

## Collaborative Method with a SMILE to Improve English Language

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**Abstract:** Language more often chooses us, then we choose language. We use this or that language according to the place, time and circumstance. For Sandhya prayer, the Sanskrit Gayathri; in homely context, or for expressing emotion, the mother tongue; outside one's home, the regional or local language, at cosmopolitan gathering, generally English. However, there are no categorical imperatives governing the choice or use of language. All that matters is that what we speak or write should bear a proper relation to the total situation. Children train it by experimenting freely, audaciously, adventurously with language.

Usually in Indian classroom one sees a mixed group of learners like a) less advanced learners, b) more advanced learners, and c) advanced learners. So the teacher should bear in mind the problems of all learners and motivate them accordingly. In fact, the teacher is supposed to enthuse, motive, stir, and guide the learner positively. Only then the learner would proceed in the right direction. So the teacher must instill a sense of optimism. While teaching the lessons he has to draw the attention of the learners through interesting facts and thought provoking questions to stimulate a sense of inquiry and curiosity. He has to create confidence by helping the learners to experience success through understanding of the concepts and their ability to apply those concepts for problem solving. The best method is to be suggested is collaborative method with syllabus, motivation, interaction, and learner centric environment.

*“Coming together is a beginning.*

*Keeping together is progress.*

*Working together is success - Henry Ford”*

English has become an International language. The reason for this is that it is constantly enriched by linguistic borrowing, particularly by cross-fertilizations from American English. Global media, the Internet, and ever-improving technology are just some of the reasons why English is fast becoming 'a global language' or 'Globish.' Today it is considered to be the world's most essential and useful language in communicating one's thoughts and feelings both at the global and local level. In fact, it has not only become a global phenomena but has a family of its own with all "varieties of Englishes' as some scholars call within the family. In the words

of Stephan Gramley (2003), “English is felt to be the language of power, the language of prestige”.

Another reason why people do not succeed in achieving fluency in English is that many teachers teach English through the regional language. Some other times, the instruction is vocabulary driven. In a typical classroom, the teacher reads the lesson aloud or asks the learner to read parts of it in turn. He then asks the learners to make a list of words and meanings - and usually gives the meaning in the regional language. The point is that, it is taught as a content subject through rote-memorization of words and meanings, rather than as a skill to be used. The present paper is intended to provide collaborative learning method with a SMILE that will ensure a teacher to teach as well as to a learner to speak without inhibitions. SMILE stands for Syllabus, Motivation, Interaction, Learner-Centric Environment.

Syllabus is an outline of a subject to study. It is suggested that primary purpose of a syllabus is to communicate with one's students, what the subject is about, why the subject is taught, and what is required to learn that subject. So one must be careful while framing the syllabus. The teachers must frame the syllabus in such a way that it is simple and interesting but not abstract, monotonous, and dreary.

Generally speaking, a syllabus need not be a complicated affair, but should aim at catering to the needs of the learner. Many teachers' idea of a syllabus is to calculate the amount of pages in the text book and then divide that by the number of teaching days in a session. The resulting figure accounts for the amount of pages that need to be covered in one lesson, and he has a simple plan to make sure that the syllabus is completed in a timely fashion. Perhaps this could be called a syllabus in some contexts, but it is really missing some important factors that could make applying the textbooks both more enjoyable and more effective. The point is that the topics that are prescribed in the syllabus should be properly used in the classroom in enriching the language of the learner. For instance, the Higher Education Board in Andhra Pradesh has introduced 'Phonetics' for Intermediate and Undergraduate students. Though the intention is good, no learner is learning those sounds due to various reasons. One such reason is, in the main examination the question on 'phonetics' is not compulsory and the learner is conveniently leaving it. To our dismay, sometimes even the teachers won't teach that subject throughout the year as he himself is not properly trained in that area. A good teacher is one who can motivate the learner. The following are some of the tips to motivate the learner

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- Be a role model, inspire, and properly guide the learner to realize that the language acquisition is simpler in group learning than individual learning.
- To take a confidence building approach, give the learners lots of encouragement and have fun with them.
- Always sound positive. Instill confidence among the learners. Make them believe that they have the potential to express themselves clearly in the target language.
- Use strategies that do not threaten them. It is very important to learn and practice a language in a non threatening environment.

It is a fact that learning doesn't take place in Indian classrooms. The reason is that there isn't enough 'Interaction' between the teachers and the students. Many students have few opportunities to speak the target language either in and out of the class. In fact 'interaction' and 'collaboration' among learners is a very important component of effective learning.

All the students should be asked to participate actively in activities like - group discussions, seminars, debates, role-play, and skits - so that they can use the language more independently. Getting them to work in pairs or small groups is also essential as each student have more time to practice which is the key to speaking English. The best way to involve the learners in speaking activity is by giving them interesting topics to know the strengths and weakness. To do this the teacher has to think first about what is interesting for the learner rather than to him or chose a current topic on which the student can speak easily. For instance, give a topic like 'the spread of corona virus'. Naturally such topics would arouse some curiosity among the learners to say something on the topic. Unlike acquiring knowledge in any field, which can be attained by listening to a lecturer or reading a book, language learning requires the learner to 'use' the language. The teacher has to create and provide access to a learning environment that helps the students how to learn and achieve their full potential. In fact, learning is an acme process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience. Learners actively construct their own knowledge by connecting new ideas while structuring and restructuring of ideas is an essential part of the learning process.

