THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ON DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: This article examines the impact of collaborative learning on the development of English speaking skills among university students. In contemporary higher education, the ability to communicate effectively in English is an important component of academic achievement and professional development. However, many students experience difficulties expressing their ideas fluently, participating in discussions, and communicating confidently in a foreign language. Collaborative learning offers opportunities to address these challenges by involving students in pair work, group discussions, problem-solving activities, and collaborative presentations. The article explores the theoretical foundations of collaborative learning, its influence on speaking fluency, vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, motivation, and communicative confidence. It also considers practical strategies for implementing collaborative activities in university English language classrooms. The article argues that purposeful collaboration, supported by appropriate teacher guidance and constructive feedback, can create a more interactive and learner-centred environment for developing English speaking proficiency.

Keywords: collaborative learning, English speaking skills, university students, communicative competence, group work, peer interaction.

Introduction

In the modern educational environment, English plays a significant role in international communication, scientific research, academic mobility, and professional cooperation. For university students, the ability to communicate effectively in English creates opportunities to access international academic resources, participate in conferences, communicate with specialists from different countries, and pursue future career opportunities. Consequently, the development of speaking skills has become one of the essential objectives of English language teaching in higher education. Speaking is a complex productive skill that requires learners to combine vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, pronunciation, fluency, and the ability to respond appropriately to other speakers. Unlike written communication, oral interaction often requires

immediate responses and spontaneous language production. Therefore, students need regular opportunities to practise expressing their thoughts, asking questions, explaining opinions, and participating in conversations.

Nevertheless, many university students experience difficulties when using English in communicative situations. Some learners possess sufficient grammatical knowledge but hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes. Others have limited opportunities to practise English outside the classroom or experience difficulties organizing their ideas during discussions. Teacher-centred lessons that rely heavily on explanations and individual exercises may not provide sufficient opportunities for every student to develop oral communication skills. Collaborative learning represents a pedagogical approach that can help address these challenges. Through pair work, small-group discussions, information-gap activities, and joint presentations, students become active participants in the learning process. They learn from one another, exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and develop the confidence required for effective communication. The purpose of this article is to analyse the pedagogical significance of collaborative learning in developing English speaking skills among university students. It also aims to identify the principal benefits of collaborative interaction and propose practical strategies for integrating collaborative activities into university English language instruction.

Theoretical Foundations of Collaborative Learning. Collaborative learning is an educational approach in which learners work together to achieve shared learning objectives. It emphasizes interaction, mutual support, shared responsibility, and the active construction of knowledge. Unlike learning environments in which students primarily receive information from the teacher, collaborative classrooms encourage learners to contribute ideas, explain concepts, discuss alternatives, and solve problems collectively.

The theoretical foundations of collaborative learning can be associated with social constructivist perspectives on education. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in cognitive development and introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development. According to this perspective, learners can accomplish certain tasks more successfully when they receive appropriate assistance from teachers or more capable peers. In foreign language education, this principle suggests that interaction with classmates can help students understand unfamiliar expressions, formulate responses, and develop new communication strategies. For example, a student who struggles to explain an opinion in English may benefit from observing how a classmate organizes similar ideas. Through repeated interaction, the learner can gradually apply these strategies independently.

Johnson and Johnson (2009) also highlighted the importance of cooperation and positive interdependence in educational settings. Effective collaborative learning requires more than placing students in groups. Learners should have shared objectives, meaningful responsibilities, opportunities to contribute, and accountability for their own participation. In English language classrooms, collaborative learning can take various forms. Pair discussions enable students to practise everyday conversations, while small-group tasks encourage the exchange of opinions and the development of arguments. Collaborative presentations provide opportunities to organize information, divide responsibilities, and speak before an audience. Problem-solving activities require learners to negotiate meaning and reach a common decision. These forms of interaction create a learning environment in which English becomes a practical means of communication rather than merely a subject of theoretical study.

Development of speaking fluency. Speaking fluency involves the ability to communicate ideas with an appropriate degree of continuity and without excessive hesitation. Students develop fluency through repeated opportunities to formulate and express their thoughts. Collaborative activities provide such opportunities by encouraging learners to participate in conversations, explain their positions, and respond to questions. For instance, a teacher may ask students to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online education. Working in pairs, students can present their opinions, request clarification, and support their arguments with examples. Repeated participation in similar activities helps learners become more comfortable with spontaneous communication. Collaborative interaction also teaches students to maintain conversations when they cannot immediately recall a particular word. They may paraphrase an idea, provide an example, or ask a partner for assistance. These strategies are important because successful communication does not depend exclusively on perfect grammatical accuracy.

Expansion of vocabulary and grammatical competence. Vocabulary knowledge is essential for expressing ideas clearly and accurately. Through collaborative activities, students encounter words and expressions used by their peers in meaningful contexts. They can ask questions about unfamiliar vocabulary, clarify meanings, and incorporate new expressions into their own speech. Group discussions also create opportunities to notice differences in sentence structure, pronunciation, and word choice. When students explain their ideas to others, they become more aware of how language is used to communicate specific meanings.

However, collaborative learning should not be understood as a replacement for explicit language instruction. Students may sometimes

reproduce incorrect forms used by their peers. Therefore, teachers should monitor activities, identify recurring difficulties, and provide appropriate explanations and feedback after communication tasks.

Improvement of confidence and motivation. Psychological factors significantly influence students' willingness to speak a foreign language. Fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, and limited confidence may prevent learners from participating actively in classroom communication. Collaborative learning can reduce these barriers by creating smaller and more supportive interactional settings. Speaking with one or two classmates may feel less intimidating than addressing an entire classroom. As students become familiar with collaborative activities, they may gradually develop greater confidence in expressing their opinions. Furthermore, shared tasks can increase motivation because students work towards a meaningful outcome. Preparing a presentation, conducting an interview, or solving a problem gives learners a clear reason to communicate in English. The social nature of these activities can also encourage responsibility, participation, and mutual support.

In conclusion, integrating collaborative learning into university English language instruction can strengthen the practical orientation of language education and support the development of more confident and independent speakers. When supported by systematic guidance and regular opportunities for reflection, collaborative learning can contribute to a classroom environment in which students learn not only to speak English but also to communicate effectively with others.

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