



Applying Collaborative-Learning Approach in the Business English Context

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Abstract

Collaborative learning, a dynamic and interactive student-centred teaching strategy, has garnered increasing recognition for its effectiveness in language education. Unlike traditional teacher-led methods, collaborative learning emphasizes active participation, peer interaction, and shared responsibility, making it particularly well-suited for the multifaceted demands of Business English instruction. This study examines its application in the Business English context, highlighting its potential to enhance language proficiency, interpersonal communication, and professional preparedness. This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive analysis. Data were collected through a combination of pre-tests and post-tests to measure changes over time, alongside detailed questionnaires designed to capture participants' perspectives, experiences, and feedback. This multifaceted approach can help to address the research problem by integrating objective measurement with subjective insights. This study also highlights the connection between collaborative learning and socio-constructivist theory, examining its relevance to real-world business scenarios where teamwork and communication are pivotal. Collaborative learning activities, such as project-based learning, role-playing, and peer feedback, demonstrate how these activities can help learners bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace requirements. The study also explores the benefits of collaborative learning, including enhanced fluency, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, which are crucial for global business environments. Additionally, challenges such as varying proficiency levels, cultural differences, and assessment complexities are addressed with actionable solutions. Through this analysis, the study highlights how collaborative learning can enhance Business English education, fostering both linguistic competence and professional skills that prepare learners for success in diverse and interconnected work environments.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Business English, Task-Based Activities and Language Proficiency

Introduction

In today's fast-paced global economy and increasingly interconnected work environments, the ability to communicate effectively in Business English has become a critical skill for professionals across industries. Negotiating deals, drafting reports, or leading meetings, clear and confident communication in English often determines success in the modern workplace, particularly in the business context. However, traditional methods of teaching English as a second language often centered on rote learning, isolated grammar exercises, and textbook dialogues that frequently fail to equip learners with the skills they need to thrive in real-world business scenarios. This gap between classroom instruction and practical application leaves many learners feeling unprepared for the dynamic and collaborative nature of business communication. Unlike conventional approaches, collaborative learning focuses on active engagement, peer-to-peer interaction, and teamwork. It mirrors the realities of the workplace, where communication rarely happens in isolation and success often depends on one's ability to work effectively with others.

This study explores how collaborative learning can improve Business Communication by making learning more meaningful and directly applicable to the professional world. Creating opportunities for learners to engage in real-life scenarios, such as team-based projects, group discussions, and role-playing exercises, helps them apply collaborative learning strategies. This not only strengthens language proficiency but also builds critical interpersonal skills. It provides a pathway to bridge the gap between knowing the language and using it confidently in the workplace, empowering learners to navigate the complexities of global business environments with ease.

In recent years, collaborative learning has garnered significant attention in language education, particularly within the realm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Business English, as a subset of ESP, emphasizes practical language skills necessary for professional environments. This literature review examines the application of collaborative learning in the context of Business English, exploring its theoretical foundations, practical implementations, and observed outcomes.

Literature Review

Ibrahim et al. (2015) claimed that collaborative learning fosters a sense of community among students, making the learning process more engaging and meaningful. By working in groups, students feel supported both academically and socially, reducing feelings of isolation. This

approach encourages students of varying abilities to cooperate, taking responsibility not only for their own learning but also for their peers' progress, creating a cycle where success inspires more success. Moreover, when teaching methods align with students' interests and motivations, they feel empowered and more invested in their education. This paper explores current teaching practices in Malaysian ESL classrooms, proposes a collaborative learning model suited to this context, highlights its benefits, and addresses its limitations.

Similarly, Srinivas (2019) proclaimed that learning is a lifelong journey that begins in childhood and continues throughout life, encompassing languages, subjects, courses, and skills. Language learning, in particular, requires consistent effort and determination. Teachers and learners employ various strategies in the classroom, such as teamwork, group work, and collaborative learning, to achieve success. Among these, collaborative learning stands out as a highly effective technique, enabling learners to grasp concepts quickly and systematically through shared efforts. This paper highlights the benefits of collaborative learning in English language classrooms, emphasizing its value in task completion and skill acquisition. It examines the roles of both teachers and learners in creating a collaborative environment and offers practical guidance for effectively implementing this approach in English language instruction.

In another study, Srinivas (2019) stated that in English language teaching, collaborative learning often takes the form of pair or group work. This approach enables students to share ideas, collaborate on solving problems, and learn from one another, thereby significantly enhancing their knowledge and critical thinking skills. Even average learners feel motivated and actively contribute to tasks, creating a more inclusive and engaging classroom experience. This paper also examines the impact of collaborative learning in EFL/ESL classrooms, focusing on its benefits, ideal group sizes, and ways to motivate learners. It also provides practical suggestions for teachers and students to maximize the effectiveness of this method, ensuring that learning becomes a shared and rewarding experience.

