

Creating Collaborative Learning Environment for English Language Learners

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Abstract

This study explores strategies adopted by a private school teacher in Kathmandu to create a collaborative learning environment for English language learners in Grade Five. A collaborative learning ambience is an educational approach where two or more learners work together in small groups to obtain a common goal, such as solving a problem, completing a task, or creating a product. This method highlights active engagement, shared responsibility, and mutual learning, where learners depend on and are accountable to each other. Key elements encompass positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, interpersonal skills, face-to-face interaction, and group processing to develop deeper understanding and critical thinking. The study adopted a case study design to collect and analyze data from a single participant. In-depth interview and observation techniques were used to collect data. The participant was chosen purposively. Findings reveal that the teacher demonstrated initiative in enhancing collaboration through group work, and interactive activities. However, the use of limited technological resources, institutional support remained weak to develop collaborative learning environment. In particular, collegial support and principal's cooperation was found weak in his initiative to creating English speaking environment. Despite these limitations, the teacher's efforts indicated the potential of collaborative learning to enhance not only students' language competence but also their communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills. As the study was conducted with a single participant, it cannot be generalized in a larger population. The finding of this study is context specific.

Keywords: Collaboration strategies; educational quality; basic education; capacity development; professional development

Introduction

Collaborative learning strategies can be a highly effective way to facilitate educational discussions while allowing for the clarification and evaluation of ideas. In the current era of distance and hybrid learning, collaboration is arguably more critical than ever before. Collaborative learning is an umbrella term. It indicates educational approaches that enhance combined intellectual effort by either group of students and teachers working together. The collaborative endeavors of these groups permit for a more effective search for understanding, meaning, and solutions to problems (Srinivas, 2011).

The primary advantages of collaborative learning strategies comprise; an increased understanding of and exposure to diverse perspectives, the development of higher-level thinking, self-management, oral communication, and leadership skills, increased student retention, enhanced levels of student responsibility and self-esteem, better preparation for real-life social and employment problems and situations, and the promotion of better student-faculty interactions (O'Reilly, 2016).

To motivate students, education must continue investigating innovative ways to meet up student learning requirements as they develop. This study aimed to find out collaborative learning environment and assess how they are affected by environment for English Language learning in private school in Kathmandu. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) assert that it is beyond time that educational institutions know that they can no longer prolong with traditional educational practices that do not assist the requirements and anticipation of the knowledge society.

Collaborative learning is effective when learners interact to form common meaning and insight (Baral & Bhatta, 2011). Teaching in the 21st century requires educators to extend beyond subject matter and support students to fine-tune skills for life, literacy, and learning. Learning skills involve critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. It can be argued that developing a collaborative learning environment addresses each of the learning skills and prepares students for cooperation outside of the confines of the classroom as contributing members of society (Pandey, 2025).

Studies were done on collaborative learning environment for English language learners. However, what strategies English teacher adopts to creating collaborative learning environment

for the learners, has not been much studied following a case study design. Therefore, this study is justifiable and re-searchable.

Objectives of the Study

The study is on creating collaborative learning ambience for the learners. The teachers play a pivotal role to creating a positive atmosphere for learning. Therefore, the objectives of a study are presented below:

1. To uncover how a private primary school teacher creates collaborative learning environment in the classroom.
2. To explore the teaching strategies adopted for collaborative learning.

Research Questions

To meet the objectives of a study, the following research questions are presented as below:

1. How is the teacher teaching in class five in private school in Kathmandu creating collaborative learning environment for students in the classroom?
2. What activities does the teacher employ to develop collaborative learning ambience for the learners?

Review of Literature

Bruce (1994) has published widely on the topic of the literature review. He has recognized six elements of a literature review. These elements comprise a list; a search; a survey; a vehicle for learning; a research facilitator; and a report. Therefore, the review is presented in the following form.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning brings a change away from the teacher-fronted or lecture-centered environment in the classrooms (Srinivas, 2011). In collaborative classrooms, the lecturing/listening/note-taking process may not disappear utterly, but it survives along with other processes that are based on students' discussion, group discussion and active work as well as participation with the course material (O'Reilly, 2016; Vijayaratnam et al., 2025). Teachers who use collaborative learning approaches think of themselves less as expert transmitters of knowledge to students, collaborative learning occurs when small groups of students support each other to learn (Austin, 2001 & Welch, 1998).

Collaborative learning is sometimes misunderstood. It is not having students talk to each other, either face-to-face or in a computer conference, while they do their individual assignments (Cooper, 1988). It is not having them do the task individually and then having those who finish first help those who have not finished. And it is not having one or less students do all the work, while the others attach their names to the report (Klemm, 1994).

