Importance of the Role of Social Inter-dependence among students of Large ESL classes at Tertiary Level

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Abstract:

This article attempts to highlight the significance of the role of social inter-dependence among students of ESL classes at tertiary level. The objective is to investigate the role of social interdependence among students of large ESL classes at tertiary level and how it increases academic achievement of learners at this level. The objective leads to have academic achievement and mastery over subject matter .In this connection, active learning strategies are formulated to prove social interdependence which is the main force behind the attainment of objective.

The population of the study included English teachers and students of large ESL classes at tertiary level from two universities of Lahore. The sample was selected randomly and it consisted of ten English teachers and 150 students both male and female of Master level programme. Data was collected through questionnaire designed for the students and semi- structured interview for the teacher to extract their opinion. T-test was applied to draw reliable findings and results from the information. The findings of the questionnaire indicated that majority of the students strongly favoured the various positive facts of social inter-dependence in large ESL classes. The results also revealed that social inter- dependence is an active learning activity and it promotes deep learning perspectives in so the subjective

matter is concerned. The responses of the faculty members of the selected universities revealed that majority of them accepted the importance of social inter-dependence in fostering better conceptual understanding of the subject matter and academic achievement. It is recommended that the teachers should equip their teaching method with active learning approaches and the students must be inculcated with the spirit of responsibility to do work by employing active learning activities.

Key words: Social inter-dependence, learning strategies, ESL, tertiary level, construction of behaviour, cooperating learning, reasoning, active classroom environment.

Introduction:

Social interdependence is the classic example of creating interaction among students for various academic tasks. They can study the growth of their companions through interaction and dialogues. According to social interdependence theory, knowing that one's performance has effects the performance of fellow students within the group, is believed to create responsibilities forces which stimulate the students' efforts to achieve and help group mates to achieve (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Modern universities are facing challenges due to increasing number of young people attending higher education. The increasing number of students raises the question that in what way teaching-learning activities are formulated to allow the learners to become active and engaged in academic sharing of ideas rather than passive spectators. Hattie (2009) found that social interdependence was one of the most effective means of instruction compared to other factors influencing academic achievement.

Theorizing on social interdependence began in early 1900's, when one of the founders of Gestalt school of psychology, Kurt Koffka proposed that groups were dynamic wholes in

which the interdependence among members could vary.
Motivational perspectives and social interdependence theory
effects the motivation of the student to exert efforts in case of
task and goal structure set up by the teacher. The basic
assumption underlying social interdependence is that the way
in which social interdependence is structured determines how
individuals interact within the situation which in turn affects
outcomes (Johnson& Johnson, 1989). Such interdependence
among students can occur in respect of positive, negative and
no interdependence. Social interdependence theory also
depends on cognitive perspectives, for the knowledge stored in
memory, the learner has to engage in elaborating the material,
such as orally explaining concepts to someone else, listening
critically to the explanation offered by fellow students within
the group; phrasing other student; giving and receiving
feedback (Slavin, 1989).

Active classroom environments using group work to
engage students in solving problems. In these environments,
students are viewed as thinkers with emerging theories.
Teachers use various curricular areas including brain-storming,
idea-generation, problem-solving, role-playing, research-
citation, peer review. The students learn effectively when the
whole process is propagated through interaction. As Ashley
Montagu (1965) says,

> "Without the cooperation of its members, society cannot
> survive. In human societies the individuals who are most
> likely to survive are those who are best enabled to do so by
> their group."

The group must hold the opinion that they sink or swim
together. Social interdependence helps students to act
cooperatively for success. The type of interdependence
structured among students determines how they interact with
each other, which in turn largely determines instructional
outcomes (Lewin, 1935). The social interdependence is helpful
in promoting healthy competition among students. They

emphasise the success and creativity as outcomes of social interdependence among students (Johnson & Johnson, 1990). Social interdependence results in higher level reasoning, frequent generation of ideas and solutions which is greater transfer of what is learned within one situation to another than did competitive or individualistic learning. Interpersonal relationships demand active participation on the part of students. Teachers must resolve the differences of many kinds. In this way students will be benefitted and paves the way for constructivism. The construction of behaviour of all students is the bliss of activities of social interdependence, acting as fortified agent.

