COLLABORATION AMONG ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS ON A SMART PHONE BASED INSTANTMESSAGING PLATFORM: CASE STUDY

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Abstract
This study aimed to discover language learners' collaboration with each other on an instant messaging platform in the process of video production. In addition, it focused on the process and shed light on the purposes of collaboration among the group members while learners fulfilled the requirements of preparing their own videos. Sixteen students studying English at a preparatory school of a state university completed an authentic task regarding shooting an introductory video to describe a building on their campus. They were divided into groups of four people by the instructor who was also one of the researchers. In addition, they were asked to create a group conversation on instant messaging platform by adding their team members and interact with each other during the planning phases and production of intended videos. The data collected from the text messages of participants was analyzed based on Small Group Collaboration Model (SCGM) which includes cognitive, managerial and social categories of collaboration. The qualitative analysis of the data showed that the participants tended to collaborate mostly for cognitive and managerial purposes as compared to social ones.

Keywords: collaboration, instant messaging platform, constructivism

1. Introduction
Collaboration among learners plays a crucial role in language learning. As being an active participant of learning has come to the fore recently, learners are expected to take part in the learning process actively by collaborating with others (Jahng, 2010). Accordingly, they are supposed to construct their own knowledge through interacting with each other, while teachers have a role of promoting and creating opportunities that enable them to collaborate and to solve problems (Vygotsky, 1986). These principles can be sustained thanks to the implementation of social constructivism. In accordance with social constructivism, learning is a student-based process rather than an instructor-based process (Wang, 2014). That is, one of the most important components of learning is learners who are encouraged to work in groups (Bauersfeld, 1995; Kan, 2011).

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Since being widely used especially by teenagers and adult learners, mobile phones might be ranked as one of the most effective ways to construct knowledge depending on collaboration among learners. Being aware of this situation, practitioners have started to integrate the use of mobile phones into teaching a foreign language. In this regard, there are numerous studies investigating content-related activities based on mobile devices; however, they are more related to delivering tasks through technological tools. Very few inquiries are present having focused on collaboration among learners. In addition, as another dimension of this proposed study, studies investigating learner collaboration among group members in mobile settings and the role of individuals in collaborative learning are few in number (Kukulska-Hulme & Shi, 2008; Reychav & Wu, 2015).

Therefore, this study mainly aims to focus on the aspects of collaboration among the group members while learners fulfill the requirements of preparing their own videos. Moreover, the intent of the proposed case study is to investigate the purposes of collaboration of learners with each other through engaging in an authentic task. Since this study sets out to handle video production in terms of social constructivism, collaboration becomes prominent as one of the components within theoretical framework.

The present study sets out to seek answers to the questions indicated below:

- Do language learners collaborate through using an instant messaging platform on their mobile phones in the process of video production?
- For what purposes do learners collaborate with each other through using an instant messaging platform to accomplish a task?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Constructivism

There are two prominent concepts of constructivism, which are Cognitive Constructivist Theory and Social Constructivist Theory. The former one regards knowledge as an active process in which learners construct it via some internal intellectual periods. In contrast, according to the latter one, individuals construct knowledge as a result of social interaction through authentic tasks and realistic settings (Cholewinski, 2009). They build knowledge by joining some various sources together with the help of experiences and interactions (Bruner, 1987). Modeling, problem-based learning, scaffolding, coaching and collaborative learning are the instructional strategies of this theory (Vygotsky, 1986). Learners can only make use of these strategies through authentic and meaningful tasks.

2.2. Collaboration

Another essential dimension of social constructivism is collaboration; therefore, collaboration among learners is emphasized as a requirement by social constructivists (Wang, 2014). Collaborative learning is defined as “an instruction method in which students work in groups toward a common academic goal” (Gokhale, 1995). As learners work collaboratively, they learn from others, solve problems, exchange ideas, come up with solutions, evaluate various arguments and implement solutions (Jonassen, 1997). To encourage students to collaborate, instructors get benefit from small group works. The reason is that small groups give learners the chance of being involved in the learning process (Davis, 1993) and contributing to each other’s construction of knowledge more actively and intensively. Moreover, among the advantages of collaboration in groups, triggering critical thinking, developing analytic and teamwork skills as well as interpersonal skills can be included.
As can be seen in Figure 1, The Small Group Collaboration Model (SCGM) by Jahng (2010) sheds light on collaboration process. 'Inputs' represents learners' prior knowledge and the necessity of learners' working on group tasks as well as the inclusion of interpersonal motives. What activates learners' prior knowledge and the other necessities included in inputs is the facilitator role of teachers in collaboration process. As a result of activation of prior knowledge, learners go through the learning process which consists of cognitive, managerial and social presence. Cognitive presence is defined as "the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication" (as cited in Jahng, 2010). On the other hand, managerial factors refer to coordination of members during group tasks like arranging meetings, scheduling and dividing jobs. Lastly, social presence stands for social relationships between community members such as encouraging each other, greetings and use of humor. This collaboration process results in 'outputs', which refers to learners' constructed knowledge and pleasure. Therefore, it can be stated that collaborative learning has a mediative role between inputs and outputs.

