

An attitudinal study on perceptions of group work when teaching English as a second language in Sri Lanka

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Since the 1980s, Sri Lanka, following trends in language teaching and learning in the West, has adopted the Communicative Approach in its endeavor to teach English as a second language to its student population. Group work is one of the strategies used under the Communicative Approach and its use in teaching English as a second language has been firmly established by sound pedagogical arguments. Past research has showed the benefits of group work, but there is also a body of evidence which implies that group work may not yield the same positive results in non-Western contexts as in Western contexts. While the reasons for this suggestion include many practical difficulties such as lack of resources and large classes, there also seems to be attitudinal issues regarding group work which are culture-bound. It is suggested by the body of research that due to cultural notions such as adherence to adult authority, expectations of teacher roles and preference for accuracy over fluency, students might not have positive attitudes about group work or the benefits it provides for their learning. Several studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of the Communicative Approach in Sri Lanka, but there is a serious dearth of studies which directly examine students' attitudes about group work. Since learners' attitudes are a major determinant of the success of a teaching strategy, this study explores Sri Lankan students' attitudes about group work. A questionnaire is distributed to a sample of 50 students, and the data collected is analyzed quantitatively to find out whether Sri Lankan learners have positive or negative attitudes regarding group work. The findings of this study shed light on the attitudes about group work among Sri Lankan students in particular and Asian students in general.

Key words: Group work, Attitudes, Culture, Communicative Approach, ESL