Teacher Collaboration

Teachers work together in a harmonized way to achieve general goals (Banner and Cannon, 1997). Hargreaves and Fullan present a useful field of collaboration from, "Scanning and storytelling, to help and support to sharing, to team work where teachers teach, plan or inquire into teaching together" (2012, p.112). This 'joint work' has played a significant role for teachers and students with teaching emphasizing on work that has possibility to improve student outcomes, well-being and self-regulation (Pandey & Kaudal, 2024).

Co-teaching

Co-teaching takes place when two or more than two teachers share responsibility for a group of students, usually within one workspace, through a shared approach which includes the grouping of resources and joint responsibility (Friend & Cook, 2010). One of the two teachers is classically a general education teacher with the second teacher a registered special education teacher (Jenni & Mauriel, 2004). By the 1990's emerging research evidenced benefits for special needs students in inclusive classrooms together with teachers reporting professional growth and an improved sense of collegiality (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2013).

Co-teaching strategies need teachers to understand and agree to mutually developed goals, a shared belief in co-teaching, a belief in the importance of engaging in the roles of teacher and student, extend functions theory of leadership and a co-operative procedure (Friend & Cook, 2013). These strategies provide chance for teachers to sketch their co-teaching strategically to meet student needs rather than simply working in the same space and teaching separately (Hang & Rabren, 2009).

While teachers work in a co-teaching relationship there is a better possibility of using research well-versed practice (Molloy, 1998). Teachers are able to classify important benefits for themselves and students when teaching in an environment enabled by a co-teaching relationship (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2013; Barjestesh et al., 2025).

Team Teaching

George and Alexander (1993) present team teaching refers to working and teaching in a team. An effort of team is encouraging and enabling. It is objective and student-centred. Team teaching in the open plan classroom was a purposeful paradigm shift away from the industrial model of the teacher directed authoritarian classroom (Alterator & Deed, 2013). In this context, team teaching represented two or more teachers, planning, teaching and working together in the same space with the equivalent of two or more classrooms of children (Buckley, 2000).

Methods and Procedures

This study follows a qualitative research method. It has adopted a case study design. Only one participant was selected purposively from one private school, situated in Kathmandu. In-depth interview and observation techniques were adopted to gather data. Data were garnered from the documents (Gautam, 2008). Methodology contains three stage-setting statements of purpose, reviewing literature and deciding samples, and analyzing and interpreting the information. Methodology is a needed theory that governs how research should perpetuate (Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2007).

Case study is a useful design to study the real-life context and examine the particular phenomenon in which one systematically searches at a specific case (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interview guides help researchers to focus an interview on the topics at hand without constraining him/her to a particular format. This freedom can help interviewers to tailor questions to the interview context, and to the people he/she is interviewing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Since interviews alone cannot dependably present a correct picture, we gathered observation data (Singh, 2006). As Adler and Adler (1994) suggests, “for as long as people have been interested in studying the social and natural world around them, observation has served as the bedrock source of human knowledge” (p. 377). Like interviews, observation as a data collection technique can be structured or unstructured to varying degrees, with qualitative observations at the more unstructured end of the continuum (Punch, 2009).

Analysis and Interpretation

The data was taken from only one participant. He belonged to a private school placed in Kathmandu district. The data was described, analyzed, and explained as below.

Case of a School

This study examines the collaborative practices of a teacher who is teaching in class 5 in a private school. The study describes the school, the buildings, and the environment of the school. Then, it introduces the case study of a participant, his teaching strategies in the classroom, student behavior and issues that are found to create the collaborative learning environment.

After my entry to the school, I found it was neat and clean in a peaceful environment. There was a big building with many classrooms and a garden in front of building. The school is one of the private schools in Kathmandu which was established in 2002 AD. Pupils of different age groups from primary to Grade 10 studied in the same premises. The school had a strong team of teachers. As an independent school, it had autonomy and flexibility to meet the needs of students and the expectations of the school's community. Although it is required to teach the Nepali curriculum, private schools have loose policy for them to decide a medium of instruction and various subjects. They manage students, classes, fees, and other facilities for the students with the guidelines of Education Act. Tuition fees are the major source of income in private schools. In general, the income increases when the number of students booms in private schools. The school had around 350 students and nearly 25 teachers when I visited the school for my fieldwork. The school's outlook indicated that it had achieved some degree of success both in academic and co-curricular activities.

From my observation, it is revealed that the open space, peace environment with a big building and well-equipped classrooms with teaching instruments, computer lab, audio- visual class, and music room are available to enhance collaborative learning.