2.2.1 Related Studies on Collaborative Learning Process

There are a few studies that focused on collaborative learning process through implementation of computer and communication-based capabilities; however, studies investigating collaboration in the process of video production through mobile phones do not exist. Nonetheless, the findings of the studies carried out in similar contexts might also give clues for collaborative learning process with the aim of video production through using an instant messaging platform on mobile phones.

To give an example, Jahng (2010) investigated the process of collaborative learning of students in an online course through focusing on their cognitive and social communications as a result of comparing whole group discussions and small group activities. In this regard, she examined text communication messages of twelve graduate students. They were assigned with several tasks. Learners involved in whole group
activities were required to make a self-introduction to team members and discussions based on a topic given by the instructor, whereas learners working in small groups were expected to complete two papers in groups of three. The quantitative analysis of data showed that each learner in small groups tended to make more equal contributions as compared to ones in whole group discussions.

Moreover, Reychav and Wu (2015) investigated the link between the process of learning and learning impact as well as the role of individuals in group in a real word setting. Besides, it was put forward in a recent study that individuals being part of a group make an effort to clarify disagreements and absorb explanations suggested by their group mates thanks to searching information collaboratively (Shah, 2014).

In another study, Alavi (1994) aimed to examine the potential contribution of computer and communication based capabilities to collaborative learning through using group discussion support systems. Accordingly, she refers to process gains indicated by Nunamaker et al. (1991) in the sense of interactive aspects that enhance group performance in comparison with individual performance. She found out that students engaged in such kind of systems were able to develop higher level of skills and interest in learning activities as compared to others that involved in traditional lectures and class discussions. Besides, it was implied that group discussion systems improve learning by triggering active construction of knowledge during group activities. In addition, the feature of information sharing in those systems is revealed to promote collaborative learning through increasing cooperation.

2.3 Mobile Phones and Smart Phone based Instant Messaging Platforms

Being small and portable devices, mobile phones offer specific advantages to learners (Stockwell and Hubbard, 2013). To exemplify, as learners can carry them everywhere, they can record videos, text messages anytime and anywhere. Such kind of features provide learners with the opportunity of using language communicatively and engaging in tasks authentic in nature. Besides, mobile phones make it possible to integrate the features of social constructivism and collaboration into teaching and learning language (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield, 2007). Mendoza (2014) also highlighted the beneficial effect of collaborating through a mobile phone on learners’ performance and quality of their end products.

As a smart phone based instant messaging platform, Whatsapp is commonly used for communication and collaboration among learners. Whatsapp presents users the opportunities of creating groups, exchanging messages, sending documents, pictures, videos and voice recordings. Barhoumi (2015) states that Whatsapp promotes online collaboration and cooperation among students who use it from school and/or home.

2.3.1 Related Studies on Video Recording Feature of Mobile Phones

The video recording feature of mobile phones can enhance language learning experiences thanks to a great many opportunities. Coleman (1992) states that engaging in the process of producing a video in the target language, learners are supplied with an attractive and a pleasant learning experience. Besides, as Secules et al. (1992) indicates, producing their own videos promotes learners to use “real world language” in authentic contexts. Apart from these, it was argued by Kearney and Schuck (2006) that video projects trigger learners to take responsibility of their own learning as well as offering remarkable and genuine learning experience. Although the advantages of videos based on student production are acknowledged and associated with constructivist practices in pedagogy, the number of the studies relying on constructivist perspective to connect language
learners’ video productions with the language teaching and learning process is scarce (Nikitina, 2009).

