

The Use of Collaborative Learning Process to Promote English Speaking Ability of Seventh Grade Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effects of collaborative learning process on students' English speaking ability, to compare the English speaking ability post – test mean score with the standard score at 60% and to explore students' opinions towards learning English through collaborative learning process. The samples were 30 seventh grade students from Somdetprateerayanmune School, Pak Thong Chai, Nakhon Ratchasima by using the cluster random sampling. The research instruments were an English speaking ability test and a questionnaire. The data was statistically analyzed using mean (\bar{X}), standard deviation (S.D.), and t-test. The results revealed that the students' English speaking ability post-test mean score after learning through collaborative learning process was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score at the .05 level and it was also significantly higher than the standard score of 60% at the .05 level. Furthermore, the students had positive opinion towards learning English through collaborative learning process.

Keywords: collaborative learning process / speaking ability

Introduction

The Ministry of Education presented an “English Speaking Year 2012” program to promote English speaking in Thai students and others to prepare them for the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015. When Thailand becomes a part of the ASEAN Community, English language will be very important for communication. The English Speaking Year 2012 program aims to get Thai citizen ready to be a part of the ASEAN Community in 2015 because English language is a major medium of communication among ASEAN member countries. This program will be initiated in schools and involve in plenty of academic activities which will provide teachers and students the opportunities to speak English and build up their confidence in using it without excessive concern about grammatical errors (Bangkok Post article. online. 2011). Therefore, English speaking is a key role in communication for Thais.

However, although speaking is widely agreed to be the most important skill and teacher must promote their students' ability of English speaking, it is not easy to do so because there are some problems in teaching and learning speaking relate to both students and teachers. The problem that related to students is students' speaking abilities are likely to be at a low level. This accord with the findings of research conducted in Thailand which found that Thai high school students' English speaking abilities were poor

in their English language studies. The students did not understand the spoken language. They were unable to communicate effectively and were always afraid of making mistakes while speaking (Wiwat Thongwad, 2011: 1). Moreover, the speaking and listening ability in English of Thai students has been minimal because they have little chance to practice speaking English inside or outside the classroom. Students respond to the teacher only when they are called upon and the learning atmosphere is individualistic (Ratana Pawapatcharandom, 2007: 2).

In addition, the problem in teaching speaking that relates to teacher is partly affected by teacher's teaching method. EFL teachers teach language in traditional way by lecturing and focusing on grammatical rules instead of language use. Teachers often provide insufficient opportunities for learners to practice English (Lochana and Deb, online: 2009). Especially, both teachers and students frequently use Thai language throughout English classes and Thai teachers mainly employ the traditional teacher-centered approach (Nunan, 2004). Students do not enjoy studying English by lecturing which provide limited input to the learning process. Students face different additional difficulties in learning English and they cannot effectively use English in conversation or correspondence with other people. Although some students study English for 10 years, they still cannot apply it in real life situations (Ruso, 2007: 14). According to the problems above, students do not enjoy speaking English and cannot effectively use English for communication because of teacher's traditional teaching method.

Lochana and Deb (online : 2009) suggested that teachers should use other teaching approaches such as brain-based learning, project-based learning, task-based learning, and collaborative learning. Therefore, collaborative learning is one of the methods applied in classroom activities in order to promote students' speaking ability, especially in speaking class. This method can improve students' English speaking ability through group discussion (Tri Ulan, 2008 : 12). It is one of the processes from two main traditions that have been socio-constructivist view and socio-cultural theory to apply in speaking class activity. The socio-cultural approach to learning traced from the Vygotskian framework (1978: 79) that emphasizes the meaning of social interaction and activity in knowledge construction as well as the mediating role of tools. These acts of intellectual processing of constructing meaning or creating something new are crucial to learning. Learning depends on rich contexts; it is fundamentally influenced by the context and activity in which it is embedded. (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989: 32)

Furthermore, some of the collaborative activities in the classroom are aimed at getting the students to be more participative in a group discussion and making them less anxious in expressing their point of views. They can be defined as classroom learning techniques which require students to work together in groups or pairs in learning tasks (Colbeck, Campbell and Bjorklund, 2000). For the regardless of students' different language proficiencies and personalities, students seem to work better in groups because they can exchange more opinions and ideas. This is because they will feel less anxious when they work in group (Delucchi, 2006: 246).

