

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN TEFL: ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH PEER INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of collaborative learning in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and its impact on students' communication skills through peer interaction. The purpose of this research is to examine how collaborative strategies enhance students' ability to communicate effectively in English. A mixed-method approach was employed, involving students from a senior high school. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observations, and questionnaires. The findings reveal that collaborative learning significantly improves students' communication skills, including fluency, interaction, and confidence. Peer interaction activities such as group discussions, role-playing, and problem-solving tasks encourage active participation and meaningful language use. Students showed increased motivation and willingness to communicate when learning collaboratively. However, challenges such as unequal participation and varying proficiency levels were identified. The study concludes that collaborative learning is an effective approach in TEFL contexts, as it promotes active engagement and enhances communicative competence. The findings suggest that teachers should incorporate structured peer interaction activities to maximize learning outcomes. This research contributes to the development of student-centered teaching practices in EFL classrooms.

Keywords : collaborative learning, TEFL, peer interaction, communication skills, EFL.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English communication skills have become essential for students to participate effectively in academic, social, and professional contexts. In Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), the development of communicative competence is one of the main instructional goals. However, many EFL learners still experience difficulties in expressing ideas fluently, responding appropriately, and interacting confidently in English. These problems are often caused by limited opportunities to use English meaningfully in classroom interaction.

Collaborative learning has been widely recognized as a pedagogical approach that can support language development through peer interaction. It involves students working together to achieve shared learning goals and encourages them to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and solve communication problems collectively (Johnson & Johnson, 2019). In language learning, peer interaction provides learners with opportunities to practice English in meaningful contexts, receive feedback, and develop communicative competence (Swain, 2018). This is also supported by interactionist perspectives, which argue that language acquisition occurs when learners negotiate meaning, modify their output, and respond to communicative challenges (Long, 2018). Previous studies have shown that collaborative

learning can improve students' speaking skills, confidence, motivation, and classroom participation. Storch (2018) found that collaborative tasks help learners develop linguistic accuracy and fluency through shared language production. Similarly, Philp et al. (2018) emphasized that peer interaction supports language development by creating opportunities for learners to use language actively. Sato and Ballinger (2020) also argued that collaborative dialogue promotes deeper understanding of language forms and functions. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is constructed through social interaction, where learners build knowledge with the support of peers and teachers (Vygotsky, 2020). Therefore, collaborative learning is theoretically and empirically relevant for improving students' communication skills in TEFL classrooms.

In addition to improving language performance, collaborative learning can enhance motivation and reduce communication anxiety. Students tend to feel more engaged and responsible when they participate in group-based tasks (Dörnyei, 2020). Cooperative activities can also increase student participation because learners are encouraged to share roles, exchange opinions, and support one another during the learning process (Le et al., 2018). Furthermore, the integration of digital platforms has expanded the practice of collaborative learning by enabling students to communicate and collaborate beyond classroom boundaries (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Despite these benefits, collaborative learning does not always produce effective outcomes. Several studies have reported challenges such as unequal participation, domination by more proficient students, lack of accountability, and classroom management difficulties (Gillies, 2020). These challenges indicate that collaborative learning requires careful task design, clear group roles, and teacher guidance to ensure balanced participation. In Indonesian EFL contexts, collaborative learning has been increasingly promoted, but its implementation varies across schools. Some studies report positive effects on students' communication skills (Prabowo, 2021), while others highlight difficulties related to classroom control, student passivity, and unequal English proficiency (Suryani, 2020).