In addition, Nikitina (2009) carried out an ethnographic study with twenty four sophomores learning Russian language to find out how the possible benefits of the activity of making a video within constructivist perspective and creating authentic learning situations perceived by foreign language learners. The participants were asked to prepare their own video in the target language on a topic that they chose depending on their preferences. The data was collected by the instructor through observations regarding students’ progress in their works, conversations and discussions applied at different phases of the project as well as questionnaires including open-ended questions. The results revealed that learners favored the project in terms of its contributions to their linguistic competence, social interaction skills in addition to implying the positive impact of group work on their learning and the motivating feature of the activity.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants were 16 students who were studying English at a preparatory school of a state university in Ankara. The number was expected to be 20; however, 4 of them did not do the task. They were chosen via convenience sampling procedure. They were studying Intermediate level in spring semester in 2015-2016 academic year. Having failed to pass the proficiency exam which was done at the beginning of the semester, they took a placement exam. Their level was determined based on the results of this placement exam. Most of them were elementary level, while one of them was Intermediate level in the fall semester and this learner was studying Intermediate level for the second time. Their ages ranged from 17 to 18. They had 20 hours of English every week and were taught in an integrated way. They had a course book, grammar book and handouts, reading books and handouts, writing and listening handouts. They were supposed to do writing tasks every two weeks. Moreover, they were assigned reading, grammar and vocabulary homework every week. Their achievement was assessed based on the grades they obtained from midterms, quizzes, writing portfolios, speaking, assignments and class performance.

3.2. Setting

The particular study was implemented in the preparatory school of a state university in Ankara in the second semester of the 2015-2016 academic year. Its medium of instruction is English. Students learn English as a foreign language for academic purposes in the preparatory school which lasts one year. Students take a proficiency exam at the beginning of the first term and those who fail to get adequate grade are provided with a placement exam in order that their level is determined. All of the levels are taught English in an integrated way. Their developments are assessed through midterms, quizzes, writing portfolios, speaking exams and instructors’ grade each semester. They are supposed to get enough points from these assessment types so that they can pass their level and take the proficiency exam at the end of the spring semester.

3.3. Data Collection

The data was collected through the participants’ group conversations on an instant messaging platform via using their smart phones. Initially, they were assigned a task to shoot an introductory video with the aim of describing some buildings on their campus (please, see Appendix A). In this regard, they were divided into groups of four people by the instructor who is one of the researchers. Besides, they were asked to create a group
conversation on instant messaging platform by adding their team members and interact with each other during the planning phases and production of intended videos.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data which was comprised of the participants’ group conversations through using a smart phone based instant messaging platform in the process of producing videos was transferred to a Word file. The groups were called according to the names of the buildings that they introduced. The data was analyzed several times by the inquirers in order to obtain a sense of the whole database (Creswell, 2013). During this stage, notes were also taken by two researchers so as to remember and examine the data better. After having built detailed description of the data, the inquirers formed codes. In this vein, Content Analysis based on the model by Jhang et al. (2010) including three collaboration categories which are cognitive (e.g. brainstorming, elaborating, questioning), social (e.g. greetings, jokes, sharing feelings) and managerial (e.g. scheduling, arranging meetings, clarifying ambiguities about the task) was applied. From codes, themes were developed and then interpreted. Finally, the data was represented through figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Indicator/Example</th>
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| Cognitive  | Statements directly related to on-task content of group | • sharing knowledge comparing information on facts assignment  
• suggesting opinion on the assigned topics  
• brainstorming, questioning, refining, elaborating  
• brainstorming, questioning, refining, elaborating  
• suggested ideas with real life  
Examples  
• evaluating by agreeing or disagreeing with each other  
• integrating and synthesizing the conflicted opinions |
| Social     | Statements to build up friendship and group membership | • salutation: greetings, calling names, conventional thanks  
• openness: self-introduction, sharing personal feeling/emotional states;  
• humour, jokes  
• encouragement/compliments (e.g., good work! Great team!)  
• off-task information: statements  
Contentor tasks, general information |
| Managerial | Statements to manage the collaborative process | • scheduling (e.g., I will post my work by 11 am tomorrow); |
4. Results

Theme 1: Cognitive Purposes

The first theme which was emerged from the data collected from the participants is ‘cognitive purposes’. They used the smartphone based instant messaging platform for cognitive purposes. Before, while and after doing the task, the students interacted and collaborated with each other in order to share knowledge and information, suggest their opinions about the task, question something related to the task, refine some information or facts, evaluate each other by agreeing and/or disagreeing with one another and brainstorm via WhatsApp.