In consideration of the problems, the importance of teaching speaking and the concept of collaborative learning, the researcher is interested applying collaborative learning process to promote English speaking ability with seventh grade students.

Objectives

1. To investigate the effects of using of collaborative learning process on English speaking ability of seventh grade students.
2. To compare the mean score of English speaking ability post - test with the standard score at 60%.
3. To explore seventh grade students' opinion towards learning English through collaborative learning process.

Research Hypotheses

1. Students who have learned English via the collaborative learning process will achieve significantly higher mean scores on the English speaking ability post-test than the pre-test.
2. The mean score of the English speaking ability post-test of the students who have learned English via the collaborative learning process is significantly higher than the standard score at 60%.

Scope of the Study

1. Population and Samples

Population consisted of 60 students who were in seventh grade students from Somdetprateerayanmune School in the first semester of the academic year 2014. Samples were 30 seventh grade students from Somdetprateerayanmune School who were selected as the samples of the study by using cluster random sampling.

2. Variables

In this study, the independent variable was teaching English via collaborative learning process.

The dependent variables were students' English speaking ability and students' opinion towards learning English through collaborative learning process.

3. Duration of the study

The study lasted 5 weeks during the first semester of the academic year 2014. The experiment took place two periods per week which is ten periods in total.

Research Methodology

1. Research design

This study was pre-experimental; one group pre-test and post-test design. It aimed to examine the effects of using collaborative learning process on students' English speaking ability. The instrument used in the research procedures was ten English lesson plans focusing on collaborative learning process. The instruments used in data collection were the English speaking ability test which is adapted from the Foreign Service institute oral interview (FSI), and the questionnaire on students' opinion towards learning English through collaborative learning process.

2. Data collection

Before learning English through collaborative learning process, the 30 samples were given English speaking ability pre-test in order to examine their prior knowledge on English speaking ability. After that, the samples learnt English through collaborative learning process lesson plans. After finishing all lesson plans, the samples were assessed by the English speaking ability post-test in order to see if collaborative learning process was an effective learning process for them or not. At the final stage, the students were surveyed with a questionnaire to gather their opinion towards learning English through collaborative learning process.

3. Data analysis

A comparison of English speaking ability pre-test and post-test was analyzed by using Arithmetic Mean (\bar{X}), Standard Deviation (S.D.) and t-test for dependent. A comparison of the mean score of English speaking ability post - test with the standard score at 60% was carried out using t-test for one sample. Then, the data obtained using the five-point rating scale in the first part of the questionnaire were analyzed by Arithmetic Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the data obtained in the second part form the open-ended questions were categorized using the content analysis.

Results

1. The results from the comparison of mean scores from the English speaking ability pre and post tests in 5 aspects of seventh grade students were presented in Table 1.

Table 1 The comparison of mean scores from the English speaking ability pre and post tests in 5 aspects of seventh grade students.

Speaking aspects	Total score	Pre-test		Post-test		MD	t	Sig
		\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.			
Accent	6	2.333	.480	3.533	.571	1.200	13.573	.000*
Grammar	27	11.933	3.269	20.500	3.980	8.567	18.460	.000*
Vocabulary	24	9.600	2.253	14.400	2.486	4.800	13.573	.000*
Fluency	20	7.000	1.819	12.000	1.930	5.000	19.039	.000*
Comprehension	22	9.867	2.285	14.867	3.170	5.000	16.091	.000*
Total	99	40.733	10.106	65.300	10.674	24.567	28.523	.000*

*p < .05

According to table 1, it was found that the post-test mean score of each speaking aspect (Accent, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension) was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score at the .05 level and the total mean score of the post-test was higher than the mean score in the

pre-test at the .05 level. Therefore, hypothesis 1, which stated the average post-test mean score of English speaking ability of the students who learn English through collaborative learning process was accepted.

2. The results from the comparison of post-test mean scores of English speaking ability with the standard scores (at 60%) were presented in Table 2.

Table 2 The comparison of the post-test mean scores of English speaking ability with the standard scores (at 60%) of seventh grade students.

