THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING THROUGH GROUP GAMES ON LEARNERS' MOTIVATION AND CLASS PARTICIPATION IN EFL CLASSROOMS

IMPACTUL ÎNVĂȚĂRII COLABORATIVE PRIN INTERMEDIUL JOCURILOR DE GRUP ASUPRA MOTIVAȚIEI ELEVILOR ȘI PARTICIPĂRII ACTIVE LA ORELE DE LIMBA ENGLEZĂ CA LIMBĂ STRĂINĂ

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Abstract: *This study examines how collaborative learning through group games influences students' motivation and participation in English as a foreign language class activities. The research was conducted as a classroom-based case study involving 29 students from the 4th and 7th forms at the "Ioan Vodă" Theoretical High School in Cahul and followed a mixed-methods approach, based on questionnaires, systematic observations, and the teacher's reflective notes. The results show that group games contributed to increased motivation, reduced speaking anxiety, and improved class participation. Elementary school students were more actively engaged in activities involving movement, visual rewards, and emotional support. In contrast, secondary school students benefited more from tasks involving problem-solving, grammar-based interaction games, and shared responsibility. The study confirms that the effectiveness of collaborative learning depends*

not only on the use of games but also on the structure of the activities, a clear distribution of roles, and constant guidance from the teacher.

Keywords: *collaborative learning, group games, motivation, class participation, EFL*

Rezumat: *Acest studiu analizează modul în care învățarea colaborativă prin jocuri de grup influențează motivația elevilor și participarea acestora la orele de limba engleză ca limbă străină. Cercetarea a fost realizată sub forma unui studiu de caz desfășurat la ore, cu participarea a 29 de elevi din clasele a IV-a B și a VII-a C de la Liceul Teoretic „Ioan Vodă” din Cahul și a urmat o abordare mixtă, bazată pe chestionare, observații sistematice și note reflexive ale profesorului. Rezultatele arată că jocurile de grup au contribuit la creșterea motivației, reducerea anxietății de vorbire și îmbunătățirea participării active la lecție. Elevii din cicul primar au s-au implicat mai activ în activități bazate pe mișcare, recompense vizuale și sprijin emoțional, în timp ce elevii din ciclul gimnazial au beneficiat mai mult de sarcini care implicau rezolvarea de probleme, explicații gramaticale și responsabilitate comună. Studiul confirmă că eficiența învățării colaborative depinde nu doar de utilizarea jocurilor, ci și de structura activităților, distribuirea clară a rolurilor și ghidarea constantă a profesorului.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *învățare colaborativă, jocuri de grup, motivația elevilor, participare la clasă, limba engleză ca limbă străină*

Foreign language learning requires not only the development of linguistic competence, but also sustained motivation, confidence, and active classroom participation. In EFL classrooms, learners are expected to communicate in a language they are still acquiring, which often creates hesitation, anxiety, and passive involvement. Under these conditions, collaborative learning becomes particularly important, as it creates opportunities for learners to work together, share responsibilities, and participate in a less threatening environment. Collaborative learning is understood as an instructional approach in which learners work together in small groups to achieve shared learning goals. Rather than treating learning as an individual process, it emphasises interaction, peer support, and the co-construction of knowledge. In language classrooms, this approach is especially valuable because communication itself becomes both the means and the purpose of learning. Group games are among the most effective techniques for fostering collaborative learning because they combine language practice with movement, competition, cooperation, and emotional engagement.

A case study was conducted at the Theoretical High School “Ioan Vodă” in Cahul and involved 29 learners from the 4th and 7th forms. The study examined how collaborative learning through group games influenced learners’ motivation and class participation during English lessons over a five-week intervention period. The analysis was based on structured questionnaires, systematic classroom observation, and reflective teaching notes, which allowed both quantitative and qualitative interpretation of learner behaviour while others responded mainly when nominated directly by the teacher. In the 4th form, learners often limited themselves to short one-word responses or repetition after the teacher. These patterns showed that participation was strongly influenced by speaking anxiety and fear of making mistakes.

The introduction of collaborative group games produced an immediate, visible change in classroom atmosphere. Activities such as Hero Challenge Relay, Family Tree Treasure Hunt, and Wellness Success Ladder fostered stronger concentration, faster task completion, and greater emotional involvement than traditional workbook exercises. In the 7th form, during the first Hero Challenge Relay activity, 12 out of 16 learners participated voluntarily

in a group discussion, compared to only five or six during previous frontal questioning. Even pupils who were usually silent during grammar correction began discussing answers with peers when responsibility was shared within the group. This showed that collaborative learning reduced the psychological pressure associated with public speaking and created more balanced participation.

One of the most significant findings concerned the reduction of speaking anxiety. During collaborative activities, answers were first discussed inside the group before being presented publicly. This preparation stage reduced the fear of failure and increased confidence. In the 4th form, learners who were usually hesitant to answer individually produced more complete short sentences after group preparation. In the 7th form, grammar-focused tasks involving tag questions and Past Perfect structures showed similar improvement, as stronger learners explained the rules to weaker classmates before final answers were shared during the report-back session.

The questionnaire results strongly confirmed these observations. The strongest result appeared in the statement “Group games make English classes more interesting,” where 92.31% of the 4th form students selected “Always.” In the 7th form, 62.5% of the respondents selected “Always” and 18.75% selected “Often.” Younger learners demonstrated stronger emotional responses related to enjoyment and classroom comfort, while older learners showed stronger results in speaking more English and memory retention. For example, 75% of the 7th form learners selected “Always” for the statement “Group work helps me remember what we learn,” which was one of the most significant findings of the study. At the same time, the study showed that collaborative learning does not automatically guarantee equal participation. Stronger learners sometimes dominated the discussion while quieter pupils remained passive. The introduction of assigned roles such as speaker, writer, checker, and presenter significantly improved this imbalance. This demonstrated that successful collaborative learning depends not only on the use of games, but also on clear structure, visible individual responsibility, and teacher facilitation.

The study confirms that collaborative learning through group games represents an effective strategy for increasing learner motivation and class participation in the EFL classrooms. Its value lies not only in making lessons more enjoyable but also in creating safer, more interactive learning environments where learners are willing to communicate, support one another, and actively participate in the learning process.

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