Proficiency and Collaborative Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the effect of different levels of proficiency on the students' achievements in collaborative learning instruction among 30 Persian-speaking EFL college students. Having been divided into dyads with different levels of proficiency, these subjects participated in nine sessions of collaborative instruction based on the form-focused collaborative text-editing task. The results of this study are obtained through the analyses of the proficiency gains in formal aspects of language in text-editing pre and post-tests and text-reconstruction post-test. The study highlights the significant effect of this type of instruction on more proficient students. Reasons provided in this study are the language analytic ability of the students, learning styles and strategies, and motivation. The findings of this study are helpful to teachers of the classes with heterogeneous language proficiency.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, information processing model, metacognition, learning style and strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, learners are guided to assume responsibility for their learning. In line with this development, a common teaching strategy is to assign students to work on a task in pairs or small groups. To this aim, the terms cooperative and collaborative learning are variously used for specific applications to L2 learning instruction. Collaborative learning, which is defined by Oxford (1997: 443) as "a kind of process that helps students become members of the knowledge communities to have reflexive dialogues and acquire a deep knowledge," puts learners in charge of learning and providing feedback for their partners.

A number of studies (e.g. Swain & Lapkin 1998; Ellis 2000; Mayo 2002) have shown that there are both pedagogic and social gains for