Speaking aspects / scores	Standard scores (60%)	Post-test		S.D.	t	sig
		\bar{X}	Percentage			
1. Accent (6)	4	3.533	58.88	.571	4.474	.000*
2. Grammar (27)	16	20.500	75.93	3.980	6.192	.000*
3. Vocabulary (24)	14	14.400	60	2.486	.881	.385
4. Fluency (20)	12	12.000	60	1.930	.000	1.000
5. Comprehension (22)	13	14.867	67.58	3.170	3.225	.003*
Total (99)	59	65.300	65.96	12.137	3.233	.003*

*p < .05

Table 2 showed the post-test mean score of each aspect. It was found that the mean score of the students' English speaking ability post-test of accent aspect, grammar aspect, and comprehension aspect were higher than the standard score (at 60%) with the statistically significance at the .05 level. On the other hand, students' post-test mean score on vocabulary aspect and fluency aspect were not significantly higher than the standard score (at 60%).

However, the overall aspects post-test mean score of English speaking ability of the students who had learned English through collaborative learning process was 65.30 and the percentage mean score was 65.96%. It was significantly higher than criterion of 60% at the .05 level.

Therefore, hypothesis 2, which stated that the average score of the English speaking ability post-test of the students who had learned English via the collaborative learning process was accepted.

3. The results of the students' opinion towards learning English through collaborative learning process questionnaire were shown in table 3.

Table 3 Students' opinions towards learning English through collaborative learning process.

Questions	\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	Range
Content				
1. The content is easy to follow.	3.57	.626	Agree	9
2. The content is related to my needs.	4.27	.785	Agree	7
Activity				
3. The activities help me to interact with friends.	4.30	.596	Agree	6
4. The activities promote my speaking ability.	4.63	.490	Strongly agree	1
5. The activities support good relationship between me and my friends.	4.57	.568	Strongly agree	2
6. The group activities make me enjoy learning English.	4.53	.571	Strongly agree	3
7. The activities make me feel good to share knowledge with friends.	4.33	.606	Agree	5
8. Doing activities successfully made me proud to be a part of success.	4.47	.629	Agree	4
Materials				
9. The materials help to stimulate my interest in learning English.	4.23	.626	Agree	8
10. The materials promote the group activities.	4.30	.596	Agree	6
Total	4.32	.609	Agree	

According to table 3, from all of 10 questions, firstly most students strongly agreed that the activities promote their speaking ability ($\bar{X} = 4.63$). Then, the activities supported good relationship between students and their friends ($\bar{X} = 4.57$). The third range, the students enjoy learning English via group activities ($\bar{X} = 4.53$). The total mean score of all the questions were 4.32 (agree). This result revealed that students had positive opinion towards learning through collaborative learning process.

In addition, since all students were required to answer the open-ended questions to give more feedback about learning English via collaborative learning process, the results of the open-ended questions showed that students reflected their opinion towards collaborative learning process that promotes the ability to speak English. Most students thought that the lessons were interesting, challenging and related to their daily life. Students could learn new vocabularies and grammatical structures. Especially, were given chances to practice listening and speaking skills with friends based on everyday situations so they and become more confident to speak English. Moreover, they gained more knowledge and understanding

of the lesson from interacting and sharing information with friends. They enjoyed learning English in groups and doing various activities because the leaning atmosphere was relaxed and cool.