A Case of Mr. Pantha

Mr. Pantha was a gentle and young English Teacher. He was a student of bachelor's in business studies. He teaches at primary level in class five. In an interview with him, he stated that his college teacher supported him to find the current job who worked as an administrator in the same school. He expressed his interest in teaching profession. He added that he was also a music teacher as he liked music as a passion.

I studied in the same school before and had a link with the teachers there. I like this teaching profession. It is challenging but I learnt a lot from it.

He stated that he had taught in the school for two years when we had this interview. From his expression, I knew that he belonged to a student of Bachelor of Business Studies. Specifically, he teaches English in class 5. Teaching English in a private school in class 5 does not require specific qualification. However, he was involved in the teaching field. It indicated that he had his inner passion towards teaching. But the educational policy does not allow management background students to teach English. However, private schools consider graduates from any background to teach English if they have English language competence. His expression reflects that he has done it to sustain his life. The teaching profession was very tough and challenging for him though he showed his interest in teaching profession.

When I met him in his school, he preferred to sit in the music room playing the guitar. He was excited in participating in the study. He demonstrated his curiosity in research, but he felt uncomfortable to talk about teaching activities as he was not from teaching education. Although he did not know about research, he was interested in learning about it. He stated that he was going to complete the third semester of BBA. Also, he would like to do an assignment in the field of Business which was his practical examination. He said, ‘Research helps us to find out the truth. I am also planning to do research in the field of business.’

Before asking him to participate in my research, I elaborated my topic. I told him my study objectives and asked for approval. He could not decide on his own and asked me to talk to his principal: “If they agree about your project, I will participate in your research.”

Then, I explained that I had already discussed my project with the administrator and got permission to involve any of the teachers from this school. He seemed to be happy, and he accepted to engage in my study. At the same time, I felt that he was very willing to help me as I was a teacher at the same school. However, I did not know Mr. Pantha very well. Although we taught at the same school, he was a teacher in primary level, and I used to teach secondary level school students. When I observed him in his school, he was an energetic teacher among the twenty-five teachers. He used to come to school with his guitar. He was always dressed in formal uniform in the school and preferred to speak English in and outside the classroom with his students and colleagues. He explained, ‘Even if I am a scholar of commerce, I teach English in this school. I love speaking English with my students to create English environment.’

His expressions reflect that even if he was from commerce background, he taught English and got pleasure from teaching English. He wanted to form English environment for him and his

students to foster their communication skills in English. His beautifully blended narration indicates that he intends to provide an exposure of English language for the students in his school premises.

Mr Pantha's Management Strategies of Classroom Resources

On the first day, I went to his classroom with Mr. Pantha. He showed his classroom, environment and students. The classroom was systematic and tidy. The environment was well-organized for teaching English. However, the organization of furniture was traditional, and a small group of students did not seem to be suitable for collaborative activities. For example, I found there were thirty students sitting on twelve benches in two columns. The seating arrangement of the students was traditional. The desks, tables, and other classroom materials were arranged properly.

The available furniture like desks, tables and chairs were not flexible to move and arranging group activities and collaborative work. From the organization of traditional furniture and the students in the classroom, I guessed that Mr Pantha would have difficulties to mobilize the students and involve them in inter-activities. However, I found that he actively created interactive activities in his classes. Mr Pantha created a good learning environment which would help the students work in various groups effectively. The decoration of classrooms with various teaching materials would provide the learners with an exposure of learning in a natural environment. In the interviews, he explained that proper management of students and classroom materials generated suitable learning environment in the classroom.

In my classroom, there are 20 to 28 students depending on the Grades and different rooms have 8 to 12 benches. There are manageable numbers of students in all classes. I conduct group work and collaborative learning activities while teaching.

From his statement, I knew that the traditional design of the furniture did not affect conduct of the collaborative class. However, the teacher could create the classroom by himself if he had such knowledge (Srinivas, 2011). His passion for teaching has worked a lot.

However, Mr. Pantha produced his anger towards the school administration for not providing sufficient resources for teaching activities in the classroom. He explained:

The school does not have sufficient resources in the classroom, but the teacher has to manage all those things. The administration does not like to provide the materials needed. Sometimes, I conduct the audio-visual class, and I take the students outside to teach. At that time, other teachers raise questions to me. This is challenging for me.

His expression reflects his frustration due to unsupportive behavior of his colleagues and administration. From his expression, I understood that if the administration provided adequate teaching materials for the teachers, teachers would help them create collaborative classrooms and interactive learning environment for the children to learn. However, it is shown that he needed to learn more on collaborative learning ambience for English teaching (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Mr Pantha's Teaching Strategies in the Classroom

In an interview with Mr Pantha, he talked about teaching plans, constructing teaching materials and classroom teaching activities. He said, 'I always prepare a lesson plan before teaching. Most of the days, I make lesson plans but sometimes I do not do it because of limited time.'