The analysis of data showed that the students shared knowledge and informed each other about the procedure and process of the task. To give examples, a student called A.K. in ‘Group Prep School’ wrote the following excerpt to share information:

“A.K.: I have edited the video
A. K.: Totally it takes 3 min 52 seconds
A.K.: Its original version takes 4.50
A. K.: But I deleted some parts
A. K.: Is it okay?”

Also, the students from ‘Group Sports Center’ exchanged text messages to inform the other members about the production of video.

“A. P.: I sent the video to teacher guys
A. P.: Now I have to send up conversation
F.D.: Where do we send this video?
M. I.: To the teacher by email

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Besides, the participants used the instant messaging platform to suggest opinions in the planning phase of the video:

“M. I.: I don’t know when the deadline is but if we have time for this video
M. I.: We don’t have to do it during the exam week
M. I.: We can do it after midterm as there may be someone wanting to study for the exams”

“F.D.: Hmm, in the first semester, I prepared with windows movie maker.
F.D.: Not so professional but it was good.
M. I.: You can try to prepare with it
M. I.: It doesn’t have to be so professional in my opinion
F.D.: Of course”

Apart from these purposes, the participants from ‘Group Convention Center’ collaborated with each other in order to do brainstorming and evaluate the deadline by agreeing with each other:

“E.T.: We may come together and prepare a dialog
E.B.: Yes?????
S.G.: But it’s confused
G.G.: Yes but before coming together we can search infos
S.G.: We might forget
E.B.: So we don’t have to share lot of info
S.G.: Spontaneous?
S.G.: I don’t think so
E.B.: Maybe but not definitely
G.G.: We are 4 people we can memorize i think
G.G.: Think
E.B.: I mean we’ll do brainstorming
E.B.: And then we’ll be able to make dialog
E.B.: Both talking to sb else last longer time than each person’s giving info”

“S.G.: Last day for teacher gives notes
S.G.: But last hour 14.00 So we have to give before Thursday night
S.G.: Thursday we will record and that night, we can prepare everything
S.G.: And we’ll send it to the teacher
S.G.: Ok
E.T.: ????
E.T.: The teacher said the deadline was on friday, 20.30 pm
E.T.: So, it is good for us
S.G.: Yes
E.T: We don’t need to hurry”
Theme 2: Managerial Purposes

The second theme emerged from the data is ‘managerial purposes’. The participants were found to use instant messaging platform for purposes such as arranging meetings, scheduling, dividing jobs, discussing strategies, clarifying ambiguity and procedures about assignments to accomplish the task. For instance, students from ‘Group Prep School’ tried to clarify procedures of the task:

S. D.: What are we going to do?  
A. K.: Introducing prep school buildings  
A. K.: And we will take a video

Also, the learners from ‘Group Sports Center’ attempted to schedule their plans before shooting the introductory video about sports center.

“S.A.: When will we record the video?  
H.E.: Is tomorrow suitable  
H.E.: I mean after midterm  
S.A.: Its okay for me  
M.I: Its okay for me too  
H.E.: Ok, we may record it tomorrow  
F.D.: It is okay for me too”
As can be seen in the excerpts below, the ‘Group Convention Center’ collaborated to arrange their meeting day and divide jobs as well as discussing strategies to prepare the video:

“E.T.: Which day is appropriate for all of us?
S.G.: I think Thursday
S.G.: Or friday
G.G: We talked with seng??l and said that after midterm we can do it
E.T: Friday is too late i think
G.G: Thursday?
E.T.: After mid-term is ok. For me but isn’t it late for our teacher”
“E.T.: Who will record it?
E.B.: Do all of us agree with me
S.G.: Main question came
E.B.: I can tell one my friend to do this
S.G.: Yes really who
E.B.: I dont know yet i can request my friend
E.B.: Or we can do
E.T.: How can we do?
S.G.: Stop and again
S.G.: I think
E.B.: In first part 3 people are on video
S.G.: We can change
E.T.: While 3 people are talking, 1 peaple will record
E.B.: Yes”

On the other hand, since one of the members of ‘Group Carsı’ didn’t know anything about the assignment, the other member clarified the procedure to prevent possible ambiguities:

“B.Ç.: What is this group about?
A.A.: we have to record a video about Çarşı
A.A.: together
B.Ç.: Why
A.A.: for IG
A.A.:if we do it , we will get a 100 A.A.: Nice
B.Ç.: Just for us or everyone”
**Theme 3: Social Purposes**

As can be seen in Figure 5, the theme named social purposes was obtained from the data. According to this theme, the learners collaborated with each other during the process of the task to greet, thank, encourage, make a compliment, share their feelings, make use of humor and jokes.