Learner-centric approach also allows learners to learn at their own pace. It also engages concepts, reflects on the underlying cause and effect relations, patterns. Similarities and interconnections to deepen understanding. Active engagement involves enquiry, exploration, questioning, leading to theory building and the creation of ideas.

Collaborative learning is a situation in which a group of people learn an activity or skill together, unlike individual learning. People engaged in collaborative learning capitalize on one another's resources and skills that is by asking one another for information, evaluating one another's ideas, monitoring one another's work etc. More specifically, collaborative learning is used as a common term for a variety of approaches in education that involve joint intellectual effort by students or students and teachers. Collaborative learning redefines traditional student-teacher relationship in the classroom which results in developing good communication skills and group dynamics. Collaborative learning activities can include collaborative writing, group projects, joint problem solving, debates, study teams, team building etc.

This is student centered method. The teacher should make the student understand that their interaction in the group is mandatory as the success can be achieved only when each participant contributes their part. The progress of the students should be evaluated by using pre-test and a post test method which helps in improving the learning level of the students. The learning level of the students should be evaluated not only in terms of the knowledge and content but also in terms of active participation, interpersonal communication, data collection, team work communication skills etc. This would bring some positive changes in the students as well as teachers.

According to Vygotsky (1978) "Students are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when asked to work in collaborative situations than when asked to work individually". Group diversity in terms of knowledge, experience, different language skills like sentence construction, vocabulary usage, and different oral presentation skills contribute positively to the learning process.

In this method students quickly learn how they are to solve problems as a group that they might not have struggled with their own. This method can be applied to develop good communication skills. It helps them to understand matter in a better way and stimulates thinking process.

In this type of method, teacher acts as a analyst and a facilitator, while the learner acts as a collaborator. Initially the feeling of security and belonging are established. Later as the learners' ability improves, they achieve a measure of independence from the teacher. Learners can speak independently and they are ready to take criticism and being corrected. It gives multiple

opportunities to students to show intellectual competence, to express communicative skills, knowledge, oral presentation skills, group dynamics etc.

Whenever a teacher implements this method the first step is to consider each stage involved in the group work so that the teacher is ready to give support whenever needed.

Some topics should be identified within the syllabus and given to the students for collaborative learning and their goals should be clearly defined. This also means considering how the students will be organized in groups during the collaboration. The teacher should keep in mind the size of the group. Groups can be formed using self-selection, random assignment or criterion based selection. The choice of group size involves smaller groups (of three) which contains less diversity, and may lack divergent thinking styles and varied expertise that help to animate collective decision making. Conversely, in larger groups it is difficult to ensure that all members participate. Hence depending upon the topic given, the size of the group may vary.

While implementing this method there are certain barriers that one definitely will encounter. The reason for these barriers is that in heterogeneous community with different socio-economic background, different IQ levels, environment, their ideologies, identities and different language abilities cause different way of expressing both in written and spoken form. They will have to modify and redefine their original identities when they enter a group. Moreover, limited communication skills would become detrimental factor in presentation skills.

In addition to the above mentioned barriers, the collaborative learning method may have certain limitations; it may not satisfy gifted students in a group as they are the only resources in the group. And every topic is not suitable for this method. Sometimes conflicts may occur among group members and across group members resulting indiscipline. Making changes in the groups should be avoided. It is important to keep the groups together even if the things are not going well with the groups. Changing the groups may change the dynamics of all the groups. Campbell and Li (2006) identified that, “the lack of competitive element disturbed the students and fairness and appropriateness of group assessment..... became a major assessment to student satisfaction.

In spite of some limitations the collaborative learning is good method to acquire knowledge, content, communication skills and soil skills. Collaboration allows students to actively

participate in the learning process by talking with each other and listening to other points of view. Collaboration establishes a personal connection between students and the topic of study and it helps student think in a less personally biased way. Teachers may employ collaboration to assess student's abilities to work as a team, leadership skills, or presentation abilities. Keeping all these benefits and limitations learning experiences are to be implemented.

For collaborative method to be effective, the teacher should view teaching as a process of developing and enhancing students' ability to learn. The teacher's role is not to transfer information, but to save as a facilitator for learners. This involves creating and managing meaningful learning experiences and stimulating students thinking through real world problems. Teachers should be encouraged to incorporate collaborative learning in their classrooms.

The advances in technology and changes in the organizational infrastructure put an increased emphasis on teamwork within the student community. Students should develop the ability to communicate fluently, think creatively, solve problem and make decisions as a team.

**Conclusion:** New wave of Collaborative Learning Languages has come into place with the Internet growth and the boom of social networking technologies. These online social network services help in information sharing and collaboration tools, for which users can help other users to learn languages by direct communication or mutual correction or proposed exercises. Researchers suggest that the collaborative learning also prepares students for the modern work force where there is an increased emphasis on team work (Fechner and Davis, 1991) and for their meaningful participation in a democratic society.

So, we, the teaching community, need to work towards a process which prepares the students to learn the language with much ease. The process also requires an environment in which students enjoy learning, develop curiosity, and team 'how to learn by learning to share and sharing to learn'. Thus, the above said method may help the teacher in making the English Language Teaching classroom interesting. It may also help the learner to improve his skills in English and shape his vision for future where he enjoys learning English with smile, free from stress and fear.

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