

INVESTIGATING EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TEACHING LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching Language and Literature (TLL) is one of the second year courses offered in the B.A. in English and English Language Teaching (ELT) Programme at the Open University of Sri Lanka. This course deals with the pedagogy of English Language Teaching and also aims to develop competencies for the teaching of English to second language (ESL) learners. Part one of this course aims to promote competencies for the teaching of language in the ESL classroom while exploring the topics such as psychology and theories of learning, the acquisition of language, the methodology of teaching, and teaching English for academic and specific purposes. However, it was noticed that the majority of the students do not take part actively in the classroom discussions although the majority of the students are teachers. This inactive behavior could be due to lack of generic skills. In response to this issue the reciprocal peer learning and teaching model was utilized in the Teaching Language (TL) class. Reciprocal peer learning can be defined as students, generally of the same class or cohort, learning with and from each other (Boud, 2001). Reciprocal peer learning emphasizes that students simultaneously learn and contribute to other students' learning. In addition to that, peer learning contributes towards the development of students' generic skills of team-work, time-management, organizational and presentation skills (Lim, 2014). When students are provided an opportunity to work with each other instead of work individually is an effective methodology as it forces students to be interactive with others. Most studies on peer teaching have predominantly been based on teaching of disciplines related to science, mathematics and information technology etc. rather than subjects related to language and literature. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how TL students evaluate their own peer teaching while investigating these students' learning behaviour. Furthermore, it examines the usefulness and helpfulness of the peer-teaching activity in the TL class and TL students' attitudes toward the peer-teaching activity.

METHODOLOGY

Second year B.A. in English and ELT students who follow TLL course were divided into groups of seven and each group was assigned a teaching task once the lecturer had provided the introduction to the lesson. For the first and second days of the class each group was allocated a strategy in language learning and a method/ approach of teaching language as their peer teaching topics respectively. These students were given a preparation time and asked to select a group leader. Further, they were instructed to include their own examples that they had encountered through their experience. Thus, each group was given the responsibility of teaching the given topic to the rest of the class, because in reciprocal peer teaching, students are individually, as well as collectively, accountable for optimizing their own learning and achievement (Bound, 2001). Each peer teaching session was monitored by the lecturer while providing the required feedback at the end of the session. However, peer learners were provided an opportunity to ask questions and give their feedback at the end of each teaching session before the lecturer's comments were given.

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In order to gather information from the students, a questionnaire was administered after all TL sessions were over. The questionnaire developed by Lim (2014) on peer teaching was adapted. Second year TLL students were asked to respond on a voluntary basis to the questionnaire as it applied to their learning Teaching Language. Although there were around seventy students who took part at the beginning of the peer teaching sessions only sixty completed and returned the questionnaires. This questionnaire consisted of three sections, the first of which contained the group self-evaluation checklist; second and third sections comprised questions related to learning behaviour and the usefulness and helpfulness of the peer teaching activity in the TL class respectively. A 4-point Likert scale was utilized for the group self-evaluation checklist, 1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Agree and 4 for Strongly Agree. Accordingly, group self-evaluation was calculated out of 20 marks by each student. In order to analyze the marks allocated by the students for their own group, frequency distribution and percentages were scrutinized. A descriptive analysis was also done to obtain further details of the group self-evaluation checklist. For section two and three of the questionnaire a 6-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6) was used. The responses were aggregated into two categories as strongly disagree to disagree and strongly agree to agree. For further analysis, the Mean values and percentages of section two and three were also scrutinized. In order to collect the TL students' attitudes towards the peer teaching, an open ended question "Do you have any comments about the way the Teaching Language classes were conducted?" was given at the end of the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1) How do TL students evaluate their own teaching?

Table1. Descriptive analysis of group self-evaluation checklist

Statement	1: SD		2: D		3: A		4: SA	
	Freque ncy	(%)	Freque ncy	(%)	Freque ncy	(%)	Freque ncy	(%)
The group was well prepared for the peer teaching.	3	5	12	20	43	71.7	2	3.3
The group understood the task well.	0	0	5	8.3	40	66.3	15	25
Majority of the group members helped keep the group on task.	2	3.3	4	6.7	39	69	15	25
The group led the peer teaching class well.	0	0	8	13.3	43	71.7	9	15
I am satisfied with the performance of the group.	1	1.7	6	10	41	68.3	12	20

Values: 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Agree and 4: Strongly Agree

According to the descriptive analysis of the group self-evaluation checklist in table 1, 71.7% of the TL students agreed that their group was well prepared and led the peer teaching class well. Furthermore, more than 66% of the students agreed that their group understood the task well, the majority of the group members helped keep the group on task as well as they were satisfied with the performance of their own group. These results agree with Saito (2008) where he says that the peer-teachers must understand work well enough to present it to their peers in a peer-teaching activity. In addition to that, when considering the marks assigned by the TL students for their group self-evaluation, the majority of the students (70%) had allocated marks ranging from 15 to 19 out of 20 for the teaching of their own group, whereas the remaining 30% of students had assigned marks between 7 and 14.