His expression indicates that he is flexible in his planning and lesson preparation. He seemed to be learning to teach when he expressed his experience of teaching activities. He stated that he used various modern technologies in his teaching activities:

Sometimes, I take the students in the audiovisual classroom, but the administration raises the questions towards me that it is not useful for them.

However, his expression reflects that he had been struggling to make the administration understand the value of knowledge and communication technology in teaching and learning.

When I asked him why he liked to deploy audio-visual materials in his classes, he stated that he wanted to create English language ambience in the school. However, he expressed his fear the school administration did not provide him with the supportive atmosphere in the school:

I prefer audio-visual class for the students so that they can learn English in modern ways. It generates English learning environment but sometimes administration's objection towards these activities disappoints me.

His comment indicates that although private schools impose English medium instruction in teaching activities in the classroom, there are some challenges for the teachers like Mr Pantha to work with their plans and generate English learning environment in private schools.

In my observation of Mr Pantha's classroom, I found that he followed student-centred teaching strategies at some level. However, most of his classes were dominated by his direct instruction. For instance, on the first day of classroom observation, Mr Pantha introduced me to his students and requested me to have a seat on a bench at the back. He started to teach the lesson without discussing the previous lesson. He wrote the topic, subtopic, date, lesson and period on

the board what he was going to teach on the day. He asked his students to open their books and turn the page where their learning content was for the day. He wrote the name of the chapter on the board and talked about the topic. He asked his students to read the whole text very carefully and to find out the difficult words. He provided them only five minutes to complete that whole text. He divided the class into different groups and asked them to consult the pocket dictionary and find out the meaning of the underlined words. Then, he asked each group leader to write their five words and their meaning on the board. At last, Mr Pantha showed the word card containing words and their meanings. This is an exemplary presentation of Mr Pantha which he continued in his following classes.

After completion of a silent reading task, Mr Pantha divided the different groups such as Group A for the first bench and Group B for the second bench. He instructed them to select a group leader and summarize each paragraph. He gave them some time to read the text. The students read at first, discussed with each other and finalised the group leader to present their paragraphs. He observed all the groups when they worked among themselves. He gave hints and guidelines to present each paragraph. Then, he asked one of the groups to present their understanding of the paragraph allocated for them. He moved to each group to motivate the students to listen to the other groups' presentations and be prepared for their presentation. In my observation of his other classes, he replicated the teaching strategies.

I reflected in my observation notes that Mr. Pantha had some knowledge and skills of involving the children in group activities which would help them to explore information themselves (Pandey, 2012). However, I reflected that perhaps he had little knowledge of engaging the learners in communicative activities to develop their English-speaking skills.

In an interview, he articulated his understanding of collaborative learning ambience in the classroom. He perceived that English learning could only be effective when the learners involved in their interactional activities, as he said:

Collaborative learning is the process of gaining knowledge being a part of a group and co-operating with each other (Cook & Friend, 1995). I think that it is a process to achieve a certain goal which cannot be done through a single person's dedication.

I found that Mr Pantha had a regular routine of teaching in different Grades. In the interview with him, he stated that teachers need to be friendly with students to understand emotions, learning attitudes and support them in their learning. He explained:

From the training, I have learnt how to create and maintain study environment, how to cope with the feelings and moods of students, how to handle students during the time of disasters and accidents and how to create an interactive class. We have training programs 3-4 times in a year. But we need various training to develop the schools and students. I have now learned how I can make my students more attentive in the class than before. Rather than before, I now try to make my students as expressive as they can be. To do so, first, I try to create a collaborative environment in the class.

His expression indicates that teachers need to have continuous training to develop and update their professional skills. He tended to say how he learned to generate collaborative activities in his English classroom. However, from my observation of his several classes, I found that he needed to learn how to create English speaking environment in his classroom.

In my observation of Mr Pantha's classes, I found him a strict teacher in discipline. He never allowed the children to leave their seats without getting his permission, and no one in the class would think about bullying each other as he followed discipline strictly. His movement in the school field outside the class would make the children alert all the time. However, his smile, when children worked in groups in the classroom indicated that he loved the children playing and enjoying themselves in their groups.

Classroom Behavior of the Learners

In my observation, I found that the students in the school obeyed their teachers and showed good behavior in and outside the school. However, some of the students did not follow the instruction of the teacher and produced anger with their friends in the classroom (Mishra, 2009). For example, when Mr Pantha explained the subject matter when teaching, some students listened to him carefully, but few students engaged themselves in doing homework of another subject. I articulated in my observation journal that he had limited knowledge on how to form collaborative learning atmosphere where everyone would involve to learn English (Friend & Cook, 2010).

