



## Development of the Learners' Collaborative Skills in the Process of Teaching English

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### Abstract

*In contemporary multilingual and multicultural world collaboration is considered one of the main life-skills of the 21st century. This study examines the problem of developing the learners' collaborative competence in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. The article aims to explore the factors that will enhance the integration of collaboration and learning in all levels of language instruction.*

*We have elaborated and presented core contents of some lessons based on appropriate communicative tasks and activities, and aimed at the formation and development of students' above-mentioned skills.*

*Methods for teaching collaboration are different. Here the role of the teacher is essential. He/she should make a careful elaboration of the lesson plan, considering the children's age, interests, as well as the topic of the lesson, goals, expected outputs and different other pedagogical and educational issues.*

*Within the framework of this article we try to present our observations related to the formation and development of collaborative skills of learners at elementary, basic and secondary stages of teaching, and particularly through interaction.*

*Collaboration not only equips student's with linguistic, communicative and intercultural experience, but also increases their self-esteem and sense of competence as an active social agent, in order to communicate and act independently and effectively in the modern multilingual and multicultural world.*

*Our analyses are generally based on the educational landscape of Armenia, and particularly on the lessons we have had during the pedagogical practicum in schools for general education.*

*We strongly believe that only with the presence of learner-centred interactive instructional context it is possible to form and develop above-mentioned skills, simultaneously guaranteeing effectiveness of the teaching process.*

**Keywords:** *collaboration, interactive environment, life skill, student-centred teaching environment, interactive teacher, collaborative learning.*

Collaboration is the act of working together, especially on a goal or shared project. Collaboration is often used in a positive context to refer to two or more parties successfully working together on professional or artistic projects. This competence helps students learn how to collaborate with other learners.

Collaboration is often described as a key skill for the 21st century education. When people are involved in verbal interaction, they are not simply sharing information, they support each other in collective thinking. So, collaborative interaction allows participants to achieve more than they can do alone.

Collaborative learning is a broad concept covering many techniques and models within communicative language teaching paradigm [4; p.115, 6; p. 244]. First, collaborative learning is a pedagogical approach in which students work together to achieve a goal or do a specific task. Under this method, all the activities focus on learners, promoting shared responsibility for the goals, dynamic work, and community. Collaborative learning evolved, building the studying process around interaction and shared knowledge. That's why collaborative learning adheres to the subsequent principles:

- Students can learn if they act, agree on and find the meaning, and negotiate the aims together.
- Learners use their strengths to contribute to the work.
- There is limited control over the group of learners.
- There is a less formal setting and more room to embrace students' individual characteristics.

That way, it brings active learning, a high level of engagement, and openness to criticism.

As for cooperative learning it is another method in which students work in groups to accomplish a common goal within specific planning by the instructor or teacher. Compared to the collaborative approach, the teacher has a greater role in affecting task distribution, differentiation of goals, and student input.

Ultimately, collaborative approach is a more orchestrated type of learning, offering less competition and more focus on student results. When learners are involved in verbal interaction, they are not simply sharing information, they are supporting each other in collective thinking. Such kind of interaction allows participants to achieve more than they can do alone [1; p. 71].

Cambridge University Press in its *Cambridge Life Competences Framework* has identified **Six Life Competences** and main domains of their development, they are:

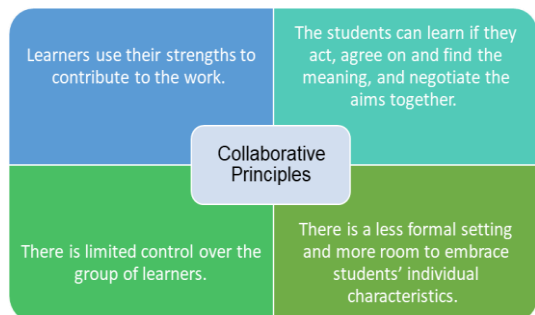
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Social responsibility
- Learning to learn [2].

Among these competences collaboration occupies key role and embraces three core sub-skills:

- **Taking personal responsibility for own contribution to a group task:** It refers to a learner's ability to participate actively in group works, to share their own ideas freely with others and demonstrate a willingness to provide explanations for their own contributions as required.
- **Listening respectfully and responding constructively to others' contributions:** It includes learner's ability to listen carefully to others and to acknowledge their views. Learners are thus able to take turns appropriately in a group task, provide constructive feedback and also put forward their own solutions and ideas. Managing the sharing of tasks in a project refers to a learner's ability to identify tasks and sub-tasks in a group activity and to share them fairly within group members.
- **Working towards a resolution to a task:** It is related to a learner's ability to contribute to in such a way that it leads to solving the task. This might include evaluating multiple solutions and points of view during a group activity and recognizing the most suitable solution for the resolution of the task.

The main advantage of the collaborative learning is that collaboration not simply promotes language acquisition of the learners, but also crucial skills for teamwork and self-development. Bellow we introduce some principles, the purposeful and regular application of which will make it possible to ensure a collaborative instructional environment in the classroom.

### Collaborative Principles



In a learner-centred collaborative instructional environment the teacher performs major role, he/she is a manager in class facilitating and monitoring teaching process.