2) What is the learning behaviour of the TL students?

Table 2. Learning behaviour of the TL students

Statement	Strongly Disagree to Disagree (%)	Strongly Agree to Agree (%)	Mean Value
I am an independent learner.	18.3	81.7	4.42
I do pre-preparation before each Teaching Language lecture.	23.3	76.7	4.13
I do revision after each Teaching Language lecture.	21.7	78.3	4.12
I am a motivated learner.	8.3	91.7	4.53
I prefer to study on Teaching Language by myself	46.7	53.3	3.52

Values: 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Somewhat Disagree, 3: Disagree, 4: Agree, 5: Somewhat Agree, and 6: Strongly Agree.

Table 2 demonstrates the summary of the feedback of TL students about their learning behaviour. Accordingly, TL students had shown that they are more independent and motivated learners and the mean values of these two factors, which were 4.42 and 4.53 respectively, were found to be highly significant. However, the mean value assigned to study by themselves (3.52) was not found to be so significant comparatively. Thus, it indicates that although these students were very independent and motivated learners, comparatively they still did not prefer to study by themselves. These results agree with Lim (2014) where he found out that although two-third of his students preferred to learn by themselves the majority enjoyed the peer teaching in the class. The mean values obtained for pre-preparation (4.13) and revision (4.12) of the TL lessons were also highly significant, indicating that these students may have done their groundwork before the lectures since they knew that they had to engage in peer-teaching activity.

3) How far peer teaching is helpful and useful to the TL student?

Table 3. Feedback of the TL students about the peer teaching

Statement	Strongly Disagree to Disagree (%)	Strongly Agree to Agree (%)	Mean Value
I enjoyed discussing Strategies and Methods in Language Teaching with classmates.	16.7	83.3	4.55
I enjoyed helping classmates in Teaching Language.	6.7	93.3	4.65
I learnt better in Teaching Language by interacting in class.	13.3	86.7	4.55
I learnt better in group work.	21.7	78.3	4.30
Having to explain to my peers helped me to understand better.	5.0	95	4.95

Values: 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Somewhat Disagree, 3: Disagree, 4: Agree, 5: Somewhat Agree, and 6: Strongly Agree.

According to Table 3, the majority of the TL students had agreed that they enjoyed peer teaching while obtaining the benefits of group work, interaction and explanation. The mean values assigned to all these factors were correspondingly found to be highly significant. Specially, TL students had agreed that having to explain to their peers had helped them to understand better (95%) and they had enjoyed helping classmates (93.3%). Hence, these results adequately supported that peer teaching is greatly helpful and useful to the TL student.

4) What are the TL students' attitudes towards the peer teaching?

The feedback provided for the open ended question "Do you have any comments about the way Teaching Language classes were conducted?" were analyzed in order to examine the TL students' attitudes towards the peer teaching. Although 13% of the students abstained from responding to this question, 80% had provided positive responses whereas 7% of them responded negatively. Majority of the students had mentioned that peer teaching was very good and helpful. Among these positive comments; "Doing group activities are really good for those who are shy to ask questions in public. They can get help from peers at the same time they learn" and "I think peer teaching is more interactive and it keeps the class lively" were provided. Further some had mentioned that they prefer to have practical sessions like peer teaching than just listening to a conventional lecture and it was a new experience for them. Among negative responses: "I prefer to have lecturer's explanations than by the peers" and "I don't like group work. I like lecturer-talk method. I think group work is time consuming" were provided. However, even among the positive comments some students had mentioned that the time allocated for their peer teaching and discussions were insufficient.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the TL students had very positive attitudes towards peer teaching activity. According to the findings, the majority of the TL students were satisfied with their own peer teaching by evaluating their own groups positively. Furthermore, these results agree with Beever and Paterson (2002) that peer teaching encourages independent learning while improving self-confidence and communication skills as the majority of the TL students felt that they were independent learners as well as they learnt better by interacting. Simultaneously, it showed that peer teaching was an encouraging tool in learning as the majority of the students indicated that they enjoyed discussing and helping each other while grasping the subject knowledge better by interacting and explaining to the others. The TL students' positive feedback and optimistic attitudes suggest that peer teaching-learning strategies can be further extended to encourage undergraduates in a variety of contexts and disciplines.

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