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THE ROLE OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK SKILLS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This study shows the impact of collaborative learning on the development of communication and teamwork skills among secondary school students in a Presidential school in Jizzakh. The participants were 24 seventh-grade students from two parallel classes, 7 Green and 7 Blue, each consisting of 12 students. Over a four-week intervention, students engaged in collaborative learning strategies, including group projects, peer discussions, and problem-solving tasks. Data were collected through classroom observations, student surveys, and reflective journals. Findings revealed notable improvements in students' ability to articulate ideas, negotiate roles, and engage in effective teamwork. The study concludes that collaborative learning is a powerful methodology for enhancing essential 21st-century competencies and recommends its integration into modern classroom practice.

Introduction. In the 21st century, education is increasingly expected to go beyond the transmission of knowledge and instead equip learners with skills that prepare them for life, work, and global citizenship. Among these skills, communication and teamwork stand out as vital competencies that enable individuals to thrive in diverse and rapidly changing environments. Employers and higher education institutions consistently emphasize the need

for students to develop not only academic excellence but also the ability to collaborate effectively with others (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019).

Collaborative learning has gained recognition as a teaching strategy that directly supports the development of such competencies. Rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, collaborative learning highlights the importance of social interaction in the construction of knowledge. When students engage in dialogue, share ideas, and work collectively toward a common goal, they are able to co-construct understanding and enhance interpersonal skills (Gillies, 2016). Research further indicates that cooperative learning environments foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Slavin, 2015).

In Uzbekistan, Presidential schools are tasked with nurturing academically gifted students who are expected to contribute to the country's development and compete globally. For these students, mastering communication and teamwork is particularly important, as their future careers are likely to demand leadership, adaptability, and intercultural competence. However, traditional approaches to teaching in many contexts still emphasise individual achievement and teacher-centred instruction, which may not provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop these essential skills.

This study therefore, explores the impact of collaborative learning on communication and teamwork among Grade 7 students in a Presidential school. By embedding collaborative strategies into English lessons, it seeks to evaluate how such methods influence classroom interaction and student growth.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were 24 students enrolled in Grade 7 at a Presidential school in Jizzakh. The sample included two parallel classes, 7 Green and 7 Blue, each consisting of 12 learners. The students, aged between 12 and 13, represented a mixed-ability group with varying levels of English language proficiency. While some demonstrated advanced communicative skills, others required additional support in both oral and written expression. This diversity provided an authentic environment for examining how collaborative learning could foster communication and teamwork skills across different learner profiles.

Procedure

The intervention was carried out over a four-week period within English language classes. Collaborative learning strategies were deliberately integrated into eight lessons, replacing some traditional teacher-centred activities with structured group work. The activities were designed to encourage interaction, shared responsibility, and joint problem-solving.

The strategies included:

Group projects: Students worked in small groups to research and present on global issues such as climate change, technology in education, and cultural diversity. Each project required collective planning, task division, and oral presentation.

Peer discussions: Learners engaged in group debates and text-based discussions, where they were encouraged to express opinions, support arguments with evidence, and actively listen to opposing views.

Problem-solving tasks: Teams were assigned real-world scenarios related to lesson themes, such as finding solutions to environmental problems or proposing school-based initiatives to improve student life.

Role assignments: Within each group, members were assigned specific roles—leader, timekeeper, note-taker, and presenter—to ensure balanced participation and accountability.

These strategies were selected not only to strengthen students' subject knowledge but also to create authentic opportunities for them to practice communication, negotiation, and teamwork.

Instruments

Data were collected using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to capture a holistic picture of student progress:

Observation checklists were employed during lessons to monitor active participation, turn-taking, and collaborative behaviours.

Student surveys were administered before and after the intervention to measure self-perceived growth in communication and teamwork skills.

Duration

The intervention spanned four consecutive weeks, covering a total of eight English language lessons. Each collaborative activity was carefully integrated into the existing curriculum to ensure alignment with learning objectives while simultaneously addressing the development of 21st-century competencies.

Results. The data collected from classroom observations, student surveys, and reflective journals revealed substantial improvements in students' communication and teamwork skills over the course of the intervention. The findings are presented in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Participation and Engagement

Observation checklists indicated a steady increase in active participation. During the first week, approximately 60% of students contributed actively in group tasks, often with

encouragement from the teacher. By the final week, this figure had risen to 90%, with all students initiating discussions independently, asking clarifying questions, and volunteering to present group outcomes. Teachers also observed that students who were initially passive gradually became more confident in contributing ideas.