### Collaborative Teacher's Characteristics





Teachers use specific strategies to help students develop their collaborative skills. The following tips might be particularly effective:

- Tasks should have clear goals and steps.
- Teachers should choose tasks that require collaboration.
- Tasks must be appropriately challenging - not so difficult that they discourage students, and not so easy that they are completed too quickly.
- Learners should understand the purpose of the task and how their individual contributions will lead to the overall goal. Each group member should recognize that the success of the task depends on everyone's involvement.
- Teachers should actively monitor group work and provide feedback. Additionally, encouraging peer feedback can be beneficial.
- Active listening skills should be taught, including techniques such as making eye contact, showing empathy and understanding, not interrupting, summarizing what the speaker has said, following turn-taking etc.

Within the context of this research, we have analysed the development of the learners' collaborative skills, based on our observations made in schools of Armenia, and particularly in different stages of language instruction.

We believe that the formation and development of collaborative sub-competences should be conducted at all stages of language teaching and we consider it more effective for learners of all grades. So, teachers should take this factor into account while designing core content of each lesson to teach the language to learners of different levels (elementary, basic, secondary).

### **Developing Collaborative Skills of Very Young Learners (Elementary Level)**

Developing collaborative skills of very young learners is challenging, as in the early years children tend to be more self-controlled. It is therefore important to lay the foundations for collaboration, starting in pre-primary classes, by creating positive instructional routines that steadily build up team-work. Teachers can explain their learners the merits of collaboration.

#### **Shared tasks**

With support from the teacher, learners take on different roles and collaborate, so that at the end they can see the result and understand that this was only achieved by working together.

#### **Games**

Games require turn-taking, paying attention to classmates and reacting to appropriate responses like 'well done' or 'never mind', which are all important aspects of collaboration.

#### **Choral work**

A good example of choral work would be action songs, where children have to follow not just the teacher, but also each other to be synchronized and feel part of the whole class. Learners could be grouped to take on different roles within the song, and will therefore be responsible for singing and doing the actions at the relevant parts.

#### **Puzzle**

The teacher divides the class into groups with four members of each. Then she gives each group a puzzle in which groups must find words, related to clothes. If the group finds all the words first, it wins. Here is an example of such puzzles:

#### **Puzzle "Clothes"**





According to the Language Educational Standards of the Republic of Armenia the main goal of teaching foreign languages in schools is to educate a person **who is fluent in different languages, capable of communicating and functioning in a modern multilingual and multicultural world.**

This document emphasizes the learners' role in the teaching process. Learning foreign languages not only helps students acquire cognitive skills but also enables them to explore the world and different cultures. It allows them to present their own culture in other languages, act with creative and critical thinking, and collaborate to solve personal, group, community, and social issues.

Next, we introduce core contents of some lessons that are relevant to the Requirements of Foreign Language Teaching Standards of the Republic of Armenia. While designing goals, objectives, expected outputs and other key components of each lesson we incorporate language tasks and activities as well, to encourage learners' participation in group/pair work, team building and other forms of collaboration.

### **Grade 3. Topic: "Food, Drink"**

#### **Goals**

- Introduce and reinforce vocabulary and grammar relevant to the topic.
- Introduce very simple and short phrases describing meal times.
- Develop the ability to present one's breakfast/lunch/dinner in writing and orally in simple phrases and short sentences.

**Emphasise the importance of following a healthy lifestyle/healthy diet.**

#### **Proposed forms of activity**

- Group work: Working with cards and pictures
- Group work: "Preparing a Menu"
- Whole-class work: Watching a cartoon/video
- Coral work: Song/Poem
- Pair-work: Dialogue, riddle.

#### **General ideas**

Globalization and sustainable development (human activity and healthy lifestyle).

#### **Interdisciplinary integration**

- **Native Language:** Write a recipe for a vegetable/fruit salad.
- **Me and the world around me:** Explain the importance of a healthy diet.
- **Visual arts:** Draw healthy and unhealthy food.
- **Technology:** Prepare a menu for a cafe or restaurant.

### **Grade 4. Topic: "Nations, My Nationality"**

#### **Goals**

- Introduce names of a number of countries, cities, relevant nationalities and languages.
- Introduce and reinforce grammatical material relevant to the topic.
- Develop the skills of introducing oneself in simple and coherent sentences, indicating one's country, nationality and native language.
- Develop skills in conducting short dialogues about the country of origin and residence.  
**Form a respectful attitude towards other countries, nationalities, languages and cultures of the world.**

#### **Proposed forms of activity**



- Working with a world map
- Working with a group worksheet
- Watching/discussing a video clip
- Poster /My Homeland, Country/Countries of the languages studied, Nationalities, Languages, Neighboring countries
- Presentation
- Role play
- Game-quiz.

### General ideas

Individuals and relationships (cultural similarities and differences)

#### Interdisciplinary integration

- **Native Language:** Watch a video about children from different nationalities and find similarities and differences between their cultures and yours.
- **Visual Arts:** Draw flags of different nationalities.
- **Technology:** Prepare a traditional dish of a nationality.