However, most previous studies have focused on general EFL contexts or urban school settings, while limited research has examined how collaborative learning supports students' communication skills in local contexts where exposure to English is relatively limited. In particular, studies focusing on students in Toraja Utara remain scarce. This creates a research gap because students in such contexts may face different challenges, including limited English-speaking environments, varying proficiency levels, and low confidence in oral communication. Therefore, it is important to investigate how collaborative learning functions in this specific local setting.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the use of collaborative learning to enhance communication skills through peer interaction in the Toraja Utara EFL context. Unlike previous studies that generally examined speaking skills or classroom participation, this study specifically focuses on three aspects of communication skills: fluency, interaction, and

confidence. By examining these aspects, the study provides a more contextual understanding of how peer interaction contributes to students' communicative development. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of collaborative learning in enhancing students' communication skills through peer interaction. Specifically, it investigates how collaborative learning improves students' fluency, interaction, and confidence in using English. The findings are expected to provide empirical insights for English teachers in designing more interactive, learner-centered, and contextually relevant TEFL practices.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach was used to measure students' improvement in English communication skills before and after the implementation of collaborative learning. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach was used to explore students' learning experiences, classroom participation, and responses toward collaborative activities. The use of a mixed-method design was considered appropriate because the study did not only aim to determine whether students' communication skills improved, but also to understand how peer interaction contributed to the learning process. Quantitative data were obtained through speaking pre-test and post-test scores, while qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and student questionnaire responses. By combining these two types of data, the study provided a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of collaborative learning in enhancing students' fluency, interaction, and confidence in English communication.

Table 1. Research Design Overview

Aspect	Description
Research design	Mixed-method design
Quantitative focus	Measuring students' improvement in communication skills
Qualitative focus	Exploring students' experiences during collaborative learning
Main intervention	Collaborative learning through peer interaction
Main skills observed	Fluency, interaction, confidence, participation, and communicative performance
Duration	Six weeks

2. Participants / Subjects

The participants of this study were 60 students from a senior high school in Toraja Utara, Indonesia. The students were selected because they were learning English as a foreign language and had limited opportunities to practice English communication outside the classroom. This context was relevant to the purpose of the study, which focused on improving students' communication skills through peer interaction. During the learning

process, the students were divided into small collaborative groups to complete various communication-based activities. The grouping was intended to encourage peer support, equal participation, and active use of English during classroom tasks. Through collaborative activities, students were expected to interact with their peers, exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and build confidence in speaking English.

Table 2. Participants of the Study

Description	Information
Number of participants	60 students
School level	Senior high school
Location	Toraja Utara, Indonesia
Learning context	English as a Foreign Language
Learning arrangement	Students worked in collaborative groups
Main focus	English communication skills through peer interaction

3. Instruments

The instruments used in this study consisted of a speaking performance rubric, an observation checklist, and a student questionnaire. These instruments were selected to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data related to students' communication skills and learning experiences. The speaking performance rubric was used to assess students' communication skills in the pre-test and post-test. The rubric focused on several aspects of speaking performance, including fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, interaction, and confidence. These aspects were used to determine students' ability to express ideas, respond to others, and participate in communicative tasks. The observation checklist was used during the six-week treatment to record students' participation and interaction in collaborative learning activities. The checklist helped the researcher observe how students engaged in group discussions, shared ideas, supported peers, used English during activities, and completed group tasks.

The student questionnaire was used to collect students' responses toward collaborative learning. It focused on students' perceptions of peer interaction, motivation, confidence, classroom participation, and the usefulness of collaborative tasks in improving communication skills. The questionnaire provided qualitative support for the speaking test and observation data.

Table 3. Research Instruments

Instrument	Purpose	Main Indicators
Speaking performance rubric	To measure students' communication skills before and after treatment	Fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, interaction, confidence

Observation checklist	To observe students' behavior during collaborative activities	Participation, peer interaction, English use, turn-taking, cooperation, task completion
Student questionnaire	To explore students' experiences and perceptions	Motivation, confidence, engagement, peer support, learning difficulties, perceived improvement

4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was conducted over six weeks. Before the treatment began, the researcher introduced the purpose of the study and explained the learning procedures to the students. The students were informed that they would participate in collaborative learning activities designed to improve their communication skills through peer interaction. At the beginning of the study, a speaking pre-test was administered to identify students' initial communication skills. The pre-test required students to perform speaking tasks that reflected real communication situations, such as expressing opinions, responding to questions, and participating in short conversations.

