Collaborative Learning through Language Games in ESL Classroom

Sujay Kumar Saha & Dr. Smriti Singh
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Abstract

Today's students would become tomorrow's successful leaders. So they must develop 21st-century collaboration skills. Collaborative learning is the most efficient way to help students to attain these skills. Methods and approaches are changing day by day according to learners' need in the field of Teaching English as Second Language from traditional to communicative one. Nowadays collaborative learning approach is of increasing interest to English Language teachers. Collaborative learning can occur in the contemporary discussions of a small group, problem-solving activities, and face-to-face & virtual game settings. Collaborative learning through language games aims at developing collaborative skills, while also maintaining the individuality of learners. The target of collaborative learning is shifting from a mere teacher-student interaction to the role of peer relationship (Johnson, 1981) and implies learner-centered instruction. This paper tries to highlight how collaborating learning can be implemented in English as Second language classroom through language games. Language games provide context for learning and make it interesting for learners. The variety and intensity that games offer may lower anxiety (Richard-Amato, 1988) and encourage shyer students to take part (Uberman, 1998), especially when games are played in small groups. Language games help the learners not only to attain collaboration skills but also to develop language skills.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Language Games, Language skills.

Introduction

Language learning is hard work. The effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over an extended period. As we need meaningfulness in language learning and

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authentic use of the language, it is useful to follow and create many different techniques and procedures. These techniques have been transforming themselves from traditional to communicative one. Nowadays, collaborative learning approach is of increasing interest to English Language teachers. Collaborative learning is the most efficient way to help students attain collaborative skills to become a successful leader in the future while also maintaining the individuality of learners. Collaborative learning is shifting its aim from teacher-student interactions to the student to student interactions. Collaborative learning can occur in the contemporary discussions of a small group, problem-solving activities and face-to-face and virtual game settings. These games and especially language games are most suitable for teachers to use in ESL classroom. The author tries to look into theoretical perspectives of collaborative learning and games for language learning to highlight how collaborative learning can be implemented in ESL classroom through language games. Language games provide the context for learning and make it interesting for learners. Different kinds of games played in small groups help to lower anxiety level of the students and encourage shy learners to participate in it. Language games may help the learners not only to develop language skills but also to attain collaboration skills like active listening, respect, manners, positive attitude, and social awareness.

Literature Review

Using games is an effective way to improve students' social skills along with language skills, as highlighted by Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2006). They said in their book that games can be found to give practice in all the skills, in all the stages of the teaching and learning and for many types of communication. While playing language games, students have to know and clearly understand the rules of the games, and should be clear about what has been, is being and will be done or said, and what is more important, they have to take some actions – doing or saying something, to compete in the games. In doing so, they can practise their skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing comprehensively, and especially they get more practice in listening and speaking, which are poor in the traditional teaching method.Littlewood (1981) in his book proposed that through games, teachers should help learners go beyond the mastery of structures, to the point where they can use them to communicate meaning in real situations. Game playing is useful in developing students communicative ability in that it is a dynamic process of communication in which students as thinking beings, emotional beings, and

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communicators instead of knowledge receptacles, try to get their ideas, concepts, thoughts, emotions and feelings expressed, based on their life experiences.Shu-yun Yu (2005) conducted an experiment on some student divided as control and the experimental group over 18 weeks game based teaching to use it in a doctoral thesis. Data collected through grammar test and examinations, questionnaire and focus group interviews. Based on analysis of the data gathered through research he claimed that games as teaching – learning strategies create fun and a non-threatening learning environment, enhances communication and teamwork, encourages active participation and enables students to demonstrate and apply previously or newly acquired language skills in a real context. Taheri Marzieh (2014), based his research on 32 female students by using a homogenizing test and three vocabulary tests as instruments to find out the effect of using language games on vocabulary retention of Iranian elementary EFL learners. He found that students were unconsciously motivated towards cooperating and consulting to win against the other group. Even weak and shy students were also engaging themselves in the game without any fear of being punished by the teacher. These outcomes are highly valued by constructivist theorists, who believe that social interaction is critical to learning. But the drawback of his research is that he had chosen only female student as the experimental group. It does not mean that result of the experimental group of male and female will be the same. In a research paper, Valipour, Valehand Aidinlou, Nader Assadi (2014) investigated the effects of language games on English listening-speaking skills of Iranian pre-school EFL learners. They conducted pre-test followed by implementation of game-based language teaching and post-test at the end of teaching session on 38 male and female students of 6- 8 years age. The result showed that using language games in teaching English as a foreign language at pre-school level had a positive effect. He also claimed that the statistical population after being taught according to this technique had better performance in comparison with the earlier method of teaching. But his research lacks in showing of collaborative skill development among learners while participating in games.Furthermore, games can be used at any stage in a lesson: at the beginning to diagnose what the students can or cannot do; during the lesson for language practice purposes; or at the end as reinforcement and reward. Language games encourage the students to express their ideas for certain purpose and also collaborate with each other while actively participating in any game which creates a real life context to use language.

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Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning (CL) approach is an umbrella term which includes lots of methods. As an educational approach to teaching and learning, CLinvolves groups of students working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. DavidNunansaid that collaborative learning is a model of language learning; it provides a class environment in which such needs can find a platform that is beneficial for both academic achievement and development learners' social and learning skills. Collaborative Learning is based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) which talks about learning as inherently a social process activated through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Dillenbourg, 1999). Vygotsky's socio-cultural views have contributed significantly to social constructivist epistemology and highlight how learning is mediated following the context and experience with peers. Therefore, collaborative learning theory brings valuable perspectives to social aspects of language learning and must be considered in our work. A consistent thread of literature has been dedicated to game-based language learning. Much of this research is devoted to the implementation of collaborative learning through games in ESL classroom. Games – both virtual and face to face can be considered as a method through which collaborative learning takes place in ESL classroom, social interaction is likely and desirable.