However, I found that the majority of the students in the classroom did their tasks timely. They discussed their learning issues with Mr Pantha and between their colleagues and listened to their teacher. They presented their group work in the classroom. On the other hand, Mr Pantha had to deal with few students who were different than the majority of the students in the classroom. It seemed to be a challenge for Mr Pantha to guide those few students who did not follow his

instructions. He expressed his difficulty changing the behavior of some of the students in his classes:

They will not listen to teacher's opinion. They will insist on doing what they think and what they know. These behaviors are mainly found in low performing groups in the classes at the moment.

His expression reflects that there is correlation between low performance and student behavior. It also indicates that either of these perhaps influences each other in teaching activities. From his expression, I reflect on whether or not he had sufficient knowledge of behaviour management of the children in the classroom.

Engaging Students in Learning in Classroom

He expressed that engaging students in group work develops their creativity. It gives them an opportunity to think pair and share with each other.

In my observation of Mr Pantha's classes, I found that he usually divided the students into different groups in the classroom and gave them a separate paragraph to find out the difficult word and its meaning. He requested his students to write the word and its meaning on the white board. He explained the word and its meaning in detail. He provided them a dictionary to find out the meaning of the difficult words. He sent the students outside and created the new group to summarize each paragraph for each group. He gave them five minutes to think before the students presented the topic. He used to think, pair and share methods in his classroom. He asked the group leader to present their point of view regarding the topic. In the second round, he selected the group leader and asked them to present the same topic. If the students faced any problem while doing exercises, he would give hints to the students to solve rest of the exercise. He provided different challenging questions regarding the text, and he gave a few minutes to think about suitable response from his students. He again asked his students to share their responses in small groups. He provided guidelines in solving their problems.

From the observation of his classes, I knew that his teaching strategies were usually student-centred (Pandey, 2008). The students worked in small groups together, presented their discussion and searched solution of the problems among their colleagues, Mr Pantha seemed to have some degree of collaborative teaching skills. His teaching strategies provided the learners with opportunities of exploring and sharing their ideas (Larsen-Freeman, 2002). It perhaps developed their English language competency and proficiency.

Issues Triggered

From the interview with Mr Pantha, I found out that he belonged to a student of Bachelor of Business Studies. But he was involved in the teaching field without meeting the certain criteria of education policy like teaching qualification and teacher's license. Although educational policy does not allow other than teacher education background students to teach English, private schools consider graduates from any background to teach English if they have English language competence in a primary level. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is a lack of monitoring system in the teacher recruitment in private schools, and it is unlikely to get trained and qualified teachers to teach English as well as other subjects.

From Mr Pantha's comments against administration and his colleagues above, I realized whether the school intended to invest in staff development and resource management for creating collaborative learning environment for students (Shrestha, 2010). I believed that if the administration provided sufficient teaching materials for the teachers; the teachers would help them create collaborative classroom and interactive learning environment for the children to learn English. However, I found he needed to learn more about collaborative learning environment for English teaching (Ghimire, 2010).

His expression indicates that he needed to have continuous training to develop and update his professional skills. From my observation of his several classes, I found that he needed to learn how to create English speaking environment in his classroom (Molloy, 1998).

Finding and Conclusion

From the observation, I found that the open space, peaceful environment with a big building and well-equipped classrooms with teaching materials supported the teacher for creating interactivity to teach English in the classroom.

Although Mr Pantha was a student of Bachelor of Business Studies, but not of teacher education, he was involved in the teaching field. Because of the flexible system of recruiting teachers at private schools, Mr Pantha was recruited to teach English in class 5. The policy provision was that one must have a teaching license to make entry for teaching. His comments indicated that he was enthusiastic to teach English. The lack of teacher education and training seemed to be deficient in his teaching efficiency. However, his interest of teaching English would

be significant aspect to bring positive result in teaching English if he was provided necessary training.

Traditional furniture seemed to be a challenge for the teacher to organize students in interactivity but more than that, the teacher's managerial skills would play more vital role in creating a collaborative learning environment for the children. The collegial support and principal's cooperation was found weak in his initiative of creating English speaking environment. The main idea in collaborative learning is that each student can bring their own unique set of skills and perspectives to their group, creating a more enriching learning environment for everyone involved. Students can gain a deeper understanding of their subject and develop soft skills like communication, teamwork, and critical thinking. However, the result of a single case cannot be generalized in a larger population. The findings are very context specific.

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