During the treatment phase, students participated in collaborative learning activities. These activities included group discussions, role-playing, peer questioning, problem-solving tasks, and short group presentations. In group discussions, students exchanged ideas on familiar topics and practiced expressing opinions. In role-playing activities, students acted out real-life communication situations, such as asking for information, giving suggestions, or responding to a problem. These activities were designed to provide students with more opportunities to speak, interact, and develop confidence in using English. Throughout the treatment, classroom observations were conducted to monitor students' participation, interaction, and engagement. The researcher used the observation checklist to record how students collaborated with peers, used English during group work, and contributed to classroom activities. At the end of the six-week treatment, a speaking post-test was administered to measure students' improvement in communication skills. After the post-test, students completed the questionnaire to provide their responses toward the collaborative learning activities.

Table 4. Data Collection Procedure

Stage	Activity	Purpose
Initial stage	Explanation of research procedures	To inform students about the study
Pre-test	Speaking performance task	To measure initial communication skills
Treatment	Collaborative learning activities for six weeks	To improve communication through peer interaction
Observation	Classroom observation during treatment	To record participation, interaction, and engagement

Post-test	Speaking performance task	To measure improvement after treatment
Questionnaire	Student response questionnaire	To explore students' learning experiences

5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from the speaking pre-test and post-test were analyzed statistically to identify students' improvement in communication skills. The analysis included calculating students' scores, mean scores, and score differences between the pre-test and post-test. The results were used to determine whether collaborative learning contributed to students' improvement in fluency, interaction, and confidence.

Qualitative data from classroom observations and student questionnaires were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher reviewed the observation notes and questionnaire responses, identified recurring patterns, and grouped the data into themes. The themes included students' participation, confidence, peer support, motivation, use of English during group work, and challenges in collaborative learning. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allowed the researcher to interpret the findings more comprehensively. The speaking test results showed the extent of students' improvement, while the observation and questionnaire data explained how collaborative learning supported students' communication development during the learning process.

Table 5. Data Analysis Techniques

Type of Data	Source	Analysis Technique
Quantitative data	Speaking pre-test and post-test	Descriptive statistical analysis
Qualitative data	Observation checklist	Thematic analysis
Qualitative data	Student questionnaire	Thematic analysis
Integrated findings	Test, observation, and questionnaire data	Interpretation of students' improvement and learning experiences

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study examined the effectiveness of collaborative learning in enhancing students' English communication skills through peer interaction. The data were obtained from speaking pre-tests and post-tests, classroom observations, and student questionnaires conducted over a six-week period. The findings are presented based on students' speaking performance, classroom interaction, questionnaire responses, and qualitative patterns observed during collaborative learning activities. The quantitative results showed that students' communication skills improved after the implementation of collaborative learning. The mean score of the students' speaking performance increased from **61.85** in the pre-test to **79.40** in

the post-test. This indicates a mean gain of **17.55 points**, suggesting that collaborative learning had a positive effect on students' ability to communicate in English. The improvement was particularly visible in fluency, interaction, and confidence, which were the main focus of this study.

Table 6. Overall Speaking Performance Results

Test	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Gain
Pre-test	60	61.85	7.42	—
Post-test	60	79.40	6.88	17.55

The paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the improvement between the pre-test and post-test was statistically significant. The result showed a significant difference between students' scores before and after the treatment, $t(59) = 16.74, p < .001$. The effect size was also high, with **Cohen's $d = 2.16$** , indicating that collaborative learning had a strong effect on students' communication skills.

Table 7. Paired-Sample t-Test Result

Comparison	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value	Effect Size
Pre-test and Post-test	17.55	16.74	59	< .001	2.16

The improvement can also be seen in each aspect of the speaking performance rubric. Among the assessed aspects, interaction showed the highest improvement, followed by confidence and fluency. This finding indicates that collaborative learning was particularly effective in encouraging students to communicate with peers, respond to ideas, and participate more actively in classroom interaction.

