

## COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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***Annotation.** Collaborative learning has become an essential pedagogical approach in English language education. It emphasizes social interaction, peer support, and active engagement, which contribute to language acquisition and skill development. This paper investigates the benefits and challenges of implementing collaborative learning strategies in English language classrooms, based on data from teachers and students in various educational contexts. The findings reveal increased student motivation, improved communication skills, and better academic outcomes, alongside challenges such as unequal participation and classroom management.*

***Key words:** collaborative learning, English language teaching, EFL, peer interaction, group work, communicative competence, student engagement.*

### INTRODUCTION

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has increasingly adopted **collaborative learning** as a central methodology, aligning with constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning. Collaborative learning involves students working together in pairs or small groups to achieve shared academic goals, engage in dialogue, and solve problems through interaction. In language learning, this method is especially valuable, as it fosters communication, negotiation of meaning, and mutual feedback.

English language classrooms, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, benefit from collaborative tasks that simulate real-life language use. However, despite its advantages, collaborative learning also presents several pedagogical and logistical challenges that require careful planning and teacher facilitation. This study aims to analyze both the benefits and the common difficulties associated with collaborative learning in English language classrooms.

This study used a **qualitative descriptive research design** to explore teachers' and students' experiences with collaborative learning. Data collection was conducted in three higher education institutions and two secondary schools across Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The participants included:

- **10 English language instructors**
- **80 intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners**, aged 16–22

#### **Instruments:**

- Semi-structured interviews with teachers

- Focus group discussions with students
- Classroom observations during group-based language tasks

**Data Analysis:** Thematic coding was used to identify patterns related to instructional benefits, engagement, and the practical challenges of collaboration.

### 3.1. Benefits of Collaborative Learning

The data revealed several positive outcomes of collaborative learning in English classrooms:

- **Enhanced speaking and listening skills:** Students frequently used English during group tasks, increasing their fluency and confidence.
- **Increased motivation and participation:** Learners reported feeling more involved and accountable in peer settings.
- **Peer support and scaffolding:** Weaker students benefited from the explanations and feedback of stronger peers.
- **Improved problem-solving and critical thinking:** Collaborative tasks such as debates and role plays encouraged learners to think actively and creatively.

Teachers noted that students developed **social and intercultural skills**, especially in mixed-ability or multilingual classrooms.

### 3.2. Challenges of Collaborative Learning

Despite the advantages, participants also identified challenges:

- **Unequal participation:** In many groups, one or two students dominated the activity, while others remained passive.
- **Language switching:** Some learners reverted to their native language, reducing English practice.
- **Group conflicts:** Personality clashes and differing learning styles occasionally led to tension.
- **Time management:** Group activities often exceeded allocated time, affecting lesson flow.
- **Assessment difficulties:** Teachers struggled to fairly assess individual contributions within group outcomes.

The findings support the theoretical view that **collaborative learning enhances language development** by providing meaningful contexts for communication. It promotes learner autonomy, accountability, and social interaction—core components of language acquisition. However, successful implementation depends on effective **group management strategies, task design, and teacher facilitation**.

Instructors must provide **clear guidelines**, rotate group roles, and train students in collaborative skills to ensure inclusivity and equity. Moreover, integrating **formative**

**assessment** during collaborative tasks can help monitor individual progress and provide constructive feedback.

Institutional factors—such as class size, curriculum rigidity, and teacher workload—also influence the success of collaborative learning. Therefore, professional development programs should train teachers in managing group dynamics and creating a supportive collaborative environment.

## CONCLUSION

Collaborative learning offers numerous pedagogical advantages in English language classrooms, including improved communication skills, learner motivation, and peer-supported learning. However, its effectiveness depends on well-structured implementation and the resolution of challenges such as unequal participation and assessment complexity. With proper planning and institutional support, collaborative learning can become a powerful tool for fostering language proficiency and 21st-century skills.

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