Perceptions of Jawzjan University Engineering Undergraduates about the Collaborative Teaching and Learning Approach

[1]Ahmad Shah Qasemi, [2]Ainol Haryati Ibrahim

[1,2] Center for Modern Languages and Human Sciences Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Lebuhraya Tun Razak, 26300 Gambang, India

Abstract: **This article describes a part of the findings of the study about collaborative teaching and learning namely group work, pair work and role of the English teacher in English classes of engineering faculties at Jawzjan University (JU). The findings of the study revealed that the students preferred to perform group work and pair work, and they are interested to do lots of activities in English classes. Furthermore, they preferred the teacher to be a facilitator or guide in the class. Based on the findings some concrete recommendations were given to develop the English language program of engineering students at the said university.**

Keywords: **collaborative language teaching, group work and pair work.**

1. INTRODUCTION

This article reports the findings of a study regarding the preferences of engineering undergraduates of JU about the type of teaching approaches, classroom activities and the role of the instructors in English classes.

There are different types of teaching and learning approaches. Use of variety of approaches accelerate the learning process and increase the quality of learning as well. By utilizing these approaches the learning process becomes more effective and interesting. One of these teaching approaches is collaborative learning. Pair work and group work are two of the techniques of collaborative language teaching that provide opportunity for collective contact. Group work and pair work are types of class managing policy in which the teacher functions as a facilitator during the teaching (Najma, 2012).

In group work the teacher has a difficult albeit very significant and effective role. In collaborative activities the students are divided into many groups in a single class session. The groups can be separated into pairs or groups of three or more than three. The groups are made to solve a problem or set a question. The instructor can manage these groups in a class session at any time. The aim of applying this approach is gauging the students' understanding of materials and providing the opportunities to apply what the students are learning, or bring a variety in teaching approach. For collaborative activities the size of class is not important as it can be applied in different size of classes.

Najma (2012) states that in a traditional classroom, the teacher controls and manage all the class activities. The learners cannot take active role during teaching and learning process. However, in group work the students will become self-directed learners. They work collaboratively for their own learning. Group work is a practical teaching approach which can be administered at all levels of education. Based on the researches, group work based tasks and discussions are a common principle of higher education (Allwright & Bailey, 1991).. Furthermore, the effective employment of collaborative approach in language classes can provide a supportive learning environment to students. Meanwhile, group works provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, which leads to their empowerment in the learning process.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the preferences of the engineering students of Jawzjan University about the type of teaching approaches, classroom activities and role of the instructors in the English classes. This is very important for teachers, and curriculum designers for developing new curriculum and syllabus of English language for engineering undergraduates.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Benefits of Collaborative learning:

Collaborative learning approach has been considered as one of practical learning approach in ESL and EFL classes. In general education classes many teachers utilize lecture method to transfer the new knowledge to their students. But lecture teaching method prevents students in ESL and EFL classes from benefiting and taking part in content education. ESL and EFL learners can learn better when they collaborate with each other. Here are the some significant benefits of collaborative learning.

• Promote self-confidence in students:

Slavin (2004) States that collaborative activities lead to advanced degree of achievement by all participants compared to individual learning. In competition system of education the advance students acquire all achievements and acknowledgements and weak students acquire nothing. On the other hand, all the participants take advantage from a collaborative environment. Students build a supportive community and help each other. It promotes the performance level of each participant (Kagan, 1986). Furthermore, collaborative learning promotes self-confidence in all students (Webb, Troper, & Fall, 1995).

• Develop a positive attitude toward the subject:

Collaborative learning encourage the students to perform in advance level (Blight, 1972). In collaborative learning the learners' thinking skills are strengthened and the students' information memory and concentration in issues about the subject are enhanced. When the students' self-confidence is enhanced, they develop a positive view towards the subject matter. Their positive attitudes towards subject create a positive series of good performance, building higher self-confidence. The positive attitude results in increasing their interest in the subject. In collaborative learning students share their achievements with their groups. The obtained achievement improves both the group's and individual's self-esteem.

Some additional benefits of collaborative learning:

• Collaborative learning is specifically helpful in ESL and EFL classes, due to the extensive interactions in activities.

• Felder and Brent (2001) state that by collaborative activities students do not consider the teachers as the only source of knowledge and information.

• CL enhance learning objectives instead of performance objectives (Handelsman et al., 2004).

• Provides opportunity for weaker students (Felder & Brent, 2001).

• Provides opportunity for stronger students to develop a deep understanding from teaching materials (Felder & Brent, 2001).

3. METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire was used as a needs analysis instrument.

3.1 Participants:

The participants who took part in this investigation, for the purpose of conducting a needs assessment, were 212 second and third year engineering undergraduate students. The students belonged to the faculties of Civil Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Geology and Mine.

3.2 Instrumentation:

As mentioned before this study is a part of an investigation about the English language needs of engineering undergraduates, the instrument used in the study was a survey questionnaire.

3.3 Data Collection:

The data were collected during the fall academic semester. A briefing was given before the students answered the questionnaire as the students have not had any previous experience to answer questionnaires.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics was used and analysis was showed by frequency and percentage.

4.1 Classroom collaboration and learning performances:

The following three questions aimed to discover the students' preferred learning styles and the teachers' role in class activities

4.1.1   The students preferred learning style:

Table 4.1 A collaborative teaching approach

A class with lots of activities, pair/group works and projects.	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	3	1.4%
Disagree	3	1.4%
Undecided	7	3.3%
Agree	73	34.4%
Strongly agree	126	59.4%

The result of the survey (a class with lots of activities, pair/group works and projects.) revealed that 126(59.4%) of the students strongly agreed, and 73(34.4%) agreed to have a class with lots of activities. In contrast, only 3(1.4%) students strongly disagreed and the same number and percentage disagreed to have a class with plenty of activities.

4.1.2   Preferences for the role of teacher:

Table 4.2 Teacher cantered class

A class where only the teacher teaches and no activities by the students	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	120	56.6%
Disagree	57	26.9%
Undecided	16	7.5%
Agree	9	4.2%
Strongly agree	10	4.7%

The result of this preferences shows that 120 (56.6%) students strongly disagreed and respectively 57(26.9%) disagreed to have a class with no activities by the students. But still there were a few of the students who agreed and strongly agreed to have such a class which is 9(4.2%) agreed and 10(4.7%) strongly agreed to have a class with no activities by the students. Meanwhile, 57(26.9%) were undecided about selecting the type of class.

4.2   Suggestions of the students for the role of English teacher:

Two questions are used for eliciting the preferences of students for the role of English teacher.

4.2.1 Role of teacher as a guide or facilitator:

Table 4.3 the instructor should be a facilitator or a guide

The instructor should be a facilitator or a guide.	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	7	3.3%
Disagree	7	3.3%
Undecided	11	5.2%
Agree	89	42.0%
Strongly agree	98	46.2%

According to the students' responses regarding the role of the instructor as a facilitator or a guide most of the students chose a teacher should be a facilitator or a guide, which is 98.46% strongly agreed and 89.42.0% agreed. Conversely, 7.3.3% strongly disagreed and 7.3.3% disagreed to the role of English teacher to be only a facilitator or a guide and 11.5.2% were undecided about the role of the English teacher in the class.

4.2.2   Role of teacher as a person who controls everything in the class:

Table 4.4 the instructor should be someone who controls everything in the class

The instructor should be someone who controls everything in the class.	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	41	19.3%
Disagree	65	30.7%
Undecided	36	17.0%
Agree	30	14.2%
Strongly agree	40	18.9%

Based on the students' responses 65.30.7% students strongly disagreed and 41 .19.3% students disagreed for the role of the instructor to be someone who controls everything in the class. But, there are some students who preferred the teacher to be someone who controls everything in the class which is 40.18.9% strongly agreed and 30.14.2% agreed respectively furthermore, 36.17.0% were undecided about the role of English teacher as a whole class controller.

5. CONCLUSION

The subjects of the survey, who are the engineering undergraduates of Jawzjan University, have provided adequate data through their preferences for collaborative teaching approach. Students can judge their needs adequately better than anyone else. Pertaining to their preferences for types of activities in English classes and the role of English teacher, most of them preferred to collaborative learning styles. Thus, we recommend that their views should be taken into account when designing the English language curriculum in engineering faculties of the country in the future. The English language course for students of engineering will encourage them only when they see the direct benefits it brings to them.

6. RECOMMENDATION

1. The students preferred their English instructors to be a facilitator in the classroom. It could be inferred that the English language teachers should rethink their roles at engineering faculties and they should keep abreast with the demands of the modern transforming world.

2. The students preferred to have lots of activities and interested to perform in groups and pairs. It can be inferred that they are interested in the collaborative learning approach. Consequently, teachers should consider the students interest in teaching and learning approaches.

3. It was a simple and preliminary study about the students' preference for collaborative learning. Several areas about collaborative teaching and learning need to be investigated in order to discover is the teachers utilize collaborative teaching.

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