Table 8. Students' Speaking Performance by Aspect

Aspect	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Gain
Fluency	61.70	79.85	18.15
Pronunciation	62.10	77.60	15.50
Vocabulary Use	63.25	80.10	16.85
Grammar	60.95	77.85	16.90
Interaction	60.40	81.20	20.80
Confidence	58.90	79.80	20.90

The increase in interaction and confidence shows that collaborative activities provided students with more opportunities to use English in meaningful contexts. During group discussions and role-playing activities, students were encouraged to ask questions, respond to peers, express opinions, and negotiate meaning. These activities helped students move from passive participation to more active communication. Classroom observations also supported the test results. At the beginning of the treatment, many students were hesitant to speak, depended heavily on their peers, and used limited English during group work. However, after several meetings, students became more active in sharing ideas, taking turns, and helping each

other complete communication tasks. The use of group discussions and role-playing created a more supportive classroom environment, allowing students to practice English with less anxiety.

Table 9. Observation Results during Collaborative Learning

Observed Aspect	Early Meetings	Final Meetings	Interpretation
Participation	Many students were passive and waited for dominant peers	Most students contributed to group tasks	Participation increased
Peer interaction	Interaction was limited and mostly teacher-directed	Students exchanged ideas and responded to peers	Peer interaction improved
Use of English	Students often used Indonesian during group work	Students used more English expressions in tasks	English use increased
Confidence	Students were hesitant to speak	Students spoke more confidently in groups	Confidence improved
Task completion	Some groups needed strong teacher guidance	Most groups completed tasks independently	Group responsibility improved

The questionnaire results showed that students responded positively to the use of collaborative learning. Most students agreed that peer interaction helped them practice English more frequently, improve confidence, and become more active in communication. The highest positive response was found in peer interaction, with **90%** of students agreeing that collaborative learning gave them more opportunities to communicate with classmates. In addition, **86.7%** of students reported that collaborative activities increased their confidence in speaking English.

Table 10. Student Questionnaire Results

Indicator	Positive Responses	Percentage	Interpretation
Peer interaction	54 students	90.0%	Students felt that group work gave them more opportunities to communicate
Motivation	52 students	86.7%	Students felt more motivated during collaborative activities
Engagement	53 students	88.3%	Students were more involved in classroom tasks
Confidence	52 students	86.7%	Students felt more confident speaking English with peers

Fluency development	51 students	85.0%	Students felt that regular interaction helped them speak more fluently
Time and task responsibility	49 students	81.7%	Students felt responsible for completing group tasks on time

The questionnaire findings indicate that collaborative learning did not only improve communication performance but also affected students' learning attitudes. Students became more motivated because they could learn with peers, share ideas, and receive support from group members. The collaborative setting reduced fear of making mistakes because students practiced English in smaller groups before performing in front of the class. Qualitative data from observations and questionnaire responses revealed several important themes. First, peer interaction helped students negotiate meaning and correct errors during communication. When students did not understand certain words or expressions, group members helped explain or provide alternative expressions. Second, collaborative learning increased students' confidence because they were not required to speak individually at all times. Third, group tasks encouraged active learning because students had specific roles and shared responsibility for completing activities. However, some challenges were also found, including unequal participation, dependence on more proficient students, and occasional use of Indonesian during group discussions.

Overall, the findings show that collaborative learning was effective in enhancing students' communication skills through peer interaction. The improvement from the pre-test mean score of **61.85** to the post-test mean score of **79.40** demonstrates that students developed better speaking performance after six weeks of collaborative learning. The strongest improvements were found in interaction, confidence, and fluency, which are essential components of communicative competence. The observation and questionnaire results further confirm that collaborative learning created a more interactive, motivating, and supportive TEFL classroom environment.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that collaborative learning through peer interaction significantly improved students' English communication skills in the TEFL classroom. The overall speaking performance increased from a pre-test mean score of **61.85** to a post-test mean score of **79.40**, with a mean gain of **17.55 points**. The paired-sample t-test result, $t(59) = 16.74$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size of **Cohen's $d = 2.16$** , indicates that the improvement was statistically significant. This result confirms that collaborative learning provided students with meaningful opportunities to practice English and develop communicative competence. It supports previous studies stating that language fluency develops through repeated communication and meaningful interaction rather than isolated grammar practice (Nation, 2019; Ellis, 2020; Willis & Willis, 2018).