The members of various groups must establish the feelings of care and responsibilities while sharing the work. They will be helped out if they show steadfastness, endurance and willingness for task accomplishments. Cooperation among students leads to create mutual understanding, flow of communication and leadership qualities. Active learning strategies make learners to propagate interpersonal skills to achieve group goals with the help of collaborative knowledge. Various grouping are formed with multiple purposes. Students feel sense of social possession when they work together (Cameron,1999).

Social interdependence supports diversity as it is the only way that gives the principle of heterogeneous grouping. Students learn much when they are encouraged to share their mutual ideas and fertility of academic record can enhance the study needs of their group mates. The activities of social interdependence aim to assess the learners. In this way students with joint efforts can formulate parameters to know the conduction of various tasks. Sharing of ideas can be a strong tool to know the ideas of group members (Felder, 2009). Open discussion can be helpful in wiping dislikes among students (Doyle,1991).

In 1960s' the learning based on social interdependence was not a known phenomenon. At tertiary level this was relatively a new term as the whole scenario was dominated by lecturing. Now teaching through social interdependence has become a shared process especially it is helpful in large ESL classes. Differences of opinions can be better regulated to perceive the flow of communication in a large class setting. Students in large classes will be more attentive if they are exposed to a variety of learning activities and teaching strategies. Language skills can be propagated effectively with the help of active learning techniques (Bonwell, 1991).

Interactionism is a theoretical perspective that derives social process such as conflict, cooperation and identity from human interaction. It is the study of individuals and how they act within society (Ellis, 1999). Language learning theories play an important role in social interdependence. They help to understand the formation of individual interaction in making groups. In this connection, theories such as learning approach, mentalist approach and Interactionist approach can be helpful in creating motivation and understanding. Vygotskys' social development theory argues that social interaction precedes development, consciousness and cognition resulting in socialization and social behaviour.

The students' performance depends directly on interaction and two elements of interaction such as nature and nurture play an important role in language learning. According to Vygotskys (1978), "The interaction among students around appropriate tasks increases their mastery of critical concepts." Donald Dansereau (1988) and his colleagues at Texas Christian university have found an impressive series of brief studies that university students working on structured "cooperative scripts" can learn better than those working alone. So the basic aim of learning activities is to enhance psychological development.

Individual accountability is essential to group success since the natural tendencies of some students to dominate some

to withdraw will gradually come into play unless some mechanism is in place requiring everyone to participate (Michealson, 1997). Interaction and discussion are much more likely if students are required to solve a problem or make a decision based on research and analysis of a complex situation.

Social interdependence is a key of structuring cooperative learning. Millis and Cottell (1998) enhanced cooperative learning staying powers as proven classroom management techniques and a host of other ideas. Social interdependence offers a systematic, student centred approach to instruction. It creates social skills, teamwork and conflict resolution for ideal citizens in a civilized society. It is supported by one of the strongest research traditions in education (Sharen,1980).

The large body of research suggests that student to student collaboration conducted in a manner consistent with cooperative learning can create host of variables including academic achievement, critical thinking, flow of information, interpersonal relationships and psychological health. Brufee (1993) stated, "The concept of learning take place when individuals move from the society which they are familiar with the society which wishes to join by learning vocabulary, language, structure and customs." Working collaboratively is an ideal way to facilitate the acquisition of language and to practice the customs of debate and discussion which occur in any particular field (Sharan, 1980).

In order to understand the historical development of social interdependence and its significance to the teaching of a second language, the student must be made cognizant about theory and research (Aronson, 1970). The roots of social interdependence in general education can be better judged through the study of social and developmental psychology. Brooks (1994) studied the terms "information gap" and "required information" for the group members having unique information. The relationship among students can be varied on the basis of different goals and they are liable to change in

relation to working with particular people in particular circumstances within the study of classroom interactions. Johnson and Johnson (1994) developed many applications of the concept of interdependence to education. His goal was to find ways to increase the feelings of positive interdependence.