A game is a learner-centered activity, governed by rules in which students have the leading roles, with teachers as facilitators.Games help learners in developing integrated language skills. By observation and discussion with teachers from vernacular medium school, the author has observed that a significant number of them underestimate games as an unserious activity just for relaxing and many of them do not try to use it in the classroom. They think that games resulted only in noise and entertained students. But there is a valid reason to paying attention to games and implementing it in the classroom since games create interest among learners to motivate them in teaching –learning the process and may have a significant role in improving second language acquisition.

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"Game is an activity carried out by co-operating or competing for decision-makers, seeking to achieve, within a set of rules, their objectives." (Rixon, 1981)."

"Games as a form of play governed by rules. They should be enjoyed and fun. They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities, but a way of getting the learner to use the language in the course of the game."(Byrne, 1995)."

Collaborative learning through games as a strategy in ESL classroom is considered as a learning-centered activity that gives students opportunity to train and use languages with a practical purpose and to use their creative skills in a joyful atmosphere. Some methodologists, for example, Richard and Rodgers, do not examine game as a method in language education, others think that game is just an additional device for building up the core skills in language learning at ESL classroom. In the present article, the author supports the idea that games have to be considered as a medium through which learner can learn collaboratively with peers in ESL classroom, and it should not be limited to primary level.

Games help a teacher to create contexts in which a learner can use language in a meaningful way by helping and supporting peers. While participating in any game, learners have to speak or write to express their point of view or give information and also have to understand what others are saying or have written. In this way, learner learns to collaborate with each other which help them to adjust themselves to others in the real social situation. Games are one of the best social skill training activities and also an active breaker. Many games provide repeated use of language forms. By making the language convey information and opinion, games provide the key feature of the drill with the opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication. The author agrees with Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby that language games can be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire. They aren't for use solely on wet days and at the end of the term. Games give practice in all the skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), in all the stages of teaching-learning process (presentation, repetition, recombination and free use of

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language) and for many types of communication tasks (encouraging, criticizing, agreeing, explaining, etc.).

The essential ingredient of a game is the challenge. The challenge is not synonymous with competition, but many of the games are competitive and need cooperation or teamwork to solve problems. There are different types of games are available for the teacher to use in ESL classroom. The teacher may use virtual games as well as face to face games in the classroom. Face to face games are like Guessing games, Picture Games, Sound Games, Mime, Fact-finding games, Debates, Jigsaw games, Think-pair-share, Role Plays. This kind of game gives an opportunity to the learner to develop language skills as well as students' social skills, especially in group work. Through games, the teacher can maintain some features of collaborative learning while implementing in ESL classroom. Learner's presence in Peer groups while participating in any game, profoundly influence the socialization process in young adolescents. As a result cooperation among friends and classmate becomes essential to the healthy development of the young learner. Using a variety of collaborative learning technique like language games provides teachers with a way to capitalize on the social needs of learners. Besides being instructional sound, collaborative learning through language games gives a learner an academic context for peer group interaction. Here is one sample game to use in ESL classroom.

Sample Game

Title: Reading Quiz

Level: Pre- intermediate plus

Time: 30 – 45 Minutes

Skills: reading, listening

Material - choose a text from textbook or collect a passage from any source.

Procedure
- Divide the class into groups and Mark the groups as ABCD or 1234.
- Give a reading material to every group.
- Ask them to read it carefully within given time limit.

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- Ask each group to frame some questions based on their comprehension by discussing with each other among the group members within given time limit.

- Teacher will draw a table on the board to give points to each group

- Now group A will ask their question to group B If B is not able to answer or pass it then it goes to Group C and this process continues.

- For asking a question they will get 1 and for not answering or passing, 1 point will be deducted.

- Highest scorer group will be the winner.

The Benefits of Using Games in ESL classroom

1. Games are learner-centered activity which helps to create a meaningful context for language use.
2. It increases learning motivation among students
3. It reduces learners' anxiety to participate in teaching-learning process actively and also encourage a shy student to participate
4. It is kind of activity which helps to develop integrated language skills.
5. It creates a cooperative learning environment in ESL classroom.
6. It helps students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
7. It can be regarded as a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
8. It provides language practice in the various skill-speaking, writing, listening and reading.
9. It encourages students to interact and communicate.
10. It helps to promote communicative competence.

Conclusion

It is observed that games of different kinds seem to be joyful, creative, and entertaining not only to young learners but also to the teenage students. Games can be used for pedagogical aims in learning the English language too. Games - both virtual and face to face help learner to develop language skills as well as social skills for collaboration with each other by creating interest in the student and motivate them to participate actively in the teaching-learning process.

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Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. The author tries to highlight that game – both face to face and virtual has to be considered and explored not as an additional device but as a primary strategy in language education both for children and adults. It maintains learners` interest, and motivation facilitates the process of teaching and learning and converts language education into real intellectual and emotional experience developing student personality and helps to develop social collaboration skills. Therefore game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching the English language; games should be incorporated in every stage of a lesson, provided that teacher should choose game carefully according to learners need and learning level and execute in the classroom with proper preparation. The author is planning to do further research on game-based language learning in ESL classroom.

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