percent disagreed and 5% had no opinion. In this way, secondly; 50% of the students strongly agreed that collaborative learning approach is appropriate to develop students' speaking skills, while, 10% strongly disagreed, 17.5% agreed, 7.5 % disagreed, and 15% had no opinion. Thirdly, in statement three, out of 40 participants, 57.5% strongly agreed that collaborative learning approach helps in developing speaking skills, whereas; 5% strongly disagreed, 27.5% agreed, 5% disagreed, and 5% had no opinion. In statement four, from the view of accuracy, collaborative learning approach learning is highly helpful for 52.5%, however; for 7.5% it is hugely detrimental, for 22.5%, helpful, for 7.5% detrimental, and for 10%, it is neutral. The largest number of students strongly agreed and lowest number of students disagreed. Therefore, it is clear that class 9 students are on the favor of using collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills in the class room.

Students' Preference of Collaborative Practice

Dealing with the students' views on preference of collaborative learning approach, frequency of collaborative learning approach on the basis of

course type, comfort while using collaborative learning approach and also its detrimental impacts for developing speaking skills in the class room of secondary level education, the data shows that: 50% out of 40 students strongly agreed that they prefer collaborative learning approach, nonetheless; 12.5% strongly disagreed, 25% agreed, 10% disagreed, and finally 2.5% did not give any response. On the basis of 2nd, among 40 students, 15% strongly agreed that the frequency of collaborative learning approach depends on the course type, while 35% strongly disagreed, 20% agreed, 20% disagreed, and 10% did not have any answer. In the 3rd statement, 32.5% strongly agreed that they feel comfortably while using collaborative learning approach, whereas; 10% strongly disagreed, 47.5% agreed, 5% disagreed, and 5% had no opinion. Out of 40 participants, 10% percent strongly agreed the use of collaborative learning approach has detrimental impact in developing speaking skills, nevertheless; 57.5% strongly disagreed, 7.5% agreed, 20% disagreed, and 5% had no opinion. The highest percentage of students strongly agreed on the favour of frequent use of collaborative learning approach, while least percentage of students had no opinion on the same statement. . Thus, collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills in the class room is highly demanding in this century of education system.

Collaborative Learning Culture Amid the Students

Dealing with the comparison of percentage of students which was collected through close ended questionnaires, the data shows that a huge number of students: 70% strongly agreed that group discussion helps students to be communicative, on the contrary; 2.5% strongly disagreed, 15% agreed, 5% disagreed, and 7.5% had no opinion. Furthermore, 82.5% participants strongly agreed that learning through collaborative learning approach is far better than individual learning; while 2.5% strongly disagreed, 7.5% agreed, 5% disagreed, and only 2.5% remained neutral. Next, 37.5% strongly agreed that learning through

collaboration easier than separation, 10% strongly disagreed, 20% agreed, 7.5% disagreed, and 25% remained silent. From the result, it is clear that most of the students of class 9 strongly agreed, however least of the students strongly disagreed on the question about group discussion or learning compared to separate or let's say individual learning for developing speaking skills of the students. Thus, result proves that collaborative learning in this century is highly overwhelming for better learning inside or outside of class room.

Positive Influence of Collaborative Tasks and Strategies

Dealing with students' responses on enhancement, enjoyment and positive influence of using collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills depict how many percentages of students strongly agreed, strongly disagreed, agreed, disagreed and remained silent on the given questions, in the first statement, the finding depicts that: 60% students strongly agreed that the use of collaborative learning approach enhances speaking skills, nonetheless; 5% strongly disagreed, 25% agreed, 2.5 disagreed, and 7.5% did not give any opinion. Secondly, out of total 40 participants, 62.5% strongly agreed that they enjoy working in group, 7.5% did not enjoy at all, 15 enjoyed, 10% did not enjoy, and 5% had no idea. Thirdly, 85% participants strongly agreed that collaborative learning approach has positive influence in students' skills, while; 5% strongly disagreed, 5% agreed, 2.5% agreed, 5% disagreed, and 2.5% had no opinion. The data shows that most of the class 9 students strongly agreed, while least of the students had no opinion on enhancement, enjoyment and positive influence of using collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills of class 9 students in secondary level education. Thus, the use of collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills of students is highly important.