Collaboration is an effective technology for teaching English in school because it promotes interaction, critical/creative thinking, and social responsibility (teamwork) among learners. It is simply important to select/elaborate topics and language material that are up-to-date, and use assignments that are accessible and appropriate to the abilities of the learners and their interests as well. The teacher must evaluate learners' collaboration as one of the key components of teaching, taking into consideration the age of the learners and the stage of learning.

### Developing Collaborative Skills of Teenagers (Secondary Level)

As learners move into secondary education, they generally encounter more opportunities for collaboration, especially with increased project work. However, it is worth considering the problems that teens may face when working together. They can be sensitive about sharing their ideas with their peers and about being judged by others.

Our analyses and observations testify that together with the formal education carried out in schools, it is effective to provide students with collaborating opportunities. In this context, Communicative language teaching offers a favourable environment in class for the growth of students' autonomy, self-confidence, for the development of their critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision - making skills in different social situations, including group working, team building, pair work or whole class initiatives [1; p. 53, 79-80]

The teacher offers tasks, the solution of which requires critical/creative thinking. Learners should collaborate, demonstrating individual responsibility, interest, mutual respect and turn taking within the group. They are free in their actions and should not be afraid of making mistakes [7; p.298, 5; p. 96-97]. As a result they acquire collaborative skills, confidence and multilateral thinking abilities.

Developing pupils' collaborative skills in the language classroom involves creating structured, meaningful opportunities to work together, communicate effectively, and build linguistic, sociocultural and emotional competences. Here are some strategies and practical activities to achieve these:

- **Role-plays and Simulations:** Students work in pairs or groups to act out real-life situations (e.g., Booking a hotel, Interviewing for a job, etc.).
- **Paired dialogues:** Learners practice conversational skills. These dialogues can be structured around a specific topic or theme, allowing learners to develop their grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
- **Think-Pair-Share:** Pose a question, have students think independently, then discuss with a partner before sharing with the class.





- **Group work:** The teacher divides the class into four groups giving them different phrases according to shopping. Learners must discuss in the group and answer what the phrases mean. Here are some examples of such phrases:
  - Window shopping
  - Shopping malls
  - Second hand shopping
  - Home shopping.
- **Jigsaw activities:** Learners are subdivided into several groups, each responsible for learning a specific part of the material. The groups then come together to share their knowledge, creating a comprehensive understanding of the topic.
- **Extension activities:** Students are involved in works that require joined activities to build a presentation, to share arguments with peers or an external audience.

Below we introduce two samples of lesson contents, relevant to the Requirements of Language Teaching Standards of the Republic of Armenia. While designing lesson goals, objectives, expected outputs and other instructional components, we incorporate interactive tasks and activities as well, the implementation of which will lead to the development of the learners' collaborative skills, as they are engaged in group/pair work, team building and other forms of collaboration.

#### **Grade 6. Topic: "People around us"**

##### **Goals**

- Expand and strengthen vocabulary related to friends, neighbours, as well as interpersonal /domestic/ relationships.
- Introduce simple expressions to present one's own opinion/approach and point of view during the discussion.
- Introduce and reinforce grammatical material relevant to the topic.  
**Contribute to the formation of attitudes aimed at establishing, maintaining and valuing respectful relationships.**

##### **Proposed forms of activity**

- Role play "Conflict Resolution"
- Letter to a friend (online or paper)
- Debate
- Educational film and discussion.

##### **General ideas**

Identity and relationships (human relationships, conflict, its causes, etc.).

##### **Interdisciplinary integration**

- **Native Language:** Discuss a text/excerpt from a text related to human relationships.
- **Digital Literacy:** Create a slideshow introducing one's neighbours and friends.
- **History:** Explore community interactions in different time periods.

#### **Grade 9. Topic: "Books and Films"**

##### **Goals**

- Introduce and reinforce the idea of the importance of books and films in human life.
- Expand and reinforce vocabulary related to the topic.
- Introduce grammatical material relevant to the topic.
- Develop five communicative skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing, interaction) on the topic.  
**Form an interest in books and films as a source of self-education and self-development.**

##### **Proposed forms of activity**



- Role play
- Watching and discussing a film clip
- Reading and discussing a literary passage
- Poster/slide: "Literary Genres", "Film Genres"
- Debate: "Books or Movies"
- Literary or film review.

#### **Interdisciplinary integration**

- **Literature:** Distinguish the genre of a work based on key literary features.
- **Arts:** Present the impact of a book or film, commenting and justifying an opinion.

Thus, within our research we tried to examine and highlight the problem of the formation and development of learners' collaborative skills in schools, and particularly at different stages of language instruction.

It is simply necessary to take into account the students' intellect, linguistic and communicative skills, their age, interests, hobbies, etc., when selecting topics or elaborating the core content of the lesson.

**As a 21-st century life skill, Collaboration is a value and it has a central role for the development of an independent and competitive individual.** The formation and development of learners' collaborative skills require a carefully elaborated methodology, which embraces diverse interactive methods, authentic material, interactive tasks, as well as a positive and constructive learning environment. Collaboration thrives in a space where students feel safe, free and respected.

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