Communication Skills

Student surveys showed that 80% of participants felt more confident in expressing their ideas in English after the intervention, compared with 20% at the beginning of the study. Reflective journals supported this finding, as many students noted that collaborative discussions encouraged them to speak more frequently and to structure their arguments more clearly. One student from 7 Green wrote, "I was shy to speak before, but now I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts because my group members support me." Teacher's observations confirmed that students increasingly used phrases for agreement, disagreement, and clarification, which contributed to more meaningful exchanges.

Teamwork Skills

Evidence of enhanced teamwork emerged strongly in surveys. By the end of the intervention, 92% of students reported that they had learned how to work more effectively in groups, including dividing responsibilities and supporting peers. Initially, conflicts over task distribution and leadership roles were observed, but by the third week, students began resolving these issues independently. In their journals, several learners reflected on the importance of listening to peers and respecting diverse opinions. For example, a student from 7 Blue noted, "I learned that every idea has value, even if it is different from mine."

Overall Classroom Dynamics

The qualitative data revealed a noticeable improvement in classroom atmosphere. Group interactions became more cooperative and less competitive, with students showing increased patience and empathy toward one another. Teachers also observed greater enthusiasm during lessons, as collaborative tasks created a sense of shared responsibility and achievement.

Discussion. The findings of this study suggest that collaborative learning plays a significant role in enhancing communication and teamwork skills among secondary school students. The steady increase in active participation, greater confidence in self-expression, and improved group dynamics observed during the intervention align closely with existing research on the benefits of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Students not only engaged more actively in lessons but also demonstrated an increased ability to negotiate roles, resolve conflicts, and support one another, all of which are core components of effective collaboration.

These results are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in the learning process. In this study, peer collaboration provided students with opportunities to co-construct knowledge, scaffold one another's understanding, and develop communication strategies in a supportive environment. The structured role assignments used during group tasks further strengthened accountability and ensured that each learner contributed meaningfully, preventing dominant voices from overshadowing quieter students.

One notable outcome was the observed shift in classroom dynamics. Initially, some students resisted group work, preferring independent learning. However, as they became accustomed to collaborative structures, they demonstrated increased willingness to cooperate and recognized the value of teamwork. This reflects earlier research which argues that collaborative learning, when consistently implemented, fosters not only cognitive development but also interpersonal growth (Slavin, 2015).

At the same time, several challenges emerged. Conflicts within groups occasionally disrupted activities, particularly in the early stages when students were unaccustomed to sharing responsibility. Moreover, differences in language proficiency sometimes created imbalances, with more fluent students taking on leadership roles. These issues underscore the importance of teacher facilitation in creating balanced groups, assigning clear roles, and encouraging equal participation.

Despite these challenges, the overall impact of collaborative learning was overwhelmingly positive. The improvement in communication and teamwork skills suggests that such approaches are particularly valuable in schools like the Presidential school, which aim to prepare students for global competitiveness. The integration of collaborative tasks into English lessons not only improved language use but also mirrored real-world scenarios where effective communication and cooperation are essential.

This study highlights the potential for collaborative learning to move beyond being a classroom technique to becoming a central pedagogical strategy. By providing students with authentic opportunities to engage in meaningful interaction, teachers can foster competencies that extend well beyond academic achievement, equipping learners with the interpersonal skills required in higher education and future professional environments.

Conclusion. This study has demonstrated that collaborative learning can significantly enhance communication and teamwork skills among secondary school students in the context of a Presidential school in Jizzakh. Through the implementation of structured group projects, peer discussions, and problem-solving tasks, students not only became more confident in

expressing their ideas but also developed the ability to listen actively, negotiate roles, and work effectively towards shared goals.

Although challenges such as unequal participation and occasional group conflicts emerged, these were mitigated through teacher facilitation and careful task design. The overall findings highlight that when appropriately structured, collaborative learning serves as a powerful pedagogical approach that fosters essential 21st-century competencies, including critical thinking, adaptability, and interpersonal effectiveness.

The implications of this study are twofold. First, it suggests that integrating collaborative learning more systematically into the curriculum can create richer opportunities for student engagement and skill development. Second, it underlines the need for ongoing teacher training to ensure that educators are equipped to design, manage, and assess collaborative activities effectively.

In conclusion, collaborative learning should be viewed not merely as an alternative instructional strategy but as a core component of modern education. By cultivating communication and teamwork skills, it prepares learners to navigate both academic and professional contexts with confidence, thereby contributing to their long-term success in an increasingly interconnected world.

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