Potential benefits of collaboration in speaking

Talking about both students' and teachers' attitudes and merits of using collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills of class 9 students,

the data shows that 67.5% students strongly agreed that they had positive influence towards the use of collaborative learning, whereas; 2.5% strongly disagreed, 7.5% agreed, 10% disagreed, and 12.5% had no opinion. Secondly, only 15% students strongly agreed that their teacher has positive attitudes towards the use of collaborative learning, nevertheless; 10% strongly disagreed, 12.5% agreed, 10% disagreed, and 52.5% did not give any opinion. Thirdly, a large majority of students that is 75% strongly agreed that developing speaking through collaborative learning approach is highly beneficial, contrastingly, 7.5% strongly disagreed, 10% agreed, 5% disagreed, and 2.5% had no response on it. The largest percentage of respondents strongly agreed, while least percent of the participants strongly disagreed dealing with the statements like students' attitudes, teachers' attitudes and merits of collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skills of class 9 students in secondary level education. Therefore, collaborative learning approach is sharply rising in this era of education system throughout the world.

The results of the study show that the secondary level English teachers do not use collaborative learning approach sufficiently to develop students' speaking skill in the classroom. A large majority of the students responded that the use of collaborative learning approach for developing speaking skill in the classroom is highly demanding. I would like to link it up with the idea of Imene (2015) and Ahmed and Bedri (2017) who have shown that collaborative learning is one of the best strategies for developing speaking competency but in our context due to the lack of collaborative learning culture students do not get the ample opportunity of interaction. As the result they are getting weak in speaking aspect day by day. They opined that collaborative learning helps in their developing speaking from the view of their accuracy. Majority of the students stated that they prefer more frequent use of collaborative learning approach in the classroom.

All the students posited that the use of collaborative has only positive impacts in developing speaking, enhancing group work which they enjoy. This

finding is similar to the idea of Olsen and Kagan (1992 as cited in Richards and Rodgers 2016, p.192), “Collaborative learning is group learning activities organized so that learning is dependent on the social structured exchange of information between learners in a group and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of the others”. About two third of the students said that they feel extremely comfortable while using collaborative learning.

Students’ attitudes towards the use of collaborative learning is positive because developing speaking through this approach is beneficial which provides them an opportunity for communication with their friends. It equates to the idea of Chickering and Gamson (1987), “Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is cooperative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding. Thus, learning is more like a team effort than a solo race”. They feel easier in learning in group than individually.

The students responded that the teacher uses mostly traditional methods of teaching like grammar translation method, direct method, lecture method and so on. The participants responded that collaborative learning enhances co-operation and provides an opportunity to share ideas and knowledge among one another. Collaborative learning helps to solve problem by discussing in the group. This finding corresponds to the conclusion of the study by (Lucina and San Jose, 2016) which indicated that collaborative learning offers a proven and practical means of creating exciting social and engaging classroom environments to help students to master traditional skills and knowledge as well as develop the creative and interactive skills in today's society. It plays the role of helping hand which makes easy to find out the solution. The students responded that the teacher does not encourage collaborative approach

as he himself is not sufficiently conscious about the method. The students predict that collaborative learning approach makes students speak fluently in the future. The students suggested to apply collaborative approach in an excessive way to develop speaking skill in the ELT classroom.

Finally, most of the students responded positively on the role of collaborative learning for developing speaking skill in the ELT classroom. Majority of the participants responded that this teaching learning approach creates active friendly relationship which leads to solution to their problem among students and teacher. It is equated to Rao (2019) mentions that collaborative learning involves groups of learners who work for completing a task or finding a solution to the problem or creating a product and it is an educational approach to teaching and learning. Therefore, only a few numbers of students showed the negative impact on its role for developing speaking skill in secondary level education.

Conclusion

From the results and discussions, the study comes to the conclusion that the students expected collaborative activities and culture in their learning. They realized the role of collaborative learning and collaborative culture as constructive as it creates them opportunities developing students’ speaking skills. A huge number of students were found to have positive perception on collaborative learning approach and culture as the part of speaking skills. It encourages to speak students accurately, fluently and appropriately.

Based on the collected data, teachers should be mostly conscious about using pair work, group work or team work as students’ collaboration is highly important in developing speaking skills in ELT classrooms. Teachers should be hugely aware of the demand of the provision of collaborative learning approach and culture while teaching in developing speaking skills in the ELT classrooms. Finally, Students can discuss the texts freely in collaborative learning approach. When they find any kind of difficulties in comprehending new

words, they have an opportunity to ask their friends and discuss together. Therefore, it can be argued that two or more heads are better than single in developing speaking in ELT classrooms.

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