In large ESL classes, the theory of social interdependence has effective implementation, which include; development of assignments, appropriate time and method to introduce the concept of group work to the class, group size and the level of teacher intervention during assessment of group work (Stanely, 2002). For the improvement of group assignments, the assessment is based on the students' apparent depth of understanding, breadth of comprehension and level of comfort with the skills learned (Johnson & Johnson,1989).

Social interdependence theory which is based on cooperative learning stimulates deep approaches to learning (Millis &Cottell, 1998). It supports a sense of ownership and control in learning which is related to intrinsic motivation resulting in active learning and opportunity in which students are encouraged to connect their experiences with existing knowledge. Students might attribute very different meanings to the same phenomenon due to previous knowledge and conceptions. Interaction and cooperation among peers are essential for understanding and interpretations.

Millis & Cottlle (1998) distinguished between deep and surface levels of processing. The levels of processing seemed to be related to students' intentions. The deep approach is often influenced by factors such as interest in the subject matter and a sophisticated conception of knowledge. A surface approach is often associated with high levels of anxiety and fear or strong external motivation to study (Entwistle, 2009). The complex interplay between learning context and learning environment and approaches led Entwistle (1991) to conclude that it is students' perception of the learning context rather than the

content that influence how students learn (Millis & Cottell,1998).

Methodology

The research is both qualitative and quantitative. It is survey type of research.

Population: The population of the study included English teachers and students of large ESL classes at tertiary level from two universities of Lahore.

Sampling: The research sample consisted of ten English teachers and 150 students both male and female of master level programme were selected randomly.

Tools: Data was collected through questionnaire, prepared for students and semi structured interview for the teachers keeping in view the objectives and themes of the study.

Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaire designed for students was distributed to get elicit opinion about role of social interdependence. Semi structured interview, designed for teachers was executed to extract the opinion incorporating social interdependence in large ESL classes. T-test was applied to draw reliable results and conclusions from the data.

The findings of questionnaire revealed that majority of both male and female students strongly accepted the various positive facts of social interdependence among students of large ESL classes. While those students who remained undecided and disagreed were very small in number. The analysis of interview showed that majority of the teachers considered social interdependence an effective technique in fostering better understanding about subject matter and academic achievement at university level, whereas few teachers discarded this

methodology and favoured traditional lecture based methodology.

Table 1: Comparison of views regarding social Interdependence of male and female students

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
MALE	50	131.06	15.326	-2.090	-.659	0.511
FEMALE	100	133.15	23.133			

Table 1 showed that t-value (-.659) is not significant at α=0.05 because p=0.511 >α=0.05. Hence it is concluded that there is no significant difference between mean social interdependence scores of male and female students.

Findings

There is no significant difference between mean scores of male (M= 131.06, SD=15.326) and female (M=133.15, SD= 23.133) students.

Discussion and Conclusions

It is evident from the results of questionnaire filled by both male and female students that social interdependence is an effective learning activity at university level, and it has been claimed that social interdependence promotes deep learning perspectives in so far as subject matter is concerned. The results of interviews of faculty members of selected universities are evidence of the fact that most of the faculty members strongly accepted the importance of social interdependence to promote better conceptual understanding about the subject matter. One of the pivotal objectives of the study is to reveal the importance of social interdependence in creating greater conceptual understanding by using various activities.

Recommendations

Following are the recommendations, based on the results.

1. Instructors must equip the method of their teaching with active learning approaches, as traditional methods do not add to students' performance.
2. Large must be divided into small groups for productive class discussion activities.
3. Faculty members should spend much time to make learners cognizant about subject matter through active learning techniques.
4. Interaction among students must be maintained so that they can solve their problems with mutual understanding.
5. Students must be inculcated with the spirit of responsibility to do work by employing active learning techniques.

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