As other groups did, ‘Group Sports Center’ greeted each other before starting to communicate:

*S.A.: Hi
P.D.: Whazzup
F.D.: ?
F.D.: Fellas
M. I.: Hi my friends
H.E.: Hi dear friends”

At the same time, another group called ‘Prep School’ thanked each other after they were done with the task:

“P.S.: Everything is good
P.S.: Thanks A.
S.D.: Thanks A.
A.K.: Not at all”

A student called S.A. from ‘Group Sports Center’ did not want to be in the video by expressing her personal feelings “You know I am very shy. I always smile on videos”.

The only group who made jokes throughout this process was ‘Group Carsı’, which is obvious in the following excerpt:

“A.A.: A, you will be the reason of being killed for all of us
A.P.: Hshshshhs
A.A.: if i took 0 in the IG i will kill you
A.A.: hahahah
A.P.: We all gonna die one day
A. P.: Guys
A.P.: We all re gonna die

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A.A.: yes A. but we have to stay alive for some time we are too young to die”

Lastly, some of the groups encouraged each other by giving positive feedback on their products as well as making compliments.

“E.B.: Really i like the video so muchhh!!!
G.G.: Yeahh me toooo!!!”
“F.Y.: Çarşı is a very big advantage for us”
“E.T.: But, what about the A.’s part?
E.T.: I mean the last part
S.G.: I couldnt
S.G.: Do
E.T.: I think it is very good”

5. Discussion

As it is obvious in the results, the students collaborated with each other mostly for cognitive and managerial purposes. Accordingly, they mostly informed each other about the process and shared knowledge about some facts related to the task. Moreover, almost all of them arranged their meeting day or time, shared the workload and made plans during the process of the task. These findings were in line with the study of Jahng (2012). In that study, it was found out that the participants helped each other by responding the questions immediately and reached a consensus.

Whereas the participants of this study dominantly used the instant messaging platform for cognitive and managerial purposes, their preference to collaborate for social purposes was relatively less. In the text messaging of some groups, no expressions linked to social and emotional aspects were observable. This situation may stem from the fact that they had to share their conversations with their instructor. Therefore, they might not have felt comfortable enough to talk in an informal way due to the intervention of the instructor. Nonetheless, some of them did not hesitate to make use of jokes as similar to the findings of the inquiry of Jahng (2012) which indicated that jokes might contribute to the maintenance of conversation as well as making team bounds stronger.

6. Limitations and Implications

There were a few limitations in this study. One of them was time limitation to collect the data since the students could have been encouraged to exchange text messages and collaborate with each other for longer periods. Moreover, although the teacher was not an active participant of the dialogs on the instant messaging platform, that the conversations would be shared with the teacher led to some discomfort among the participants. The rationale behind this assumption was the messages having been deleted by some of the group member before they sent them to the teacher.

In the light of these limitations, it can be stated that a longitudinal study in which further and various data can be collected. Moreover, further research studies that investigate the influence of the intervention of instructors on group conversations and collaboration can be carried out.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A - Task**

**Inside Metu Campus: Take a closer look**

1. Walk around Metu campus and choose one of the buildings below that are located inside it. Then, describe its features and make a list of them, decide on length of video and content, lastly shoot a video together with your team members to introduce it using your mobile phones.

   - President’s office
   - Registrar’s office
   - Library
   - Culture and Convention Center
   - Bookstore
   - Shopping Centre
   - Student cafeteria
   - Sports Center
   - Science and Technology Museum

2. During the planning phases of your videos, you are required to create a group conversation on instant messaging platform by adding your team members and interact with them throughout the preparation process.

3. Once you complete recording videos, share it with other groups on instant messaging platform through sending it to the group of class.

**Notes:**

- The list above is tentative, so you can also introduce any other building that is not included in the list.
- Each building will be assigned to only one group, which means that there should not be any overlaps in your choices.