Unlike Srinivas (2019) and Ibrahim et al. (2015), who examined the importance of collaborative learning in improving English language proficiency, Veramuthu and Shah (2020) observed the effectiveness of collaborative writing in enhancing the writing skills of secondary school students in ESL classrooms. He claimed that in alignment with 21st-century educational practices, the collaborative approach has emerged as a pivotal shift in pedagogy, helping ESL students develop proficiency in writing. His findings suggested that language teachers can incorporate collaborative

writing into their classrooms as a practical and engaging method to enhance ESL teaching and learning.

Based on the findings, this study aims to explore the application of collaborative learning in the Business English (ESP) context, whereas previous studies have explored the benefits of collaborative learning in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. In this way, this study aims to address the existing research gap.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting data through pre- and post-tests as well as questionnaires. The target group consisted of second-year undergraduates enrolled in a business communication course, with a total of 50 students selected to participate. These students participated in five collaborative learning activities centred on real-world scenarios, including peer feedback, role-playing, group tasks, problem-solving exercises, and presenting graphic information. This approach not only enhanced their learning experience but also allowed them to apply theoretical concepts in practical contexts.

Data Analysis

The Quantitative data collected through the pretest and posttest were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. By examining the mean differences for each collaborative learning activity, the following chart highlights the impact of interventions on these activities.

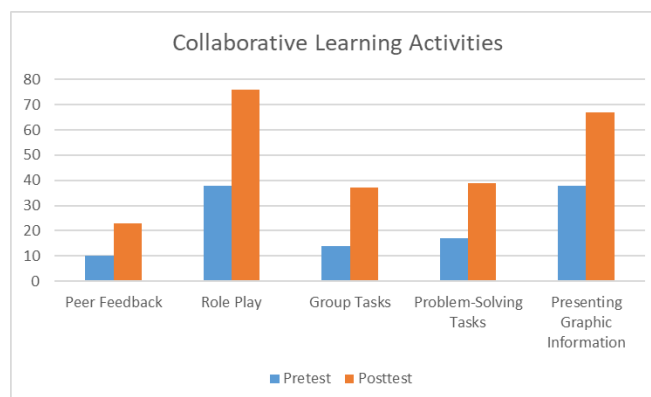


Figure 1: Mean comparison of Collaborative Activities

1. Peer Feedback:

- The mean difference between pretest and posttest is relatively small but still positive. This suggests a measurable improvement in the participants' ability or willingness to provide constructive feedback to peers, though the change is less pronounced compared to other activities.

2. Role Play:

- The largest mean difference is observed in this category. This indicates that role-play saw the most significant growth in effectiveness or frequency post-test. It could be attributed to its engaging, hands-on nature, which resonates well with participants, making it a standout method for enhancing collaborative learning.

3. Group Tasks:

- The mean difference for group tasks is moderate, reflecting a steady improvement. This suggests that while group tasks were beneficial, they may not have had as transformative an effect as activities such as role-playing. It could imply that participants were already somewhat familiar or comfortable with working in groups during the pretest phase.

4. Problem-Solving Tasks:

- A notable increase in the mean difference highlights an enhanced ability to tackle problems collaboratively. This suggests that the intervention fostered greater critical thinking and teamwork skills, enabling participants to approach challenges more effectively together.

5. Presenting Graphic Information:

- A significant mean difference here points to marked improvement in this area. Participants likely became more proficient at synthesising and presenting data visually, a crucial skill in collaborative settings. This improvement might reflect increased confidence in sharing ideas and interpreting visual information collaboratively.

The above SPSS analysis reveals that all five activities saw positive mean differences between pretest and posttest, reflecting overall progress in collaborative learning. The most substantial changes occurred in **role play** and **presenting graphic information**, indicating that these

methods were particularly impactful in fostering collaboration. These results underline the effectiveness of the interventions, emphasizing the importance of interactive, creative, and engaging activities in enhancing group learning experiences.

In addition, the qualitative data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed thematically to gain deeper insights into learners' engagement in collaborative activities and their perceptions of collaborative learning. This analysis focused on identifying recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses, shedding light on their experiences, challenges, and overall attitudes toward collaborative tasks.

Learners' Engagement in the Collaborative Activities:

The thematic analysis highlighted various factors that influenced learners' participation in group-based activities. These included their level of interest, the perceived relevance of the tasks, and the dynamics within their groups. Key themes that emerged included enhanced communication, improved teamwork skills, and increased motivation when working with peers. However, some challenges were also noted, such as uneven participation among group members or difficulties in maintaining focus during specific tasks.

