

Life Skills through Collaborative Learning

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ABSTRACT

In technical institutions the task of grooming the students for employment is often laid at the door step of language classes. A known fact is that mere language competence does not make a student employable. Language competence is certainly a huge chunk but attitudinal and behavioral aspects play a major role in governing the type of communicative competence in the students that the industry needs. The globally growing demand for better communication both written and oral calls for innovative teaching methodologies with greater participation of the learners. This is primarily the reason why this paper advocates Collaborative Learning as a method to examine its effectiveness in not only improving communicative competence but also in enhancing the life skills among the learners. The paper discusses how the challenge of a heterogeneous group coupled with large sized class room can be dealt with

using the techniques of one of the approaches of Collaborative learning. (152)

Keywords:

Life Skills, Collaborative Learning, Language competence, language classes, communicative competence

Introduction

Collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. Usually students are working 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 of it. (Smith and McGregor (1992)

The ever growing need for communication skills in English demands a shift from teacher centric to learner centric approach, for today's world requires equipping the learner with all the tools needed for effective communication Besides, good language skills and fluency in English have become the pre-requisite for employability. Today teaching of English is 'need fulfilling' activity. We as the teachers of English should take the lead towards this end in order to meet the growing demands of the world in the field

of technology. In this scenario, Collaborative learning is a shift from the teacher centric approach to learner centric approach and it helps in developing many skills in the learner.

Collaborative Learning is a method that involves group activity. It is a teaching/learning strategy where small groups of students of different levels of ability put to use variety of language activities in order to improve their knowledge about a subject. The team members or groups help one another towards reaching the target of better learning. This combined effort is used in all learning activities including the completeness of assignments. To learn new information, ideas or skills, learners have to work actively in a number of ways. They need to integrate new material with what they already know-or use it to reorganize what they thought they knew. In collaborative learning situations, learners do not simply taking in new information or ideas. They learn something new with the information and ideas. These acts of intellectual processing, of constructing meaning is something new- to learning

The globally growing demand for better communication both written and oral calls for innovative teaching methodologies with greater participation of the learners. Today the industry needs team effort. Individuals need to be assertive. The competition promotes aggressiveness and either they become passive or lose the race or win the race. But the need of the hour is to co-operate and move forward. Collaborative learning will be an effective method to improve communication skills and soft skills in technical undergraduate students. It will not only enhance language learning or developing communication, but also on impressing the students in applying the strategies involved in Collaborative Learning to all subjects to the optional level.

Why Collaborative learning?

- Collaborative learning by nature involves both social and intellectual learning. Research shows that it makes a significant difference in student performance and subsequently student retention.
- In collaborative activities learners inevitably encounter difference and work to recognise and deal

with it which helps in building a community of learners.

- Habits of participation and responsibility to a subject/classroom community can help in the broader communities. Collaborative learning encourages students to develop an active voice in shaping their ideas and values and also developing a sensitive ear to the views and opinions of others.
- Collaborative learning is an active constructive process where to learn new information, ideas or skills learners have to work actively with them in purposeful ways. In collaborative learning situations learners create something new by integrating the new material with something they already know.
- Learners learn valuable social skills such as conflict resolving, problem solving, criticizing ideas and not people, asking questions, group working and building on each other's information.

Elements of Collaborative Learning that enhance Life Skills

Positive interdependence

Each group member's efforts are required and indispensable for group success. Each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources and/or role and task responsibilities. Each group member's efforts are required and essential for group success. The group as a whole either sink or swim together. Creating a sense of positive interdependence within the groups helps the members feel connected to each other and their learning.

Face-to-face interaction

The learners orally explain one another the ways to solve problems and share their knowledge with each others. They would also make sure that the members of the group have understood the concept and also connect their present experiences with the past learning.

Individual Accountability

Structuring of individual accountability in the groups is another advantage of

collaborative learning. In order to do this one of the members of the group is called to explain his contribution to the group. This ensures that every member has put in his/her effort for the groups success.

Interpersonal Skills

The collaborative, life skills like:

- Leadership
- Decision-making
- Trust-building
- Communication
- Conflict-management skills

develop in the learners as the learners have to use these skills if the group has to collaborative, resolve conflict, enjoy working together effectively and efficiently perform the task assigned to them.

In technical institutions the task of grooming the students for employment is often laid at the door step of language classes. A known fact is that mere language competence does not make a student employable. Language competence is certainly a huge chunk but attitudinal and behavioral aspects play a major role in governing the type of communicative competence in the students that the industry needs. The globally growing demand for better communication both written and oral calls for innovative

teaching methodologies with greater participation of the learners. This is primarily the reason why this paper advocates Collaborative Learning as a method to examine its effectiveness in not only improving communicative competence but also in enhancing the life skills among the learners. Collaborative Learning is not the easiest way to teach but when used effectively helps learners be better learners, praise and support each others' learning and develop necessary life skills/ collaborative skills for use in problem solving.

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