

Integrating Collaborative Learning in English Proficiency Classroom: Does It Resolve Students' Speaking Anxiety?

Pengintegrasian Pembelajaran Kolaboratif di dalam Kelas Bahasa Inggeris: Adakah ia Menyelesaikan Masalah Keresahan Bertutur Pelajar?

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Abstract: Understanding a language and being able to speak one confidently are two entirely different aspects in second language acquisition. Most students struggle with the latter due to lack of good speaking skills. There are many possible reasons that could hinder students from acquiring this particular skill, and one of the most common is speaking anxiety. Among many available teaching approaches available, collaborative learning is believed to be very effective in providing atmosphere that could reduce students' speaking anxiety. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the effectiveness of integrating collaborative learning in ESL classroom in reducing speaking anxiety and how this approach helps to do so. Collaborative learning approach is conducted in the classroom through a short movie assignment which mainly focuses on teamwork. This study involves 150 students of Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS. They are required to complete a graded assignment in which they need to prepare a themed short movie in a group of 10. After submission, they need to answer a set of questionnaire and write a reflection on the effects of the assignment on their speaking anxiety. Results shows that collaborative learning approach helps students to reduce their speaking anxiety as it promotes continuous practice of the language with their teammates during rehearsals which in return improves their confidence to speak.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, speaking anxiety, speaking skill, English language proficiency, teaching and learning, second language acquisition.

Abstrak: Memahami sesuatu bahasa dan dapat bertutur dengan yakin adalah dua aspek yang berbeza dalam pemerolehan bahasa kedua. Sebilangan besar pelajar berhadapan dengan masalah untuk bertutur kerana kurangnya kemahiran bertutur yang baik. Terdapat beberapa faktor yang menjadi punca kepada masalah ini dan salah satunya adalah keresahan ketika bertutur. Terdapat banyak pendekatan pengajaran yang diyakini dapat mengurangkan masalah ini dan salah satunya adalah melalui pembelajaran kolaboratif. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti keberkesanan pembelajaran kolaboratif dalam mengurangkan keresahan pertuturan bahasa Inggeris dan bagaimana pendekatan ini dapat mengurangkan masalah keresahan tersebut. Pembelajaran kolaboratif ini dilaksanakan melalui tugas filem pendek secara berkumpulan bagi kursus English Proficiency. Kajian ini melibatkan 150 pelajar Pusat Pengajian Asasi (CFS) di Universiti Teknologi Petronas. Pelajar perlu menyiapkan filem pendek mengikut tema yang diberi di dalam kumpulan yang terdiri daripada 10 orang. Setelah tugas ini dihantar, mereka perlu menjawab satu set soal selidik dan perlu menulis refleksi mengenai kesan kaedah pembelajaran itu terhadap masalah keresahan mereka. Hasil kajian menunjukkan kaedah pembelajaran kolaboratif ini membantu pelajar untuk mengurangkan masalah keresahan mereka ketika bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris. Kaedah ini memberikan peluang kepada

mereka untuk bertutur dalam bahasa Inggris dengan rakan sekumpulan yang seterusnya dapat meningkatkan keyakinan dan mengurangkan keresahan dalam bertutur.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran kolaboratif, keresahan bertutur, kemahiran bertutur, pengajaran dan pembelajaran, pemerolehan bahasa kedua.

Introduction

Anxiety is a kind of negative outsource that makes students reluctant and unable to communicate well. Most of the time, they have the ideas but somehow unable to express it fluently due to speaking anxiety (Brown, 2001). Foreign language and second language speaking anxiety are among the most frequently discussed topics by researchers and educators as they negatively affect students' performances and their ability to speak well in the target language (Mak, 2011; Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). Learners who have speaking anxiety do not usually view making language errors as part of a normal learning process but rather a threat to their self-image and this hinders them from participating in language-based activities (Ely, 1986). There are several factors that could lead to speaking anxiety such as low self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension (Toubot et al., 2018).

According to Krashen (1982), anxiety is one of the variables that increases students' affective filter which in return hinders comprehensible learning input from happening. In order to reduce the filter, students should be trained to speak in a non-provoking environment as to make them feel less anxious. Asking the students to give oral presentations and impromptu speeches in front of class are not the best practice to train students to be great speakers (Zheng, 2008). Putting them in such situation will make them even more anxious as they are unprepared and have much higher tendency to make mistakes, which they fear of most.

Instead of giving students individual and impromptu tasks, lecturers should explore different alternatives that could offer students the chance to improve their speaking skill and overcome their speaking anxiety in a less threatening environment. Collaborative learning is an approach that mainly focuses on group activities among the students. The students have to work in groups and are assigned with specific roles to ensure equal participation and contribution from each group members (Swantarathip & Wichadee, 2010).

Group activities provide a friendly atmosphere for students to experience their learning curve without having to feel intimidated or insecure of their weaknesses as they are surrounded by group members who are mostly their friends (Toyama & Mori, 2017). This is supported by a study conducted by Worde (2003)

who found that friendly and relaxing classroom atmosphere are paramount in reducing anxiety and in gaining motivation to learn. Activities conducted with peers may lessen tension because collaborating instead of competing may help learners feel less threatened to participate. Putting aside individualism and competitiveness, group activities focus more on providing equal opportunities for students to actively construct the knowledge with their peers (Dooly, 2008; Mon, 2019). In fact, group discussions might create more space for anxious learners to speak, since there is no right or wrong in what is said. They feel a little less afraid of making mistakes, which in return makes them more confident to participate actively in group discussions and activities.