The improvement was especially evident in fluency, interaction, and confidence. Students' fluency increased from **61.70** to **79.85**, showing that group discussions, role-playing, and peer-questioning tasks helped students express ideas more smoothly. The interaction score also rose from **60.40** to **81.20**, indicating that students became more active in initiating conversations, responding to peers, asking questions, and negotiating meaning. This finding is consistent with Long's (2018) Interaction Hypothesis, which emphasizes that interaction facilitates language acquisition. It also supports Philp et al. (2018) and Sato and Ballinger (2020), who argue that peer interaction promotes deeper language processing through clarification, feedback, and collaborative dialogue. Confidence showed one of the highest gains, increasing from **58.90** to **79.80**. This suggests that collaborative learning created a supportive environment where students felt more comfortable speaking English. Working in groups reduced anxiety because students could practice with peers before speaking more publicly. This finding aligns with Dörnyei (2020), who highlights the role of affective factors in language learning, and Le et al. (2018), who found that cooperative activities can increase motivation and reduce communication anxiety.

The findings also indicate improvement in vocabulary and grammar. Vocabulary use increased from **63.25** to **80.10**, while grammar improved from **60.95** to **77.85**. These results show that collaborative learning supported both meaning-focused and form-focused learning. During group work, students exchanged vocabulary, corrected expressions, and used language in context. This supports Nation's (2019) view that vocabulary is best learned through meaningful use and Ellis's (2020) argument that grammatical development can occur through communicative practice. Storch (2018) also emphasizes that collaborative dialogue contributes to linguistic development through peer correction and shared language construction. The questionnaire results further support the test findings. About **90.0%** of students agreed that peer interaction gave them more opportunities to communicate, while **88.3%** reported higher engagement, **86.7%** increased motivation, and **86.7%** improved confidence. These results indicate that collaborative learning encouraged active participation and shared responsibility, supporting Johnson and Johnson's (2019) concept of structured cooperative learning. This is also consistent with Deng et al. (2021), who found that collaborative activities improve engagement and learning outcomes.

However, some challenges were observed, including unequal participation, dominance by more proficient students, dependence on stronger peers, and occasional use of Indonesian during group work. These issues are consistent with Gillies (2020), Carless (2018), and Garton and Copland (2019), who note that collaborative learning requires careful classroom management. Therefore, teachers need to assign clear roles, monitor group interaction, provide scaffolding, and ensure individual accountability. Overall, this study confirms that collaborative learning is an effective and contextually relevant strategy for improving

students' fluency, interaction, confidence, and overall communicative competence in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that collaborative learning is an effective approach for enhancing students' English communication skills in the TEFL classroom. The findings show that students' speaking performance improved significantly after participating in collaborative learning activities for six weeks. The increase from the pre-test mean score of 61.85 to the post-test mean score of 79.40 indicates that peer interaction contributed positively to students' communicative development. The improvement was particularly visible in fluency, interaction, confidence, vocabulary use, and grammatical accuracy. Collaborative activities such as group discussions, role-playing, peer questioning, and problem-solving tasks provided students with more opportunities to use English in meaningful contexts. Through these activities, students were able to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, support one another, and practice speaking with less anxiety. The questionnaire results also showed positive responses, with most students reporting increased opportunities for communication, higher engagement, stronger motivation, and greater confidence in speaking English.

The study also highlights that collaborative learning is relevant to the EFL context in Toraja Utara, where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. By creating a supportive and interactive learning environment, collaborative learning helps students become more active and confident language users. However, challenges such as unequal participation, student dominance, and dependence on more proficient peers should be addressed through clear role distribution, teacher monitoring, and structured group tasks. Future research is recommended to involve larger samples, longer treatment periods, and different school contexts. Further studies may also apply mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights into how collaborative learning supports students' communication skills and classroom participation.

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