Discussion

Based on the findings, learning English through collaborative learning process had an effect on students' English speaking ability because the students' post-test mean score of English speaking ability after learning through collaborative learning process was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score and the post-test mean score was significantly higher than the standard score of 60%. It was concluded that the use of collaborative learning process can promote students' speaking ability. The success of using collaborative learning for promoting English speaking ability was discussed in the following paragraphs. In conducting this study, the students were explicitly taught by using learning process which the researcher designed based on the elements of collaborative learning process, especially, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, and individual accountability. These elements of collaborative learning process provided students the instruction through working together in pairs and in groups since the beginning through the end of the lesson in order to complete the activities that help to promote their speaking ability such as playing speaking games, classifying the vocabulary, pronouncing the words and sentences, surveying, interviewing, and performing role play. According to Matera (2008: 1) who pointed about advantages of pair work and group work, she proposed that working together gave the students more opportunity to speak English in the classroom. Students participated in the lesson much more actively because they were involved in interaction with their friends for sharing information, brainstorming, discussing and summarizing their answer/ information, practicing new vocabularies and expressions, creating speaking tasks, and performing roles-play. Also, Fasawang Pattanpichet (2011: 7) who found that frequently working in collaboration with their group members, the students became more familiar with the tasks and one another. While their familiarity and friendship were growing, their anxiety and face threats were simultaneously lowering as the students' feedback revealed that they had no stress, felt relaxed and enjoyed themselves in class. Besides, each member of a group shared responsibility to do activities and thought that the success of themselves was bound up with the success of others. Therefore, group members would share their responsibility and concentrate to get the activities done successfully. This step was consistent with the study by Laal (2013: abstract), stated that in a collaborative setting, that the success of one person was dependent on the success of the group; this was referred to as positive interdependence. After that, each group would separate the content to every member to study and described their content to others; they not only concentrated to study their own content but also helped other members when they had some problems such as pronouncing words or sentences, telling the meaning of the words, and suggesting how to study the content. This was consistent with Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) who stated that each member of a group was accountable for his/her learning and actions as well as the group learning and performance. It was required to prevent a member from getting a free riding. Then students created the conversation together and they divided themselves to be different characters

based on the situation. The researcher observed students in learning process and found that they had opportunities to share their knowledge with each other as same as could learn new knowledge from their friends. Meanwhile, face-to-face interaction between group members gave individuals opportunities to help each member overcome problems. Also, Dillenbourg and others (2005) stated that in the collaborative learning situations, the members often had to justify their action to each other. Students' learning in groups effectively encouraged each other to ask questions, explain and justify their opinions, articulate their reasoning, and elaborate and reflect upon their knowledge.

However, the finding from the comparison of post-test mean scores with the standard scores (at 60%) in each aspect of English, showed that there were non-significant differences in two aspects, that is; vocabulary and fluency. The researcher noticed that when students performed their role play, some students communicated with other student word by word and took time to speak out because of the lack of vocabulary. So, their speaking was not fluent enough. According to Suttinee Chuanchaisit and Kanchana Prapphal (2009: abstract), they stated that Thai students appeared to have problems communicating in English, especially students of low ability, this may be caused both of the lack of basic grammar and vocabulary. Speaking English became the most difficult part in the process of learning English for Thais. Similarly to Yulsic (n.d.: 3-5), who explored the problem of speaking, and found that there were many Thais who think in Thai when they speak English, hence, they thought in Thai first before translating into English. Moreover, they had difficulty in pronunciation because of the alphabet and they were pegged in grammar more than communication.

Considering students' opinion towards learning English through collaborative learning process, the findings expressed that students had positive opinions towards learning English through collaborative learning process. It revealed that students agreed that collaborative learning process helped them to learn English. In this study, the researcher observed students in learning process and found that students were interested in collaborative learning process, especially group working. Therefore, using collaborative learning process could encourage students to learn and speak English better.

In summary, even though collaborative learning process had not been widely used for secondary level instruction, this study confirmed that the collaborative learning process could be used in teaching speaking in secondary level. Collaborative learning process helped to encourage students to study the lessons, promoted deeper understanding, developed personal relationship with friends, entailed greater responsibility – for themselves and the group, enabled learners to help weaker learners in groups, and provided more relaxed atmosphere.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for instruction

1.1 When dividing into groups, students should be arranged in pairs and groups differently for different kinds of activities, sometimes putting slow learners and advanced learners in different groups, sometimes mixing slow learners and advanced learners, in which case the advanced ones

will encourage and help the weaker ones.

1.2 In the process of learning, students are required to learn both inside and outside the classroom. The teacher should encourage students to get experiences outside the classroom. And, the teacher should use a wide variety of resources for students to learn with.

1.3 Learning tasks used in the learning activities should be relevant to students' interest or needs. It is suggested that the teacher should conduct a need analysis study prior to learning.

2. Recommendations for further study

2.1 Further studies should increase the time of the study in order to make more opportunities for students to learn English through collaborative learning process.

2.2 Further studies should select instructional materials, and technologies that promote the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing to teach via collaborative learning process.

2.3 Further studies should design various activities that related to students' daily life and add more collaborative learning techniques in teaching steps.

2.4 Further studies should promote English learning through collaborative learning process with other contents such as local content, local culture, and ASEAN content.

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