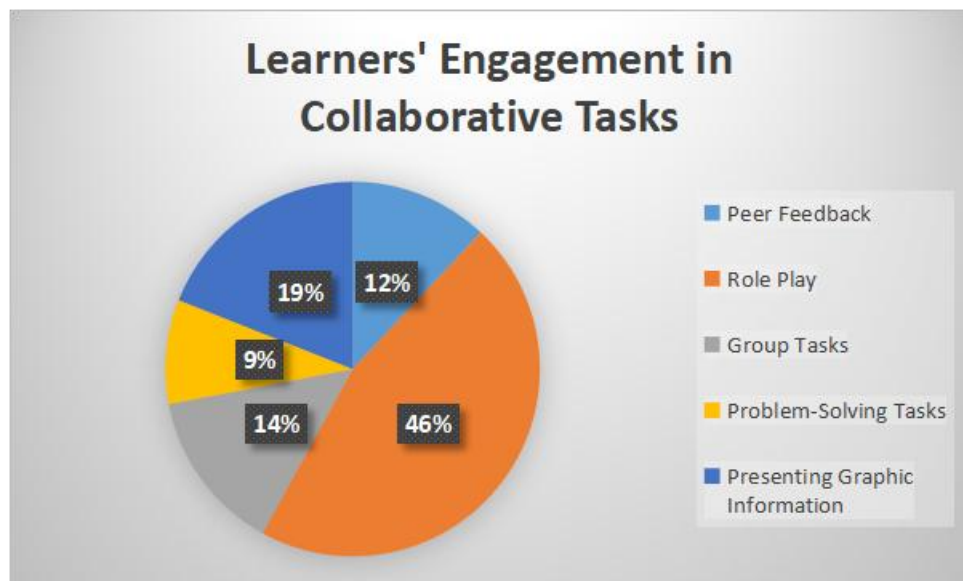


Figure 2: Learners' Engagement in Collaborative Tasks

The chart reflects learners' preferences, with **role-play standing out as the most favoured** activity by nearly half of the participants. This dominance suggests its ability to foster engagement, creativity, and effective collaboration. Meanwhile, activities such as presenting graphic information and solving problem-solving tasks are also well-regarded, emphasizing the value of diverse methods in enhancing collaborative learning experiences.

Learners' Perception of Collaborative Learning: Participants expressed diverse views regarding the effectiveness and appeal of collaborative learning. Many learners emphasised the value of shared learning experiences, which helped them develop new perspectives and enhance their problem-solving skills. Activities such as role-playing and presenting graphic information, were particularly praised for being interactive and engaging. On the other hand, some participants voiced concerns about time constraints or the need for more precise guidance during group tasks.

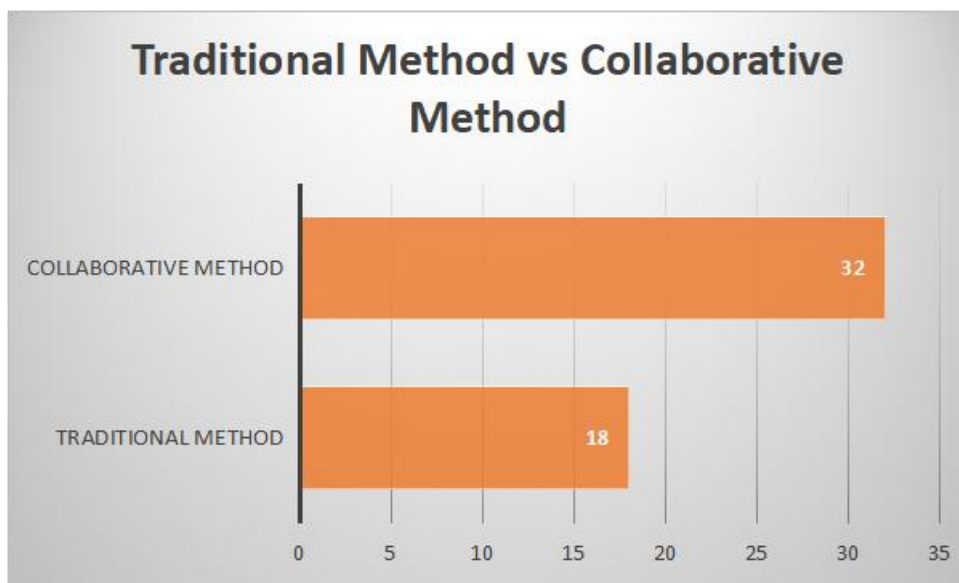


Figure 3: Learners' Perception about Collaborative Tasks

The chart emphasizes the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies compared to traditional teaching approaches. It suggests that implementing collaborative methods can significantly enhance the educational experience, fostering better participation, understanding, and skill development among learners.