Students will be able to improve a lot on their speaking and communication skills when they become active members in group discussions and activities (Ghaffari, 2013), which consequently make them better and more confident in speaking as there is much lesser anxiety factor at play. This very nature of collaborative learning provides educators with one of the most suitable approaches to reduce speaking anxiety among second language learners. In regards to this study, collaborative learning is conducted through an assignment which requires the students to work in a group to produce a short movie. While acting live in front of big crowd is more or less similar to the dreaded oral presentations, recording a short movie allows the students to correct their mistakes without jeopardising or minimising their chances to speak. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the effect collaborative learning has in reducing speaking anxiety.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:

1. to identify the effectiveness of collaborative learning in helping students to overcome speaking anxiety.
2. to explore how collaborative learning helps students to overcome speaking anxiety.

Methodology

Participants

Participants of this study are 150 first semester foundation students of Universiti Teknologi

PETRONAS who take Proficiency English subject.

Instruments

The questionnaire for this study is adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et.al (1986). Some of the components in Horwitz's questionnaire are omitted and replaced to properly suit the contexts and objectives of this study. The questionnaire which consists of eight questions were given to each of the students in week 11, a week after their assignment's final submission. Questions related to collaborative learning are added to identify its effectiveness in reducing speaking anxiety. Besides questionnaire, each of the students was also required to write a short reflection on how collaborative learning activity, particularly this short movie assignment, helps them in reducing their speaking anxiety.

Section A

Table 1

o.	Item	A lways	M ostly	So metimes	ever
	I communicate with my friends in English.	1 5%	3 3%	51 %	%
	I am confident to communicate in English.	2 2%	3 9%	33 %	%
	I feel anxious when I have to speak in English.	1 4%	2 5%	47 %	4%
	I work well in groups.	2 0%	6 3%	16 %	%

Table 2

o.	Questionnaire item	Totally agree	Agree e	Disagre e	Totally disagree
4	The assignment makes me speak English with my group mates	33%	46%	20%	1%
6	The assignment improves my communication skills in English	21%	68%	9%	2%
7	The assignment has improved my confidence to speak in English.	21%	65%	14%	0%
8	The assignment has reduced my speaking anxiety.	20%	66%	13%	1%

Section B

Students' reflections are studied to explore how collaborative learning help students to overcome speaking anxiety. Results for reflection are analysed thematically and presented in the table below.

Research Procedure

This study was conducted throughout semester 1, 2019/2020 academic year which started in May and ended in mid-September 2019. The students were divided into groups of 10-12 members and were given 10 weeks to prepare the short movie. After the submission, each of the students was asked to answer a set of questionnaire and was also required to write a short reflection. Responses and data obtained were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results and Findings

Results are analysed and presented in two sections: section A (questionnaire) and section B (reflection).

Table 3

N	Theme	Comments
1	The increase in confidence level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It gave me confidence. -I used to be a little bit scared to talk to people I don't really know much about but now, not as much. -I can guaranteed that this short movie assignment is totally boosting my confidence in speaking. -I have more confident now. -It helps to me build my confidence level.
2	Team support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Motivation from the group members. -The group members were all very cooperative and understanding towards each other. -For having supportive teammates who always believe in what I'm doing and going to speak. -Helps us be confident in ourselves because of supporting friends. -because gaining support from lecture and friends. -They give me a support. -For having supportive teammates who always believe in what I'm doing and going to speak
3	Opportunity to speak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provide a more friendly environment for students to speak up -We have to communicate totally in English so I think i can improve my English and reduce my anxiety for being judge -The assignment requires students to socialize hence it does help students who suffer anxiety in socializing. -By talking to my group mate using English language whenever we have discussion -We have to communicate totally in English so I think i can improve my English and reduce my anxiety for being judge -The short movie makes you speak more English even if you want it or not, because all your friends will be talking in English and so will you -Give opportunities for students to speak English in front of people -Since we've to do this short movie in English, so we frequently talked to each other in English.

Discussions

It is common for students these days to experience countless episodes of speaking anxiety when they must speak English in public. Despite being a common problem, it should be dealt with because speaking is one of the aspects that significantly contributes in developing strong social relations (Liddicoat, 2009). It would be such a waste to see individuals with great potentials to just sit back and stay quiet simply because they do not have the confidence to speak up.

Results from the questionnaire shows that only 14% has never experienced anxiety when speaking

English in public and not more than 22% has the confidence to communicate in English. There is a very small number of students who can use the language confidently while the rest which makes up the majority, struggles to do so because of the anxiety they can't seem to get rid of. This is quite worrying as it can debilitate students' performance. It can affect the student's ability to express their thoughts and opinions in English and their readiness to communicate in English.

More than 80% of the participants agreed that the implementation of collaborative learning through short movie assignment helps in reducing their speaking anxiety. As agreed by majority of the participants,

working in group encourages them to communicate and talk more with their members which in return helps them with their confidence and ultimately lessen their anxiety in speaking the language.

Forcing the students to talk is usually not the best approach as it will only make them anxious because the environment is too intimidating for them. Using principles of collaborative learning, short movie assignment requires the students to brainstorm and discuss in a group, but in a very friendly and comfortable environment. Providing students with this type of environment allows them to express themselves freely without having the feelings of being scrutinised or judged (Adiguzel, 2007). Putting them around their peers help reduce their tension and stress while giving them opportunity to contribute to the assignment. This is seen not only in literature (Ansari, 2015), but from the findings as well where many students claim to have improved their confidence levels in speaking in English as they were put in situations that required them to converse in the language in informal settings such as the planning of the drama and during practice sessions.

Conclusion

As second language learning shifts from the acquisition of technical skills of the language to a more communicative aspect, being able to speak the language is undeniably important. However, previous literature and current study have found that speaking anxiety exists and can hinder language learning processes. L2 teachers must be sensitive towards learners' affective filters and consider students' struggles such as speaking anxiety when planning and conducting speaking-based activities.

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