Overall, the qualitative and quantitative analyses provided a nuanced understanding of how learners engaged with and perceived collaborative learning activities. These findings also offered

valuable insights into learners' perceptions of collaborative learning, providing practical recommendations for enhancing collaborative learning strategies. Students also gained numerous benefits from the collaborative learning activities, as follows:

- Improved Communication Skills

Group activities simulate real-life business interactions, enhancing fluency, confidence, and cultural sensitivity.

- Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills

Collaborative tasks foster teamwork, leadership, and conflict resolution—key attributes for professional success.

- Practical Application of Language

Learners apply theoretical knowledge in realistic contexts, bridging the gap between classroom instruction and workplace demands.

- Increased Motivation and Engagement

The interactive nature of collaborative learning keeps students motivated, as they feel accountable to their peers and see tangible results from their efforts.

However, several challenges were encountered when implementing these collaborative learning activities in the business context:

- Lack of Contextual Relevance: Traditional curricula often emphasize grammar and vocabulary without sufficient focus on workplace scenarios.
- Limited Interaction Opportunities: Learners may not have access to real-life business communication practice.
- Varying proficiency levels among learners
- Resistance to group work due to cultural or personal preferences.
- Assessment of collaborative tasks.

To overcome these challenges, this study suggests the following recommendations:

- Gradually introduce collaborative activities and provide clear guidelines to build trust and rapport.

- Use rubrics that evaluate both individual contributions and group outcomes.
- Assign mixed-ability groups, allowing stronger students to mentor peers while reinforcing their own learning.
- Revising the existing curriculum.

Theoretical Application

Collaborative learning is rooted in socio-constructivist theories of education, particularly Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) argued that learners achieve higher levels of understanding through social interaction and guided participation. In the context of Business English, collaborative learning aligns with these principles by fostering interactive, student-centred learning environments. Additionally, Dörnyei and Murphy (2003) emphasized the role of group dynamics and cooperative tasks in enhancing language acquisition and communication skills.

In practical terms, this means that learning does not happen in isolation but thrives in a dynamic, shared environment. When learners engage with their peers in group settings, they draw from each other's strengths, share unique perspectives, and offer mutual support. This process not only builds knowledge but also fosters confidence and encourages critical thinking as learners actively negotiate meaning, solve problems together, and apply their understanding in real-time.

This collaborative framework aligns perfectly with the demands of Business English. In professional environments, success often hinges on effective communication, teamwork, and the ability to analyse and respond to complex situations with precision. Whether it is participating in a team meeting, presenting to stakeholders, or brainstorming solutions to a problem, these scenarios mirror the collaborative dynamics of a classroom using this approach.

By applying Vygotsky's principles, Business English educators can create a learning space that feels both authentic and empowering. Learners not only improve their language skills but also develop interpersonal abilities and confidence that directly translate to the workplace.

Conclusion

The collaborative learning approach offers a dynamic, student-centred pathway to mastering Business English. By integrating teamwork, contextual learning, and practical skills, it prepares learners for the linguistic and interpersonal demands of the global workplace. While challenges exist, careful planning and adaptation can unlock the full potential of collaborative learning, transforming Business English education into a more engaging and impactful experience.

This approach provides a vibrant and student-focused pathway for mastering Business English, transforming the learning process into an active, meaningful, and engaging journey. Rather than relying solely on traditional lecture-based methods, this approach places students at the heart of their learning experience. By working together in groups, learners tackle real-world business scenarios that mirror workplace challenges, making the process not just about language acquisition but also about developing practical and professional skills.

Collaboration brings context to the forefront, enabling learners to apply their language skills in situations that closely resemble those they will encounter in their careers, such as negotiating a deal, presenting a pitch, or participating in team discussions. Through teamwork, students develop essential interpersonal abilities, such as active listening, clear articulation, and cultural sensitivity. These skills are critical in today's globalized business landscape, where effective communication is often the key to success.

However, like any teaching method, the collaborative-learning approach comes with its challenges. Differences in language proficiency, cultural expectations, or even personality types can sometimes make group work tricky. However, these hurdles can be overcome with thoughtful planning, inclusive strategies, and a supportive learning environment. For example, creating clear guidelines, fostering open communication, and providing balanced roles within groups can help ensure everyone feels valued and engaged.

When implemented well, collaborative learning can revolutionize Business English education. It not only enhances language proficiency but also empowers students to build confidence, teamwork, and critical thinking skills. In doing so, it equips them with the tools they need to excel in real-world business contexts, making the learning experience both impactful and enjoyable. This

approach not only teaches Business English but also prepares learners to communicate and thrive in the dynamic, interconnected workplace of the future.

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